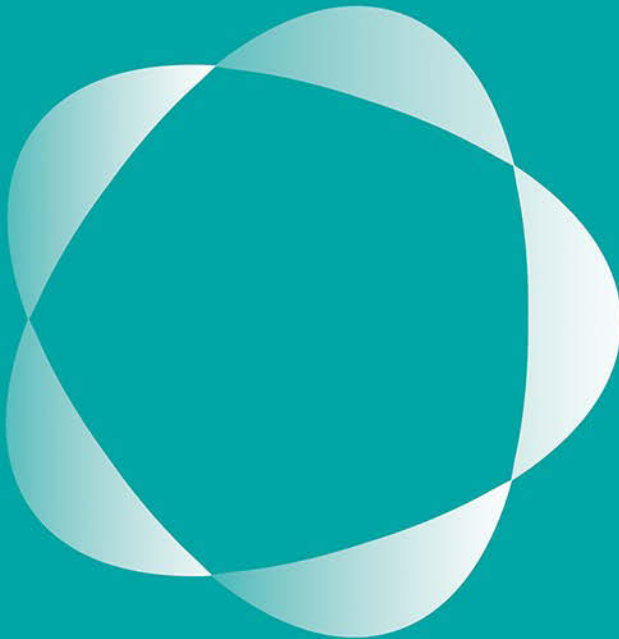


Jörg Dinkelaker, Klara-Aylin Wenten (eds.)

# TRANSLATIONS AND PARTICIPATION

Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives



**[transcript]** Mediation and Translation in Transition

Jörg Dinkelaker, Klara-Aylin Wenten (eds.)  
Translations and Participation

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# Translations and Participation

## An Overview on the Contributions to this Volume and the Issues Debated Across them

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*Jörg Dinkelaker and Klara-Aylin Wenten*

This volume explores the interplay of translation and participation, two fundamental social dynamics which are usually scrutinized separately. While there is a great deal of literature studying issues of participation (e.g., Levasseur et al. 2010; Cornwall 2011; Fung 2004; Chilvers & Kearnes 2015; Halder & Squires 2023) on the one hand and translation (e.g., Gambier & Doorslaer 2010; Millán & Bartrina 2016; Bachmann-Medick 2016; Fernández & Evans 2018; Wolf & Fukari 2007) on the other, the investigation of their interrelations is still in its beginnings. Against this background, this volume features contributions from an international conference that assembled scholars from diverse disciplines, each of them focusing on how translation and participation interdepend from different angles.

To introduce this volume, we begin with an overview of the perspectives compiled herein, sketching each contribution by briefly relating it to the disciplinary background from which it originates. Due to the diverse origins, each contribution enriches the general understanding of how translation and participation intertwine in another way (see Section 1).

Even though the contributions draw on distinct conceptual frameworks and scrutinizes different cases of translational constellations, they deal with the same key issues concerning the dynamic intertwining



of participation and translation. Three of these issues will be outlined in this introduction.

First, we focus on the fuzzy simultaneity of establishing commensurabilities and renewing differences that is characteristic of translational practices and discuss its consequences for participation. Translation makes it possible to say or do the same, or at least similar, things in different social contexts. Connections are established across delineated contexts. Accordingly, participation is enabled across social boundaries. However, any translation has to start from the assumption that the contexts involved differ and, hence, the people and things within these contexts have to be treated differently. This implies constraints of who can participate, and in which ways in the activities of the involved social contexts. Each of the contributions to this volume sheds a different light on this two-sidedness of translation and its implications for how participation is facilitated and constrained (Section 2).

These constellations of 'sameness-in-difference', that translations yield, are peculiarly reflected within the highly contested debates on what constitutes a good or bad translation. Is an 'accurate translation' one that comes as close as possible to the translated source? Or should translations rather invent (new) ways of expressing what is meant within the horizon of the target context? The diverse contributions to this volume discuss various cases in which these contradicting norms compete with each other in different translational constellations. They thereby illuminate how these ambivalent relationships interfere with participation issues. Depending on what is translated for whom and in which situation, accuracy as well as inventiveness may enable or constrain fertile involvement (Section 3).

Since sameness and difference may both be desirable, and accuracy as well as creativity may be equally appropriate, there is no way of simply unraveling the intertwining between participation and translation. Any translation implies decisions about what differentiates one social context from the other, who is expected to participate in which of these contexts, and under what conditions. Consequently, translational practices are inherently political. They imply power-bound negotiations, shaping and reshaping the boundaries between social realms and influencing the

construction of identities within them. The cases discussed in this volume offer valuable insights into these politics (Section 4).

## **1 Disciplinary Perspectives**

This volume includes contributions from translation and interpreting studies, social anthropology, sociology and from education research. Each of these contexts is experiencing a growing interest in exploring the interplay between translation and participation, although the considerations originate from diverse starting points within each discipline. Each background offers another perspective on the interdependencies between translational practices and social participation.

### **1.1 Bridging Language Barriers: Exploring Participation through the Lens of Translation and Interpreting Studies**

The research field of translating and interpreting studies encompasses two variations of translation (cf. Kade 1968): ‘literary translation’ – the transfer of written texts from one language to another, and ‘interpreting’ – enabling verbal exchanges between speakers of different languages. Both strands discuss and question the conditions and requirements for and the responsibility inherent in the work of translators and interpreters. While translation is, of course, an established subject in this disciplinary context, participation is not problematized to the same extent in this research field. Two contributions to this volume stem from the fields of translating and interpreting studies.

Sebnem Bahadir-Berzig’s paper, ‘The As If of Integration, Participation and Empowerment: When Interpreting Undermines Borders and Boundaries’, focuses on how participation is framed in interpreting situations. The author problematizes the taken-for-granted expectation that interpreting enlarges opportunities for participation. She discusses the case of interpreting in context of immigrants interacting with professionals, such as doctors, school officials or social workers. Since mutual understanding is crucial for achieving participation, the relevance of in-

terpreting is evident. Interpreters are expected to overcome “not only linguistic, but also social, cultural, political, personal, even digital barriers” (Bahadir in this volume, p. 67). Even though this interpreting work aims at bridging barriers, it reproduces differences at the same time. A closer look reveals that aiming to enable participation through interpreting results in a paradox: because of the ways in which the interpretative settings are established, translation not only opens up possibilities for participation, but also implies powerful constraints on involvement (see also Dizdar 2021). Taking a performative point of view on the work of interpreters, Bahadir shows that translations are more than and different from just mimetic acts: discussing translations as acts of interference and intervention reveals their ethical and political implications.

Referring to the concept of ‘traductology’, H  l  ne Buzelin discusses in her contribution, ‘Translating as a Way of Producing Knowledge Across Boundaries’, how the work of literary translators involves participating in multiple contexts of communication. She emphasizes that the knowledge required for a ‘proper translation’ cannot be solely informed by dictionaries but instead necessitates the active engagement of translators in various practices of reading and text production. This includes accomplishing different literary practices such as reading the original text (of course), secondary literature and further adjacent texts in the language of origin as well as in the target language. As the case discussed by Buzelin demonstrates – being written in a vernacular language (a Trinidadian dialect) – just reading would not be enough. Visiting different places where the languages are spoken, and immersing oneself in the environment where the dialect is used, becomes equally essential. Therefore, translations involve the process of shifting affiliations and identities back and forth, which produces a specific kind of experience accompanied by reflexivity. Buzelin emphasizes that new knowledge is created in this process, through which the ethnocentric structure of cultures is transcended. She therefore argues for an ethics of *m  tissage* “where translation and original, foreign and domestic, are inextricably linked and transforming one another” (Buzelin in this volume, p. 47).

## 1.2 Crossing the Boundaries between Social Contexts: The Social Sciences Perspective

While participation has been a topic of interest in the social sciences from their very beginnings, it is only in the last two decades that translation has gained considerable interest. Scholars from sociology and anthropology such as Latour (2005), Renn (2006), Star and Griesemer (1989), Tsing (2005) or Gal (2015) suggest a broader understanding of translation to be also applicable beyond language use in the narrow sense. In this vein, the use of the concept of translation emerges as a possible way of uncovering the processes of how participation is structured across different institutional, cultural, national or linguistic contexts (Czarniawska & Sevón 1996). As anthropological research highlights, translations involve attempts to integrate actors which usually are not part of a specific practice, culture or language regime. Latour (2005) and Tsing (2005), for instance, have shown how translations take place, when practices, meanings, objects or persons enter a novel context. Accordingly, translations render cultural, political or semantic elements intelligible, justifiable, durable or acceptable in social contexts different from the context of origin. Unlike translation and interpreting studies, studies in the social sciences focus on the constellations which emerge from translational practices rather than on the content being transformed and molded. Two contributions in this volume build on this research perspective. Both are concerned with translations across national contexts, yet with a different focus.

In 'Sameness-in-Difference: Politics Between Literary and Anthropological Translation', Susan Gal demonstrates from the perspective of linguistic anthropology how translations of literature become relevant for negotiations of national identity (see also Wrana 2023). Her paper examines the fascinating case of the ongoing controversy over the Hungarian translation of the British children's book *Winnie-the-Pooh*. She demonstrates how the well-known and widely used translation from the 1920s has become the subject of a heated debate about what should be considered Hungarian and what should not. It is no coincidence that these issues of nationality are debated in relation to texts transferred

from foreign contexts. Gal rather argues that every translation has a political dimension. She points out that “language ideologies invariably include ideas about translation: understandings about the relative value of particular languages in the social world” (Gal in this volume, p. 22). Her analysis illuminates how even the translation of a children’s book enables and constrains the participation of different social groups across national, cultural and socio-political borders.

In ‘The Recognition of Foreign Professionalism: An Examination of the Organizational Translation Practices of Foreign Professional Knowledge and Skills in Germany’, Anne Vatter scrutinizes the organizational procedures by which professional qualifications gained abroad are transformed into certificates suitable for the German labor market. Such procedures have only recently been made possible by German law with the purpose of facilitating the integration of immigrants in the labor market. Vatter shows that the process of translating qualifications is split up into different tasks carried out by different organizations. Since each of these organizations has different purposes and interests, a complex network of translations is established between them. Drawing on actor-network theory (ANT), the paper sheds light on the intricate ways in which translations function as a crucial mechanism in the negotiation of professional identity and social mobility within and across national contexts. Her analysis reveals how this complex organizational process of translating certificates both enables and constrains the possibilities for immigrants to officially participate in social life.

### **1.3 Translation as a Means to Enable Participation: Perspectives from Education Research**

Within education research – the third disciplinary context covered in this volume – both phenomena, participation (as in Dewey 1916, Newberry 1959, and Halder & Squires 2023) as well as translation (as in Havelock 1967, Prain & Waldrup 2006, and Lee Pettman et al. 2020), have been recurring themes, yet the links between them have only recently begun to receive increased attention (Dinkelaker 2023). Since facilitating participation is a key aim of any educational work, questions

about how this goal may be accomplished and why education repeatedly fails to achieve it, are at the heart of education research. Questions of translation, on the other hand, are raised when it comes to discussing how scientific knowledge can be transferred in the contexts of the everyday lives of learners (Dewe 1996; Hof 2001; Negt 1971). While the term 'translation' was used rather metaphorically initially, in recent years a deeper conceptual engagement has emerged (Dinkelaker et al. 2020; Engel & Köngeter 2019). Yet, the interplay between translation and participation has not been systematically studied so far. The two articles in this volume attempt to advance the scrutiny of this interrelation in education research.

In his contribution 'Learning with Machines: Divisions and Transformations in the Era of Datafication', Jeremy Knox traces the effects of introducing digital data processing in education. He highlights how the translation of educational tasks into digital algorithms changes the definitions and measurements of learning, resulting in shifting frameworks of participation. Knox's case study provides a compelling case for how the introduction of foreign concepts and systems – in this case, digital algorithms – can have far-reaching implications for how participation is facilitated and constrained.

Jörg Dinkelaker's contribution, 'Doing Crossing Boundaries: Adult Education as a Translational Practice', explores how education can be conceptualized as a specific kind of translational practice that aims to increase scopes of participation. In his analysis, Dinkelaker identifies two distinct, yet interrelated, constellations of translation and participation: cross-boundary participation and cross-boundary communication. While both modes of engagement have been addressed in educational theory, he argues that the relations between them need to be further clarified. Dinkelaker contends that the specific constellation of translation that characterizes adult education can be defined by the intersection of both modes. This results in a complex and contradictory nexus of fostering participation in new cultural contexts, while at the same time transferring knowledge from one context to another.

## 2 Bridging or Renewing Differences?

Translations connect and divide. They build both bridges and barriers (Cronin 2006, Gonzalez/Tolron 2006). On the one hand, translations can be described as dynamics in which different linguistic, organizational or cultural contexts are aligned with each other. From this perspective, translations reveal the common elements between these contexts. They provide access to literature originally written in a foreign language, thus facilitating broader cultural exchange. In interpreting situations, people are enabled to communicate despite relying on different languages. Translations facilitate the dissemination of scientific knowledge, making it accessible and relevant to people's everyday lives. Qualifications acquired abroad can be used in new national contexts, fostering professional growth and societal and political integration. At the same time, however, translations restage differences. They start from the assumption that the involved contexts and systems of expression differ and that this difference is irresolvable. Translated texts inevitably differ from the original since, of course, different words and syntax need to be used. This also implies differing references and resonances within the new context. Differences therefore are not only bridged, but also iterated and renewed.

This complex interplay of what Susan Gal (2015) terms 'sameness-in-difference' has implications for how participation is affected by translations. Translations simultaneously include and exclude. On the one hand, they enable involvement and understanding across the boundaries of semiotic contexts while, on the other, they reproduce otherness. Actors are portrayed as belonging to different social contexts, having no immediate access to the related other side. The contributions to this volume address this two-sidedness of translations from specific perspectives, each shedding a different light on it.

In the case of the recognition of foreign qualifications discussed by Anne Vatter, the purpose of constructing sameness dominates. A recognized qualification in another country is now to be described in terms of an equivalent qualification in Germany. It is precisely this emphasis on matching that results in this procedure of recognition becoming a pro-

cess of denial and alienation. What cannot be expressed in terms of the German qualification system has to be ignored or rejected. Hence, Vater's analysis, as well as highlighting the connections and similarities, also illuminates incommensurable differences emerging from translational efforts.

Emphasizing sameness may even lead to denying that differences even exist. Discussing the case of digital learning platforms, Jeremy Knox shows that the assumption of something (here, learning) being the same in two different contexts (everyday schooling and digital learning platforms) obscures how its meaning is profoundly altered as it moves between these contexts (see also Macgilchrist 2021). Knox illustrates, that different understandings and interpretations of learning by platform companies, public institutions such as schools, and users of digital learning platforms are aligned and connected with each other in order to make learning accessible in the digital sphere. Understanding this process of adapting 'learning' in digital terms as a process of translation reveals, by contrast, how the notion of learning changes from context to context. What is seen as a locally situated practice mediated by organizational procedures in one constellation appears as a convertible commodity accessible through digital interfaces in another.

Stressing differences in translational constellations, on the other hand, may open up broader perspectives on sameness. This is illustrated by Gal in reference to the rather loose translation of *Winnie-the-Pooh* into Hungarian. She shows how differences between the original and the translation reflect differences between middle-class British childhood in the 1920s and childhood in Hungary, and lays out how the ways, in which the relationship between rural and urban cultures and how the expression of emotions are depicted differ significantly between the two. It is this diverging of both versions that allows us a broader understanding of the situation of childhood and adulthood in the historical situation after the First World War and, beyond that, the interrelations between adulthood and childhood as a universal human condition. The 'outlandishness' of the Hungarian translation points us to broader common grounds. Those who insist on a particular kind of translation,



which sticks closely to the original, ultimately aim to narrow down the scope of commonalities, as Gal convincingly argues in her case study.

Yet, there are also translational constellations in which differences are emphasized, but no commonalities are opened up. In the case of community interpreting, discussed by Sebnem Bahadir-Berzig, the starting point of professional interventions is the assumption of deep differences. A need for sensitivity to cultural plurality is stressed, but integration is seen as disbanding, rather than bridging, differences. As long as sameness remains primarily defined by the 'host society', integration tends to remain within a framework of assimilation in only one of the related contexts. The author reveals, however, the often hidden and overlooked subversive acts in which interpreting undermines boundaries and definite categorizations.

In yet other constellations, the practices oscillate between emphasizing either sameness or difference as a necessity. Within the discussion about how social participation can be enabled by adult education, both ideals are pursued alternatingly, as Jörg Dinkelaker shows in his analysis of how adult education is described in terms of a translational practice.

The concept of *métissage* discussed by Hélène Buzelin goes beyond this juxtaposition of sameness and difference because it emphasizes the emergence of new ways of using language within the translation process. Rather than highlighting the differences between the language of origin and the target language, this concept underlines the difference in time that is produced by the act of translation itself (Berman 1992). Sameness-in-difference becomes a matter of relating past and future practices of language use.

### 3 Fidelity or Creativity?

Depending on how we look at the process of translation, we encounter either the establishment of commonalities or we identify the (re-)production of differences. This oscillating picture is reflected in the ways in which normative claims about translational practices are negotiated. On the one hand, emphasis is put on the need to translate as faithfully as

possible in order to do justice to the originally intended meaning. As a result of this account, some stress the demand that translations should resemble the original message and meaning as accurately as possible. On the other hand, it is also necessary to consider the context in which the translated text is situated and to adjust translations accordingly. This is why others emphasize the inventive and creative character of translations. They stress the need to adapt translations to the cultural and linguistic peculiarities of the target audience. In this view, translators are not merely more or less faithful reproducers of the original message, but rather active participants in the process of cultural exchange and development (Steiner 1973).

Which of these competing claims is emphasized usually depends on the situational context in which translations are accomplished. When it is about interpreting a testimony in a courtroom, for example, it may be argued that the translation should be as accurate as possible to reflect what the witness said. Conversely, when the translation of a poem is discussed, it may be stressed that creative transformation is necessary to convey its meaning. Requiring different degrees of precision or creativity in order to be translated properly, is, however, not only an issue of differing types of texts. The fact that these claims compete with each other and that their evaluation varies according to the situational circumstances also reflects that both demands – accuracy as well as originality – address important issues of participation. Accurate as well as inventive translations may facilitate as well as hinder participation. The constellations discussed in this volume exemplarily illustrate this. A closer look at the problematization of what constitutes a ‘good’ translation reveals that these conflicting demands for accuracy or creativity are inextricably intertwined – as illustrated by the contributions to this volume.

In the context of literary translation, creative adaptations are what is usually expected and appreciated. In the heated debates about the Hungarian version of *Winnie-The-Pooh* addressed by Susan Gal, the translation is contested because it is accused of differing inappropriately from the original. Upon closer examination it can be shown, however, that the problem to which the critics refer is not about how the original is inter-

preted, but about how Hungarian culture and language – that is, the target context – is portrayed. Paradoxically, the demand for fidelity to the British text is used here to intervene in debates about how Hungarian culture should be promoted.

In the case of recognition of qualifications from abroad, stabilizing the expectation of accuracy and commensurability is a major purpose. Yet, this demand for precision entails the consequence that untranslatable elements of the translated qualifications are systematically neglected. These neglects are, in turn, taken into account by some instances of the recognition process. Some of the instances involved in this translational process (such as counseling and companies) emphasize the specific, incommensurable backgrounds of the person's vocational biography – they are accurate to the original – while others (such as formal recognition and training) stress the universal and generic standards of certification – they are accurate to the conventions of the target context. A closer look at the performative, interfering nature of translations and an analytical focus on distortions and misunderstandings reveals the tensions between the need for adherence to the original expressions and that of adapting to the target context.

In the context of community interpreting, as discussed by Sebnem Bahadır-Berzig, interpreters are expected to accurately translate what migrants say in interactions with authorities (and *vice versa*). Yet, the interpreters are also expected to explain and elaborate on what each of the parties says in order to make the translation understandable in each different cultural context. The tensions between the need for adherence to the original expressions and the need for adapting to the target context are handled by producing two versions of the translation.

Jeremy Knox engages with how educational assessment practices are profoundly transformed when translated into the digital context. He highlights that these transformations take place largely unnoticed, which raises the question of whether a more deliberate discussion about the accuracy and the situatedness of the translation should be pushed.

Jörg Dinkelaker shows that when education is conceptualized as a translational practice it can be seen as a process in which the competing demands of fidelity to the original (the knowledge imparted) and fi-

delity to the target situation (the knowledge conceived) have to be constantly balanced. He highlights the challenges of nurturing and developing unique individuality on the one hand, and making individuals understandable and compatible within cultural conventions on the other.

The concept of *métissage* discussed by H  l  ne Buzelin transcends this question of whether to stick as closely as possible to the original or to be sensitive to the target context. Translations are seen as creating new ways of relating and assembling textual practices from differing contextual references. Any translation is seen as the accomplishment of a new way of merging and is a creative event per se. Yet, this process of ‘interweaving’ requires extensive efforts to accomplish appropriately, i.e. accurate readings of the original, as Buzelin lays out so impressively.

## 4 Politics of Translation

It has been repeatedly stressed that translation processes are inherently and inevitably political (Gal 2015; Bahadir 2020). Translations are acts of boundary-marking and boundary-crossing and therefore involve arbitrary decisions – be they conscious choices or unconscious actions. As these decisions have a direct impact on the framing of participation, they are a matter of ethical and political reflection. These issues concern the (trans-)formation of boundaries on the one hand (Section 4.1) and the construction of identities on the other (Section 4.2).

### 4.1 (Trans-)Forming Boundaries

Boundaries between contexts and languages are not only a precondition for translation, but translations themselves contribute to the formation of such boundaries. Thus, translations can lead to the transformation of how boundaries are drawn, as well as to the enforcement and iteration of existing modes of differentiation (and unification).

The distinctions between semiotic contexts such as languages, cultures or social worlds, which are implied by translations, reflect power differentials and hierarchical valuations. In some constellations, the

target context is considered superior, as in many cases of immigration work (Anne Vatter, Sebnem Bahadir-Berzig). In other situations, the context of origin is given a superior position; for example, when a piece of literature is translated into another language (Hélène Buzelin, Susan Gal), when scientific knowledge is transferred into the lifeworld of the recipients (Jörg Dinkelaker) or when a social practice is reframed through a new language as is the case in digitalization processes (Jeremy Knox). These hierarchizations shape how translations are constituted, which can be traced by comparing the diverse constellations scrutinized within this volume. The contributions in this volume investigate how boundaries of participation are transformed and negotiated by translations: they discuss which differences are denied and which are emphasized, reconstructing how differences and commonalities are defined and constructed.

## 4.2 (De-)Constructing Identities

Translations highlight that identities are linked to the social contexts in which they develop. Hence, translations alienate as well as nostrify. They relate and identify the ways in which identities and differences are constructed along the boundaries of the languages and cultures involved. In any given case there are multiple ways of relating to the differences between the two contexts – the origin and the target – of a translation. Who is addressed in what manner, and with what attributes, depends on how boundaries between contexts are delineated, how the inherent contradictions between bridging and overcoming these differences are handled and how the complexities between accuracy and creativity are dealt with. Hence, the scope of participation within and across the boundaries of social contexts depends crucially on the ways in which translational constellations are approached, established and dealt with. This involves questions of which frameworks of participation are established by translations and how identities themselves may be translated from one context to another. While any kind of language use implies specific frameworks of participation, translation – by raising questions of fidelity and creativity – stresses the constructedness of them.

The case of the Hungarian adaption of *Winnie-The-Pooh* illustrates how ideologies about who belongs to a particular social context – here, the Hungarian nation – are implicated in the ways a translation is carried out. The same correlation can be observed in the case of the translation of educational notions of learning into the language of digital algorithms, discussed by Jeremy Knox.

Some specific kinds of translation are not primarily concerned with the translation of texts describing and inscribing participation, but with the translation of identity constructions themselves (Pelizza 2020). Once a person has crossed the borders of a social context, identities have to be translated in order to enable participation as illustrated by the case of the recognition of foreign qualifications discussed by Anne Vatter. The categories and frameworks of participation used in the respective social contexts are related to and distinguished from each other. How commonalities and differences are defined and processed becomes a matter of contested negotiations. In educational contexts, this political question of translating identities becomes the dominant work, as Jörg Dinkelaker points out. This work is carried out against the backdrop of differentiated cultures of knowledge use and knowledge production.

Discussing concerns about the ethical and political implications of translations finally brings to the fore the question of the positioning of translators. Their participation in both related social contexts and their responsibility for weighing up the competing demands of the translational situation requires that their (professional) identities undergo constant reflection and balancing. The situatedness of any translation highlights the responsibility of translators not only to recognize the specific social contexts of both the translator and the translated entity, but also to recognize the limits of their own understanding. Since any translational constellation is permeated with power lines and hierarchies, navigating between the risks of usurpation on the one hand and disregard on the other, involves dealing with the currents and gradients which arise from that. In the context of community interpreting, Sebnem Bahadır-Berzig describes how the translators' positioning is discussed in relation to how the need for translation is defined, by whom and how the transla-

tor is purposefully deployed while, in the context of literary translation, H el ene Buzelin highlights the relevance of reflected experience.

These diverse perspectives on the ambiguous aspects of how translations and participations are dynamically intertwined make it obvious that claiming straightforward answers to translational issues is bound to fall short. Rather, thoughtful negotiations are as unavoidable as they are desirable. Our hope is that the compilation of contributions in this volume will play a valuable role in fostering these essential discussions.

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**Part I.**

**Translating Written Texts  
as a Matter of Participation**



## **Sameness-in-Difference**

### Politics between Literary and Anthropological Translation

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*Susan Gal*

A beloved children's book – indisputably a literary text – has evoked the kind of fierce discursive disputes in Hungary that anthropologists often analyse. This presents an opportunity to contrast and combine literary and anthropological approaches. The book in question is the lighthearted *Winnie-the-Pooh*, by A.A. Milne (1882–1956), published in London in 1926 and translated into Hungarian ten years later by the writer and poet Karinthy Frigyes (1887–1938), with the title *Micimackó*. Like the English, the Hungarian book is cherished, its verses have become part of everyday language. The English book has sold over 50 million copies and has never been out of print; the Hungarian is now in its thirty-third edition and going strong. The stories have been commercialised, psychoanalysed, philosophised. Disney started merchandising the characters in the 1960s and bought the rights in 2001; their economic value has increased enormously. The stories and characters, however, have never seemed to have any specifically political significance. Yet, the Hungarian translation has been attacked and swept into nasty and repeated polemics in national level media since the end of communism. The book became the focus of fights about nationalism, xenophobia, and the sex politics of the current right-wing FIDESZ government. Readers and writers took political positions through their stances towards the text and its different versions over time. To be sure, anthropologists have

not paid much attention to literary translation.<sup>1</sup> Yet, this case shows how both literary studies and anthropology can benefit by an approach that analyses the social and political embeddedness of literary translation and, by implication, translation in other domains as well.

It seems self-evident in Euro-America that “a translation is no substitute for the original” (Bellos, 2011, p. 37). Yet my friends in Budapest – Hungarian-English bilinguals quite familiar with both versions of *Winnie-the-Pooh* – insisted that the Hungarian was a better book than the English. Such a de-valorisation of a literary “original” by readers may be unusual today – and I will return to it later – but it was common in post-Renaissance Europe (Leavitt, 2015, p. 269). Both notions are examples of what linguistic anthropologists call language ideologies: ideas and presuppositions about language and its use, along with the moral, aesthetic and political implications of such ideas for speakers (cf. Woolard, 2018). Language ideologies are not doctrines (not like liberalism or communism); they are not true or false (not false consciousness). Rather, they are frameworks that enable the interpretation of texts and talk. Speakers draw on their presumptions about how language and speech are connected to stereotypes of people and places, in order to be able to engage in everyday interactions, enact identities, and make judgements about cultural values. There are always multiple ideologies in any social setting, often in conflict or contradiction (cf. Gal & Irvine, 2019). Language ideologies invariably include ideas about translation: understandings about the relative value of particular languages in the social world, what kind of task translation is, who in society is able and allowed to do it, and how (cf. Gal, 2015).

The politicisation of *Winnie-the-Pooh* in Hungary can tell us about politicisation in general: how political oppositions are made, enacted and justified. With this aim, a first section outlines a linguistic anthropologist’s approach to translation. The second analyses *Micimackó* in anthropological terms, sketching its ideological and sociocultural

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1 The exception is bible translation, which has received much attention (see Gal, 2023). Some of the evidence in this chapter was presented earlier in Gal (2021). My thanks for helpful comments to the Michigaoan faculty group.

context. The third section takes up politicisation directly, tracking the translation's afterlife: three rounds of public debates, showing how Karinthy's work became implicated in vicious national politics, establishing social categories, factions, oppositional stances, and boundaries between categories.

## 1 A Linguistic Anthropological Approach

Anthropologists start by questioning seemingly self-evident common-sense notions. The Euro-American view of language starts with word-meanings, often claiming that some terms are untranslatable. By contrast, linguistic anthropology starts with pragmatics: the contrasting ways of speaking (including phonological, lexical, morphosyntactic differences) that are felt by speakers to be appropriate to contrasting social contexts and uses. How to express politeness or respect is a pragmatic issue, not necessarily a matter of differences between standard languages. For instance, even within the same language, rural politeness practices often differ from urban ones. Politeness is only one example of register differences: linguistic differences that point to (they index and evoke) ethnic, racial and regional differences are register contrasts (cf. Silverstein, 2003). They present special issues for translation. How should one render the stylised speech of Southerners and Northerners in an American movie about the U.S. Civil War, when that movie is being dubbed into German or Turkish? What register contrasts could convey to German-speakers the social contrasts displayed or suggested by English regional dialects in that case? Register differences enact identities and invoke social scenes. These are the focus of the linguistic anthropological approach, as they were for the literary scholar M.M. Bakhtin:

"[...] there are no 'neutral' words and forms – words and forms that belong to 'no one'; language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents [...] All words have the 'taste' of a profession a genre, a party, a class, a particular work [...] a particular person," (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293)



Genre differences are also captured in Bakhtin's purview, as in that of linguistic anthropology. Both require making judgements about similarity and difference.

Any two texts have innumerable qualities that can be picked out as similar in some way. Linguistic anthropology asks: in what way(s) is this a translation of that, and for whom. What norms and ideological frames enable recognition of both similarity and difference. Euro-American ways of talking about translation are once again deceptive because they focus on differences among standard languages, emphasising the difference between "domesticating" translations that make the foreign text seem familiar to readers in the target language, and "foreignising" translations, that make the text sound foreign in the target language (cf. Venuti, 2010). This omits the role of registers and genres. For example, Japanese marks idealised women's speech with final particles on verbs, creating a "woman's language" (register) in a way English does not. In a Japanese translation of the US Civil War novel *Gone with the Wind*, white women's speech was given these particles, but black enslaved women's speech was not. For Japanese readers, racial difference was signalled by the presence or absence of gender particles (cf. Inoue, 2003). This was neither domesticating nor foreignising. It drew on non-equivalent, contrasting registers (gendered vs. racialised) in both languages. The domesticating/foreignising dichotomy presumes standard languages are fixed and translators merely adjust. More often, translation creates a juxtaposition of codes that demands the creation of new registers. Bible translation has often created new sacred registers in non-European languages. These sometimes extend a language's boundaries, but may also set up more rigid boundaries between what are, as a result of juxtaposition, seen as separate and inter-translateable codes (cf. Gal, 2023).

A related commonsense notion is that the goal of translation is to find equivalence of denotation or pragmatic effect. Yet, as philosophers have long argued, judgements of equivalence – even of mere similarity – are relative to the roles, situations and projects of those who make the judgements (cf. Goodman, 1972). The anthropological emphasis on difference-in-similarity aims to include situations in which the inter-

pretation of a message or text, its “uptake” or pragmatic meaning, are in contention. For instance, in 2001 there was a dispute about a mid-air collision of a Chinese and an American plane over the S. China Sea. It was resolved by a diplomatic memo from the US saying “very sorry” for loss of the Chinese pilot. The Chinese took this as the (pragmatic) speech act of “apology.” The US claimed it was simply an expression of sorrow, and unlike an apology, implied no responsibility. The issue of interpretative uptake gains importance from the fact that no translation is final. There are always further translations, translations of translations. Drawing on Derrida’s notion of citationality, Bakhtin’s dialogicality, and developments in the semiotics of interaction, linguistic anthropologists argue that translation is a special case of recontextualisation – also called intertextuality or interdiscursivity or transduction (cf. Gal, 2015). Each recontextualisation is a reframing that emphasises or diminishes the inevitable “gap” between repetitions, across texts and across speech events (cf. Briggs & Bauman, 1992; cf. Agha & Wortham, 2005; cf. Nakassis, 2013). The ideological work of the (re)translator inevitably (re)conceptualises the work, for different audiences, in different contexts. Recontextualisers – translators – always and inevitably have different goals than the authors they translate. Any translation is simultaneously imitative and novel. It creates something new in the world.

Some of the differing goals of translation are nicely captured by statistical and theoretical works about the “world republic of letters” – the global circulation of translations (cf. Casanova, 2004). Like the anthropological literature on ethnographic translation (cf. Hanks & Severi, 2015), these works are interested in power differences. Languages with very large numbers of speakers – English, Spanish, Chinese – have overwhelmingly larger literary markets than demographically “minor” languages like Hungarian. It is a sign of differential power that more works are translated from these demographically large languages into smaller ones than vice versa. The large languages are said to dominate the smaller ones. Yet, this global view, though indispensable, ignores the disputes, social boundaries and linguistic differences *within* national contexts where the standard national language(s) might reign, but where genres and register differences are crucial. They can be used

to parlay the perceived international status of a national language and its writers into more local intra-national disputes. Such disputes create factions and contention among both writers and readers, factions that align readers and writers with broader political values and stances existing as possibilities in their social worlds. The case of Winnie-the-Pooh – now a transnational text – is well situated to illuminate how its translations in Hungary became a fulcrum for everyday politics, participating in the making and overstepping of social borders through the differential valuation of linguistic practices.

## 2 What Karinthy Did to Winnie-the-Pooh

For those not familiar with Winnie-the-Pooh nor with *Micimackó*, here are the basics: Both books consist of stories that the narrator tells about a 6-year old boy who is the presumed audience and, like the narrator (who is his father), is also a character in the stories. The boy plays with stuffed animals that come to life and have adventures in the woods around the family's summer house in the English countryside. In both books the animals become human types, endearingly depicted. Both books entertain children, while engaging adults by seeing linguistic practices (idioms, anaphor, narrative framings, complex words) through children's eyes. Despite these similarities however, when one reads the two side-by-side there are real differences in the narrator's voice and the characters of the animals. Although English and Hungarian are notably different in their grammatical structures, that will not explain these voicings, which are neither simply lexical nor syntactic. They are matters of register and genre. They are due to what the translator, Karinthy, took to be his task.

Why are language ideologies, especially registers, relevant to that task? An example will clarify. One might imagine that an American and an English child, both reading the first edition of Winnie-the-Pooh were reading the same book. Yet, for an American, street signs reading *Wayin*, *Wayout*, *glass meaning mirror*; *deceive them meaning fool them*; that's a *pity meaning that's too bad* would be comprehensible,

yet strange. Not to mention mysterious items such a gorse bush and towel horse. Unfamiliar turns of phrase have pragmatic (register) effect. American ideas (ideologies) about English variants, make the stuffed animals seem to exist in a world different from America. That is part of the book's appeal. For Americans, Winnie-the-Pooh is not written in American or British English but in an aspirational register that indexes a magical foreignness. English children and adults could not have read it this way. Instead, when it was first published, the book envisioned upper middle class life, with daily baths, and a summer house in the woods. Historians tell us that the book responded to a yearning for escapism after the First World War, and an exaltation of childhood as enchanted and innocent. It recalled a more secure period for the middle class before the war (cf. Bilclough & Laws, 2017). The space-time evoked for English readers was an imagined national past, certainly not foreign Otherness. Arguably, then, even for the initial readers, the book evoked different chronotopes, through different uptakes of register, on the two sides of the Atlantic.

What imagined worlds would be of interest to children and adults in 1930s Hungary? Hardly any children's books had been translated from English into Hungarian, so there were no obvious models for Karinthy to follow. But children's books are an old genre in Europe and the framing ideology in Karinthy's era was clear: be true to the content but not to the form. As noted by a memo to writers and librarians from the Hungarian Education Ministry: "The Grimm and Anderson tales, reworked, with Magyar names, Magyar turns of phrase, should give the impression, in the hands of a good writer, that they are original Magyar works," (cf. Farkas & Seres, 2017). Karinthy was faithful to this translation ideology, if certainly not always to Milne's text.

In keeping with faithfulness to content, Winnie-the-Pooh and Mici-mackó have the same storylines and characters. Karinthy invented new names, but they match Milne's. Like Winnie, Mici is gender-ambiguous and mackó is the general term for teddy bear. Eeyore/Füles (big ears), loses his tail, Piglet/Malacka, (pig+diminutive) is little and easily frightened, Kanga+Roo as Kanga+Zsebibaba (pocket baby) arrive as strangers, are at first feared, but are ultimately welcomed into the animal society of

the 100 Acre Wood. Moreover, many of Karinthy's linguistic inventions convey amusing effects much like Milne's. When Owl tells Pooh the "customary procedure" for finding Eeyore's tail, Owl says: "First, issue a Reward." Pooh thinks Owl has sneezed; ostensibly because the word "issue" sounds like a sneeze. Karinthy renders this as *dijat kell kitűzni. Ennek pszichikus hatása van* (We must offer a Reward. This has a psychological effect), *pszichikus* too sounds like a sneeze.

Yet, the overall effects and values the books convey are different. In Milne's stories there is an innocence, a gentle irony and understatement. The motives of the animals are only implied. The world is one of suburban comfort, leisure and the privilege of empire. The characters are the stuffed toys of the middle class, their activities suggest nothing of the barnyard. They take evening baths, have world-exploring adventures, birthday parties with cakes and balloons; with pencil holders and paints for gifts. Nothing in Milne's language hints at farms or the provinces.

By contrast, Karinthy's characters are not so gentle, subtle nor suburban. The narrator's voice is often reminiscent of rural, farmer-peasant usages, as in Hungarian folk tales. Some of these locutions are simply old-fashioned, others are stigmatised today but in the 1930s pointed to dialect speakers and village life. The rustic flavour of the narrator is in sharp contrast with the speech of the animal characters, which evokes an urban, modern world and stressful relationships. In place of Milne's understatement, Karinthy frequently describes the animals' inner states and feelings. Verbs of saying elaborate on the animals' reactions. The characters do not "say" their speeches, as in Milne, they "ask suspiciously" or are "forced to admit" or "bark triumphantly." Karinthy's animals seem excitable and conflicted, as in this segment's translation:

Milne: "What?" said Piglet, with a jump. And then, to show that he hadn't been frightened, he jumped up and down once or twice in an exercising sort of way.

Karinthy adapted the Milne passage like this, in my back-translation:

Karinthy back translated: Piglet jumped a big one in fright, but at the same time, he was ashamed of his own cowardice, and so that no one would notice what happened, he jumped a few more times and remarked

lightly that it was at this time in the mornings that he usually did his daily exercises.

Note how Karinthy endows Piglet with an explicit inner life of cowardice, shame, and white lies that are hardly even implied in Milne.

In addition to stressful reactions, Karinthy locates the characters in an urban adult world, with mentions of money, expense, business, offices, and technology that are absent in Milne. This is evident in the songs Karinthy invented that diverge considerably from Milne:

Milne:

Isn't it funny  
How a bear likes honey?  
Buzz! Buzz! Buzz!  
I wonder why he does?

Karinthy:

Erdei körökben az a nézet  
hogy a medve szereti a mézet,  
ez nem csak afféle szerény  
vélemény  
ez tény, tény, tény.

Karinthy back translated:

In woodland cliques the general view  
is that bears like honey,  
it's what they do,  
it's not mere opinion or modest act  
that's fact, fact, fact.

Milne's four simple lines would be easy to render in Hungarian. Yet Karinthy instead hints at a citified café culture of gossip, cliques, argument, pretence. Overall, Karinthy's animals seem a more knowing lot, not the clueless innocents of Milne.

In a commentary on his own translation, Karinthy (1935) called Milne's verses "nonsense poetry" using the English words and adding: "in the speech of Budapest, I would call this stupid/jokey poetry," with

the slang term *blóddli* – borrowed from German *blöd* – meaning “stupid.” The contrast is striking: Most English readers find Milne’s verses not stupid, but whimsical and fanciful rhymes on honey, the weather and afternoon tea.

Some have charged that Karinthy misunderstood Milne’s book. It is true that he did not know much English; his sister did a rough translation first that he then reworked. Such double translation – rough followed by polish – was not unusual practice at the time and is still common globally. Yet, Karinthy’s literary sensitivity was never at issue; it was recognised and admired by his large public. He is often compared by critics to his contemporaries Kafka, Musil, Hašek and Karl Krauss (cf. Szabó, 1982). His hilarious parodies of his contemporaries – poets and writers – made his reputation. He was famous and popular, very much a man of his time and place, a regular of 1920s and 30s Budapest cafés and active in Hungary’s modernist movement that is still today a touchstone for artists of all kinds.

What moved Karinthy to change the text in such active ways, confident and immune to his supposedly marginal place in the global literary periphery, versus Milne at the centre? As one critic noted: In order to please an audience that was used to his ironies, Karinthy “mixed in his own particular language, tasting of the Budapest-coffeehouse, through which the little animals ... became even more absurd, more humorous...” (cf. Kappanyos, 2015, 200). Indeed, *Micimackó* and his friends sound like denizens of a sophisticated Budapest. And Karinthy paired this register of the urban coffeehouse with the voice of rustic folk tales: the rural narrator and the citified animals; the provincial and the urban combined. Neither of these registers is present in Milne.

Karinthy was not mixing randomly. As part of the first generation of Europe-facing Hungarian modernists, Karinthy participated in the café-centred artistic scene that created the Budapest journal *the Nyugat* (1908–1941). The journal, though called “West” did not simply import Parisian or London artistic values and styles to Budapest. Its goal was to establish for Hungarian artistic projects a distinct aesthetic identity, their own place among European modernisms. To do this, they aimed to resolve what they saw as a contradiction of national identity that drew

on the traditions of peasant life as much as the ethnic mix of cities. They aimed for a combination of *urbánus* (cosmopolitan) and *népies* (folk) values and styles. The most admired literary artists – Ady Endre, Kosztolányi Dezső – succeeded at this. The composer Bartók Béla – a contributor to the *Nyugat* – was admired for creating, out of Hungarian folk tunes, a sophisticated modernist music recognised continent-wide in high culture circles. Karinthy likely saw his translation’s pairings through this aesthetic.

The *Nyugat*’s artistic ambition had a political counterpart. During the journal’s heyday between the World Wars, European countries were increasingly divided politically between extreme right and extreme left-wing movements. The intellectuals of the *Nyugat* wanted a progressive, modern Hungary: cherishing its national identity yet neither communist nor right-wing nationalist. They saw themselves as a “bridge” between East and West. It is a position that is still evoked in public life by allusions to the long-defunct *Nyugat*. The cosmopolitan/folk dichotomy – in politics and aesthetics – re-emerged after the fall of communism in 1989 as a way of interpreting new political distinctions. Though transformed in many ways, the dichotomy is still vibrant, contrasting right-wing, conservative, nationalist parties on the one hand, and on the other hand parties of free markets and free speech (Gal, 1991). It continues to resonate as a way of distinguishing between those who want a liberal, civil society imagined as West-aligned as opposed to those who favour an “illiberal,” Christian, national one, closer to Eastern models.

### 3 Afterlives: Scandals and Polemics

Only in the post-communist era, with the re-emergence of a somewhat changed cosmopolitan/folk dichotomy, did Karinthy’s translation become a subject of debate. During 40 years of communism, *Micimackó* was beloved and widely read, but not much discussed. The previous section took up issues of ideology, register and genre in translation; this section turns to recontextualisations (citationality, interdiscursivity) to understand the politicisation of Karinthy’s translation. By commenting



on a work, rewriting it, or parodying it, writers re-contextualise it (as Karinthy surely did), but also – crucially – locate themselves vis-a-vis the positions of others who are also responding to the work (Karinthy did this too). Divergent stances towards the work can reveal whole fields of debate, what linguistic anthropologists have called axes of ideological differentiation (cf. Gal & Irvine, 2019). When opinions about a text become signs of broader social distinctions, the text is effectively politicised.

Since the fall of communism, there have been three rounds of public debate in Hungary about Karinthy's translation. The first was in 1992 when criticism of all kinds flourished, English became more accessible and translation became a separate profession. The second occurred between 2005–7, under a centrist socialist government. The third was in the 2010s, when the rightist FIDESZ (Young Democrats) party came to power. Through the debates, writers evoked aesthetics and literary canons in the justification of their views, but also located themselves in opposing positions on political issues such as national identity and the cultural politics of FIDESZ, as the ruling party.

### 3.1 The First Debate

Published as the lead article in *Kortárs*, a prestigious literary journal in 1992, the first salvo in the first debate was a real shocker. It was a vicious, frontal attack against Karinthy's text, naming it a "literary crime" perpetrated by a translator who misread, corrupted, "distorted and disfigured" the original's uplifting purity and deep wisdom. Molnár Miklós (1992) – I will call him the Attacker for simplicity – was a minor writer and translator, 47 at that time – denounced Karinthy as a neurotic humorist hungry for punchlines, with no humility; an aggressive "vandal" willing to sell his country for a laugh. The book was a symptom of vacuous bolshevik word games, a "sick" literary world lacking in self-criticism, where a conspiracy between translators-editors-publishers allowed this pernicious "forgery" to continue for decades. The Attacker charged that these corrupt forces refused to let him do a truer re-translation. He charged that

Karinthy's translation was a symptom of the "fetishization" of a canon, that is of certain Hungarian authors, names and personalities.

This bitter diatribe, in its subtext, revealed a man who wished to enter a literary world that excluded him. The response to his article, printed in the same issue, was a light, humorous defence of Karinthy by two well-established literary elders, ten years older than the Attacker, one a prize-winner (cf. Orbán, 1992; cf. Kabdebó, 1992). They defended Karinthy, the canon, and the supposedly fetishised writers whom they identified as the Nyugat's heirs. The Defenders condescended to the Attacker implying he was a hack, a mere translator, one who forgot how to be a writer. Karinthy, in their view, had a certain genius. They pointed out the great gulf separating Milne, confident heir of Britain's global empire, and Karinthy, struggling in the 1930s in the chaos of a collapsed Habsburg realm. Karinthy bridged that gap, said the Defenders, by transplanting Winnie-the-Pooh to his own cosmopolitan Budapest, yet with a national flavour. The Attacker, they charged, was deaf to the modernist-national values of Micimackó. The debate about this translation implicated the literary canon, access to jobs, and the "health" of the nation.

### 3.2 The Second Debate

In subsequent years, Karinthy's translation was used for training translators (cf. Kamarás, 1998), for proposing alternative solutions, without undermining respect for his achievement. Country-wide discussion emerged only in 2007 when literary theorist Kappanyos András, then leading a committee on a new translation of Joyce's *Ulysses* into Hungarian, and working on a book about literary translation, stepped up to defend Karinthy again. The first Defenders had admitted that Karinthy made some mistakes. Kappanyos, with the credentials of a respected professional translator, argued that most divergences from Milne were actually improvements. Armed with new theories, Kappanyos rejected the Attacker's outdated translation ideology of "faithfulness," that is, literal word correspondences. Instead, he proposed that a translated text is a cultural object that should be judged by how well it is embedded

in the literary traditions of the receiving culture. All translation, he argued, is “adaptation” to the new context. All translation establishes links to precedents, but – echoing Bakhtin on dialogicality – he added that a good one also makes way for future works. Karinthy’s *Micimackó*, he argued, was beautifully adapted. It has been deeply influential in Hungarian children’s literature, enabling valuable works that otherwise would not have existed (cf. Kappanyos, 2007).

In his later book on translation theory, Kappanyos (2015) also rose to the defence of the literary canon and a national self. He noted that Karinthy has a higher status in the Hungarian literary world than Milne has in the English one. This is why, he added, educated Hungarians are sure that *Micimackó* is a better book than *Winnie-the-Pooh*; Karinthy a better writer than Milne. In short, he stated in writing what my Budapest friends had insisted to me in discussions years before. This view was more widespread than I had imagined. It was not only a return, as mentioned earlier, of the post-Renaissance language ideology that a translation may well be better than the original. It is also a double-barreled national claim. First, Karinthy’s confidence was not arrogance and aggression, as the Attacker had charged. On the contrary, this position avers, the Hungarian literary canon is strong enough to counter works in dominant languages. Second, the western-facing intellectual world that aligns in this way with Karinthy stands against a domestic opponent too, namely writers like the Attacker. This domestic opponent devalues the cultural institutions that the western-facing social group controls. It is important to see that praising *Micimackó* is a retort in a domestic fight as well as an international one. It parlays the fight at one scale into the struggle at the other.<sup>2</sup>

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2 It follows that this dynamic also implicates me, as a Hungarian-English bilingual living in diaspora, and makes it important that I value both books equally and say so. That opinion conveys volumes about my identity and politics.

### 3.3 A Third Debate

In the period between 2007–2010, the initial Attacker once again published criticisms, this time in a daily newspaper. His earlier complaint against bolshevism was now a complaint against capitalism. Monopolies had bought the rights to *Micimackó*, and in yielding to business interests, “we [Hungarians] have become stupid, governed by idiots,” (cf. Molnár, 2007). That was a swipe against the liberal-socialist government then in power. In expressing his complaints, the Attacker also cited a new ally, the writer Orbán János Dénes, who seemed to agree with him, and who continued, in a different way, the attacks on *Micimackó*.

This Orbán (no relation to the Prime Minister), was a young poet and writer from Transylvania who was welcomed into Hungarian literary circles in the 1990s as a refreshingly iconoclastic voice, a parodist and norm breaker, an *enfant terrible*. It was an era in Budapest of great popular enthusiasm, even kitchy romance, for anything from and about the several millions of Hungarian-speaking minorities living in the states around Hungary’s borders in Romania, Slovakia, Serbia and Ukraine. Orbán János Dénes, a product of minority life, was publishing parodies of *Micimackó*. This too was a comment on Karinthy’s book, recruiting it via the intertext of parody to debates that became more pointed as the FIDESZ conservative party gained power in 2010 and moved considerably to the right.

The conceit of the parodic stories (cf. Orbán, 2012) was that Karinthy’s book was a failure in the Székely region of Transylvania because it was not written in the Székely dialect of Hungarian and failed to support the region’s ancient rural *virtus*, the provincial masculine prowess romanticised by metropolitan Hungarians. Orbán changed *Micimackó* to *Misi*, making him sound more masculine, or, as he wrote, less *buzis* (pejorative for gay). Further, the stories were written in non-standard spelling, lexicon and syntax that was supposed to represent the Székely dialect. *Misi* never speaks, he yells and bellows. There is an animus against Budapest, as when *Misi* says: “a proper Székely bear should not go out into the woods with a shit naked ass, like the Budapesters do.” Indeed, the stories are full of harsh obscenities and ethnic and regional

slurs, as Misi issues threats and insults to his friends. Owl and Piglet instruct Misi about sex, specifically where, and into whom, he should (or should not) insert his newly erect penis. Misi is represented as dreaming graphically of having sex with Kanga, who is cast as a divorcee, because “those kind are easily available.” And so on, in further insults.

At first glance this seems mildly amusing, like a fan-zine that puts a beloved hero in new, incongruous and taboo circumstances. It is a translation that does to Karinthy what Karinthy did to Milne’s text: taking it into a different linguistic register (dialect) that indexes an imagined scene, here an eastern rustic one. The sex and violence in Orbán’s version make Karinthy’s animals seem innocent. Written by a Transylvanian author, these parodies are not directed against Székely readers. They aim to shock educated Budapesters. Orbán aims to provoke and ridicule the (Budapest) Hungarians who supposedly believe in the rough and tough Transylvanian. These are supposedly the same people who would be shocked by the depiction of sex and ethnic slurs in *Micimackó* because they revere Karinthy and his bear. An otherwise positive review in *Kortárs*, the prestigious literary journal, remarked that the constant profanity of Orbán’s parody is “neither witty nor provocative, just crude,” and the constant gay-bashing is hurtful and offensive (cf. Pécsi, 2014). The review failed to add that the parody was perfectly in tune with the government’s policies against sexual minorities.

Indeed, in Orbán’s (2018) journalistic essays, published somewhat later, he conspicuously supported the right-wing FIDESZ government. Fuming against the “boundless arrogance of the left,” he chastised intellectuals he called “liberals” for their “political correctness,” their support of Budapest Pride parades and feminist writings. By his own account, he was mounting a “culture war” against anyone who rejected the casual use of ethnic and sexual slurs. Such people he called “liberals” and they could be found among the intellectuals of Budapest who have consistently voted against FIDESZ and its anti-immigrant, anti-feminist, homophobic, and anti-EU policies. Against such people, Orbán took up what he called the “national” position. Ignoring that his own views matched right-wing voices in western Europe, Orbán ridiculed those he called “liberals” for blindly following European political and

artistic trends, continuing to respect the Nyugat and its heirs. Echoing the first Attacker, he accused Hungarian literary life of being an exclusivist club with a fetishised canon. He cast himself as a righteous outsider, supporting anti-immigrant, homophobic cultural policy. Yet, far from being an outsider, Orbán had been the darling of Budapest artistic circles and even before embarking on his “culture war,” he was a conspicuous beneficiary of government largesse. He received generous state funding for the cultural organisations he established. Meanwhile, support was withdrawn from longstanding, prestigious cultural institutions (cf. Grecsó, 2017). In this way, Orbán the writer contributed to the plan of that other Orbán, the Prime Minister, who aimed to centralise and control the country’s cultural life by selectively funding only those activities that were in line with government-approved opinions, while suppressing or starving others.

But, Orbán’s parodies did not end the dialogue of translations; the re-contextualisations continue. Karinthy’s bear has recently been recruited to the opposite side of this political axis of differentiation, this discursive divide. In 2020, the Budapest Puppet Theatre opened its season with *Micimackó*. A reviewer wrote: “Thanks to Karinthy’s translation [it] has become a Hungarian cultural treasure.” In the puppet theatre, the names have been changed, yet the characters are recognisable. This is yet another re-translation, in another medium. Here there are no xenophobic slurs. When the Kanga character and her child show up in the 100 Acre Wood – as in the plot of both Milne’s and Karinthy’s stories – they are identified as migrants, and seen as strange by the other animals. But in both versions, as in the puppet theatre, they are soon accepted and invited to stay. This storyline, writes the reviewer (cf. Rádai, 2020), is a quiet reference to the recent harsh mis-treatment of migrants in Hungary. One does not even have to “read between the lines,” the reviewer adds, as people did in communism, to see the puppet version of *Micimackó* as a quiet protest against the anti-migrant policies of the FIDESZ government.

## 4 Conclusions

Karinthy invented a Budapest Bear out of Milne's suburban English idyll, drawing on the language ideologies that supported the aesthetic and political commitments of Hungarian modernism. Orbán invented a Székely bear, playing on some of the same value-contrasts, but occupying the opposing positions on an axis of differentiation that had itself been somewhat transformed since the 1930s. In these literary creations, as in the articles of the Attacker, the Defenders and the production of the Puppet Theatre, politicisation took the form of aesthetic judgements that were understood equally as political ones. Writers and readers aligned with one faction as against another. They positioned themselves against others' aesthetic-cum-political views, always alert to national as well as international discussions, simultaneously watching the domestic literary world and continent-wide debates. Thus, multiple scales were invoked in each round of debate. Axes of differentiation are ideological contrasts, not social groupings, but they do establish the discursive basis for oppositions and thus the scaffolding for borders between categories of people that, ultimately, can be formed into factions and groups.

A linguistic anthropological analysis of translation processes, drawing as well on some literary theorists, shows how socially embedded is the formation of contrasting categories around literary works and their afterlives, their re-translations. In the making of these consequential differentiations, the text itself – while changed significantly – was still deliberately framed and understood as the “same” in some ways: another version of the beloved book. A linguistic anthropological approach enables one to see, in this series of scandals, the way politicization was achieved, both artistically and politically, through the ideological perception of sameness in a multiply reframed and changing text: sameness-in-difference.

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# Translating as a Way of Producing Knowledge across Boundaries

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*Hélène Buzelin*

This chapter is an attempt at recontextualising and furthering an early contribution in which I explored the relations between translation studies, ethnography and the production of knowledge (cf. Buzelin, 2004/2007). The first part presents the sources of inspiration and research that had nourished, at the time, this understanding of translation as a way of producing knowledge across boundaries. As more than fifteen years have passed since this piece was written, the second part questions, with the benefit of hindsight, to what extent this conception of translation has made its way and is now well accepted in translation practice, research and training. Elements of the answer are searched in TS literature on the topic.

## 1 The Context and Sources of Inspiration

To begin with, it is worth recalling that the chapter entitled “Translation Studies, Ethnography and the Production of Knowledge” was originally written and published in French in the translation journal *Meta*.

### 1.1 Stories of Translation and Migration

Soon after its publication, Paul St-Pierre, a senior colleague at Université de Montréal, offered to translate this article into English so as to include it in a collective volume he was preparing with Prafulla C. Kar and which

came out under the title *In Translation: Reflections, Refractions, Transformations* (cf. St-Pierre & Kar, 2005). Two years after its release at Pencraft India, a new edition was published in the “translation library” series by John Benjamins, both in print and in digital format. These changes in the language (from French to English), the status (article to chapter) and the format (print to digital) of the initial text—made possible thanks to intellectual affinities and professional ties—are in themselves revealing of how ideas (and knowledge) are produced and how they circulate through multiple forms of translation. Among its contributors, the volume edited by St-Pierre and Kar contained two chapters that will be referred to below: “Translation and society: the Emergence of a Relationship” by Daniel Simeoni (the opening chapter of the book) and “Translation and Métissage” by Alexis Nous.

The 2004 article published in *Meta* was to a large extent informed by a doctoral research (1997–2002)<sup>1</sup> conducted at the department of French language and literature of McGill University (Montréal, Canada). The latter had developed expertise, both practical and theoretical, in the translation of literary sociolects (particularly in American literature) thanks to the works of Annick Chapdelaine and Gillian Lane-Mercier (1994/1997/2001) as well as Judith Lavoie (1994/1997/2002). Inspired by the research produced by these scholars, but moving away from the American domain, the research I undertook would address the challenges of translating into French English Caribbean fictions making use of vernacular languages. Another decision, in line with the work that had been done previously at McGill, was to approach the question not only through an analysis of existing translations of English Caribbean creolized narratives, but also from a practical and reflexive viewpoint by trying to translate one particular novel. For this practical part, which constituted the core of the thesis, the choice was set on *The Lonely Londoners* by Indo-Trinidadian writer Samuel Selvon.

This novel relates the experience of the so-called Windrush Generation, a generation of migrants from the British colonies, mostly but not

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1 The doctoral thesis submitted in 2002 gave way to a monograph published three years later (cf. Buzelin, 2005).

exclusively from the West Indies, who came to London after World War II to help rebuild the country. Selvon, who belonged to this generation and who had migrated himself to Britain in 1950, expresses in a tragi-comic mode the daily life of those migrants: the initial fascination for the capital city, but also the racism, poverty and exclusion they faced, their solidarity, the loneliness, nostalgia, and longing for home. Beyond the topic, what made the novel unique was its style, as it was entirely narrated in a literary English very much informed by Trinidadian dialect, something unprecedented. The novel opens as follows:

“One grim winter evening, when it had a kind of unrealness about London, with a fog sleeping restlessly over the city and the lights showing in the blur as if is not London at all but some strange place on another planet, Moses Aloetta hop on a number 46 bus at the corner of Chepstow Road and Westbourne Grove to go to Waterloo to meet a fellar who was coming from Trinidad on the boat-train.” (Selvon, 1956, p. 7)

The reviews published at the time show that Selvon's prose let no critic indifferent<sup>2</sup>. Despite its longstanding success and its recognition, with time, as a classic<sup>3</sup>, the book was translated in very few languages, and not in French. Hence my decision to try to take up the challenge, fully aware that it would be a difficult one, but hoping that the experience would be

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2 Among the early reviews are the following: “cadenced prose which catches the special rhythms of the speech of the people without distortion or artifice.”(cf. Baltimore Sunday Sun, 01/12/1956) “poetical novel [...] making effective use of dialect” (Times, 6/12/1956, p. 13); “the West Indian idiom in which it is written is (I feel) a literary trick rather than the author's authentic voice”; (Spectator, 14/12/1956, p. 882); “the idiom [...] is West Indian, with its curious grammar and slang words” (The Times Literary Supplement, 21/12/1956, p. 761); “written in the language of the Trinidad streets, a strange tongue that will be unfamiliar to most Barbarians and nearly all Englishmen and Americans” (Bim, 1956, p. 61).

3 After its release in American and Canadian publishing houses in the fifties, the novel was included in the Longman Caribbean Writers series in 1985, and in Penguin's Modern Classics series in 2006. In October 2018, it was picked up as the book of the month by the Guardian's Reading group.

enriching and produce some form of knowledge. This decision was to a large extent inspired by Antoine Berman's definition of traductology.

## 1.2 Antoine Berman's Legacy

A key figure in contemporary translation studies and one of the founders of traductology in France, Antoine Berman (1942–1991) is, among other things, the author of *The Experience of the Foreign. Culture and Translation in Romantic Germany*<sup>4</sup> and *Toward a Translation Criticism: John Donne* published posthumously in 1995<sup>5</sup>. In the opening chapter of the first essay, a chapter entitled “La traduction au manifeste” – rendered in English as “The Manifestation of translation” but that could also be read as “Translation Manifesto” –, he provides his definition of translation:

“The very aim of translation—to open up in writing a certain relation with the Other, to fertilize what is one's Own through the mediation of what is Foreign—is diametrically opposed to the ethnocentric structure of every culture, that species of narcissism by which every society wants to be a pure unadulterated Whole. There is a tinge of the violence of cross-breeding in translation. [...] The essence of translation is to be an opening, a dialogue, a cross-breeding, a de-centering. Translation is ‘a putting in touch with,’ or it is nothing. (Berman transl. by Heyvaert, 1992, p. 4)<sup>6</sup>

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4 The essay was released in 1984 in French under the title *L'Épreuve de l'étranger. Culture et traduction dans l'Allemagne romantique* and appeared in 1992 in an English Translation signed by S. Heyvaert.

5 The original title of this essay is *Pour une critique des traductions: John Donne*. Its English translation by Françoise Massardier-Kenney came out only fourteen years later, in 2009.

6 Original citation: “La visée même de la traduction – ouvrir au niveau de l'écrit un certain rapport à l'Autre, féconder le Propre par la médiation de l'Étranger – heurte de front la structure ethnocentrique de toute culture, ou cette espèce de narcissisme qui fait que toute société voudrait être un Tout pur et non mélange. Dans la traduction, il y a quelque chose de la violence du métissage. [...] [L']essence de la traduction est d'être ouverture, dialogue, métissage, décen-

S. Heyvaert chose the term “cross-breeding” to render the concept of “métissage” used by Berman. Nouss (2007), who took over this idea of translation as *métissage* and reframed it in a post-structuralist (rather than dialectic) epistemology, aptly notes that the root of the concept *métissage* also refers to the action of weaving, and therefore could be translated as misweaving or interweaving. Nouss explains how this conceptualisation allows to move away from an either/or logic toward an inclusive one where translation and original, foreign and domestic, are inextricably linked and transforming one another.

“*Métissage* [...] is an assemblage of affiliations and identities which is never fixed once and for all and in which the different parts retain their identity and history. In a similar way, the translated text exists through its difference from the original, and the original makes known and legitimizes its own existence only in and through the translation. Thus an ethics of *métissage* constitutes a basis for a politics of translation.” (Nouss, 2007, p. 245)

Observing that translation has often been diverted from its very aim, its essence, Berman asserted the need for a history, an analytic and an ethics of translation, three components of what he called *traductology*. In the concluding chapter consisting of two sections, *The Archeology of Translation and Translation as a New Object of Knowledge*, he clarifies the goal and epistemology of *traductology*. He affirms that:

“First of all, as experience and as operation, it [translation] is the carrier of a knowledge *sui generis* on languages, literatures, cultures, movements of exchange and contact, etc. The issue is to manifest and articulate *sui generis*, to confront it with other modes of knowledge and experience concerning these domains. In this sense, translation must be considered rather as a subject of knowledge, as original and source of knowledge. In the second place, this knowledge, in order to become a ‘knowledge’ in the strict sense, should take

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trement. Elle est mise en rapport ou elle n'est rien.” (Berman, 1984, p. 16, emphasis in the original)

on a definite, quasi-institutional and established form, suited to further its development in a field of research and teachability. This has sometimes been called traductology [...] But that does not mean, at least not in the first place, that translation should become the object of a specific 'discipline' concerning a separate 'region' or 'domain,' precisely because it is not anything separate itself." (Berman & Heyvaert, 1992, p. 181–182)<sup>7</sup>

The scholar adds that this inter-discipline rests on two hypotheses: first, translation is the model for any process of communication; second, translation's role is "constitutive of all literature, philosophy, and all human science" (Ibid. 183)<sup>8</sup>. Yet, this role is overshadowed, as historically translation has often been reduced "either as the modest transmission of meaning, or as the suspect activity of injecting the language with strangeness. In both cases, translation is denied and obscured." (Ibid. 188)<sup>9</sup>. In Berman's view, one of the fundamental tasks of traductology is to fight this obscuring, which could only be done by creating...

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7 Original citation: "Tout d'abord, le fait qu'en tant qu'expérience et opération, elle est porteuse d'un savoir sui generis sur les langues, les littératures, les cultures, les mouvements d'échange et de contact, etc. Ce savoir sui generis, il s'agirait de le manifester, de l'articuler, de la confronter aux autres modes de savoir et d'expérience qui concernent des domaines. En ce sens, il faut considérer plutôt la traduction comme sujet de savoir, comme origine et source de savoir. / En second lieu, ce savoir devrait, pour devenir un « savoir » au sens strict, prendre une forme définie, aussi institutionnelle et établie, propre à permettre son déploiement dans un champ de recherche et d'enseignabilité. C'est ce qu'on a voulu appeler parfois la « traductologie ». [...] Mais cela ne veut pas dire, du moins en premier lieu, que la traduction devienne l'objet d'une « discipline » spécifique portant sur une « région » ou un « domaine » séparés, dans la mesure où elle n'est justement pas quelque chose de séparé." (Berman, 1984, p. 289–90)

8 Original citation: "Ce rôle [...] est tendanciellement constitutif de toute littérature, de toute philosophie et de toute science humaine." (Berman, 1984, p. 293)

9 Original citation: "[...] la traduction apparaît soit comme une transmission inapparente du sens, soit comme une activité suspecte d'injecter de l'«étrangeté» dans la langue. Dans les deux cas, elle est niée et occultée." (Berman, 1984, p. 300)

“[...] the possibility of a traductology that would cover both the practical and the theoretical field and that would be developed on the basis of the experience of translation—more specifically, on the basis of its very nature as experience. Abstract theorists and empirical practitioners concur in the assertion that the experience of translation is not, should not and could not be theorizable. Now, this presupposition is a negation of the meaning of the act of translation: by definition, this act is a second and reflexive activity. Reflexivity is essential to it, and with it systematicity.” (Berman & Heyvaert, 1992, p. 188)<sup>10</sup>

In his last essay, *Pour une critique des traductions: John Donne*, the scholar offered methodological guidelines to reach this goal. To him, a translation started with the act of reading: not only the text to be translated, but a myriad of parallel readings:

“[...] the reading done by the translator is [...] already a pre-translation, a reading done within the horizon of translation, and all the individuating characteristics of the text [...] are discovered within the movement of the act of translating as before. It is in this movement that translation has its own autonomous criticisme. Most certainly, this criticisme cannot be simply based on the encounter between the translator and the text. It must turn to numerous parallel readings, other works by the same author, various studies about this author and about his times, and the like. [...] Generally speaking, translating requires numerous and various readings. An ignorant translator—that is, one that does not read in this way—is a deficient translator. One translates with books.<sup>1</sup>

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10 Original citation: “[...] la possibilité d’une traductologie couvrant à la fois un champ théorique et pratique, qui serait élaborée à partie de l’expérience de la traduction; plus précisément, à partir de sa nature même d’expérience. Théoriciens abstraits et praticiens empiriques coïncident en ceci qu’ils affirment que l’expérience de la traduction n’est pas théorisable, ne doit et ne peut pas l’être. Or, cette présupposition est une négation du sens de l’acte de traduire: celui-ci, par définition, est une activité seconde et réflexive.” (Berman, 1984, pp. 300–301)



<sup>1</sup> And not only with dictionaries.” (Berman, trans. By F. Massardier-Kenney, 2009, p. 52)<sup>11</sup>

### 1.3 Reading, Interpreting and Translating – The Lonely Londoners

Trying to adopt Berman’s vision to the project of translating *The Lonely Londoners* implied a close reading not only of the novel, but of other works by Selvon and the vast critical literature on his works. It also entailed studying Trinidadian dialect and culture, consulting archives on the Windrush generation, reading other English Caribbean fictions and their French translations. Reading and library work was necessary but hardly sufficient. Since one of Selvon’s main source of inspiration was a vernacular language and a local culture, fieldwork in a more literal sense had to be undertaken. In other words, translating *The Lonely Londoners* required a trip back from London (where I lived at the time) to Trinidad, so as to retrace those influences and hopefully unveil the rich fabric, that is the linguistic and cultural interweaving, this novel was made of.

This work involving both reading and fieldwork allowed to highlight the many viewpoints from which *The Lonely Londoners* could be read. One could approach the novel as a piece of British literature written in a non-standard English with a Trinidadian flavour; but one could also turn the telescope the other way round and see it as a novel in Trinidadian, as an instance of Caribbean literature, or as a piece of Creole literature. The novel is all of this: at once British, Trinidadian, Caribbean,

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11 Original citation: “[...] la lecture du traducteur est [...] déjà une pré-translation, une lecture effectuée dans l’horizon de la traduction; et tous les traits individuels de l’œuvre [...] se découvrent autant dans le mouvement de traduire qu’avant. C’est en cela que celui-ci possède son « criticisme » propre, autonome. Il est bien certain que ce « criticisme » ne saurait être purement et simplement fondé sur le face-à-face du traducteur et de l’œuvre. Il faut qu’il recoure à de multiples lectures collatérales, d’autres œuvres de l’auteur, d’ouvrages divers sur cet auteur, son époque, etc.[...] / D’une manière générale, traduire exige des lectures vastes et diversifiées. Un traducteur ignorant – qui ne traduit pas de la sorte – est un traducteur déficient. On traduit avec des livres. 1Et pas seulement avec des dictionnaires.” (Berman, 1995, pp. 67–68)

Creole. Ultimately, as a novel on migration, on the encounter between the foreign and the domestic, *The Lonely Londoners* could also tell us something about language hospitality, to take up Paul Ricoeur's concept (1999), and hospitality full stop. Without stretching too far, it could also be read as a reflection on translation, at least as a novel carrying, underlyingly, its own vision and ethics of translation.

The whole process, moving from the text to the context and back to the text, in order to uncover multiple layers of interpretation and to find an appropriate translation strategy, also led to a comparison of English and French creoles: their respective history, their sociolinguistic status, and the way they are represented in contemporary Caribbean literatures (cf. Buzelin, 2002; cf. Buzelin & Winer, 2008). This comparison first highlighted formal and sociolinguistic differences between the two types of Creoles, some French Caribbean commentators going sometimes as far as claiming that there was no creole in the English-Caribbean, but only "broken English," an attitude which could be interpreted as a product of colonial history. Those differences also appeared in literary usages. Whereas English-Caribbean writers had used the vernacular as early as the 1950s, literary creolization had only started in the 1980s in the French Petites Antilles. While French Caribbean writers tended to mark and even emphasize the distance between French and Creole and were reluctant to create a Creolized French that might be interpreted as "broken French," English-Caribbean writers had no problem representing the interlanguage, what linguists called the "mesolect." This reluctance could also be interpreted as a legacy of the long history of derogatory, stereotyping and stigmatizing representations of French Creoles. But research also confirmed that beyond those differences, common grounds did exist at a deeper level, in the expressivity, the orality and the musicality of those languages<sup>12</sup>.

With time, as the process went by, the idea of translating the novel in a morpho-syntactically non-standard French was abandoned and gave

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12 Interestingly, the history of colonization and migration within the Caribbean had made French Creole one of the main vernacular languages of Trinidad in the 19th century and traces of it could be found in the current dialect.

way to another strategy that focused less on realism, less on a search for authenticity, and more on recreating, by other means, the expressivity, musicality and orality of Selvon's prose. Hence, for example, expressions existing both in French and in Creole, that a non-Creole-speaking reader would not necessarily see as Creole, but that a Creole-speaking reader might recognise, were favoured (cf. Buzelin, 2006). Although long passages of the translation were included in the thesis, this translation was never published in the whole. In that sense the research was partly a failure. Yet, the knowledge produced throughout the process was very much in tune with what Berman had described in his essay. It was by essence interdisciplinary, at the crossroad of (comparative) literature, sociolinguistic, cultural anthropology, Caribbean studies etc.<sup>13</sup> Another translator might have reached other conclusions, highlighted other aspects and created different connections, just like two literary critics commenting on the same book and two ethnographers doing fieldwork in the same location would be likely to produce different accounts.

This particular case confirmed that one of the virtues of translation, as a boundary interpretative, research and rewriting process, is its ability to unravel the many literary, linguistic and cultural ramifications of a text and the multiple connections that can be made with other literary, linguistic and cultural constituents. In that sense, it did not so much consist in finding an equivalent as in creating one, by favouring some connections rather than others.

#### 1.4 Producing Knowledge through Translation – Some Early Examples

Beyond Berman's essays on translation (itself very much influenced by the German romantics) and the work done at McGill University (nourished by Berman's writings), this doctoral research was inspired by other experiential approaches in translation studies, such as Suzanne Jill Levine's essay *The Subversive Scribe* (1991), a special issue of *TTR*

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13 As such it was disseminated in translation studies, comparative literature, Caribbean literary studies and linguistics.

proposing both a criticism of existing English and French translations and a new annotated French translation of Walter Benjamin's essay on translation (cf. Nouss ed., 1997). The same year saw the publication of *Gender in Translation* in which Luise von Flotow explained how, in women's studies, experiences in translation were central to the reflection on the relation between language, power and gender. The collective volume *Translating Slavery* (cf. Kadish & Massardier-Kenney, 1994) illustrates her point. Finally, in 2000 the translation journal *Palimpsestes* launched an issue on translating Caribbean literature with articles reflecting on this topic on the basis of collaborative translation projects (cf. Raguét-Bouvard & Bensimon, 2000).

It should be mentioned that, apart from those initiatives—and certainly others—the idea that the study of translation could be based on a reflexive practice of it was not unanimously shared at the time, when the discipline was striving for its recognition as a legitimate science. In fact, Berman's vision of traductology was in sharp contrast with the epistemology advocated by those who are today regarded as the founding fathers of translation studies, Gideon Toury and James Holmes. For them, TS defined itself as an empirical discipline aimed at describing phenomena in order to explain and predict them. Translation practice and criticism were only possible “extensions” of the field but in no way central nor even necessary (cf. Holmes, 1972; cf. Toury, 1995). Contrary to Berman's, the position those scholars advocated contributed to widening the gap between theory and practice, between a distanced approach to the study of translation and a more subjective (or reflexive) one.

Although understandable to some extent (as a strategy to ensure the discipline's controlled development and its recognition as legitimate scientific field) this empirical not to say positivist bias in early translation studies seems paradoxical given that the human and social sciences, around the same time, were moving in the opposite direction, undertaking the so-called “interpretative” and semiotic turn. In cultural anthropology, this turn was mostly associated with the work of Clifford Geertz who suggested approaching culture as a text, i.e., a web of signs to be interpreted: “The culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the

shoulders of those to whom they properly belong.” (Geertz, 1973, p. 452). In this line of thinking, the ethnographer would no longer seek causal or structural explanations but act rather as a translator, reading and interpreting a foreign manuscript: “Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of ‘construct a reading of’) a manuscript—foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound, but in transient examples of shaped behaviour.” (Geertz, 1973, p. 10) The body of work carried out at the crossroad of anthropology and translation studies in the nineties was another substantial source of inspiration leading to the idea that if translation was a subject of knowledge, as argued by Berman, this knowledge was in its very (reflexive) nature and in its mode of production (as a boundary work) comparable to that acquired in ethnographic research; the main difference being a directional one: the former approaches culture as a text, while the other approaches the foreign text as a web made of complex linguistic, cultural and textual ramifications to be unveiled.

## 2 Translation in Academia and Education Today

There is no denying that well before Berman, there existed a longstanding philological and hermeneutic tradition in translation. This tradition was reserved to sacred texts, philosophical ones, or simply those with a wide historical or cultural gap. As argued in the previous section, the emergence of traductology in the 1980s created a space for the experience of translation to become a source of knowledge in a more systematic way regardless of the type of text being translated. But this approach to the study of translation was rather marginal in the nineties. Is it less marginal today?

According to Lawrence Venuti, the answer is no contest a negative one. In a recent essay entitled *contra-instrumentalism* (2019), the scholar reaffirms the existence of two models of translation: a hermeneutic model that “conceives of translation as an interpretive act” (Venuti, 2019, p. 12) and an instrumentalist one that “conceives of trans-

lation as the reproduction of an invariant meaning” (Ibid.). He observes that the second still dominates, not only in the translation industry, but also in research and among translators. Venuti had already made this point in a previous monograph, *Translation Changes Everything* (2013), pointing some contradictions in translators’ discourses:

“Recently, translators have claimed that translation is de facto a form of scholarship, but [they] remain so deeply invested in a belletristic approach that they can’t—some say they won’t—provide a scholarly account of their translating. Merely to assert that translation is scholarship will not compel scholars to abandon romantic concepts of original authorship that have long been entrenched in the academy, and that have stigmatized translation as hackwork or restricted it to a derivative form of creative writing.” (Venuti, 2013, p. 247).

The result, in his view, is that we still “lack a discourse about translating that can foster and sustain [...] a translation culture” (Ibid). His dark diagnosis bears some truth, particularly in the context from and for which it is made—the United States. We can find echoes of it in other publications (see for example Bennett 2019). But his statement also aims to be polemical, and therefore deliberately lacks nuance. If much more needs to be done to encourage a reflexive practice of translation, some signs do suggest that things have changed, not always for the worst, over the past 20 years.

## 2.1 Studying Translation: The “Viewpoint of the Agent”

As early as 1995, Simeoni had written an article calling for an approach to the study of translation that would take the agent in practice as its reference point. This scholar recognised Toury’s contribution as a seminal one, but didn’t share his positivism and behaviouristic definition of translation norms. Taking for granted that a discipline cannot define itself by its object only, he suggested an epistemological ground at the

crossroad of reflexive sociology and a linguistics of utterances (or a linguistique de l'énonciation) a study of language focusing on speaking subjects in action. Favouring reflexivity (from translation scholars and translators) and inclusivity (by bringing back linguistics in translation studies), this epistemology paved the way for a theory of the practice of translation. Integrating, in my view, the best of translation studies (as defined by Toury) and traductology (as defined by Berman), this proposal allowed to overcome the opposition between theory and practice, empiricism and hermeneutics. It allowed us to make translation not only an object but also, as Berman claimed, a source of knowledge, of a hybrid and interdisciplinary kind.

The aforementioned article was visionary as agency became a key issue and a buzz word in translation studies in the following years. The statistics that can be drawn from John Benjamin's Translation Studies Bibliography are revealing, with a rise from eight entries for this concept before 2000, to 81 entries on the following decade (2000–2009) and 272 for the following one (2010–2019) (see Appendix 1). These are absolute rather than relative figures, but they are indicative somehow. Meanwhile, methodologies based on the study of translators' archives or interviews with professionals have become common place. Likewise, conducting research involving the practice of translation has become more accepted today, without the work in question being categorised as belonging solely to the realms of creative writing or action research.

## 2.2 Interdisciplinary Exchanges and the Boom in Studies on Science in Translation

What also changed for the past 30 years is translation studies relation to other fields of the human and social sciences. As a young discipline, TS has borrowed a lot, but it seems that interdisciplinary exchanges in both directions have become more widespread, although a certain imbalance surely still exists. In other words, not only is translation (even translation proper) given more consideration in the social sciences, as a productive concept and as an object of study, but researchers in related fields seem to engage more often with the literature produced in TS. This trend is

perceivable not only with established disciplines, but also in more recent ones such as women and cultural studies, communication, book studies, adaptation and many others. The volume *Border Crossings. Translation Studies and other disciplines* published in 2016 tend to corroborate this idea.

Emblematic of this opening is also the boom in studies on translating science, as suggested by the sudden increase in publications on this issue. Interestingly, there was no entry for the keyword “translating science” in the *Translation Studies Bibliography* before 2000, but the past twenty years have seen the publication of several monographs and special issues in this topic in TS and beyond<sup>14</sup>. From the English translations of Freud’s concepts to the French translation of Darwin’s, many studies have shown, for a long time, how translation can transform, and in worse cases betray, a theory. Less widespread is the idea, developed by anthropologist and translation scholar Joshua Price (2008) and exemplified in those recent publications, that translation can contribute to clarifying and elaborating concepts and, as such, can nurture the “original” concept<sup>15</sup>. This highlights not only how translating changes, but also what can be gained in the process. Here again, original and translation are not conceived in opposition, in an either/or logic, but as closely intertwined,

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14 Some of these titles include the monograph by Scott Montgomery entitled *Science in translation* (2000); a special issue of *Les Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* on the “international circulation of ideas” with an opening article by Pierre Bourdieu; in 2011 a special issue of *The Translator on Translating Science* (2011); a special issue of *Annals of Sciences on Translating and Translations in the History of Science* (2016); two collective volumes: *Circulation of Academic Thought: Rethinking Translation in the Academic Field* edited by Rafael Y. Schögle (2019) and *Translation in Knowledge, Knowledge in Translation* Edited by Rocío G. Sumillera, Jan Surman and Katharina Kühn (2020).

15 Price’s argument finds a nice illustration in the volume ‘On ne naît pas femme on le devient’, the life a sentence (cf. Mann & Ferrari, 2017), an interdisciplinary initiative involving translators and philosophers reflecting on the multiple interpretations of Simone de Beauvoir’s writings by analyzing their translation in several languages including English, German, Croatian and Finnish.



enriching one another, something that brings us back to this notion of translation as *métissage*.

### 2.3 Emphasising Agency – Situatedness and Inclusivity in (Translation) Education

Moving to the field of translation training, the present configuration is a complex but interesting one. Technological advances have fostered new textual materialities and new translation tools favouring collaborative forms of writing and translation, making translators as well as the translation process more visible. Yet some of those technologies may also reinforce the myth of translation as a mechanical and instantaneous transfer of information, this very instrumental view of translation Venuti denounces. As Michael Cronin (2013) notes, if trade, translation and technologies have always intertwined, there is something both fascinating and frightening about the current configuration. Translation programmes in higher education must at once train translators for the market (a market that is rapidly changing and showing worrying trends). This means that they have to be technologically intensive, but they also have to provide other types of tools that will empower translators beyond the needs of the market.

The “sociological eye” (cf. Simeoni, 2007), emphasising the situatedness of translation, which has emerged in the mid-nineties in translation studies, seems to have also made its way in translation education. There is little doubt that no instructor today would adopt a strictly formal approach nor define translation quality in linguistic terms only, without considering why, for whom, in what context a translation is done and without asking Am I the right person to do the job? The literature produced for the past twenty years in translation studies (or *traductology*) provides a rich corpus from which examples can be found to increase students’ awareness and reflexivity. Also, the enhanced visibility of translation and translators in the public sphere makes things easier for instructors. From the debates over the choice of the right person to translate the poem delivered by Amanda Gorman on Joe Biden’s investiture, to the public outrage caused by the poor subtitles offered by Netflix, or

the social commentaries triggered by interpreters who expressed their emotions while interpreting Ukrainian president Zelenski, these recent translation events can foster discussions on translation as a situated, linguistic, social and ethical act, provided they are properly analysed, beyond the polemics. An inspiring example is the course entitled “Translation and Interpreting Ethics and Standards of Practice” of the University of Massachusetts where the final project entails the production, in small teams, of a critical analysis of a “real-life” translation ethical dilemma. One of the teams of the Winter 2022 semester chose to work on Goggles’ decision to request their translators no longer use the word “war” to refer to the crisis in Ukraine and rather refer to it as an “extraordinary circumstance”<sup>16</sup>. The case was an occasion to address the many implications of this request, both at micro and macro levels.

Two recent books also illustrate quite well this change of paradigm from a formal approach to translation training focusing on linguistic parameters only to a more situated and reflexive one also acknowledging the translator’s social role and embeddedness. First, the *Handbook for Interpreters in Asylum Procedures* (2017), which states and emphasises straight away, in its front cover, the fact that neutrality in interpreting is a fiction—we could add, maybe a necessary fiction, but still one. The second book authored by Cristiano A. Mazzei and Laurence Jay-Rayon entitled *The Routledge Guide to Teaching Translation and Interpreting Online* (2022) explores how the online teaching environment, which also reminds, as the authors note, today’s translating environment, can increase accessibility as well as linguistic, cultural, gender and socio-economic diversity in translation classrooms. Relating education, society and technology, this textbook paves the way for more inclusive and more reflexive approach to translation education, which may be one of the

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16 The course designer, Laurence Jay-Rayon Ibrahim Aibo, and the two students, Alvaro Cepeda and LaRon Esau, were invited to present their project in the Podcast Brand the Interpreter hosted by Mireya Pérez. This edition entitled *An Extraordinary Circumstance: A Translator’s Ethical Dilemma* can be watched at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-fO611gvs9E>

conditions for the development of a “translation culture” at a broader level.

### 3 Conclusion

The emergence of an academic field dedicated to translation has created a space whereby the experience of translation, beyond the philological tradition, could become a source of knowledge, a hybrid form of knowledge in the sense that it unfolds at the crossroad of languages, cultures and disciplines. Like any other social/academic field, this one is dynamic, involving exchanges, translations but also resistance to translation. This is why “translation studies” and “traductology” are far from being perfect equivalents. In a contribution to the volume *Circulation of Academic Thought*, Karen Bennett argues that despite the considerable attenuation of the positivism shown by the founders of Translation Studies, the dominant paradigm remains empirical rather than hermeneutics. “The result is a relentless drift toward an epistemological monoculture” (Bennett, 2019, p. 34). Although this observation about the predominance of empirical approaches in TS is well founded, a number of signs point toward the development of a more reflexive and interpretative approach to the practice, the study and the teaching of translation, be it literary or not. And this is surely one of the necessary conditions for allowing translation, in the restricted as well as the broader sense, to generate a hybrid form of knowledge, across boundaries. As Simeoni (2007, p. 26) aptly put it:

“It would seem that there is something about translation itself that must have been unsettling for the disciplines [maybe because it] is not an ordinary object, certainly not one that is easy to ‘objectify’ [...] Translation is also a cognitive ‘operator,’ a mechanism which provides access to the social worldview. [...] Proper translation [...] is never simply a replica. An appropriate dose of ‘friction,’ in the sense of being neither too aggressive nor too ignorant of the other, is inevitable, giving rise to mutual misunderstandings as an ingenious solution to or-

dinary, yet potentially, devastating, disagreements in social life. This, of course, is an uncertain path.”

The difficulty to circumscribe translation and therefore to objectify it is partly what has made it ‘unsettling’ for the discipline. The practice of translation always operates at the boundaries. Hence, it involves tension, frictions, negotiations possible understandings and disagreements. This is what makes it suspect and partly unpredictable—hence the desire to control it. But all those qualifiers highlight precisely what makes it so valuable and productive, as long as we accept to take the risks of following this ‘uncertain path.’”

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**Appendix—Entries in the Translation Studies Bibliography  
by Keywords**

	<i>Agency</i>	<i>Agents</i>	<i>Habitus</i>
-1979	1	1	0
1980-1999	7	12	4
2000-2009	81	93	35
2010-2014	137	94	58
2015-2019	135	103	32
2020-2021	71	50	22

**Part II.**

**Translating Identities  
in the Context of Migration**





# **The As If of Integration, Participation and Empowerment**

## When Interpreting undermines Borders and Boundaries<sup>1</sup>

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*Şebnem Bahadır-Berzig*

### **1 An invitation to read against the grain**

Within the context of migration, interpreting is often described as abolishing boundaries between people and bridging communication gaps. The interpreter who is already integrated but belongs to the same community of origin as the newly arrived migrant is expected to overcome not only linguistic, but also social, cultural, political, personal, even digital barriers. Furthermore, the opinion is widespread that she interprets not because she is being paid, but mostly out of the motivation to give the receiving country ‘something back’ – comparable to paying off a debt. This means, that the already resident but still foreign migrant in the sense of Donatella di Cesare’s “resident foreigner” (2021) and in the sense of Naika Foroutan’s “postmigrant” (2019), feels gratitude towards the host country – almost eternally. On the basis of this gratitude, she is expected to enter into a commitment to pay back her debt for having had the chance to become a resident of the host country by way of volunteering to interpret for the newly arrived strangers.

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1 I would like to thank my colleague Sophie Staud for her invaluable help as critical and creative proofreader of this English text.

Whether in societies currently experiencing huge amounts of immigration or in the so-called postmigrant societies with a solid base and long tradition of migrant population: Interpreters, no matter whether professional or nonprofessional, help migrants with limited knowledge of the language of the host country. They assist refugees, when they are on their routes. They accompany them, when they cross borders. They provide linguistic support, when they enter refugee camps. They enable communication, facilitate understanding, explain – and they give voice to things that otherwise would remain unsaid. In the context of migratory settings interpreting is most often wrapped up in sparkly paper on which is written in bold letters: facilitating integration, enabling participation and fostering empowerment. Interpreting researchers, politicians, representatives of public institutions as well as professional associations for translators and interpreters alike propagate this view of the intercultural and interlingual mediator. Altruism, engagement, commitment and activism seem to be virtues attached to the act of interpreting. Nearly all stakeholders in migratory settings seem to search for interpreting performances capable of crossing borders to reach other cultures, closing gaps to understand the unfamiliar and overcoming boundaries between strangers and natives. This ideal act of interpreting is closely linked to an understanding of integration aimed at ‘naturalizing’ migrants by de-foreignizing and assimilating them in the sense of making them similar. The interpreter is promising to overcome barriers, abolish borders and wipe out boundaries. Yet this promise is one-sided and two-faced. There is a basic illusion, a misconception in this approach: Everybody seems to assume that all that the interpreter utters (in the name and as the voice of the migrant) and all that would have remained unsaid is what all parties involved want or need to hear. This commitment is at the same time a promise that is nearly impossible to fulfil: The migrant’s voice is expected to be rendered in such a way that it becomes compatible with the host country’s ideology of integration and participation. Plus, the fact that the interpreter stands by the side of the up until then speechless migrant is shown as an act of empowerment by giving a voice to the migrant. Whenever interpreting services are offered and used, the world seems to become a better place – above all

for the migrant, but also for the institutions, the public, the interpreting researchers and especially the politicians in the host country.

In my contribution I want to draw attention to interpreting and interpreter performances that undermine this ideology and blur the boundaries between being the speechless, i. e. being without rights and obligations, and being the one who already has a voice, i. e. between migrant and native, or rather 'nativized'. So, I try to read against the grain (in the sense Spivak 1985 uses this method) all that is supposedly 'integration-fostering' and 'de-foreignizing' interpreting. With this aim I briefly ponder on three scenarios of interpreting in the context of migration by concentrating on situations of discomfort and dispositions of uneasiness. These reflections are placed as interventions between the three sections of my paper in which I first critically reflect upon a motivation that seems to push so many already-integrated migrants to interpret for the newcomers: the 'eternal gratitude' or the idea of wishing to give something 'back' to the host country/society after having succeeded in becoming an 'integrated member' of it. This 'oblique look' (and reading) also requires casting a critical eye on some master concepts we use in this context. Thus, in the second section I try to dig a bit into the concept 'integration', touching briefly on 'participation', and 'empowerment' against the background of the concept of 'postmigrant' societies/ individuals. I conclude with a short discussion on how interpreting acts breaking the above-mentioned commitment to and promise of integration and participation might show us a path towards a more 'radical' interpreting research. A critical attitude towards the imposition of the idea of interpreting out of the motivation of an eternal gratitude in the specific context of community interpreting provides us with the chance to revisit some foundational traits assigned to all 'good' or 'ethical' interpreting: becoming a bridge for the Other to cross over, abolishing borders between us and them, connecting people and communities, being neutral and staying impartial no matter what happens, interpreting everything and interpreting always without leaving out or adding something. The aim of a 'radical interpreting studies' would then be to dig out failures, inefficiencies, misunderstandings and distortions in this credo which are most often not very clearly seen, because they are

hidden behind smooth enactments. ‘Radical interpreting studies’ would then concentrate on moments of discomfort attempting to show the potential of resistance within this unease, when it comes to illuminating the bigger economic and political entanglements and the systemic relevance of interpreting in the context of migration and postmigrant societies.

### ***Intervention 1: SprInt / The Promise***

My first critical reflection is on a capacity-building project for migrants in Germany that seems to have fulfilled the promise of ensuring integration, enabling participation and installing empowerment through interpreting since its foundation. The naming of those individuals, who after a well-founded 18-month training course start to work as interpreters, is programmatic. They are to not only mediate linguistically but to also make a contribution to the integration of the migrants for whom they interpret: „Sprach- und Integrationsmittelnde leisten einen konkreten Beitrag zur Chancengleichheit im Gemeinwesen und zur Integration von Flüchtlingen und Migrierten.“<sup>2</sup>

In their job profile, three functions or rather tasks are recorded: interpreting, informing, assisting. I was involved in the development of the training curriculum, designing the topic area *Theory and Practice of Interpreting*, the methods and materials for the interpreting training courses and the final interpreting examinations. I have worked for many years as an interpreter trainer at various project locations and chaired examination boards, thus qualifying an estimated number of 800–1000 SprInt so far. SprInt is used as abbreviation both for the project itself and the interpreters trained in this project: Sprach- und Integrationsmittler\*innen which can be translated as language and integration brokers/mediators into English. Since the beginning of my involvement in this project I have had stomach aches that never truly went away.

My uneasiness goes even further back: In the previous project SpraKum, the term Sprach- und Kulturmittlung (language and cultural

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2 <https://www.sprinteg.de/sprach-und-integrationsmittlung/>

mediation) was used – an equally problematic approach to the practice, as the notion of culture in this usage is very strongly linked to reductionism and essentialism, even nativist notions of cultural belonging and origin. Over time, there came a shift away from this label in light of anti-racist, feminist, and postcolonial approaches in cultural, social and care studies and through the involvement of colleagues in the project who are highly sensitised in this regard. Cultural mediation was now viewed more critically as an activity that always takes place on the threshold of culturalization and cultural appropriation and systematically crosses this threshold. Replacing a reductionist understanding of culturally mediating interpreting with a demand for integration-enabling language mediation is, however, to the detriment of all. This substitution is due to political will and new turns in migration politics. Until well into the 1990s, migrants were the strangers and the foreigners (euphemistically also guests or guest workers from the 1960s to the 1980s) in German but also Austrian political agendas (concerning state policies and laws, no matter whether with regard to social, educational, medical or economic domains). In the 2000s, people bit the bullet and de facto migration countries kept changing their legal frameworks with tiny steps (and often still merely cosmetically). In this process, the labels of so-called capacity-building projects for and with migrants have also changed. Thus, *SpraKum* becomes *SprInt* – both publicly funded, but also church-supported and to a certain extent politically desired ‘empowering’ projects. The promise of *SprInt* is a political endeavour, and has been so from the very beginning<sup>3</sup>.

This promise is intertwined with an almost frantic search in projects like *SprInt*, *Sprakum*, but also *SpuK* (in Osnabrück) or the organization *INTERPRET* in Switzerland<sup>4</sup>, for a ‘different’, socially relevant, semi-professional or professionalized identity based on the cultural resources

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3 cf. for a rather compact account of the transition phase from *SpraKum* to *SprInt*: <https://www.migazin.de/2010/01/11/professionelle-sprach-und-integrationsmittler/>

4 <https://www.spuk.info/>; <https://www.inter-pret.ch/de/home-1.html>

of the migrants. However, it also has to do with a strong need for differentiation from the ‘conventional’, that is, academic and ‘properly’ professional interpreter, who in the eyes of these projects, being little informed by translation studies, always acts only linguistically (cf. Bahadır, 2007).

Yet in translation studies and academic translator training as well, the ambivalent relationship to language as the basic unit of the interpreting activity has always been at the centre of the process of becoming a professional: sometimes language mediation is too reductionist and mechanistic, sometimes what is postulated beyond that is politically too dangerous and an overstraining demand or false ‘empowerment’ of the interpreter<sup>5</sup>. Today, however, we are faced with the situation where the division between academic interpreting as a technically and linguistically perfected, fully professional and absolutely neutral activity on the one hand and language and integration mediation as culturally sensitive interpreting that strives for understanding and comprehension, professionalized but underpinned with migrant knowledge on the other, has solidified and almost transformed into a migration policy programme: Language and integration mediators are propagated as both bridge builders between people with migration backgrounds, mostly newcomers, as well as professionals in educational, healthcare and social services. Their work is described as breaking down barriers to understanding and enabling problem-free and effective cooperation<sup>6</sup>.

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5 To get a well-founded idea of what interpreting has been covering as activities and attitudes I would recommend Grbic’s comprehensive and critical study (2022) on the history and present of professionalization of interpreting, opening up a large landscape of highly complex, often ambivalent, even paradoxical conceptualizations of interpreting.

6 “SprInt steht für Sprach- und Integrationsmittlung. Sprach- und Integrationsmittler – SprInts – sind Brückenbauer zwischen Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund und Fachpersonal im Bildungs-, Gesundheits- und Sozialwesen. Ihre Arbeit baut Verständigungsbarrieren ab und ermöglicht eine problemlose und effektive Zusammenarbeit.” (<https://www.sprachundintegrationsmittler.org/sprach-und-integrationsmittlung/>)

This migration policy programme is imposed on the individual agents of language and integration mediation. The praxis of interpreting cannot keep this promise to overcome not only linguistic, but also social, cultural, political, even personal barriers/boundaries. The promise is doomed to fail the moment it is articulated because in order to be able to overcome boundaries, to cross borders, to build bridges via interpreting, these acts of interpreting often primarily construct borders, even simply by declaring, articulating, naming them (cf. Dizdar, 2020). And the promise is dangerously one-sided as in the job profile of the SprInt it is always the expert, the representative of the receiving country, who shall be transferred and made understandable to the migrant client. The migrant's, the minority's voice, however, is generally rendered in line with the promise of the host country's ideology of integration and participation. The migrant is made compatible and comfortable by interpreting, wrapped up in such a way that assimilation can take place and as the next step participation can be provided, like a gift or a reward for assimilation (cf. Bahadır-Berzig, 2021)<sup>7</sup>.

A few years ago my stomach ache intensified into a serious uneasiness and led to a decision that has accompanied me ever since and which is still waiting to be transferred into a Germany-wide research project: In the feedback and reflection sessions, but also in the interpreting enactments during the final interpreting examinations, I noticed more and more often that we were confronted with a large group of 'fully integrated', 'empowered', 'thankful' and professionalized interpreters who repeatedly had major problems with the demands of their job profile and their intrinsic motivation. It even seemed that the more we professionalized them, the deeper they felt this discomfort. In 2019, I started to conduct narrative biographical interviews with some language and integration mediators: The cracks and breaks in their attitudes and actions

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7 For a systematic analysis of the conceptual and empirical complexity of translational phenomena, procedures, agents and motivations from the perspective of the interdisciplinary theory of human differentiation I would recommend Dizdar 2021.



concerning the ‘impossible mission’ to foster integration and enable empowerment were ever-present – sometimes in fully reflected accounts of their daily praxis, sometimes only recognizable as glimpses in their narratives of their experiences in the field. With some caution, I would like to venture the prognosis that many of the up to 1000 professionalized language and integration mediators enjoy a uniquely well-founded training in Germany, but are constantly exposed to conflicts in their daily work, which can be traced back to the paradoxical situation concerning their loyalty and responsibility which is very similar to the triple mandate of the social worker (cf. Staub-Bernasconi, 2016): They try to help the migrant-client, simultaneously enabling the expert (commissioned by the state) to control and ‘manage’ the migrant-client, and attempt to stay loyal to their professional ethics of impartiality. They can only continue to be active in their daily attempts to fulfill this mandate by breaking the promise. These moments of crossing boundaries, of doubt and ambivalence, the moments when the promise is broken, are now to be explored in further narrative-biographical interviews.

## **2 ‘Eternal gratitude’: Nonprofessional interpreters as instruments of (de/re)migrationisation in postmigrant societies**

Migration studies nowadays seem to be confronted with a similar identity crisis as did ethnography when entering the postcolonial world order (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Marcus and Fischer, 1986). To use Foroutan’s argument (2019), this is because we meanwhile live in a post-migrant society, yet in which there is still a tendency in politics and society to see the root of all problems in migration, although there are obviously other struggles for structural, social, cultural and personal recognition happening behind the question of migration. According to Foroutan the postmigrant disposition in our society is based on a promise of a pluralistic democracy, namely the promise to guarantee participation for all groups and recognition for this complex social and cultural diversity on all levels but (just as in the case of the SprInt)

the promise cannot be fulfilled: The affective resistance within society against these two norms and the failure of the state to enable that the norms can be 'lived', engenders a paradoxical situation: The promise of a plural democracy seems to carry the risk of shaking the very foundations of this democracy. Foroutan highlights in her sharp analysis that the claim to equality in pluralistic systems reminds society most painfully of the betrayal or the inaccessibility of this norm (2019, pp. 42–46).

We all know the general talk of floods of migrants and trouble-making, integration-resistant asylum seekers. These days military operations and wars seem to pop up in so many regions of the world which we can witness and follow via social media at the moment of their outbreak. Meanwhile, the populations of so many Western countries are immediately reminded of these floods of migrants while watching these catastrophes— by media, by politicians and by expert analysts and researchers. Before the first migrant from any of these multiple spaces of human disaster enter the country the struggle for opinions and analyses, i.e., the propaganda starts. Di Cesare's brilliant book (2021) attempting at laying the foundations of a philosophy of migration almost painfully describes and deconstructs all the complex entanglements within the politics of rejection and repulsion on global scale when it comes to accepting the universal human right to migration and asylum. This attitude of immediate repulsion seems to be a general norm in many Western societies today. However, the composition and stratification of migrant communities has become much more diverse today. Yes, we have newcomers, but we also have the 'resident foreigner' to use di Cesare's term again which underlines the right of residence and mobility within the framework of an ethics of global justice. Di Cesare calls for resolving the paradox between the disposition of residing in a space and the disposition of migrating between spaces in order to accomplish new ways of cohabitation going beyond nation states.

Nowadays, many members of migrant communities have moved away from a simple origin-cultural orientation via ethnicised and migrantised identities towards more hybrid and (pro)active communities and actors within the host country. This stronger anchoring, presence and visibility in the host country do not necessarily minimize the 'prob-

lems', but simply make them more diverse, different and 'non-migrant-ish'. These persons with parents or grand-parents who migrated to the country of residence change and direct their attention to the country they live in, which means that they might become either troublemakers or critical minds, as well as satisfied or mainstream citizens. Yet in the public – and not only in the political handling of these integrated but somehow 'deviant' persons, but also, interestingly enough, in migration research itself – these persons remain migrants or are re-migrantised as soon as they become visible (cf. Foroutan, 2019 and the call for migration research that critically observes and opposes this re-migrantisation, e.g., in Anderson, 2019). In the current situation researchers are calling for a more (self-)reflexive attitude in examining the "integration paradox" as El Mafaalani calls this situation (2020). This is also accompanied by the demand for an open commitment to de-migrantization (cf. Dahinden, 2016): A 'migrantised' and 'migrantising' migration studies is subject to the influence of the "nation-state migration apparatus", which is supposed to regulate, contain, control, direct, organize and order migration, because this research is based on the conception of migrants as other, different, foreign – and the demand, indeed the social and political norm, that these actors are to be integrated, in the sense of normalized (Dahinden 2016, pp. 2209–2211).

Meanwhile we are confronted with a praxis of multicultural and even to some extent multilingual knowledge production, of migrant voices as an integral part of society, not only in literature or arts, but also in the economy, in technology and slowly but steadily also in politics and science. Opposed to this fact we have a lethargic political and legal system unable to recognize and articulate the contributions of these single actors. In postmigrant societies like Germany, legal and political frameworks foster hybridization, ambivalence and what is most important: the petrification of gaps of distribution (of resources and possibilities) and recognition. And this leads to a continual remigrantisation or a stable migrantisation of migrants as a seemingly homogenous group. So not only the immigrating individual becomes someone like an eternal migrant but she is also continually subsumed under an ominous

and seemingly homogenous group named 'migrants' (Foroutan, 2019, pp. 104–108).

Therefore, a critical positioning towards this essentialization of the migrant condition is not only important in migration studies but also in other relevant disciplines like translation studies. With a postmigrant perspective we have a framework of analysis for social and political transformations that occur after migration in the middle of the migrants' struggle to be recognized as legal and political stakeholders in society. Analysing nonprofessional interpreting within the process of (re)migrantisation illustrates that this language work is viewed somehow like a 'genetic' property of any postmigrant who has entered the process of becoming integrated. Everybody seems to know very well that every multilingual person 'with a migration background' can and shall interpret...

In this context voluntary work is assigned a special role. At first sight voluntary work for a good cause, for humanitarian aid projects, seems to be something untouchable and absolutely noble. In German 'Ehrenamt', which literally means honourable work, is largely associated with the two big Christian social welfare institutions Caritas and Diakonie but also with the German Red Cross. We have plenty of research dwelling on the development of voluntary work especially from the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to now. *Ehrenamt* starts out as the care of the poor, especially driven by the big Christian motive of charity, in German very interestingly the 'love of the one next to you': *Nächstenliebe*. But what is more interesting for our case of civic engagement of refugees and migrants is the more recent constellation of volunteering as a means to get access to the regulated labour market and to social and political participation as well as visibility. At the University of Erfurt Bettina Hollstein directs a very important research project concentrating on the experiences of socially disadvantaged persons in voluntary work using a citizen science approach. Hollstein is very clear when she states that the promotion of engagement does not create a solution for deficient social systems, a care crisis or unemployment. Volunteer work is about creating spaces that enable individuals to express publicly and to engage with their ideas of a 'good' life in a 'good' society (Hollstein, 2017).

But precisely this orientation towards a deficit-correction can be observed in many projects fostering volunteer work by migrants. Volunteering in many areas of social and communal work is a way to compensate for the general withdrawal of the state. This systemic problem of volunteer work in Germany dates back to the 1990s when a fundamental systemic shift happened, away from a welfare state towards a liberal market economy. So, in the current situation of a post-welfare-state, critical analyses show how the so-called engagement discourse, in which volunteers are hailed as “Alltagshelden”, everyday heroes, influences the market of paid social and communal work and how these voluntary workers are denied political and economic advocacy by trade unions or any other self-organized structures. The so-called experts and leaders in the welfare organizations speak for them and design programmes and initiatives within a politics of praising from above (van Dyk, 2021, p. 352). The state supports these initiatives with large budgets. But the problem is that this financial support is dedicated to the establishment of structures of volunteer work and the recruitment and organization of it – and seldom if ever for the adequate remuneration of volunteer work. With these initiatives the state finances its politics of withdrawal and refrainment from as well as the outsourcing of its welfare services to NGOs: „Im Kontext des wohlfahrtsstaatlichen, arbeitgesellschaftlichen, familialen und demografischen Wandels erweist sich der Staat in dreifacher Hinsicht als Treiber der Freiwilligengesellschaft: erstens in diskursiver und programmatischer Hinsicht durch die moralische Aufwertung ehrenamtlichen Engagements, zweitens durch (materielle) Förderprogramme und Policy-Instrumente, die den Ausbau ehrenamtlicher Arbeit zum Ziel haben, sowie drittens durch eine Politik des Unterlassens.“ (van Dyk, 2021, p. 345)<sup>8</sup>

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8 “In the context of the changes related to the welfare-state, labour-society, family and demographic situation, the state is proving to push the voluntary society in three ways: firstly, in discursive and programmatic terms through the moral upgrading of voluntary work, secondly, through (material) support programmes and policy instruments aimed at expanding voluntary work, and thirdly, through a politics of omission.” (my own translation)

As for the migrants, there is an additional aspect of precarisation in this development. Volunteering becomes a double-edged instrument of migrantisation: On the one hand, the promise of integration and participation in the host society is articulated through these initiatives. Since refugees during their asylum procedure, but also other migrants (e.g., when it comes to family reunification) are not allowed to take up regular employment (or cannot, because they are overwhelmed by the bureaucratic requirements and are often too little or even misinformed), volunteering is presented as the great gateway and threshold to employment. Volunteering is stylized as a promising in-between space, a transitional space that makes it easier for refugees to enter society. But on the other hand, it is not an agreeable waiting room, it is an examination room. They have to prove themselves, show themselves, do something (which rarely has anything to do with their former occupations and qualifications which anyhow are mostly not recognized as 'useful' or 'adequate' in the host country's job market), make themselves worthy in order to be allowed to cross the threshold to regularity and normality. In today's liberal market economies, volunteering is an instrument for outsourcing state welfare tasks onto the shoulders of a (voluntarily or forcedly) committed civil society. There are so many projects for the guided involvement and empowerment of actors with migrant background – most of them decorated with prizes and awards. Volunteering undoubtedly has an important function in a democratic social order, if it really happens voluntarily and of one's own accord – and not as the only way of being visible and valued.

Hassemer (2020) clearly shows in his research on unpaid voluntary language workers in a social counselling centre run by an NGO in Vienna how ambivalent and vulnerable the situation of these volunteering refugees is: They see and accept the chance to gain 'value' in the host society by this work. But the human capital they invest in this value-gaining process has only a very weak and maybe indirect impact on future employment chances. So, they become instrumentalized by the politics of a state that praises their volunteer work and enables them to enter the social and personal spheres of society as a 'good citizen' but the precari-

ous economic situation and the exclusion from the employment market remains and is even more set-in stone.

In the case of unpaid nonprofessional interpreters, we have a very strong inclination towards elevating this discourse of volunteering as helping their 'own people' coupled with the aim of giving back the help they received from the host country. We definitely need to conduct more research concentrating on this feeling of giving something back, a phenomenon I have labelled as 'Bringschuld' earlier (cf. Bahadır, 2021). This notion is used by the media and in political discourse on migrants quite often, but it also seems to be an intrinsic motivation of the volunteering migrant language workers, no matter whether they are refugees who are waiting to be 'legalized' or the so-called resident migrants who are settled, integrated, and who have proved that they have brought 'additional value' to their receiving societies. But of course, the question to start with here would be to ask how cultural, religious, ethnic, familial and personal backgrounds, the trauma of migration, the state politics of praising volunteer, unpaid and 'thankful' work for the community in the host countries are intertwined with policies of leaving the engaged migrants as long as possible in this ambivalent condition of economic precarity and social praise against the background of a bigger picture of failures in integrating migrant workers in the regular job market.

### ***Intervention 2: Nonprofessional interpreters / Giving something back ... but what?***

In the self-image of the state in Germany and Austria, interpreting has never been part of the standard services of migrant care – not even in the area of refugee aid is this service systematically and comprehensively provided by trained or certified and, above all, paid interpreters, but rather left to the charitable willingness of formerly affected persons to act as lay interpreters. There are countless, often enthusiastic reports in various media about voluntary interpreting as a noble task. There is also no shortage of interviews with former refugees who now want to show their gratitude by volunteering as interpreters in various NGOs. In a video on the website of Pro Asyl Essen about and with volunteers, a mi-

grant woman talks about her motivation to volunteer as an interpreter and emphasises that she interprets because when she came to Germany, the Germans helped her a lot and that is why she now wants to help by acting as a language broker.<sup>9</sup>

It is interesting that she wants to help because the Germans helped her, not because she wants to help her own community. Her German is quite broken. I don't want to be misunderstood – my point here is not to condemn the deficient German skills of a non-professional volunteer interpreter in a project that undoubtedly promotes civic engagement (Join Ehrenamt)<sup>10</sup>. In this case, too, I would like to look at this interpreting setting from the perspective of the multi-layered promise of integration. I would like to point out that this promise first of all cannot be fulfilled simply because of the linguistic reduction, i.e., the German level of the interpreting. It might be true that the professionals of the majority society are interpreted as well as possible into the language of origin of the newly arrived migrants – although here, too, a high level of competence in the language and culture of origin as well as a reasonable understanding of the target language and cultural circumstances is assumed or rather presupposed. Both conditions are usually not checked. Trust in the self-disclosure and the self-assessment of those involved is what counts. I am deliberately not talking about false interpreting here. I am talking here about a field of interpreting in which charity or civic engagement seems to be more important than the legal correctness of the word. Thus, the duplicity or two-faced nature lies in the fact that this is not openly stated, i.e., it is pretended, the appearance is maintained that 'good' or the 'right' interpreting is taking place here and that the condition of the migrant being formerly speechless and thus powerless is therefore reversed and a situation of empowerment is made possible.

A newspaper report emphasises that the need for lay interpreters is enormous – in that region and all over Germany. And 13 volunteers have just been trained, we read in the article. What exactly this training involves remains unclear. But it is anyhow an imposition to be trained for

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9 <https://www.proasylessen.de/mitmachen/ehrenamt/>

10 <https://join-ehrenamt.drk-hessen.de/>



a service that will always remain in the precariat of voluntary work. I have also been designing and conducting training courses, shorter and longer ones, for volunteer interpreters. Over the years, my attitude in this regard has moved in a completely different direction. Initially, I was concerned with remedying deficits, with teaching as many techniques and strategies as possible in the shortest possible time. The result was too often disillusionment and a kind of destabilization without time to recover and develop resilience for all involved, me as a trainer included. It was a struggle in vain because I tried to compensate their deficits in the German language and in the knowledge of the social, legal and medical systems in which they have to act as interpreters through competence building in interpreting techniques and strategies.

“Shortly before their final exams, they talk about their volunteer work, in which they invest a lot of time: ‘Three years ago, I felt like a refugee myself and now I want to give that back,’ says Ukrainian Vitalina Lukovkina, for example.”<sup>11</sup> For a long time, I didn’t want to see that lay interpreting is always about ‘giving back’, about paying a debt. Even and especially after short-term training. As long as the volunteering and the charitable orientation continues. In the newspaper report we read further: “The family of Ukrainian Dmitry Skyrta was taken in by a family in Bischofswiesen a few weeks ago. ‘I have an obligation to give something back,’ says Skyrta. He is looking forward to being able to communicate with others and support them when they arrive in Germany.”

So, in my trainings, the focus has shifted more and more to raising awareness for the ethical in this activity, which clearly also touches on the political. I am now concerned with taking the responsibility off these heavy-laden shoulders, and to invite them to recognize the systemic entanglements of their voluntary work. And also to recognize that it does make a difference, primarily on the level of the politics of recognition and the right for fair and equal treatment in the public services of the

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11 [https://www.berchtesgadener-anzeiger.de/region-und-lokal/lokales-berchte-sgadener-land\\_artikel,-laiendolmetscher-haenderingend-gesucht-13-freiwillige-haben-sich-ausbilden-lassen-\\_arid,698230.html](https://www.berchtesgadener-anzeiger.de/region-und-lokal/lokales-berchte-sgadener-land_artikel,-laiendolmetscher-haenderingend-gesucht-13-freiwillige-haben-sich-ausbilden-lassen-_arid,698230.html). (The translations of the direct quotes from the article are my own.)

host country, if they interpret for ‘their community’ with a German language competence that is barely level B 1 – as opposed to the option that ‘their community’ might be provided with a certified and professional interpreter with very good command of both working languages.

Whether they will be happier and feel less deficient as a result, as they mostly did in my training courses packed with impossible-to-master competence enhancements, is a different question.

### **3 Integration, participation, empowerment via interpreting**

I will not provide definitions of what integration, participation and empowerment do, might, or should mean for which project, initiative, politician or theoretician. It is evident that we have a multiplicity of different definitions and understandings of these three key concepts – as well as a large corpus of literature in the social, political and legal sciences on them. What I want to stress for our usage in the context of migration in general and community interpreting in particular is that there is a huge critical discussion going on about these concepts in migration studies but also in other areas of the social sciences. So, a cautious handling of these concepts, which are meanwhile presented as political but also ethical axioms for the functioning of postmigrant societies, is very important.<sup>12</sup> I want to therefore base my arguments now mainly on the ideas of Willem Schinkel, a social theorist who is very critical of the constant demand for integration, especially in the context of enabling participation, i.e., the becoming of a member of a society (2013, 2017, 2018). I take his resistance to view immigrant integration within a neo-colonial and racist order of knowledge production as my reference point for a plea for a critical reading of the master concepts of migration politics as well as policies not only in migration research but also in interpreting research on volunteer and nonprofessional interpreters – if we are ready to conduct our research by taking into

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12 I would recommend the volume “Umkämpfte Begriffe der Migration. Inventar” (2023) to get a critical overview of these master concepts.

account the current situation of migrants in many Western countries. These interpreting acts mostly happen in states that have withdrawn from a so-called credo of the possibility of multicultural societies – and Schinkel poignantly highlights that there is a big paradox behind these rhetorics of denouncement: All of these countries denounce something that never existed: “This fiction of a multiculturalism that was once dominant across Western Europe but has now been shown to have failed is espoused both by politicians of nearly all colours and by well-known immigrant integration scholars.” (Schinkel, 2018, p.1)

Yet the so-called failure of multiculturalism is closely linked to a tradition of calling it integration, while thinking of assimilation. The major integration theorist in German sociology, Hartmut Esser, is influenced by early assimilation theories in US American sociology in the 1980s. In Germany the understanding of integration in sociology as well as in social politics is strongly connected with other forms of societal and national identification and incorporation processes (cf. Laubenthal, 2023, Becker, 2022). Structural, social and cultural integration seem to be instrumental for a sense of belonging, which in turn seems to increase the migrants’ possibilities of participating in society. We have a clear intermingling of expectations for national identification (to become/feel as/be German) and procedures of incorporation into the society (to become a member of society in Germany, to take part in society, to participate in society). Schenkel coins the word “multiculturealism” in order to describe “the self-declared ‘realism’ of supposedly having been ‘multicultural’ and hence ‘politically correct’, naively ‘left-wing’, ‘ignoring the problems’ (with immigrants, with ‘Islam’, and so on), but of now having become realistic/a realist, daring to voice the harsh truth about the troubled realities of a failing model of immigrant integration. The discourse of multiculturealism has entailed a license to problematize migrant others, i.e., to forego the relational aspects of migration and to focus solely on the position and problems of immigrants and their children, many of whom were actually born on European soil” (2018, p. 2).

In this context Schinkel criticizes the concept of integration which was used in classical sociology to describe processes in a society as a whole, in an organicist approach, and which is meanwhile taken as a

property of the individual: “‘Integration’ thus changes from a *system state* to a *state of being* of an individual. Lack of immigrant integration thus turns out to have to do with the being of immigrants, and the resulting picture of course ends up pitting ‘society’ over against individuals that are racialized in particular ways, because in order for their being to affect their integration, that being must be somehow problematic” (2018, p. 3).

Integration has become a measurable competence – the one migrant is less integrated, the other is better integrated. It is presented as a parameter that guarantees the next step, which is participation. It has been transformed into a static and unrelational concept according to Schinkel – thus within a neoliberal paradigm of migration policies in Europe integration has become the responsibility of each individual migrant (2018, p. 2). This individualization of integration is fertile ground for developing an ideology of the individual contribution to the integration of newcomers by acting as language and integration mediators. The acts of nonprofessional and volunteer language work give the migrant who has already gained access to society the opportunity to pay off their debt of having reached a state of successful integration into the host country with the help of members or institutions of this society. This intricate interconnectedness of receiving help and thus getting into the debt via this received help, then trying to pay off one’s debt with the system’s expectation of the migrants’ finding their own ways and solutions to first enter the organic unit called host society and to then try and become an active member of this entity, is a heavy load on the shoulders of every nonprofessional and volunteering interpreter. It suits migration and integration policies however to hail the good and thankful migrant who works for the new society, volunteering and without getting paid<sup>13</sup>.

The most problematic consequence that is postulated by migration policies with regard to volunteer lay interpreting is the atmosphere of

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13 See also the very interesting study by Düsener 2010 in which she shows how migrants try to reach inclusion by civic engagement not for ‘their own people’ but for Germans.

apparent empowerment. What even is empowerment when the power resides in organic aggregates that foster structural discrimination, create ambivalent and paradoxical narratives on the dangers of excessive migration and the unwillingness of migrants to be integrated and accept an increasing racialization and culturalization of the public as well as academic debates on the limits of migration? Who empowers whom in this system? Who has the right to do that? Who is the language worker, whether nonprofessional and unpaid or professionalized and paid, to dare to adopt the task to empower? And who commissions them to empower the newly arrived migrant? To empower to do what and to become what? Empowering here has a clear instrumentalizing side. For me this is an interesting and most virulent case for illustrating the phenomenon of 'instrumental thinking' which Dizdar diagnoses as a typical feature of translation and translation studies within the market-oriented neoliberal economies of education and scholarship (Dizdar, 2014).

***Intervention 3: There is resistance and resilience - no matter whether with nonprofessional, professionalized or highly professional interpreters***

In this last reflection, I would like to outline one concrete example of deliberate resistance to the two cherished ethical ideals of interpreting, namely neutrality or impartiality as well as correctness and completeness of interpreting, without additions or omissions. I am sure that many other interpreters have had similar experiences, but they haven't been asked the right questions in research projects in order to talk openly about them – or didn't even have the time to reflect on their experiences and to become aware of what had happened in that situation. In the three narrative biographical interviews I conducted with language and integration mediators and in the feedback and self-reflection sessions after the interpreting exams in the SprInt project, there were quite a few accounts of breaches and cracks in the promise of establishing understanding and enabling communication via highest possible transparency and using all one's competences. Even in the accounts of conference interpreter colleagues we see similar situations

which I have documented in a field diary over quite a few years. I want to dwell upon only one concrete breach of the triple mandate of the interpreter, i.e., her solemn pledge to simultaneously serve the three sides involved in the scenario of interpreted events. I will just touch upon this scenario, which is based upon my personal experience. I deliberately choose to narrate it in the third-person-singular-perspective because I think it is not important that I had been the interpreter. I would like to present the situation as a framing scenario, just like the ones I use in the interpreting enactments in my performance-and body-centred pedagogy of interpreting. Framing or rough scenario means that it is an abstract and exemplary case that can be enriched with cultural, social, situational, personal features and adapted to different times and spaces (cf. e.g. Bahadır, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2017).

An academically educated, professional interpreter experiences the situation in which a prosecutor questions a woman who is accused of having beaten her five-year-old daughter in the staircase of the house in which she lives. The neighbour who filed a complaint is the only witness. The prosecutor openly shows his discontent and a discriminatory attitude towards the woman. Right at the beginning while the three involved persons are sitting around a table, he grumbles something like 'again one of these migrant women'. The interpreter asks him to whom he had spoken and whether she should interpret this. He waves her off impatiently and starts to ask questions at such a high speed that the interpreter has difficulties taking notes. The questions are tricky, partly misleading and laden with insinuations. The interpreter knows the woman and her daughter from a German course which she had taught. She had mentioned this to the prosecutor. He wasn't interested. She knows about the patience and the naiveness of the mother, a very shy person, barely educated, who married a man from the same village in their country of origin and afterwards came to Germany. She is now staying with her husband's big family, under constant pressure trying to prove herself worthy of her husband and being allowed to come to Germany. The interpreter also knows about how the mother normally pampers the child while the child often takes advantage of this by being overly dramatic about each tiny thing. The mother is terrified by this

questioning, even paralysed; she confuses details of the events in the staircase, stumbles over every question, answers either frantically or speaks with a very low voice. The interpreter tries to draw the prosecutor's attention to the mother's very apparent shock, but he harshly calls the interpreter back to her duty 'just to interpret and to interpret everything literally and not to disturb his questioning'. The interpreter, in the course of the questioning, suddenly starts to warn the mother, to give tiny directions to her, just in one or two short sentences introducing the prosecutor's misleading tricky questions. The first intervention, a very soft and short warning, something like 'be careful, this question the prosecutor asks is tricky, please reflect well before answering' happens abruptly, like a silent outburst. Then she becomes aware of this act of transgressing the border of uninvolved and distanced interpreting and of breaking the rule of intervening, without changing the words said by the prosecutor but by commenting on them, adding to them something like an explanation or a stage direction. And as her intransparent intervention has the impact of somehow shaking the migrant mother up, she deliberately chooses to intervene three more times, with hasty introductory comments like 'this is a repetition of the last question, only in other words' and 'please dare to speak about your current situation at home' and lastly 'please don't get angry, this is just a hypothetical question' – as an introductory comment to the provocative question the prosecutor is shouting at the mother as to whether she would beat her daughter if she had broken the TV screen by throwing something at it. His aim was clear to the interpreter: He wanted to push the woman into a corner and get her to yell that of course she would then beat her. But the interpreter's intervention didn't allow him to provoke the mother and to enrage her. She remained calm and said that she cannot answer this question because she doesn't know but that she loves her nasty daughter and that she hasn't ever beaten her. The interpreter didn't feel any remorse. She felt that it was right, that it was even just. She had compensated a very tiny bit for the lack of justice in the questioning – of course in her own opinion. But as the prosecutor wasn't interested in her opinion and didn't show any readiness to cooperate with her, she

decided herself what to do to correct the situation. She didn't dare to talk about this transgression to anybody for a very long time.

All types of interpreters under all sorts of conditions and in all kinds of situations have many more such experiences. The point is that we have to dig them out, we have to provide an honest and open, a respectful and appreciative atmosphere and a participatory and activating frame of research in which they are encouraged, even empowered to talk frankly but also self-reflexively and critically about such instances of transgression of borders – and of instances of setting up boundaries instead of overcoming or bridging them through interpreting.

#### **4 'Radical Interpreting Studies': The Political in the Ethical – or the Ethical in the Political?**

Up until now I have attempted to demonstrate that interpreting to enable faster integration in migratory settings is part of a political programme in states where the care of migrants is outsourced to NGOs following the rationale of liberal market economies. Interpreting as a volunteer and unpaid 'integration aid' is thus imposed upon agents of interpreting in community settings in line with a specific political and social agenda of integration. As interpreting researchers, we have to be highly-aware of this ideology of integration and participation attached to interpreting as we are prone to being influenced by this ideology as well. Our position is no different from that of migration researchers. Schinkel invites these researchers (2018, pp. 7, 9) to read against the grain– to question the mainstream understanding of society as an unmovable, unchangeable, untouchable organic union into which problematic individuals are to be incorporated through a more or less successful integration process. He stresses that this organic unit called society is not critically discussed in this approach – it is always the migrant, the individual to be incorporated who is successful or not. In his book *Imagined Societies* (2017) he invites us to turn this perspective upside down. He convincingly argues that in such an approach it is only the subject in/of migration who causes trouble or is even *integra-*



*tionsunwillig* ('not willing to integrate') or who is compliant and thus *integrationswillig* ('willing to integrate'). Thus, the complete load of integration as a complex package of social and political action, i.e., for the individual to become part of this social body and at the same time for the social body to incorporate this new part, is placed on the shoulders of the individual person who immigrated. It is the other, the foreigner, the stranger as an individual who clearly has a *Bringschuld* within this perspective. We can also discern the idea of the guest, the foreigner who is accepted only thanks to the *Gutmensch* *tum*, i.e., the benevolence of the natives, of those who are already there. Schinkel's thought-provokingly oblique look at this imbalanced distribution of duties, responsibilities and expectations during the process of integration can be connected to Zygmunt Bauman's deliberations on the stranger, as a third and most ominous category between friend and foe, who are the complete insider and the complete outsider (e.g. in Bauman, 2005). This stranger is *un-heimlich* according to Bauman, in the double sense of the German adjective: not belonging to us, to our home – and therefore terrifying. So, interpreting for this unknown or mis-known and therefore awful and mis-fit individual is in a way performed as part of a mission to make this stranger known, better known, similar to us, understandable, shapeable, assimilate-able. This mission is sometimes openly articulated by policy-makers, but might also be left unspoken by certain initiatives which seemingly care for the wellbeing of both their migrants and their interpreters– but it is always taken-for-granted. Another important source for a reshuffle in our approach to the eternal debate on integration are no doubt Di Cesare's deliberations on migration/mobility as "the original sin of the migrant" as opposed to migration/mobility as a basic and the oldest human right (Donatella di Cesare, 2021, basing her arguments on Arendt, Derrida, Simmel and others). The resident foreigners with the stigma of this 'original sin' experience the political and legal consolidation of a continuous oscillation between being accused and self-accusation (guilt) paired with (socially, politically and self-imposed) feelings of gratitude.

For the kind of 'radical interpreting studies' that I would like to start envisaging here, this impossible bulk of expectations loaded on

the shoulders of interpreters is a starting point inviting us interpreting researchers to take a closer look at many more seemingly smooth performances of interpreting. ‘Radical interpreting studies’ could concentrate on illustrating the potential of resistance inscribed in interpreting in general and on how these acts of subversive interpreting are most often hidden and overseen, deliberately or unconsciously. Radical would mean digging out the social, cultural, economic, political, and personal roots of scenarios of interpreting, diving deeper into acts of interpreting and peeking behind the curtain of interpreting performances. Radical would also be necessarily paired with critical. And critical would be aligned with unconditional.

As I am very aware of the fact that I am normative in my researcher positioning now, I would like to underline here the necessity of conducting critical research without condition and to reflect upon concepts, but also upon phenomena and agents in the field in an unconditionally critical attitude – in the sense of Derrida’s unconditional university which is yet to come and his concept of the ‘new’ humanities in which philosophical thought is openly involved in politics as well as in law (Derrida, 2002). In her seminal text delineating the framework for a deconstructive attitude as a translation studies scholar, Dizdar asks us what kind of a position a responsible translation studies can occupy if our research and academic thinking is not only to be commissioned and bought up by certain companies, basing her question on the warnings Derrida articulates for the university as an institution of education, philosophical thought and science (2013, 152). And more than this question, I find her answer important for my view of ‘radical interpreting studies’: As this question is not at all easy to answer we should ask it again and again under each and every new condition (2013, 153). What makes our research responsible and ethical is thus first of all this question we have to ask ourselves continuously – a courageous way of asking questions in research. In this context, it is the right and the duty of researchers working on nonprofessional or professional interpreting to ask uncomfortable questions and to unfold the political and economic framing of these interpreting performances. Dizdar stresses that translation studies is very often confronted by demands like “Praxistauglichkeit” (practicality) and

“Beschäftigungsfähigkeit” (employability) (2013, 149). While Dizdar ponders whether ‘perhaps’ this might be the reason for so little critical research on the social and political impact of translations and translators and especially on the entanglements between automation and translation on the one hand and the translation market on the other, I would like to underline that the position of regarding translation as an ‘instrumental’ performance, as an activity that must be ‘*nützlich*’ (useful) is exactly the quandary translation studies, and even more so interpreting research, only rarely escapes.

Yet I think that ‘radical interpreting studies’ could also bestow us with the strategy of reading against the grain, even in this debate on the ‘usefulness’ of research. Schinkel poignantly shows how the social scientist degenerates into a record keeper, measuring deviant and nonnormative behaviour, i.e., in the case of integration, analysing and keeping the record of the ways of how migrants entering a society are being integrated or not (2018, 11). He calls this a modern endeavour, which reminds me of Zygmunt Bauman’s deliberations on a postmodern critique of the modern condition (e.g. in Bauman, 1999).

In his own work Schinkel shows us how we can escape ‘toolification’ in research by asking uncomfortable questions about all phenomena, even those which we think are very clearly studied up to now or seem to be clear in their meaning to us researchers, to our scientific community, to society. For me this means that at the very end of my text, in the case of acts and agents of integration-fostering interpreting, I would like to ask, supported by Chantal Mouffe, the uncomfortable question of whether we can even talk about dialogue and understanding safeguarded by interpreters under the condition of postmigrant societies: “There is much talk today about ‘dialogue’ and ‘deliberation’ but what is the meaning of such words in the political field, if no real choice is at hand and if the participants in the discussion are not able to decide between clearly defined alternatives?” (Mouffe, 2015, 3)

I would therefore like to end my contribution with the demand to (re)read the ethical in nonprofessional interpreting as the political within a “post-political vision“ of liberal thought in contemporary democracies (Mouffe, 2015, pp. 1–2) where conflict and antagonism is

unwanted in line with an “aspiration to a world where the we/they discrimination would have been overcome”. Based on Mouffe’s disclosure of the falseness of the discourse on dialogue and understanding under conditions of discrimination and power imbalances, it is absolutely necessary to look at acts of interpreting as performances/(re)enactments and at nonprofessional interpreters as performers/(re)enactors with the potential for both consolidation and transformation of systemic constraints by enduring or refusing instrumentalization. A critical reading of ‘dialogue’ guaranteed by interpreters in postmigrant societies requires us to concentrate on the politics of interpreting and the political in interpreting and to look closer at the ethical implications of the role/function/task of the (non)professional interpreter in postmigrant societies as well as at the ambivalence in the acts and procedures of presenting the (non)professional interpreter (in the public sphere) as an example for ‘best practice’ in integration (the one who made it!).

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# The recognition of foreign professionalism

## An examination of the organizational translation practices of foreign professional knowledge and skills in Germany

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*Anne Vatter*

### 1 Introduction

In many cases, the decision to leave the country of origin is not only associated with the consequences of leaving one's own material possessions and social networks behind, but it is also linked to the loss of previously acquired professional knowledge and skills, since the qualifications from the country of origin are often incompatible with those in the destination country (Friedberg, 2020; Reitz, 2007; Konietzka & Kreyenfeld, 2001; Kogan, 2016). Thus, assuming an equivalent job in the host country can be much more difficult for migrants.

In the “race for talent” (Shachar, 2006), the moral call to integrate migrants into the host country not only includes the economic necessity of recruiting skilled workers from abroad, but also promoting their adequate employment. Recently, many nation states have been dealing with the prevailing tension between the interests of national actors (e.g., maintaining national education standards) and the demands for the integration of migrants (Pfeffer & Skrivanek 2018). However, considering the approximately 200 countries worldwide and the 3,008 identified occupations for Europe alone (European Commission 2022), the question of how qualifications can be translated across borders has yet to be answered.



Germany thereby poses an interesting case, since its vocational training systems are highly standardized and stratified (Allmendinger, 1989). Meanwhile, the combination of training in a company and education in a vocational school can only be found in several other countries (Fürstenau et al., 2014), making translatability especially difficult. Hence, the research question in this study is as follows: How are foreign skills and knowledge translated in Germany? This question is addressed by interviews with employees of consulting offices, individuals responsible for the assessment of foreign knowledge and skills (e.g., the members of Chambers of Crafts), and various training organizations.

Building on the sociology of translation, the present study considers translation as a performative act, which is carried out through a network in which knowledge regarding a certain entity is continuously transformed (Latour, 1986). As the third section in this study argues, the materialization of the results (Czarniawski, 2010) must be used in another organization. Artifacts can thereby be described as objects that are produced, handled, and modified through human interventions (Lueger & Froschauer, 2018, p. 11). They also determine how their information is processed and conveyed, and through the application of artifact practices in an organization, how they can be transformed. Moreover, transformations in a translation chain can be described with the following concepts: *interessement devices*, *spokespersons*, and *shifting*. In this case, *shifting* refers to contextual or material changes of an entity (Pelizza, 2021). Following Pelizza's (2021) work, this study adapts these concepts to understand the transformations of foreign skills and knowledge, the details of which are discussed in the fourth section.

The remainder of this study is organized as follows. The next section summarizes the recognition procedure in Germany, followed by two sections specifying the previous theoretical considerations on translation. This is followed by a description of the methodology of this study and the data. Subsequently, the next sections focus on the work and interplay of various organizations by examining the practices of consulting offices, Chambers of Crafts, and vocational training organizations. Upon comparing the concept of *shifting* in foreign skills and knowledge, the

procedure in the Chambers of Crafts presents itself as formal. Formal transformation is accompanied by more informal procedures carried out in consulting offices and training organizations. Furthermore, artifacts, such as application forms, manifest the necessary information and determine the form of translation in the Chambers of Crafts. Overall, the translation of foreign skills and knowledge in Germany is not a sole reductionist process, since this analysis shows that additional training can lead to subsequent modifications of the materialized results regarding the formal recognition of foreign skills and knowledge.

## 2 The Recognition Procedure in Germany

The starting point of this study is the enactment of the Federal Recognition Act of 2012 in Germany. The intention of this Act was to promote the integration of migrants into the labour market, in accordance with their qualifications. In this regard, efforts have been made to facilitate the use of foreign professional knowledge and skills by directly involving the German certification bodies for professional qualifications and formal recognition. These procedures aimed at making competencies comparable (through the formal examination and certification of foreign qualifications) to German occupations, regardless of whether they are regulated professions (in which formal recognition of qualifications is necessary) or non-regulated professions (in which formal recognition is not necessary) (BMBF, 2012; Knuth, 2013).

Since the implementation of the Federal Recognition Act of 2012, further education programs/offices for the formal recognition of qualifications have been established (BMBF, 2019). Therefore, the labour market integration of migrants in Germany is a complex structure of organizations that actively participate in this integration process. During such integration, they each work on the translation of foreign qualifications (Sackmann, 2023); however, little is known about the interplay of these organizations and how foreign professional knowledge and skills are processed.

### 3 Theoretical Considerations on Translation

#### 3.1 The Role of Artifacts in Inter-Organizational Cooperation

Drawing on the constructivist approach of actor-network theory, the idea of translation and related transformation processes have been pursued in Scandinavian institutionalism. Specifically, their perspective underlined the necessity to materialize informal information in order to travel between organizations (Czarniawska, 2010). In this regard, materialized ideas can be carried into other organizations (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996, p. 47; Czarniawska & Sevón, 2005, 8). Their studies also followed Latour's (2017) understanding of translation, in which ideas cannot be carried forward in their abstract form, but must be de-contextualized, since only a section of the world is considered for translations. Knowledge regarding this section is (re-)produced in networks and exists in the form of so-called "inscriptions" (Latour, 2017). Inscriptions are materializations of knowledge that influence translations as non-human actors such as signs, archives, or documents (*ibid.*, 375 f.). This can be illustrated by the following example. Researchers use existing data to generate new insights. Meanwhile, the original data remains untouched in the research process, but is modified in different ways by researchers according to their scientific interest. In other words, the data is continuously transformed. Moreover, researchers often work with previous results and in this way, the original data becomes increasingly translated. The documentation of the results (materialized in scientific knowledge) is further processed and thereby transformed in organizations and scientific papers that connect researchers.

Translation is thereby a process of transforming knowledge. This process is characterized by an organization-specific form of receiving information, processing this knowledge, and repackaging it for other purposes. In the case of foreign professional knowledge and skills, it can be assumed that each organization translates them according to their organizational structure. In this regard, artifacts contribute to inter-organizational cooperation. While the preceding depictions mainly discuss the role of artifacts for organizations and their inter-organizational

practices, the following section further defines artifacts and describes their modification through translation. From a more performative perspective, it encompasses the important role that various actors (human and non-human) and technical devices play (as inscriptive forces) in the translation process.

### 3.2 The Translation of Qualifications through Artifacts

Building on actor-network theory, Pelizza (2021) used the concepts of spokespersons, interessement devices, and shifting to open “[...] black boxes and reveal how the material qualities of artifacts act to involve diverse actors [...]” (Pelizza, 2021, p. 488). In doing so, she further specified Latour’s concept of inscriptions. In her study, she used these concepts as “thinking tools” (Leander, 2008) to describe the translation processes in the identification of refugees at European borders. Identification is thereby a performative process in which various actors, such as officers at the border or technical devices, participate.

Concomitant to the process of translating foreign professional knowledge and skills, information about an individual is also translated and transformed (Pelizza, 2020). The translation in both cases is a reduction of an individual’s characteristics or (in the case of this study) an individual’s capacity to work in a specific profession. Hence, translation is part of a process in which the organizations involved select the required information in order to translate the employability of migrants. In this process, artifacts play a crucial role, since they define who is being addressed (Latour, 2017). The following section adapts this approach to better understand the different stages of the translation of foreign professional skills and knowledge. It also describes the three aforementioned concepts in more detail.

The terms interessement devices and spokespersons have both been used in Callon (1984), who applied these terms to describe the use of translation to solve a problem. In his analysis, translation is a network-forming process characterized by four stages: problematization, interessement, enrollment, and mobilization. Throughout this process, the actors involved manifest their positions by involving some actors,

while leaving others out. This can occur through conversations and artifacts. He also referred to this as *interessement*, since the interest in participating is either generated or not generated, and by doing so, actors become either involved or excluded. According to Callon (1984, p. 133), “*Interessement devices push actors to adopt the expected roles and behaviours; they are devices which can be placed between actors and all other entities who want to define their identities otherwise.*”

Spokespersons are human or non-human actors who speak for others. They can do this verbally (e.g., like a mayor who speaks for his/her community) “or because they replace the preceding link in the chain of action and translate it into a different materiality” (Pelizza, 2021, p. 495). In the identification process at border crossings, fingerprints act as spokespersons. Dahlvik (2017) described the materialization of spokespersons in administrations when discussing asylum procedures. In this regard, the materialization of informal knowledge is essential for the legitimacy of certain decisions, while the transformation process is characterized by the transition from informality to formality. It also distinguishes between two decision-making processes: *factualization* and *writing*. *Factualization* describes the process of transforming information into facts, while *writing* involves the transformation from spoken words into written ones (Dahlvik, 2017). The validity of decisions can be established through written words, while files or notifications are spokespersons of the forgone translation.

Pelizza (2021) used the theoretical concept of *shifting*, which was made explicit by Akrich and Latour (1992) and Latour (1992), in her analysis to define how spokespersons who do not verbally speak for someone else can materially work. Hence, *shifting* draws attention to material or contextual changes (e.g., foreign skills and knowledge), enabling a further understanding of underlying procedural structures.

Following her descriptions, four *shifting* modes can be identified. First, *shifting up* refers to the transformation of a spokesperson into a written word/sign. In this regard, the process that Dahlvik calls *factualization* is a process of *shifting up*. Second, *shifting down* describes the opposite movement. The classic example by Latour (1992, pp. 225–227) is the sound a car makes if a seatbelt is not fastened. In this case, the sound

replaces the sentence “fasten your seat belt.” Both describe changes in the materiality of the entity. The final two modes are shifting in and shifting out. In a text, the narrator can shift in and out of a scene by referring to different times or spaces. Therefore, shifting out describes de-contextualization, whereas shifting in describes recontextualization (Akrich & Latour, 1992).

### **3.3 The Concept of Shifting in the Translation Chain to Account for Participating Actors and their Translation Practices**

Initially, cross-border employment of foreign professionals appears to be a question regarding the linguistic translation of professional qualifications. Specifically, certificates must be translated into another language so that they can be understood in the host country. However, upon closer inspection, it is not simply the certificates that are linguistically translated, but (as this study argues) it is also the professional knowledge and skills that the certificates convey (Kell, 1982). In this case, the certificates act as spokespersons for the foreign professional skills and knowledge of the applicant. In addition, the Notification of Recognition acts as a spokesperson for the ability of the applicant to work in a specific profession in Germany. Thus, the following sections take a closer look at the organizations involved in labour market integration and their translation practices. As for the three aforementioned concepts, spokespersons represent the results of translations in organizations and the promotion of inter-organizational cooperation, while interessement devices coordinate the translation processes. Finally, shifting indicates material or contextual changes in foreign professional skills and knowledge. Revealing these moments can allow us to discuss the underlying practices in more detail.

## **4 Methodology**

In order to discuss the translation of foreign professionals in this study, expert interviews (Meuser & Nagel, 2002) were conducted with actors

from various associations, welfare organizations, Chambers of Crafts, Chambers of Industry and Commerce, research institutes, vocational training organizations, language schools, and companies. The selection of the interviewees was based on an ideal process for the translation of vocational qualifications, which was divided into different phases, ranging from the acquisition of information and counselling to labour market integration. A total of 32 interviews with 35 individuals were conducted in 2020 and 2021 via the Ovid website. In addition, various artifacts, such as applications, guidelines, and websites, were examined. All of the materials collected in the general information, application review, and professional training phases were analysed to determine how foreign professional skills and knowledge are processed in counselling, examinations, and the establishment of suitable training organizations in Germany. The study sample is presented in the following table.

*Table 1: Study sample*

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Interviews</i>
Acquisition of information and counselling	One interview with an expert from the information portal of the German government, for the recognition of foreign professional qualifications. Four expert interviews with migration counselors who specialize in the recognition of foreign qualifications.
Application review	One interview with an expert from the information portal for foreign professional qualifications who specializes in supporting recognition bodies. Five expert interviews with members of various Chambers of Crafts.
Professional training	Four expert interviews with members of professional training facilities. Two expert interviews with counselors for professional training.

## 5 The Interplay of Organisations

### 5.1 Consulting

This section focuses on guidance/consulting services that emerged under the Federal Recognition Act of 2012. Such services (Anerkennungsberatungen) offer assistance to migrants by identifying ways to use their foreign professional knowledge and skills in Germany. The following excerpt from an interview with a counsellor describes the approach and provides insights into the practice of translating foreign knowledge and skills during consultations:

“In the initial consultation, the first thing is personal data, of course, then the entire tableau of school education and the country of origin. What did it look like there? Then, what followed afterwards? Was there perhaps some type of vocational training or preliminary training also coupled with school education? What does the work experience look like? Then, with all these steps, what do the documents look like? [...] Maybe we already have an idea of where the journey should go. There is maybe a first judgment of what he/she can do. What are the possibilities? Then, after some research, letters of recommendation are finalized.” (I3, a migrations counsellor who specializes in the recognition of qualifications.)

Here, the interviewee describes a typical counselling situation in which foreign skills and knowledge are removed from their original context and relevant information is selected for comparison with German qualifications. He thereby focuses on specific and relevant events in the biography of the migrant. This refers to a contextual shift (i. e., shifting in) of the information during the consultation. Consequently, foreign vocational knowledge and skills are no longer considered in isolation, but are related to possible occupations in Germany. In this process, the connection of foreign professional knowledge and skills to domestic occupations is established.



Overall, this is a selective process, since certain information (e.g., German language skills or German-specific cultural manners) is not included, even though it might play an important role in the employment of migrants (Imdorf, 2011). Through these steps, eligible life-events are identified and most importantly, they are selected through the reduction of relevant information to the ones that can be documented (Figure 1). Here, the counsellor relies on the information provided by the client in order to subsume the translatability of foreign skills and knowledge. His description also suggests a routinized approach to dealing with clients in which he does not use standardized forms to classify professional knowledge or skills. In this way, the transformation of professional knowledge and skills is linked to individual classifications by counsellors, which are not necessarily replicable.

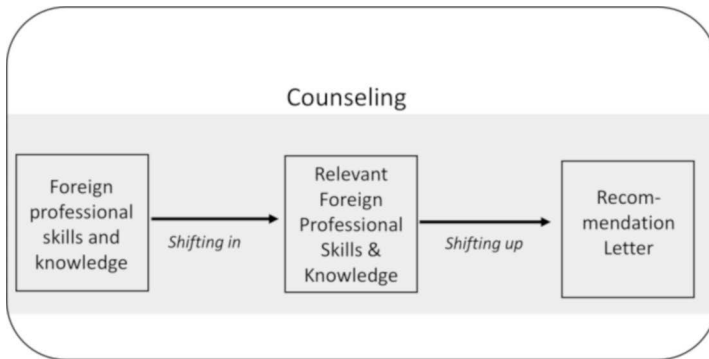
Some counsellors described a second step of transforming the selected information by writing a recommendation letter following the consultation. The contents are as follows:

“In this protocol, there are always the recognition possibilities. What can you do with the degree? What are the costs and who can take over these costs? There are also links in this protocol. You simply click on them and then you can print out the necessary forms.” (I5, a migrations counsellor who specializes in the recognition of qualifications.)

In this case, the materiality of the information changes and shifting up occurs. While initially connecting foreign professional knowledge and skills to the requirements of German educational qualifications, the recommendation letter highlights possible next steps. Here, the information gathered during counselling is translated into follow-up actions. Thus, the consultants convey the results that could be misunderstood/misinterpreted in face-to-face consultations, which can easily occur in situations where the parties have different linguistic abilities. The materialized results can be further taken into other organizations. For example, migrants can use these results to apply for funding, find

relevant application forms, or have other counsellors link their activities to the findings in the recommendation letter (Figure 1).

*Figure 1: Translation chain for counselling, including spokespersons and shifting (own representation, based on Pelizza, 2021)*



This figure illustrates the translation chain of foreign professionals in Germany. Spokespersons, as the representation of translations, are shown in the squares, while the arrows with solid lines represent the general translation process.

Ideally, this process leads to an understanding of possible next steps such as contacting the appropriate authorities responsible for recognition applications. In Germany, approximately 800 organizations (with 53 Chambers of Crafts in the craft sector alone) are responsible for formal recognition procedures. Depending on the profession and the place of residence of the migrant, one of them is responsible for the individual procedure. In this regard, classification through consultation reduces the field of recognition to the authorities responsible for the relevant profession. Details regarding the translation processes in the Chambers of Crafts are discussed in the following section.

## 5.2 Chambers of Crafts

Compared to counselling, Chambers of Crafts in Germany are obliged (in accordance with the Vocational Qualifications Act) to assess foreign vocational knowledge and skills. It is a bureaucratic procedure that must be formally requested and leads to a legally valid document. This procedure is marked by three shifts (as the following part argues), whereas the materiality is changed through the re-decontextualization of professional skills and knowledge.

First, examinations must be requested (with related costs) by submitting an Application for Recognition. Migrants can obtain the necessary information and application form for the recognition of their foreign professional skills and knowledge through the website of their respective Chamber of Crafts or by directly contacting the governing body. Compared to the procedure in consultations, the information regarding foreign professional knowledge and skills is further specified. Hence, the process of completing an application form ahead of the procedure transforms the migrant's professional skills and knowledge anew, since such information must be provided with the application form.

Second, previous translations (e.g., the recommendation of the reference profession) can be challenged by simply rejecting the application. In this process, application forms represent the formal requirements pronounced in the jurisdictional regulations. They also mediate between the applicants and the formal recognition bodies. Since they define the necessary information and the form of their documentation, they are an integral part in determining the translatability of foreign professional skills and knowledge. If the migrants are unable to complete the form (due to, for example, the language barrier), then they cannot continue the process and are deemed ineligible for the labour market. Generally, the application is structured into four main parts: 1) A statement regarding the application procedure and the reference occupation; 2) General information of the applicant (e.g., name, origin, contacts, etc.); 3) Information regarding the capabilities of the applicant (e.g., training certificates (*Ausbildungsnachweise*), certificates of competencies (*Befähigungsnachweise*), practical work experiences, etc.); and 4) In-

formation for processing the application form (e.g., former application forms (if any), the intention to work in Germany, the consent to data privacy, signatures, information on further necessary documents, etc.). For instance, regional Chambers of Crafts are only responsible if the applicant plans to work in their district. Thus, the planned place of work must be specified in the Application for Recognition, which enables the respective Chamber of Crafts to continue working on the translation.

Third, this is a formalized selective process in which the materiality of professional skills and knowledge can be changed, i.e., shifting up occurs (Figure 2). Specifically, documents and information are edited, supplemented, and written down to be further processed. Regarding the processing of Applications for Recognition, note the following excerpt from an employee of a Chamber of Crafts responsible for the recognition of qualifications:

“This is where I say, ‘Yes, the degree must be available in the original and in the translation from a sworn translator.’ Then, everything that can validate former training is included. At the moment, these are often annual certificates. So, you can see what subjects were taught in a certain year. We can also get an idea and say, ‘Okay, he is fresh out of school, he is already had work experience, or he has had work experience outside of school,’ so that we can give feedback. At the same time, we can determine whether the qualification has already been assessed somewhere in the Federal Republic. I do not know if you know this, but the content is posted on the so-called BQ-Portal. In particular, the leading Chambers enter the assessed vocational qualifications in a standardized way. What is the content? What have the experts determined? What is comparable with our training here? This way, we can determine whether there is something available or, we have to say, ‘OK, we do not have anything yet. Please request the training contents such as the lesson plan, syllabus, schedule, or something.’ I have to say that Bosnia is doing very well at the moment. We actually receive confirmed lesson plans from the schools! Although they are only excerpts, experts can instantly judge whether the contents fit. Sometimes they read the subjects and skim the contents and say, ‘It does not fit and bam bam bam is missing.’” (18, an

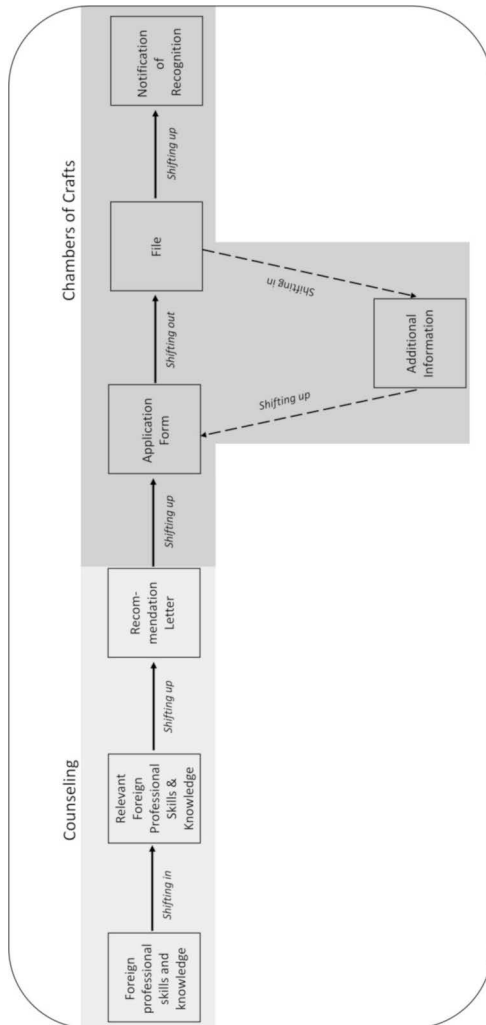
employee of a Chamber of Crafts responsible for the recognition of qualifications.)

Here, the interviewee describes the typical course of events. Compared to the migration counsellor's description, this excerpt emphasizes the importance of materializing information for initiating the formal recognition process. In this case, the migrants do not take an active role. Moreover, the employee of the Chambers of Crafts describes how presented information is classified in the first step. At this point, there is no direct evaluation of the documents. Instead, the information at hand is removed from its original context and is compared with information already available. In other words, this file does not represent a final decision, but the information created there will be used (internally) to justify the decision. In this case, shifting out occurs (Figure 2). By doing so, not only a comparison is possible, but also missing information can be identified:

“Processing actually occurs all of the time. I process about five applications per day. Do you mean a completely finished application? In some cases, information is missing and I have to clarify certain training content because they did not specify it. In another case, we simply ask for more documents. Then, of course, there are some that are complete and we send out a fee invoice.” (115, an employee of a Chamber of Crafts responsible for the recognition of qualifications.)

As this excerpt shows, supplementing application forms appears to be a regular procedure and it allows applicants to enhance their documents. Here, a possible loophole in the translation chain can be observed. Specifically, translations of professional knowledge and skills are open for subsequent changes, since existing information can be supplemented. This can be described as a process of shifting in, since the file is no longer de-embedded from time and space, but rather embedded to add more information. In other words, the applicant can actively change his/her application documents and influence the outcome of the procedure.

Figure 2: Translation chain for counselling and Chambers of Crafts, including spokespersons and shifting (own representation, based on Pelizza, 2021)



Subsequently, shifting up occurs, since additional information is included in the Application for Recognition. For example, naming a reference profession is mandatory for admission. However, as the aforementioned employee described, this information might be missing. Thus, to continue working on the recognition of foreign skills and knowledge, the applicant must be contacted and requested to name a German reference profession. While this is not specified in the law, it can be described as a re-specification of the formal rules of action that evolve through experiences (Renn, 2006).

Once all of the necessary information is available, shifting out occurs in which the information is taken out of its original context and the file is reviewed. Furthermore, training regulations standardize the requirements for foreign vocational knowledge and skills according to the German vocational training system.

This figure illustrates the translation chain of foreign professionals in Germany. Spokespersons, as the representation of the translation, are shown in the squares. Additionally, the arrows with solid lines represent the general translation processes, while the arrows with dotted lines represent movements that are not general translation processes, but have proven to be typical for the translation chain in this research project. The involvement of the various organizations is highlighted through different shades of grey.

In sum, translations in the Chambers of Crafts are defined by formal standards of documentation, not only for the applicant, but also for the employees of the Chambers. On one hand, the requirements for migrants become transparent, while on the other hand, the information or incorporated skills of the migrants (which can only be determined through direct interactions) may not be considered. However, the decision lies within the regional Chambers of Crafts, while the assessment of professional knowledge and skills depends on the interestment devices used. This analysis indicates that beyond the law and regulations, further measures are generally taken to coordinate the cross-border transfer of knowledge. Thus, the BQ-Portal, the lead Chambers, and local experts should be mentioned here.

First, the BQ-Portal represents a self-learning platform. Since Chambers of Crafts are individually responsible for the recognition of foreign knowledge and skills, the use of this portal potentially connects the decisions in the different Chambers and aligns their translations. This portal is externally managed and contains (especially for recognition bodies) information for processing applications, including country profiles on foreign vocational training systems or frameworks of curriculum that enable a comparison between foreign and domestic professional knowledge and skills. In addition, it contains an internal forum that can be used by employees of the Chambers of Crafts. Specifically, they can upload the results of their examination procedures (in the form of expert opinions) and make them available to others. Second, another means of standardizing the results of the recognition procedures is through exchanges with so-called lead Chambers, i.e., Chambers of Crafts that have been deemed responsible for a certain country under the Federal Recognition Act. For example, they are responsible for gathering expert opinions for other chambers regarding Applications for Recognition of professions in the country. Here, the lead chambers and the BQ-Portal represents a way in which country-specific knowledge about vocational training systems can be bundled and made accessible to other chambers in a compressed form.

Third, it should be noted that in both cases, the information can be incomplete, since not all countries are included and the gathering of knowledge is an ongoing process. Thus, local experts, such as those in the training centres of the Chambers, act as interestment devices that can shape the translations. They also act as a local source of information for carrying out comparisons, as mentioned by the interviewees. In addition, they are experts who base their judgments on experiential knowledge of the vocational training in Germany, which they gathered during their professional careers. Since there is traditionally a close connection between practice and theory in this sector (Thelen, 2012), these experts both work and teach in their respective profession.

In the final step (Figure 2), shifting up occurs in which the information previously extracted from the individual case is changed, since an individual Notification of Recognition must be published according to



the standards of the Federal Recognition Act. In this case, it is possible that an application is rejected or that either partial or full recognition is certified.

Overall, the information contained in the Notification of Recognition does not represent the individual characteristics of foreign professional skills and knowledge, since they are simply reduced to selected parts of such information. In other words, it is primarily a legal document that represents the decision of the recognition authorities (Müller & Ayan, 2015). Since this information can be objected, the retention of legal standards, such as references to laws, is necessary. In this regard, it is structured into several aspects. Its first aspect is the disclosure of the procedure and its conclusion, including the reasons for the conclusion and the legal assessment of the case. In the case of partial recognition, the deficits of foreign skills and knowledge are listed. This listing can then be used to complete further training, as discussed in the following section.

The document concludes with the fees for the procedure and the legal remedy. In this capacity, the Notification of Recognition also serves as an *interessement* device. Specifically, it defines the procedural standards for translating qualifications and forces the recognition authorities to translate the qualifications according to the training regulations. The decision must also be reasoned and any deficits in foreign vocational knowledge and skills must be highlighted with reference to the contents of the German curricula.

Overall, this procedure presents itself as standardized, since legal regulations define their approach and the results must be materialized according to set standards. Even though the variety and complexity of different professional systems challenge the objectivity (as the section beforehand showed), the bureaucratic requirements distinguish this procedure from the approach in other countries (e.g., the United Kingdom), where there are no uniform standards for the assessment of professional skills (Meghnagi & Tuccio, 2022, p. 21).

### 5.3 Vocational Training

When applying for jobs, applicants may use the Notification of Recognition, regardless of whether it certifies partial or full recognition. However, in the case of partial recognition, this document can be used to find appropriate continuing education. In the following excerpt, the head of a professional training organization describes this process of translating information (in particular, missing components or deficits) in the Notification of Recognition:

“So, when an applicant applies for recognition at the Chamber of Crafts, there is a committee that compares his/her training with the German training, finds reference points, and finds deficits. These deficits are then passed on to us. Then, I receive an evaluation and look up which courses the applicant would have to take with us.” (122, the head of a professional training facility.)

Since the missing components for full recognition are highlighted in the Notification for Recognition, training organizations can determine the necessary courses. In this regard, since the recognition certificate can be subsequently changed, it enables related actions to be taken by other training organizations. Based on the interviews, it appears that in many cases, counsellors assist migrants in deciding how to best proceed. Additionally, both the financing of further training and the identification of adequate courses are described as prerequisites.

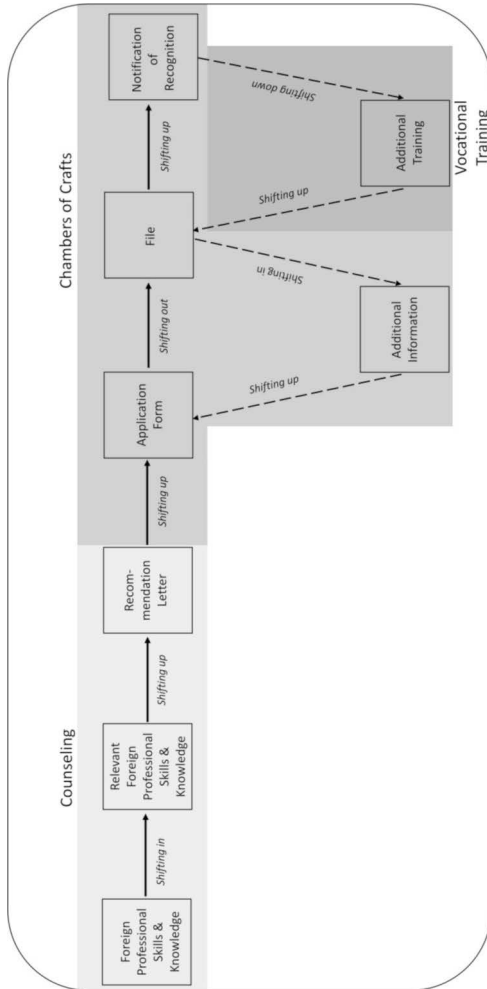
During the training courses, the process of shifting down occurs and the former certificate with missing components is replaced by a newly trained professional (Figure 3). In contrast to the document-oriented approach in the Chambers of Crafts, further education is based on the knowledge and skills obtained in their courses/examinations. Here, the skills are assessed in execution. In this way, the transparency of the translation decreases because unlike documents, not all of the information about professional skills and knowledge can be objectively assessed during personal interactions. Latent characteristics, such as linguistic skills, motivation, ability to fit into groups, etc., can promote

(or hinder) translation processes because they affect the ability to complete the training measures. Hence, incorporated knowledge that might have been latent before the translation of skills and knowledge, might be enhanced by the completion of vocational training.

Furthermore, successful completion of any training is communicated to the Chambers of Crafts and certified so that the results can be attached to the case file. Again, the materiality changes and the results are written down, i.e., shifting up occurs. Therefore, professional knowledge and skills are institutionalized through full recognition (Figure 3), while the issuance of partial recognition is an instrument that makes the procedure more than a reductive translation of foreign professional knowledge and skills, but a process that potentially promotes additional skills and knowledge in the host country.

Figure 3 illustrates the translation chain of foreign professionals in Germany. Spokespersons, as the representation of the translation, are shown in the squares. Additionally, the arrows with solid lines represent the general translation processes, while the arrows with dotted lines represent movements that are not general translation processes, but have proven to be typical for the translation chain in this research project. The involvement of the various organizations is highlighted through different shades of grey.

Figure 3: Complete translation chain for counseling, including spokespersons and shifting (own representation, based on Pelizza, 2021)



## 6 Conclusion and Implications

This study focused on the organizational translation practices of foreign skills and knowledge in Germany. Such practices were examined on the basis of expert interviews with consultancies, Chambers of Crafts, and vocational training organizations. In addition, by focusing on the concept of shifting, changes in the meaning of professional skills and knowledge during the translation chain were analysed. Overall, the translation of foreign skills and knowledge in Germany presents itself as a complex process characterized by a high degree of standardization, compared to the translation procedures in other countries such as the United Kingdom.

As for the Application for Recognition and the Notification of Recognition, they are based on the interplay between different (human and non-human) actors. Since they are highly standardized documents, they coordinate translations and foster actions in other organizations. Moreover, collaboration emerged through materialization, which was operationalized with the concept of spokespersons, while interestment devices coordinated the actions within organizations, since they set the standard practices and helped determine the translatability of the information. For example, the BQ-Portal supported the local Chambers of Crafts in their decision-making. The results thereby indicate that foreign skills and knowledge are translated according to German standards, whereas any skills and knowledge that cannot be translated according to the set standards are excluded from the process.

Overall, two implications can be made:

1. There are both formal and informal translations in the process of transforming foreign professional knowledge and skills.

In this regard, counsellors start by narrowing down the information on foreign skills and knowledge by focusing on usable information for the formal recognition of qualifications. In this case, foreign skills and knowledge are de-contextualized to determine the options for using them in Germany. Since usable information is distinguished from non-

usable information, possible connecting actions can be established, which might not have been clarified earlier. However, the translation of skills and knowledge remains imprecise.

In this regard, the translations in the Chambers of Crafts are mainly semantic changes, since they are document-oriented, while the person behind the document remains out of focus as rational decisions are made. In addition, even though translations become more tangible, employees must adhere to written rules when performing the procedures. However, the concept of shifting indicates that changes in the translation of professional skills and knowledge can be made by focusing more on professional training organizations. Here, the concept of shifting down occurs as the focus changes from professional skills and knowledge (or lack thereof) to an applicant willing to train to become a member of the labour force. Meanwhile, language skills or the motivation of the student might make a difference in passing a necessary class/course. Hence, this leads to the second implication of this study:

2. The ability to work in a specific profession is not only assessed, but it can also be produced.

The German approach of translating foreign professional skills and knowledge can be connected to the idea of recognizing prior learning or identifying adequate training measures through the identification of deficits (Andersson et al., 2005; Diedrich, 2013). Overall, the German approach appears to be a more bureaucratic process than those observed in other countries. In this case, additional training measures are not mandatory, but concrete training measures are made possible by the Notification of Recognition.

In this study, the concepts of shifting, spokespersons, and interestment devices present a fruitful approach to gaining a deeper understanding of the changes in foreign skills and knowledge as well as the involvement of different actors during the translation chain. With these concepts, it becomes clear that examining the actions of only one organization can obscure prior and downstream actions. Therefore, to

understand the translation of professional knowledge and skills, the chain of actors should be considered.

Finally, from an analytical point of view, it might be fruitful to consider companies and their recruitment practices as an important addition to the translation chain. Through this approach, an even more specific understanding of the successful labour market integration of foreign professionals can be established. This is especially important considering that the current status of the evaluation of materials (on which this study is based) has not yet allowed any dependable statements to be made in this regard.

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**Part III.**

**Bridging and Establishing Boundaries  
by Education**



# Learning with Machines

## Divisions and Transformations in the Era of Datafication

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*Jeremy Knox*

### 1 Introduction

Contemporary times are increasingly characterised by the processing of data, collected by a range of information technologies, social media, and platform software, and networked infrastructures designed to quantify a broad range of human activity. As Zuboff suggests, “just about everything we now do is mediated by computers that record and codify the details of our daily lives” (2019, p. 182). This processing of data often utilises computational techniques known as “machine learning” (cf. Alpaydin, 2016), through which software systems are programmed to analyse large volumes of data for the purposes of deriving patterns and training algorithms. The resulting systems, it is often claimed, are able to produce, not only more efficient processing of information, but even new insights that mere human data-workers would be unable to perceive, given the huge quantities of data at play. The recent prominence of this technology has generated much in the way of hyperbole (e.g. cf. Mayer-Schonberger & Cukier 2013; cf. Tank, 2017), as so-called “big data”, “machine learning” or “artificial intelligence” are portrayed as ground-breaking technologies, claimed to be on the verge of not only disrupting a range of commercial activity (cf. Bhatia, 2017), but also able to ignite a “fourth industrial revolution” (cf. Schwab, 2016). This kind of promotional and celebratory

discourse around data-driven technology is not only widespread, but seductive. As Kitchin suggests:

“The power of the discursive regimes being constructed is illustrated by considering the counter-arguments – it is difficult to contend that being less insightful and wise, productive, competitive, efficient, effective, sustainable, secure, safe, and so on, is a desirable situation. If big data provide all of these benefits, the regime contends that it makes little sense not to pursue the development of big data systems.” (Kitchin, 2014, p. 126)

It seems unsurprising, therefore, that the promise of data-driven technology has been directed increasingly in recent years towards the education sector. However, such interventions should not be seen as necessarily or wholly novel, given a decades-old drive to automate and digitise educational activity with the use of technology. Howard and Mozejko (2015), for example, outline three periods – the pre-digital, that of the personal computer, and that of the internet – as key eras in which different kinds of technologies were proposed (and often overestimated) as revolutionary and disruptive innovations for all manner of teaching, learning, and administrative tasks. Nevertheless, partly as a result of the prominence of machine learning techniques, the contemporary era is one in which digital technologies appear to have sunk down into the mundane, everyday practices of education, not only collecting and processing more data than ever before, but also using the resulting insights to automate decision-making in unprecedented ways. As Selwyn et al. claim:

“we are now teaching, studying and working in highly-automated and digitally directed educational environments. Over the past 10 years or so, responsibility for all manner of everyday educational decisions and tasks has been passed over to automated software, systems and platforms” (Selwyn et al., 2021, p. 1–2)

One of the key terms to emerge in the field of research and development is “analytics”, used to refer to a broad range of techniques

involving the processing of educational data. So-called “learning analytics” has been hailed as an imminent disruptive solution for wide array of educational activities (cf. Clow, 2013; cf. Cooper, 2012), being established around the prominent professional organisation, the Society for Learning Analytics Research, or SoLAR<sup>1</sup>. Importantly, as the literature in this area makes clear, learning analytics derives its methods from the disciplines of statistics, computer science, and psychology (cf. Siemens, 2013), in order to develop techniques and applications aimed at, for example, analysing and predicting student behaviours (cf. Dawson et al., 2017), or automating teacher feedback (cf. Pardo et al., 2018).

However, while university research has played a substantial role in developing computational techniques for specific applications in the educational domain, commercial activity has also been increasingly on the rise, often utilising techniques associated with learning analytics to develop commercial educational products and services. As has been documented extensively elsewhere (e.g. Williamson, 2021), the recent COVID-19 pandemic has greatly accelerated the uptake of such products and services, as public education institutions struggled to provide online provision during global school and campus lockdowns:

“The “pivot” to ‘online learning’ and “emergency remote teaching” has positioned educational technology (ed tech) as an integral component of education globally, bringing private sector and commercial organisations into the centre of essential educational services” (Williamson & Hogan, 2020, p. 1)

A crucially important agenda for research has therefore emerged around the notion of the platformisation of education (cf. Decuyper et al., 2021), exploring the extent to which private companies and data-driven infrastructures are beginning to govern and intervene in a broad range of educational activity. This paper is particularly concerned with what such configurations mean for learning; both how and where it is

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1 See: <https://solaresearch.org/>



assumed to take place, as well as how it is conceptualised and understood. This exploration does not necessarily require, it is argued here, a normative dimension as to the definition of learning, but rather an explicit interest in how its understanding is being shaped and influenced by the use of technology. The key question underpinning this enquiry is therefore: how is learning changing, given the significant incursions of data-driven systems and platforms, both in terms of how it is being practiced, as well as how those practices are rationalised. Two themes will guide this exploration over the subsequent sections of this chapter: division, highlighting the relationships between learning and technology corporations; and transformation, focused on the ways data-driven systems shape and modify the practice and understanding of learning itself.

## 2 Learning Divided

Where platforms are “altering the meaning, possibilities and potential functions of education” (Decuyppere et al., 2021, p. 2), it seems pertinent to examine what kinds of learning are being encouraged and developed through platforms, and how the assumptions underpinning these forms of learning are in turn shaping what we understand education to be. Following Van Dijck and Poell’s definition of the platform, that is, a “programmable digital architecture designed to organize interactions between users – not just end users but also corporate entities and public bodies” (2018, p. 4), different educational actors, and hence differing kinds of learning, might be identified where commercial platforms become utilised in formal educational activity. This section will outline some of the key actors that are formed from the use of platforms in education, as well as different kinds of learning assumed to be taking place, with the aim of examining distinctions between the private owners of educational platforms and the public educational institutions that make use of them.

Perhaps the most obvious, is the learning undertaken by students as users of educational platforms. If one takes the promotional dis-

course around educational platforms at their word, then this kind of learning can be understood to take place as students interact with the software, ostensibly on an individual basis, to encounter resources and assessments. Depending on the platform, there may also be elements of the platform which facilitate synchronous or asynchronous communication between the student and the teacher(s), as well as with other students. While there are very particular ideas about the form of this learning, and ideas that are structured into the functioning of data-driven platforms themselves (as will be discussed in detail below), the fact that students are positioned as “learners” in platforms is perhaps to be expected, given the application of this technology to educational concerns. Platforms are typically promoted on the basis that they provide enhanced opportunities for students to learn, usually through claims of flexible access to resources or the ability of the software to “personalise” content (processes generally involving some form of machine learning that tailors defined sets of educational materials according to an individual’s previous behaviour within the platform combined with aggregated behavioural data from previous users). In these ways, the learning undertaken by students is assumed to be made more efficient through either self-directed or customised access to educational content, where the platform serves as a kind of intermediary, able to deliver educational materials in ways impossible for the teacher alone. The next section will interrogate some of the assumptions underpinning this view of ‘enhanced’ learning through platforms; however, for now, it remains important to highlight the other, perhaps less expected, forms of learning that are operationalised by platforms, and the other platform “audiences” who, alongside the students, also undertake learning.

As procurers of commercial education platforms, educational institutions become a key actor, user, and audience. Or rather, the involvement of educational institutions consists of multiple actors, users, and audiences, and it is vital to distinguish these roles in order to understand the purpose and functioning of the platform. While specific institutional contexts and configurations will likely vary, it may be useful to distinguish between, on the one hand, different kinds of “on the ground” classroom educators, such as teachers, teaching assistants, and learning sup-

port workers, while on the other, different kinds of administrative and managerial roles, such as department heads, course administrators, and senior leaders (these being rough indications of roles that will undoubtedly vary across institutional and national contexts). Any and all of such roles are likely to be classified, just like the student above, as merely another “user” of the platform. Yet, each user role is assigned a distinct set of abilities and permissions within the platform, meaning that, out of all the possible data flowing through it, only very specific renderings and representations are available to each role. For example, a teacher may be able to view the names and assessment scores for individual students in their own class, but not any student from another class. Further, a senior manager might be presented with accumulated assessment scores across an identified subject area, but not the profiles or specific assignment grades related to individual students. The point here is not to try to define any particular configuration in precise accuracy, but rather underscore that roles are configured, in some fashion, even where abilities and permissions can be changed. In this sense, the platform is a carefully crafted and controlled environment, that organises, often in a fine-grained way, the interactions between different users, and between users and particular forms of data. Furthermore, it is important here to see the platform, not as a unified entity, or a single plane of data, onto which different users are supplied a particular “window”, but rather as a system which is continually rearticulating, representing, and translating data, in a continual state of (re)configuration across its internal modular form and between its users. This point will be developed further below.

In terms of learning, these articulations are largely (re)configured around a desire to learn about students, through collecting, for example background information about individuals, measures of attendance, progress, and assessment, as well as calculations of year-group or cohort outcomes. Again, rather than focusing on precisely the kinds of analyses undertaken by any specific platform, the point here is merely to highlight that platforms engender and facilitate what might be seen as an entirely different mode of learning to that discussed above; learning about student performance. While the desire to know and understand students has undoubtedly been an aspect of educational institutions

for much of their existence, platforms establish what is arguably an intensification of surveillance and measurement, as fine-grained data representing all kind of student activity is presented as a resource for the enhancement of the institution. There are at least two important aspects to this form of learning. Firstly, in the sense that students become subjects of increased scrutiny, and are defined and understood by institutions through processes of measurement and attainment. In this way, the processes of learning about students undertaken through platforms constructs students as very particular kinds of learning subjects, constituted through a “data gaze” (cf. Beer, 2019) that privileges highly technologised and statistical forms of knowing in education. As Beer argues, the data gaze is an attempt to understand “new types of knowledge that are emerging along with an understanding of how that knowledge achieves authority, credibility and legitimacy” (2019, p. 1), driven as it is by an emergent industry of intensive data processing. The platform is one of the key sites through which such an industrial data-informed knowledge-making is shaping educational activity, as well as practices and assumptions about learning. As Grimaldi and Ball suggest, through educational platforms, the learner “is made visible, knowable, malleable and, overall, governable” (2021, p. 117), attesting to the ways institutions are adopting the practices of the data gaze to operationalise new forms of knowledge about students. In this sense, the learning undertaken by institutions can be understood as a form of power, with the ability to penetrate learning behaviours with new kinds of precision, and ultimately render students as pliable subjects through subsequent data-informed intervention.

Secondly, it is not just students who are recast through the “data gaze” of the platform, but educational institutions themselves. Rather than being simply institutions that teach students, data-driven platforms rearticulate schools and universities as learning organisations that undertaken processes of self-improvement through analysing learner data and modifying their operations as a result. This is largely what is meant by Lane and Finsel’s framing of the “smarter university”, which draws on big data analytics to “improve the student learning experience, enhance the research enterprise, support effective commu-

nity outreach, and advance the campus's infrastructure" (Lane & Finsel, 2014, p. 4). Notably, the improvement of student learning appears to be only one dimension within this much broader call for organisational efficiency through data. Cheslock et al. (2014) further challenge what they see as a dominant interest in student learning, and suggest a greater focus on other kinds of data generated by educational institutions, for the purposes of gaining more precise understandings of internal operations and streamlining institutional functions. They further stress in their conclusion the economic rationale driving the need for such forms of organisational learning:

"The financial challenges present in higher education cause institutional leaders to face numerous decisions that could be made easier if accurate and insightful information about the organization could be extracted from the large amounts of data being collected." (Cheslock et al., 2014, p. 233)

As such, through the logic of the data gaze and the functioning of education platforms, educational institutions appear to be rearticulated as learning organisations, centred on forms of self-improvement and economic efficiency that extend well beyond measures of student performance.

However, educational platforms involve another set of key actors that are often overlooked in the general promotion of such services in education settings: the private owners of the software. As suggested above, the recent pandemic triggered a surge in partnerships between public educational institutions and private "ed tech" companies, typically offering some kind of platform-based service for schools, colleges, and universities to maintain their education provision "online". However, it is important to acknowledge that such enterprises have been around for some time, and the public education system has long been perceived as ripe territory for commercialisation. Platform software in education has typically been referred to as a "Virtual Learning Environment" (VLE) or Learning Management System (LMS), with key examples

being US-based company Blackboard<sup>2</sup>, founded in the late 1990s, and the opensource Moodle<sup>3</sup>, developed in the early 2000s. While originally developed as web-based repositories for educational materials, often incorporating modes of communication such as asynchronous discussion fora, VLEs and LMSs have gradually shifted towards more data-driven approaches, featuring, for example, analytic dashboards (discussed further below). More intensive data processing has also emerged in platforms that are explicitly focused on so-called “adaptive” or “personalised” learning, involving the use of machine learning techniques to recommend particular resources or assessments based on analyses of individual and group behaviours within the software. Notable examples here include: the ALEKS<sup>4</sup> (Assessment and Learning in Knowledge Spaces) platform, originally developed at the University of California, Irvine, and subsequently acquired by educational publishing company McGraw Gill Education; Century<sup>5</sup>, a UK-based company claiming to offer platform services incorporating artificial intelligence and informed by neuroscience research; and Squirrel AI<sup>6</sup>, a company based in China offering a similar “adaptive learning engine”, having established research and development partnerships with a range of educational institutions and investors in the US. Alongside companies specifically focused on education, other technology corporations are increasingly viewing education as productive avenue for business. The most notable example here is Google, which, through its eco-system of platform services and application programming interfaces (termed APIs), constitutes a novel kind of infrastructure for pedagogy (cf. Perrotta et al., 2021) that is increasingly utilising artificial intelligence techniques to adapt and personalise educational content (cf. Williamson, 2022).

While on the surface, these education platforms simply provide “services” for students, teachers, and educational institutions, it is

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2 See: <https://www.blackboard.com/en-uk/about-us>

3 See: [https://docs.moodle.org/400/en/About\\_Moodle](https://docs.moodle.org/400/en/About_Moodle)

4 See: [https://www.aleks.com/about\\_aleks](https://www.aleks.com/about_aleks)

5 See: <https://www.century.tech/about-us/>

6 See: <http://squirrelai.com/about>

important to acknowledge and examine the role played by the companies themselves, not only as technical designers and managers of the software and therefore influential arbiters in the forms of learning described above, but also as organisations that learn. However, the order of learning undertaken by owners of platforms software might be seen as substantially different from the kinds of activities discussed previously in relation to students, teachers, and institutional management. While students, teachers, and administrators, for example, are merely “users” of platform software, and therefore subjects of finitely controlled spaces ascribed to their respective roles and responsibilities, platform owners are able to access all flows of data. Importantly, this does not simply mean that platform owners are able to adopt any and all other “user perspectives” at their discretion (although presumably such functions are available), but rather that the platform is articulated in an entirely different way for its owners.

Zuboff’s concept of the “division of learning” is useful here to emphasise this distinction; a term suggested to signal “ascendant principle of social ordering in our time” (Zuboff, 2019, p. 181). Although Zuboff (2019) does not examine formal education specifically, this division is located precisely between the owners of more general data-driven systems and their “end users” – Google is singled out as a key example of such arrangements. The critical orientation of Zuboff’s (2019) argument is that such platform owners are able to undertake hugely advantageous forms of learning by analysing the data traces left behind by mere “users” (of, for example, social media services), thus entrenching significant inequality between those able to understand and practice data-driven processing techniques, and those limited to simply supplying data through their everyday interactions with information technologies. In this way Zuboff claims that learning is “captured by a narrow priesthood of privately employed computational specialists, their privately owned machines, and the economic interests for whose sake they learn” (p. 189), while the vast majority of the population are excluded from, not only the technical skills required for such learning, but the supposed financial benefits that result from it.

While Zuboff's stark rendition of the "unauthorized privatisation of the division of learning in society" (Zuboff, 2019, p. 191) might be interpreted as simply advocating more democratic training in data science (rather than questioning the assumptions underpinning such forms of learning – see Knox 2021), it nevertheless provides a useful acknowledgement of the power of the private sector which appears increasingly relevant for public education. As Zuboff underscores, platforms are constituted by two kinds of texts: firstly, the public interface that "users" encounter and contribute to; and secondly, a "shadow text" only available to platform owners and comprised of valuable data traces from which profit can be derived (2019, p. 185). Further, these texts are linked in the sense that the "shadow text" is produced from the surplus extracted from the public interface; a "raw material to be accumulated and analysed as means to others' market ends" (Zuboff, 2019, p. 185). Platform owners thus have control over both texts, so that the public interface can be controlled and shaped in ways that best serve the "shadow text" underneath. This presents a wholly different articulation of power than that typically described in the promotion of data-driven education, where students, teachers, and client-institutions are cast as the key agents of "smart" learning, technology enhanced pedagogy, or data-informed organisational efficiency. The profound insight emphasised through Zuboff's division of learning is that, at least from the software owners' perspective, all of the educational actors are mere "users" of the education platform software, limited to tightly controlled interfaces that are, in some form or another, designed in ways that enhance the underlying "shadow text" of private data beneath. Given that this "shadow text" is the primary source of value for business involved in the data economy, companies developing such systems have a vested interest in designing education platforms, not exclusively for a benevolent desire to improve education (although this is often what is emphasised in promotional media), but rather for the enhancement of their own databases and analytic abilities. As such, private education companies might be seen, not simply as suppliers of learning materials, or indeed intermediaries in new forms of online provision, but rather as organisations engaged in their own learning agenda. In this way, the entire gamut of educational



activity, however one decides to characterise it in terms of teaching, learning, and institutional management, becomes the raw material for a form of corporate learning focused on understanding (and intervening in) human behaviour. As Williamson suggests:

“The analytics, data, and AI systems developed by global technology companies and edtech businesses have become experimental engines of algorithmic education—and school systems have become their laboratories” (Williamson 2021, p. 20)

### 3 Learning Transformed

As the previous section has emphasised, data-driven platform software is not a passive backcloth to educational activity, but rather an increasingly powerful authority, which functions not only to reconfigure and control the relationships between educational actors, but also to differentiate multiple practices of learning. This section continues this agentive framing of the platform by focusing on the ways such data-driven systems transform learning itself, rather than simply identifying, measuring, or enhancing it. One of the most persistent fallacies in discussions of education technology in particular has been the assumption of instrumentalism (cf. Hamilton & Friesen, 2013), where technologies are understood as neutral “tools”, “employed for ends determined independently by their users” (Hamilton & Friesen, 2013, p. 3). Educational platforms appear to be marketed on precisely such assumptions, where teachers, students, and managers are presumed to be able to not only detect learning as it happens, but also exact control over it, all without the technology itself having any influence over how it is perceived, other than to simply “enhance” or “diminish” it (cf. Hamilton & Friesen, 2013). This section will suggest that such data-driven systems, rather than simply offering a transparent “window” on a core, underlying, and essential form of learning, function in ways that persistently transform learning in different ways.

One central and underlying dimension here is the extent to which data-driven platforms entrench very particular ideas of what “learning” is, by structuring-in specific concepts of learning as part of their design and functioning. Specifically, such data-driven educational platforms are largely underpinned by radical behaviourist concepts of learning, through which, as Friesen suggests, the work of psychologist B.F Skinner “has been making a comeback” (2018, p. 3). This is an acknowledgement that, at least in the field of education research and practice, Skinner’s form of radical behaviourism has been out of favour for some decades, due to its somewhat stark view of the human subject as a passive *tabula rasa*, and the framing of education as a means of strict control over the environment in order to produce desired behaviours in students. As Skinner makes clear, in human beings’ “struggle for freedom”, within with education has a foundational role, the goal is “not to free men from control but to analyse and change the kinds of control to which they are exposed” (Skinner, 1972, p. 98). It is precisely such a vision of external control, accompanied by an apparent lack of interest in the inner workings of the mind, that has long been *passé* in educational theory, and particular in the development of associated technology, which, as Cooper (1993) notes, was responding to the subsequent “paradigm shifts” of cognitivism and constructivism in the early 1990s. Indeed, it does not seem particularly contentious to suggest that most contemporary educators assume learning to be some kind of continuously emerging social and relational process, where the work of Illeris (e.g. 2009) and Lave and Wenger (e.g. 1991) provide a broadly accepted conceptual basis. However, as Watters (2017) also suggests, “behaviour design” appears to be back in fashion, this time in the form of data-driven educational technologies that seek to adapt and “personalise” digital environments for the purposes of “nudging” and directing students towards predefined learning goals or measures of performance. This is precisely the orientation towards learning that appears to be foregrounded in the so-called “adaptive” and “personalising” platforms offered by companies such as ALEKS, Century, and Squirrel AI (as introduced previously). These systems are unambiguously designed to analyse student behaviours in fine-grained ways, for the purpose of exacting precise control over

learning activities and pathways, in ways strikingly similar to Skinner's vision for radical behaviourism. This is demonstrated clearly in the ways these platforms are structured around the notion of a "knowledge domain" or "knowledge space", which establishes a mathematical representation of all knowledge within a defined topic area, and therefore an ability to position and direct students within it. Siemens explains how the "knowledge domain" underpins the ability to track and control learners within data-driven platforms thusly:

"Once knowledge domains have been articulated or mapped, learner data, profile information, and curricular data can be brought together and analyzed to determine learner knowledge in relation to the knowledge structure of a discipline. Data trails and profiles, in relation to curriculum in a course, can be analyzed and used as a basis for prediction, intervention, personalization, and adaptation" (Siemens, 2013, p. 1389)

In other words, once a specific knowledge domain, for example the topic "Algebra" (this is the example used in the promotional material for the ALEKS platform, see footnote 4) has been established as a map, individual students can be assessed for their existing knowledge, and not only placed somewhere within the domain, but also nudged and directed along particular pathways so that all areas of the topic are eventually covered. The pathways are formed by first dividing the knowledge domain into small fragments for which specific learning activities can be devised, and then deriving appropriate connections and sequences between these elements – Century, for example, terms the individual fragments "nuggets" (see footnote 5). This process of modularisation assumes that knowledge can be divided into sub-components, and re-assembled in multiple configurations according to individual needs. Such systems therefore seek not only to pre-define and delimit all possible knowledge within a particular topic of study, but also to render it as an environment of precise surveillance and control. This appears to leave no room for contestation or debate about what might constitute authentic knowledge within a particular subject area, and is therefore

clearly oriented more towards technical domains, such as mathematics. However, the sense of fine-grained control is important to emphasise here, described in the following way by the promotional material related to the ALEKS platform:

“ALEKS intelligence uses machine learning based on Knowledge Space Theory to efficiently develop and maintain a detailed map of each student’s knowledge. ALEKS knows, at each moment, with respect to each individual topic in the course, whether the individual student has mastered that topic and if they are ready to learn it now.” (ALEKS, 2022)

Crucially, the assessment of mastery and “readiness to learn a new topic” in this explanation is undertaken algorithmically, subjecting students to a system of automated decision-making about their progress. Indeed, all of the data-driven platforms promising such “adaptive” learning foreground algorithmic decision-making, largely conforming to three discrete stages. Firstly, such systems automatically diagnose students through an initial assessment that supposedly determines their current understanding of a given topic. Secondly, this measure of already existing knowledge is then used to situate students within the “knowledge domain”, but also to (re)orient the “knowledge domain” itself, according to the particular elements the student is assumed to be in need of addressing. Thirdly, students are then directed towards specific pathways through the “knowledge domain”, by assessing their progress and comparing it to data from previous cohorts. This form of environmental management establishes an overtly radical behaviourist configuration of learning, in which students are analysed and controlled in fine-grained and intensive ways, throughout their entire interactions with the platform software.

The key question to be asked in this example is: to what extent can the data-driven platform be said to be “neutral” here; in other words, as a technology which simply identifies, measures, and enhances learning? Given the multiple forms of transformation arguably taking place – from an often-diverse body of topic knowledge into a definitive and bounded

“knowledge domain”, from understanding into a diagnosed knowledge state, and from behavioural interactions with the software into “mastery” and “readiness” – such systems would seem to be substantially involved in producing or enacting particular forms of learning, rather than passively enhancing them. As such, one might perceive the manner of learning as being transformed, across both the functioning of the platform (which maps the “knowledge space”, tracks students within it, and determines customised pathways) and the conduct of the learner (who responds to the defined learning tasks, progresses according to algorithmically-derived sets of activities, and ultimately achieves the state of “mastery” by exhibiting the correct sequence of behaviours). In this way, the technology can be understood, not simply as a neutral instrument for the analysis or enhancement of learning, but rather as agentive force that moulds and shapes learning in powerful ways, and works to transform learning into a distinctly behaviourist endeavour. More broadly, Knox et al. describe the increasing amalgamations of radical behaviourist theory and data-driven technology as the emergence of a “machine behaviourism” in education, deriving from:

“the increasing entanglement of sophisticated arrangements of software, infrastructure, and code with theories of learning, in ways that powerfully shape both the governance and day-to-day activities of teaching and learning in institutions” (Knox et al., 2020, p. 31)

Another key dimension of the performative functions of the education platform can be examined in the ways that learning is (re)presented by the software itself. As Decuyper et al. suggest, the digital architecture of platforms can be understood through two different forms of interface: the Graphical User Interfaces (GUIs) and Application Programme Interfaces (APIs). The purpose of the former is to “present the back-end of the platform to the user in a pleasant combination of text and visuals”, while the latter allows “platforms and software modules to communicate with one another” (Decuyper et al., 2021, p. 4). In this sense, the graphical rendering of data might be seen as a core modus operandi of the platform, representing, combining, and depicting various kinds of

data into pleasant visual surfaces. However, it is the specific “data visualisation” or “analytics interface” that is perhaps the most explicit depiction of learning within such systems. Indeed, such data visualisations are designed to provide straightforward graphical depictions of student progress and performance that ostensibly aid rapid interpretation, facilitate data-driven decision-making and therefore constitute “actionable intelligence”. Such “analytics” provide data visualisations of various activities, such as student performance in assessments, or cohort retention measures, presented to different platform users according to predefined requirements. A teacher, for example, might be presented with data visualisations of individual student or class performance, while administrators or managers might be served with comparisons across classes or cohorts. Rather than simply (re)presenting learning, or indeed objectively depicting some kind of “raw” data beneath the platform, such data visualisations might be seen as actively constructing very particular notions of learning, and contributing to the wider behaviourist orientations of the software. As Williamson suggests, data visualisations amplify the:

“rhetorical or persuasive function of data, allowing it to be employed to create arguments and generate explanations about the world and to produce conviction in others that such representations, explanations and arguments depict the world as it really appears” (Williamson, 2013, p. 131)

In other words, the data visualisations with educational platforms might be understood, not simply as straightforward, objective, and impartial “insights” about student learning, but as graphical depictions intended to reinforce a very specific vision of educational as measurable, quantifiable, and predictable. Typically, such visualisations offer various types of graphs and charts to depict assessment progress within individual tasks or overall courses, time spent active on the platform or interacting with specific resources, or indication of strengths and weaknesses within particular topic areas. Such (re)presentations might therefore be seen as carefully constructed in order to convey an idea of learning as

highly performative and individually measurable, overlooking other socially-oriented perspectives. Jarke and Macgilchrist, for example, contend that data dashboards “cannot represent the social complexities in which teachers and students live, work and learn”, by rendering “structural inequalities invisible and students individually responsible” (2021, p. 12).

Across the radical behaviourist functioning of “adaptive” educational platforms and their persistent visualisations of performance and progress, therefore, is a rendering of learning as an intensely individualised undertaking. This individualising process is established at the very first encounter with the software, as students are diagnosed through an initial assessment, and intensified as they are situated and directed through the highly-controlled “knowledge space”. Furthermore, analytic data visualisations encountered throughout the graphical interfaces of the platform, reinforce the sense of individualised experience, as students are presented with personalised depictions of performance. As discussed in the previous section, platform software functions by dividing and partitioning user interfaces, so students are necessarily channelled down highly individualised pathways with no technical means of viewing or experiencing the adaptive or personalised pathway of a peer. This, of course, does not mean that students, or indeed teachers, are necessarily or totally isolated as a result of the deployment of such “adaptive” or personalising platforms in education. However, it is important to emphasise here that such platforms appear to be designed in ways that leave no room for an understanding of the social institution of education, and seem to construct and accentuate a form of learning that is intensely individualised, not only in the sense of performance and attainment, but also with respect to inferences of responsibility. As Jarke and Macgilchrist (2021) highlight, the visual rendering of behaviour as individualised learning performance bolsters a view that students are themselves responsible for achieving better scores or improving predicted targets, aligning with a particularly neoliberal framing of education. As such, it is crucial to see such processes of individualisation as radically distinct from notions of self-direction or “student-centredness” in education. The individualisation (and “per-

sonalisation”) produced through data-driven platforms functions to control student choice and agency in the learning process, with little room for any sense of agency in the definition of learning pathways or outcomes.

## 4 Conclusions

This paper has argued for an agentic understanding of the data-driven platform in education, where such technology does not simply serve as a passive backcloth, or indeed a straightforward “enhancement” to “human” pedagogical relationships, but rather functions in ways that significantly influence resulting educational activity. Decuyper et al. attest to the multidimensional ways platforms now “act” in education:

“digital education platforms do not only generally guide users’ decision-making processes and cognition; they equally contribute to structure particular forms of education and make specific forms of education visible, knowable, thinkable, and, ultimately, actionable, in ways that reformat, redo, restructure, and reconceive what education is or could be about.” (cf. Decuyper et al., 2021, p. 7)

The particular focus of this chapter has been on the ways assumptions, understandings, and practices of learning are being shaped through the use of platforms. Two themes – division and transformation – suggested some of the functions through which data-driven platforms not only apportion and restrict flows of educational data across a range of actors, but also rearticulate educational conduct in terms of radical behaviourist perspectives, and introduce acutely performative and individualising routines through the focus on data visualisation. Across these dividing and transforming practices, student data are routinely aggregated, disaggregated, modelled, and compared; multiple processes that further transform learning practices into objective and measurable insights for the increasing surveillance and control of educational activity.



However, it is worth emphasising here that a fuller sense of the extent to which data-driven platforms impact education, and indeed “learning” as it is experienced by students, would require a much broader research agenda, with a specific focus on empirical analyses of such technologies in deployment in educational settings. Indeed, this is an important area for future research in this area, which has largely been focused on conceptual engagement with data, algorithms, and machine learning-type processing. A key aspect of generating broader understanding in this area is to examine what actually happens in classrooms or other educational environments where data-driven systems are being used – presumably, for example, in such scenarios individual students may have opportunities to interact with peers and teachers at the same time as engaging with platform software. Further, the behaviouristic and individual interactions with the software might be interspersed with group teaching, or some other socially-active pedagogical arrangement. In short, it seems likely that the use of data-driven platforms would only constitute one part of a broader set of “real world” and “messier” educational activities. Nevertheless, the data-driven functions examined in this chapter demonstrate some of the powerful imaginaries (cf. Beckett & Bronk, 2021) of educational futures being promoted, designed, and constructed by private companies increasingly involved in state education. These future visions are clearly of a learning that is divided between public educational actors and commercial entities, with the latter orchestrating new kinds of value and authority in the process. Further, such visions are being operationalised to transform learning into a form of data-driven radical behaviourism that privileges intensive performance measurement, and individualises student experience.

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# Doing Crossing Boundaries

## Adult Education as a Translational Practice

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The following remarks are concerned with how adult education can be described in terms of a translational practice. They follow on from a number of papers which have previously discussed this topic (e.g. Dewe, 2000; Thompson, 2017; Engel & Köngeter, 2019; Dinkelaker, Ebner von Eschenbach & Kondratjuk, 2020; Dinkelaker, 2023), yet introduce another angle by emphasizing the question of how translation and participation interrelate in educational settings.

The paper begins with a somewhat abstract, nevertheless highly specific concept of translation, defining it as a social practice that is grounded in two intertwined assumptions. First, this practice recognizes and embraces the existence of diverse contexts of meaning. The significance and relevance of something (such as words, texts, objects, ideas or actions) within one context differs from its significance and relevance within another. Second, translation recognizes the possibility for meaningful elements to traverse the boundaries between these contexts through specific operations, which we refer to as 'translating'. By being translated, the translated elements are somehow transformed on the one hand and preserved on the other (Gal, 2015), so that meaning may be transferred, even though the semiotic context has been changed.

Starting from this definition, the paper aims to investigate whether adult education can be characterized as a practice in which crossings of context boundaries and changes in participation status become systematically entangled.

To lay the foundation for such a performative perspective on interrelations between translation, boundary crossing, and participation, the paper begins with a discussion of how these phenomena can be defined as an ongoing collaborative accomplishment. This allows us to focus on the procedural dimensions of this entanglement (Section 1).

Section 2 identifies two distinct configurations (in the sense of patterns of features which frame the dynamics of a situation) in which translation and participation co-unfold. In configurations of ‘cross-boundary communication’ (Section 2.1), translations are accomplished in order to make ideas or objects from one semiotic context understandable and accessible within another. Achieving this involves reconfigurations of the frameworks of participation within the target context. In configurations of ‘cross-boundary participation’ (Section 2.2), the ambition is to enable individuals who come from outside a specific semiotic context to participate effectively within it. This requires a process of translation to facilitate mutual understanding and exchange of ideas.

Although both of these configurations are described in the existing literature on the nature of adult education, they have not yet been explored in relation to one another. The final section (Section 3) of this paper addresses this issue by examining how these two configurations may be interrelated.

## **1 Boundary Crossing: A Performative View on Relations between Participating and Translating**

Our considerations start with some issues of definition as the undertaking at hand requires concepts in which translating and participating can be described in terms of ongoing accomplishments instead of seeing them as, for example, concluded acts or stable states.

We begin with the most challenging question of how *participation* may be described as something that is performed and that includes more than just the person’s belonging to the activity in which they participate (Section 1.1). We then take a closer look at how *boundaries* of activity contexts are established and maintained and what it could

mean when we say that these boundaries are crossed (Section 1.2). With this in mind, we then explore what is meant by the term *translation* when we define it as the act of conveying the meaning of something from one context to another (Section 1.3).

## 1.1 Doing Participation

A common understanding of participation defines it as the involvement of people in a social activity.<sup>1</sup> In this notion, participation is regarded either as a feature of the activities in which people are involved, or as a feature of the persons who are involved in the activity. Participation appears here to lack a distinct processual dimension of its own.

In the search for a definition of participation that emphasizes this performative dimension, valuable insights can be found in studies focusing on talk in interaction. In the context of these studies, participation is specified as making one's involvement observable: "The term participation refers to actions demonstrating forms of involvement performed by parties within evolving structures of talk" (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2004, p. 222).

From this perspective, participating implies the continuous and contextual process of actively making one's involvement noticeable and recognizable. This ongoing task of making visible who is involved, and in which ways, is a challenge which has to be handled collaboratively by all of those who take part. Analysis of multimodal interaction using video footage allows very close observations of how such activities of doing participation are performed in any moment of the ongoing process of interaction, and how these displays of participation are necessary for the participants for "building in concert with each other the actions that define and shape their lifeworld" (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2004, p. 223). Rather than participation being just a feature of activities, such that this

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1 "Social participation can be defined as a person's involvement in activities that provide interaction with others in society or the community" (Levasseur et al. 2010, 2148).



activity may exist before and beyond participation, this notion of participation puts it the other way round. What is recognized as the actions performed together is derived from the ways in which participation in this activity is demonstrated (cf. Goffman, 1963). To understand, how participation is enacted, one can ask how involvement is displayed.

However, participation is not limited to local face-to-face interactions. To comprehend the broader dimensions of participation, we can adduce additional insights from the social world perspective. David Unruh's 1979 paper, 'Characteristics and Types of Participation in Social Worlds', identifies four distinct participation statuses that reflect the varying ways in which individuals demonstrate their engagement within a particular context of activity. Participants being labeled as 'strangers', 'tourists', 'regulars', or 'insiders' is connected to certain behavioral characteristics. Each of these participation statuses involves the behavioral display of a unique combination of orientations, experiences, relationships, and levels of commitment. Referring to Georg Simmel (1908), Unruh defines the stranger as a person who is perceived as coming from outside, but staying. Participation in this status is, according to Unruh, characterized by 'naivete', 'disorientation', 'superficiality' and 'detachment'. Tourists, by contrast, are persons who "enter already-established worlds in search of a certain 'kind' of experience imbued with meaning" (p. 118), while regulars are typified by their 'habituation', 'integration', 'familiarity' and 'attachment'. Finally, insiders are characterized by their engagement in the "creation of the world for others" and are perceived as maintaining "intimate relationships with participants" and having a strong commitment to the group activity, as well as to the "recruitment of new members" (p. 120).

All four participation statuses that Unruh describes refer to the boundaries of the shared activity contexts (i.e., the social worlds) in which the participants get involved. These boundaries serve to demarcate the activity context at hand from an imagined outside, which lies beyond it. Strangers and tourists are defined by their stemming from this beyond. The status of insiders is defined by being concerned with questions of representing the shared context of activity to persons outside, and so on. Furthermore, the differentiation of participation

statuses implies boundaries *within* the shared context of activity. All participants – strangers, tourist, regulars and insiders – are involved in the shared activities of the social world, but they are involved differently.

For a more detailed and nuanced understanding of how the dynamics of participating unfold, we need to examine more closely how collaborative demonstrations of involvement are related to processes of regenerating boundaries.

## 1.2 Maintaining and Transforming Social Boundaries

As illustrated above, participating in a shared activity implies the notion of boundaries that define what and who is involved and what and who is not. Participating, hence, is a way of a person's ongoing demonstration of their relation to the boundaries of the activity. The analysis of how participation is performed, therefore, has to include the question of how social boundaries are established, maintained and transformed.

In reference to social boundaries, people are placed inside or outside, at the center or at the periphery of defined contexts of activity. These boundaries, however, are not stable entities themselves. They are formed and developed dynamically during the process of participation. Michele Lamont and Virág Molnár elaborate on these dynamics in their paper 'The study of boundaries in the social sciences'. They start by defining *symbolic* boundaries as "conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space" (2002, p. 168). *Social* boundaries are established, enforced and transformed by applying symbolic boundaries to matters of participation. When social boundaries are performed, symbolic boundaries are used to establish differences between an *us* and a *them*. Social boundaries "are objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities" (Lamont & Molnar, 2002, p. 168).

Participation and the actualization of social boundaries are therefore mutually intertwined. Social boundaries are established, maintained and transformed when symbolic boundaries are used to demarcate who belongs to a specific context of activity and in which position. And

showing the involvement of a person in a specific activity context implies references to its boundaries. By shifting the focus to how boundaries are established and negotiated, rather than assuming a preconceived notion of what constitutes a boundary, we may gain a more nuanced understanding of how participation and translation are performed. As Abbott suggests, this approach allows us to examine the “things of boundaries” rather than simply searching for the “boundaries of things” (1995, p. 857.)

This perspective has important implications for how we can describe education as an occurrence, in which a person’s participation status is intentionally changed. As has already been shown elsewhere, learning can be described in terms of an ongoing process of changing a person’s participation status within a stable context of activity, here named as communities of practice (cf. Lave & Wenger, 1991). The vector against which learning is demonstrated leads from peripheral participation to the entitlement of responsibility for core aspects of the activity. If we understand education as the purposeful facilitation of learning, education can, hence, be seen as a social practice in which a transformation in the participants’ participation status is induced (cf. Dinkelaker, 2008; Dinkelaker & Wyßuwa, 2023). This notion of education, however, remains focused on a process which occurs *within* the social boundaries that define a context of participation.

Looking at how adult education is performed, we are, however, confronted with the fact that settings of education do not only operate within social boundaries, but also aim at crossing them. This is the point where the concept of translation becomes relevant.

### 1.3 Crossing Boundaries by Accomplishing Translation

Translation implies the expectation that social boundaries can not only be established and maintained, but that they can also be transcended. To discuss this, we begin with the following definition: “Translation in its broadest sense is the expression in one semiotic system of what has been said, written, or done in another” (Gal, 2015, p. 227).

This definition of translation places communication at the forefront, emphasizing that translation requires the existence of multiple semiotic contexts. Translation comes with the presupposition that expressions only gain meaning when understood in reference to the specific semiotic context in which they are used. Furthermore, translation insinuates that something that has been expressed in one semiotic context can also be expressed within another, and that the expressed something somehow remains the same, even though it is expressed in a different way and related to another web of significances. Translation has to start from this assumption, even though it is obvious that any translation comes with a certain shift in what can be meant since any semiotic context founds its own unique horizon of meaning. The assumption of translatability is maintained despite the fact that the meaning of any expression depends on the specific context in which it is produced. Translation, hence, has to deal with a fuzzy simultaneity of otherness and sameness. Since this crossing necessarily has to assume that specific boundaries exist, the bounding and demarcation is also renewed. Hence, translation is a specific type of “doing languages” (Auer, 2022). Translation is thereby not merely bringing over something or somebody from one semiotic context to another: it has to be accompanied by a collaborative handling of the distinctions between them.

This definition of translation does not, however, specify how issues of participation are involved in such translational practices. However, we may yet find a link to these issues when we consider semiotic contexts as being contexts of activity (and vice versa). On the one hand, it has been argued that language use itself is an activity in which people are participating. The concept of speech communities emphasizes how issues of belonging and involvement are made relevant so that members can distinguish insiders from outsiders, those passing as members from those living in contact zones and borderlands (Morgan, 2004, p. 18). On the other hand, any form of social activity presumes the assumption of a shared semiotic system (Morgan, 2004, p. 3). Crossing the boundaries between contexts (of activity and meaning) implies addressing participants as belonging to one or to another sign using community of practice (cf. Star & Griesemer, 1989; Bowker & Star, 1999).

## 2 Two Kinds of Crossing: How Translation and Participation Co-Unfold

Translation allows communication across the boundaries of activity contexts. When a translational practice is established and maintained, this has effects on the opportunities of demonstrating participation. This nexus emerges in two different configurations.

The first configuration occurs when something (a message, a text or an object) is brought from outside an activity context to inside it, to be utilized by those participating in it. The integration of these imported expressions, ideas or objects demands translators who are able to interpret the sense in which they are used in the context of origin and are, at the same time, able to point out the relevance of their use in the new context. One could call this configuration cross-boundary communication (Section 2.1).

The second configuration arises when people enter a semiotic context of activity with which they are not (yet) familiar. In order for this people to get involved in the activities at hand, translation has to be accomplished. One has to translate because it is necessary to understand the newcomers, what they say and how they act. And one has to translate, because the novice needs to understand what is said and done in this community. We can call this translational configuration cross-boundary participation (Section 2.2).

### 2.1 Shifting Frames of Participation by Cross-Boundary Communication

In configurations of cross-boundary communication something that originates from another semiotic context is marked as relevant and interesting. Since those who participate as regulars are not expected to be familiar with the foreign semiotic conventions, they have no independent access to the imported ideas. Hence, translation has to be arranged in order for them to be involved in related activities. A characteristic framework of doing participation emerges around this issue of borrowing relevant foreign ideas. A new boundary is established, between

those who can deal with the original because they are familiar with the foreign context and those who cannot. Thus, the polyglots turn into a kind of insider who has exclusive access to relevant knowledge or information. By means of translation, this group of people who have access to the borrowed concept or object is expanded. However, the difference between those who deal with the translated version of the import, and those who deal with the original version persists. In addition to this, a second social boundary emerges between those who have access to the translation and those who do not. The formation of boundaries within cross-boundary communication configurations is shaped by the politics surrounding the attribution of relevance to foreign concepts and the politics of granting access to their translations.

One of the most well-known instances of transforming frameworks of participation through cross-boundary communication is Martin Luther's translation of the Christian Bible. He aimed to enable new ways of participating in religious practices by allowing believers to read the religious texts on their own, independent of those who were able to read it in the languages of origin. This was intended to result in non-ordained believers in religious practices no longer being seen as laypersons, but accepted as competent practitioners of biblical exegesis. However, history shows that those who were able to read the texts in the original languages still retained a specific status of participation.

In terms of theories of education, we can identify a discourse tradition, in which adult education is discussed as a such a configuration of cross-boundary communication. Conventionally, two semiotic contexts are marked as being involved in these translations: the context of scientific knowledge production and the context of knowledge appliance in everyday life. Adult education is defined as the practice in which knowledge, which has been developed in the context of academia, is made accessible and usable in the context of the non-academic contexts. Knowledge is transferred from its source in science to the life-worlds of the general population (Dewe, 1996; Hof, 2001) or to specific professionalized social worlds (Thompson, 2017; Wyßuwa, 2014). Performing adult education in this way establishes a specific framework of participation (cf. Dinkelaker, 2023): Learners are characterized as persons who do not

understand the meaning of scientific knowledge on their own because they are not familiar with the specific disciplinary practices in which the knowledge was established. Educators are addressed as, and thus given the status of being able to communicate in both contexts – the scientific discipline that they are experts in, and the specific life worlds in which they enter the stage as translators. By taking part in adult education, academic knowledge is made accessible to the learners.

## **2.2 Enabling Cross-Boundary Participation**

Configurations of cross-boundary participation are characterized by persons being involved in an activity context in which they are identified as somebody who previously belonged to another context and therefore are not familiar with the local semiotic conventions. Translation is requested in such configurations when mutual understanding between such newcomers and the regulars and insiders is sought. This becomes possible when persons can be identified as interpreters who are ascribed as being knowledgeable and proficient in both the source and the target context. Only these interpreters are supposed to be able to communicate directly with newcomers as well as with regulars. In these interpreting situations, three kinds of participating are differentiated. One party participates as newcomers, who are not familiar with the local context; the second party is ascribed the status of regulars, who are familiar with the local but not with the foreign context. The third party, the interpreters, are expected to be able to understand and to be understood in both contexts. Despite the interpreters' specific competence, which enables them to bridge the communication gap between the newcomers and the regulars, their participation status is strongly limited: their agency is limited to repeating the statements and actions of others while using a different language and, sometimes, explaining what is meant. They are in the position of an intermediary, transmitting messages between, rather than fully participating in, the activity contexts themselves. Regulars and newcomers are also limited in their agency when an interpreter is present as they have to rely on

the interpreters when they want to be understood and when they want to understand. Hence, interpreting establishes its own framework of participation, with a unique set of participation statuses and unique demands of coordination. The dynamics of such interpreting settings depend on how the boundaries between the contexts at hand are defined and how participants are positioned in relation to them (Dizdar, 2020, 2021).

For the purpose of this paper, it is of particular interest that adult education has also been described as a configuration of cross-boundary participation (cf. Kade, 1997). Learners are characterized as novices, who first have to become familiar with the new context. Educators are characterized as interpreters who are able to understand the learners as well as the practices, which are new to them. They are, hence, characterized as mediators who make context-specific meaning accessible for newcomers. Such an approach sets itself apart from traditional education concepts, where learners are viewed as being solely assimilated into and guided through the conventions of the given semiotic context. It, instead, highlights the importance of considering that the learners come from specific semiotic backgrounds which must be considered permanently within the educational process. This implies a bidirectional channel of translation. Not only do the newcomers have to understand how the regulars behave in a specific context of activity, but knowledge that the newcomers bring with them should also be made accessible. Instead of just aligning newcomers to a context, adult education here means to establish situations in which people are enabled to interact with one another despite living in multiple semiotic worlds (see Renn, 2006; Fuchs, 2023; Auer, 2022).

### **3 Crossings in Two Directions: Translations of Knowledge in Adult Education**

As shown above, adult education may or may not be understood as a translational practice. If we understand education simply as a means of guiding individuals through a specific context of activity from a posi-



tion of peripheral participation to a more central one, then we may not need to consider references to differing semiotic contexts. If we assume, however, that adult education involves crossing social boundaries, then the concept of translation becomes crucial to understanding what takes place in such configurations.

Confusingly, we can identify two different ways of describing education as a translational practice. One description starts from the assumption that education is about introducing ideas and concepts from elsewhere in an existing practice. The other starts from the assumption that education is about introducing people to a context of activity with which they are not familiar. This duality of descriptions demands an explanation. Are there possibly two different kinds of translational practice, both of which are called adult education? Or is there only one kind of translational practice which may be described in two different manners depending on the chosen point of view?

Empirical observations of what happens in social settings of adult education (e.g., Nolda, 1996; Kade, Nolda, Dinkelaker & Herrle, 2014; Dinkelaker & Wyśława, 2023) suggest that the second interpretation may be more appropriate. Both kinds of boundary crossing have been observed in adult education despite each implying another translational configuration. While the two translational configurations can easily be differentiated analytically, they usually co-occur within the actual conduct of educational practices and often become entangled in messy mixtures. Empirically, it can be difficult to differentiate which of the two configurations is at play in any given situation as not only are they often intertwined and interdependent, the involved persons also negotiate what kind of boundary crossing has to be handled in the given situation. It can be observed on the one hand, that adult education is performed as a practice of importing foreign concepts. This is accomplished, however, not just by translating texts and making them accessible: huge efforts are made to arrange settings of interaction in which interpreting-like situations are established. On the other hand, adult education can be seen as a kind of interaction in which mutual understanding is facilitated by interpreters. This is accomplished, however, without being the regulars at the site. In fact, the educators are appointed as a sort of proxy

for those who usually participate in the context to which the learners are being introduced. Hence, each of the two distinct interpretations of the translational nature of adult education is incomplete on its own and gives a complete picture only when combined with the other. As a result, adult education may be described as a peculiar hybridization of cross-boundary communication and cross-boundary participation.

In conclusion, it should be noted that although adult education can be described in terms of a translational practice, it does not have to be understood in that way. There are, furthermore, two different ways of characterizing the translational practices which are accomplished by education. Thus, it ultimately depends on decisions, whether education is treated as a translational practice, and which kind of translational configuration is chosen to define the situation at hand. These decisions, however, as shown above, have consequences. They affect which options of participation may be established and which will stay barred. They involve the question of which contexts are seen as foreign and which as local, and how educators and learners are placed in relation to these contexts and their boundaries. Therefore, a responsible approach to adult education would involve analyzing the specific local decisions that shape educational conduct as a translational practice. The considerations above may help in navigating some of the related issues.

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