Translation in times of technocapitalism

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Most of what we do in translation studies, and anywhere else in the Humanities and Social Sciences, is to analyse the manifold facets of power. It is a notion so all-encompassing that academics seem not to be daring to pursue an engaged analysis. Just like the notion of 'translation', this concept would need to be 'fenced in' for it to maintain enough scope for our research endeavours. Several publications over the last 20 years or so feature the word 'power' in their titles (Fawcett 1995, Alvarez and Vidal 1996, Tymoczko and Gentzler 2002), and the word 'ideology' has been even more prominent in this regard (Calzada-Pérez 2003, Munday 2007, Munday and Cunico 2007), and all this in connection with calls for a 'power turn' (Tymoczko and Gentzler 2002) or indeed an 'ideological turn' in our field of enquiry (Leung 2006). Largely absent from most of the sociological literature on translation, however, is the question of how translation features in times of advanced capitalism and rapid technological advance. In other words, how does the global domination of capital and technology and their gradual evolution into unquestioned hegemonic principles affect the ways in which translated communication is mediated across cultural and linguistic boundaries? This special issue tries to approach a complex cluster of questions with socioeconomic significance which thus far have merited little analysis in our field. The following seven articles represent a tentative exploration into quasi-unknown territory, hence they do not claim to provide us with a definite set of answers. Rather, they seek to pave the way for further supplementary research into more diversified sets of issues and questions, helping us to

start rethinking our knowledge on translation as a cultural and socioeconomic category against the backdrop of technological evolution and advanced (neoliberal) capitalism (cf. Suarez-Villa 2016). It appears useful to summarise the articles in this special issue from the perspective of the hierarchical set-up of modern societies, from the viewpoint of the spaces of power that accentuate social inequalities and thus bear a decisive imprint on the ways translated communication is produced, disseminated, and consumed. Approaching translated communication from the perspective of (critical) discourse analysis with a focus on contexts, value orientations and discursive-textual patterns allows us to scrutinise the ideological imprints of power in language (Munday and Cunico 2007). Yet, it is also crucial to diagnose power's flows, its concentrations and fluctuations, in the shifting life worlds of modern societies and their institutions. From such an analytical angle, transcultural communication in times of advanced capitalism may be scrutinised against the backdrop of a dominant instrumental rationality (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002) that keeps evolving through the prism of hegemonic technological progress (Feenberg 2010).

Instrumental rationality as domination

Modern rationality constitutes a specific form of symbolic violence. Engraved in the rituals and practices of state and commercial institutions, and spurred on by the ideological victory of the neoliberal marketplace, instrumental rationality has come to dominate modern societies to an unprecedented degree. The first three papers of this special issue may well be framed within this general sociocognitive orientation which, across languages and cultures, exercises significant power over the individual and collective imaginary. Here, Michel Foucault's work offers an intriguing starting point for a tentative foray into the intricacies of translation, capitalist rationality

and technology-driven biopolitics (Nakai and Solomon, 2006). Christina Delistathi's paper 'Translation reviews and the construction of Marxist discourse' adopts a historical perspective by harnessing Foucault's discourse theory as a methodological tool, whereas Karen Bennett's paper 'Foucault in English: the politics of exoticization' takes the philosopher's work itself as its main point of departure, focusing on the translation of some key works into English.

Delistathi investigates how early 20th-century Greek Marxists, under the impression of the 1917 Russian revolution and at the time of intense ideological conflict over the 'right' interpretation of Marxist ideas, attempted to regulate the translation of key Marxist texts into Greek in the 1920s and 1930s. Delistathi's close Foucauldian reading of translation reviews brings to light discursive patterns and their ideological relationship to the exercise of power, and her case study indeed serves as a representative example of how sociopolitical struggles spill over into the domain of transcultural communication. There is no denying that all over the world, throughout the Marxist movement, there have been numerous similar cases of discourse control and censorship through translation activity (cf. Neris and Serin 2016). What is important, however, is the continuous significance of Marxism as a counterweight to the power of capital, as a critique of capitalist relations of production, its immanent exploitation of labour power, and the general subjection of working people to today's neoliberal dogma. Bennett's paper constitutes an important contribution to Foucault scholarship, providing significant new insights into the recontextualisation of this major Western philosopher. According to Bennett, an intellectual rift across two 'strong' epistemic traditions, non-empiricist French theory and Anglophone rationalism, may have lead to an 'exoticised' English-speaking Foucault, quite in contradistinction to the apparent dominant trend of translational domestication into English. Stemming from an entirely different intellectual

tradition, Foucault's English-language refraction might have been more efficiently introduced into the Anglophone world by a method of 'phased translation' which, in harmony with Goethe's diction to gently and gradually inject new epistemes into a new sociocultural environment, would possibly have lead to quite a different reading and acceptance of Foucault's oeuvre in English. Bennett's argument invites us to rethink Foucault's Anglophone reception in terms of translational strategies within the context of dominant orders of discourse. It emerges, in fact, that the Anglophone translation history of the works by a towering intellectual figure cannot be construed without recourse to dominant manifestations of instrumental rationality and to an empiricist self-understanding aligned to the forces of capitalist reproduction. Stefan Baumgarten's paper 'Translation and hegemonic knowledge under advanced capitalism' adds an analytics of power that gradually brings to light the sociopolitical impact of technology on transcultural communication. This paper provides a tentative conceptual framework for investigating translation within the current climate of neoliberal politics, and it serves as a conceptual transition to the second set of papers which focus more strongly on the interrelation of technology, ideology, and power. By taking the translation history of Theodor Adorno's seminal work *Aesthetic Theory* as a case in point, Baumgarten's main focus lies on translation across the German and Anglophone intellectual traditions. But unlike system-theoretical approaches whose emphasis lies on the analytical description of sociocultural values, this paper links the historical and epistemic genealogy of capitalism to its translational objects of investigation. Baumgarten invites us to relate the genealogy of capitalist Western modernity, which evolved from progressive social alienation via the reproduction of capitalist values towards their eventual consecration as hegemonic knowledge, to three symbolic images: the street market, the assembly line, and a rudimentary artificial intelligence gadget. These images may help us to identify underlying values of epistemic

traditions such as the positivistic and increasingly technoscientific rationality inscribed in Anglophone discourse, and they may help us to establish how the power of this hegemonic discourse may impinge on translational communication.

The hegemony of technological evolution

Echoing Gambier and Gottlieb's idea that "electronic media with their polysemiotic codes somehow disturbed the established world of translation and the discipline of Translation Studies" (2001, p. xii), the papers in the second part of this special issue inspire us to reformulate the links between translation, society, technology and hegemonic capitalist relations of production and consumption. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in research on the technologies with which translations are produced, but these studies sometimes lack a clear understanding of the ways in which these technologies are socially constructed within particular contexts.

The contributions by Maeve Olohan and Mark O'Thomas, respectively entitled 'Technology, translation and society: a constructivist, critical theory approach' and 'Humanum ex machina: translation in the post-global, posthuman world', perceptively evaluate the current state of research at the crossroads of power, society and technology, in an attempt to lay out a road map for the development of new frameworks of analysis and to refine and sharpen our concepts and tools of investigation. Olohan abandons mechanicist and deterministic approaches regarding the role and evolution of technology in translation. Drawing on Science and Technology Studies (STS), she adopts a non-essentialist, constructivist perspective which critically explores the power relationships established between science, technology, society and the economy. This complex web of interrelations has traditionally been studied from a purely technical and professional

perspective, and little has been written on the impact that power, economics and ideologies have on the consolidation of technologies and the way they are constructed, interpreted and refracted within the context of intercultural mediations. Olohan makes a convincing plea for integrating a stronger sociocultural dimension into the analysis of computer-assisted translation, and she also argues for an engaged theoretical development on the part of translation scholars within the framework of STS. After all, without a more robust theoretical apparatus we cannot hope to integrate and consolidate new (interdisciplinary) research projects in order to gain a sophisticated contextual understanding of the interplay between translation, society and technology. O'Thomas' contribution engages with posthumanist thinking in an attempt to reconceptualise the present and envisage the future of translation both as a discipline and a practice. For him, translation technology as a hegemonic force keeps challenging the concept of translation in all its multiple facets: as a dynamic transcultural operation, as a (non-)literary product, as a profession or indeed as a sprawling global industry. The convergence of machine translation with translation memories is already relegating translators to post-editing tasks, and it is not unreasonable to imagine a potential future in which this practice will have been rendered obsolete by technology. What is more, as O'Thomas suggests the state of translation under advanced technocapitalism may progress towards a posthuman world order where the machine has moved into the body and where traditional binary distinctions such as nature-culture and time-space will have disappeared.

O'Thomas' and Olohan's theoretical and methodological reflections are well complemented by the two remaining, more empirical contributions by Teresa Iribarren and Dingkun Wang and Xiaochun Zhang, which both deal with the digital migration of written literary and popular cultures. Given the pervasiveness of cyberspace in both private and public life, the digital domain

has become a highly significant arena of intercultural contact among communities and social movements, who increasingly interact in multimodal ways of communication through multimedia channels and devices. Wang and Zhang's paper, entitled 'Fansubbing in China: technology-facilitated activism in translation', delves into the complex sociopolitical, technological and economic implications of non-professional subtitling, where the accessibility of translation technology has allowed fansubbers to defy the state's tight ideological and political control in a bid to democratise the consumption of popular media. They argue that fansubbing communities have rarely intervened in the political arena, preferring instead to focus on the cultural, social and recreational aspects of their activities. This is no doubt a mechanism of self-defense which has protected the communities of fansubbers from state interference. These networks, however, have become catalysts for change in that they actively participate in the emergence of digital culture in China and thus help to transform working and social relations. Fansubbing groups have not only made accessible media content otherwise not available in the country, but they have also fostered the forging of interpersonal ties, the creation of new social identities, and the emergence of a sense of community by means of 'gamification' techniques which actively encourage the participation of audiences to enhance the quality of subtitles. Iribarren's paper 'Subaltern mediators in the digital landscape: the case of video poetry' similarly focuses on the ways in which web-based and user-generated cultural products are transforming the literary field. The example of digitally-created poetry shows that a new generation of writers are increasingly bypassing traditional publishing practices in favour of the more flexible opportunities provided by the World Wide Web. Producing content under Creative Commons licenses, these artists strive to operate outside the capitalist logic of commodity exchange, translating online visibility into cultural capital. Traditional publishing companies and the new E-commerce corporations, however, are trying to maintain their monopoly

on copyright, attempting to commodify the new products and patterns of communication that emerge from open access digital platforms. What both these case studies suggest is that technology-based translation activities seem to be contributing to and even providing a model for the pluralisation and democratisation of cultural life, and that they can provide alternatives to hegemonic capitalism. Opposition to cultural and political hegemony, however, is not necessarily linked to a clear political identity, because in the examples analysed resistance is growing out of everyday practices. Online communities that are built on trust collectively co-construct their own media, and therefore their cultural production and (subversive) activities are no longer a top-down, unidirectional affair (cf. Earl and Kimport 2011). This new economy of production is not predominantly at the service of capital, but of knowledge understood as a co-operative effort that is destined to benefit the whole community. In fact, the most important resource for this emerging socioeconomic and digital model is perhaps no longer capital, but individually and collectively situated networks of knowledge that sidestep economic incentives and emphasise different sets of ethical values. Here, the production of knowledge operates increasingly through an alternative logic of exchange outside the capitalist system.

In conclusion, the papers gathered in this special issue overlap and interweave in their exploration of topics related to power, technology, and the socioeconomic sphere, addressing a number of important issues that future research in translation studies will need to take on board. Given that the evolving technoscientific complex and the digital spheres of sociocultural activity continue to transform our ways of communicating and consuming culture, we begin to differently acknowledge the vital role that translation plays in a world of interconnected in(ter)dependencies. The new context for sociologically-minded translation research, therefore, demands a concept of

translation that is more sensitive to power, technological evolution and current hegemonic capitalist relations, a context which has remained largely unexplored (but cf. Pym 2015). Several articles collected here suggest that new technologies have given rise to new frameworks of interaction, to new intercultural initiatives where economic and social life are no longer organised around traditional notions of order, hierarchy and centralisation, but on self-organisation and co-operation. This special issue seeks to fill a gap by offering a (necessarily limited) selection of perspectives which explore how translation can be positioned within spaces of socioeconomic exchange. It also seeks to provide an impetus for the development of more nuanced research questions and hypotheses, both regarding the ways in which the power of technology changes the very nature of transcultural communication as well as the translator's identity and professional standing, and regarding the ways in which translational products are disseminated and consumed within the context of a global marketplace dominated by capitalist principles. It is, of course, impossible to account for all the approaches and methodologies in a single publication, but we hope that this will be a first step towards a sustained debate on the global (capitalist) expansion of the technoscientific marketplace and the implications for translation as a socioeconomic phenomenon. The time is ripe for sustained interdisciplinary efforts to investigate new forms of producing, distributing and consuming translations in our times of advanced capitalism and rapid technological progress.

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