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Introduction: The translational turn

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Introduction

The translational turn

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Translated by Kate Sturge

It is no longer possible to ignore how crucial the processes of cultural translation and their analysis have become, whether for cultural contact or interreligious relations and conflicts, for integration strategies in multicultural societies, or for the exploration of productive interfaces between humanities and the natural sciences. The globalization of world society, in particular, demands increased attention to mediation processes and problems of transfer, in terms both of the circulation of global representations and “travelling concepts” and of the interactions that make up cultural encounters. Here, translation becomes, on the one hand, a condition for global relations of exchange (“global translatability”), and on the other, a medium especially liable to reveal cultural differences, power imbalances and scope for action. An explicit focus on translation processes – something increasingly prevalent across the humanities – may thus enable us to scrutinize more closely current and historical situations of cultural encounter as complex processes of cultural translation. Translation is opened up to a transnational cultural practice that in no way remains restricted to binary relationships between national languages, national literatures or national cultures.

This broadening of the horizon of translation currently poses challenges both to translation studies and to other disciplines in the humanities, specifically cultural studies.¹ Admittedly, the process risks diluting the concept of translation, and it seems important at this stage to delineate the concept more precisely. We might begin that specification by dissecting what has become a rather vague term into its most important facets (transfer, mediation, metaphor, the linguistic dimension, and so on) and the most significant areas of enquiry to which it can contribute. One of these areas would be the reinterpretation of situations of global cultural encounter. Another would be a reworked view of the academic landscape and research practices – it might, for example, be constructive to consider interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity as a translation problem, potentially enhancing our understanding of the contact zones arising in the transitions between disciplines. In all these cases, it would be a mistake to pass hastily over the tensions inhering in translation’s relationships of appropriation, transformation and conflict. These can usefully be explored and developed; the frictions arising from the translational relations – whether metaphor transfers, conceptual bridges or mutual repudiations – in the contact zones between the humanities and neurobiology offer a taste of what that might involve, and it is beginning to emerge in the challenges that a “translational turn” poses for the disciplines of the humanities, not least translation studies itself.

The turn to “translation” – a “translational turn”?

If the horizon of translation is expanding and differentiating, does this alone imply a “translational turn” in the humanities? Certainly it is not enough to disengage the category of translation from a linguistic and textual paradigm and locate it, as a cultural practice, in the sphere of social action, where it plays an ever more vital role for a world of mutual dependences and networks. In this respect, important studies within translation studies have long been moving the category far beyond its traditional contexts (among many others Venuti 1998, Tymoczko and Gentzler 2002, Cronin 2003, Hermans 2006; on the “turns” *within* translation studies, see Snell-Hornby 2006). But a “translational turn” goes further because it is born specifically out of the translation category’s migration from translation studies into other disciplinary discursive fields in the humanities. This is the basis of the view from outside translation studies which this special issue of *Translation Studies* aims to pursue. My intention is to open up the agenda for more far-reaching experiments, in a very wide range of disciplines, that attempt to develop the translation category into a more general translational category of investigation and to apply it concretely in more comprehensive cultural analyses – bearing in mind that the success of a “translational turn” depends on the translation category undergoing methodological specification as it moves through the disciplines. Only then will translation fully develop its potential for the study of culture, already noted by Lawrence Venuti in the late 1990s (Venuti 1998, 9), and only then will we be justified in calling translation a new key term for the humanities, including the social sciences and *Kulturwissenschaften*² (cf. Bachmann-Medick 2007).

In recent years, there have been numerous ambitious initiatives by scholars of the *Kulturwissenschaften* and social sciences to foreground the translation category and give it practical application. Jürgen Habermas, for example, calls on religious communities in post-secular societies to “translate” their religious language into a publicly accessible secular language (Habermas 2006), while Joachim Renn grounds a whole sociology on “relations of translation” (Renn 2006). Nikos Papastergiadis reinterprets migration in terms of translational action (Papastergiadis 2000) and Veena Das discusses “violence and translation” (Das 2002); in more obviously textual terms Susan Bassnett talks about “translating terror” (Bassnett 2005) and Mona Baker “translation and conflict” (Baker 2006). Countless other examples – not least in this special issue – demonstrate the huge range of areas of enquiry within the humanities which are currently making use of the category of translation: as a new analytical category and as a category of action itself. Perhaps, then, the “translational turn” has already arrived?

It is certainly clear that, compared to just a decade ago, today’s situation is much more complex and blurs the boundaries between disciplines to a far greater extent. Even then, some voices within translation studies, interested in a “cultural turn” in translation studies, were naming a “translation turn in cultural studies” (Bassnett 1998; more recently Snell-Hornby 2006, 164–9, and Snell-Hornby in this issue), then a “translative turn” (West 2002, 162). But these early hints have not yet been systematically pursued by translation studies, despite increasingly “translational” research standpoints across the humanities and social sciences. Only now, as voices from outside the discipline join the debate, does there seem to be a drive to sharpen the translational perspective theoretically and systematically enough to constitute the breakthrough to an independent “turn” (see Bachmann-Medick 2007, 238–83; 2008). The essays collected in this special issue will, I hope, contribute to the project of furthering, while also critically rethinking, this heightened theoretical attention to translation processes in the most various of fields. They are responses to a fork in the

road: will the translation category, as it moves beyond the textual and linguistic level, stubbornly stick to the path of purely metaphorical uses of the translation concept? Or will new research approaches begin to elaborate a more sophisticated and detailed translation perspective in methodological and analytical terms?

At this decisive moment, the underexplored interfaces between translation studies and other humanities disciplines may become newly productive – as a translation process of its own, so to speak. In this respect a comprehensive “translational turn” would be highly challenging for translation studies, forcing it to make itself translatable in and for other disciplines. Translation studies’ special disciplinary competences would open up even further to expansion and, inevitably, transformation – especially in the disciplinary border and transition zones where the translation perspective is contributing to a translational thinking intended more than just metaphorically: translation stances that are more fundamental and more capable of wider application, “border” and “in-between” thinking, and an increase in the value attached to mediation processes. And the humanities could make new “turns back” to translation studies as they try to sharpen the contours of this broad understanding of translation.

However, mutual incursions, conceptual migrations or hybrid overlaps between the disciplines do not alone effect a “translational turn”. We must ask a more general question: how do “turns” in the humanities come about? In disciplines concerned with culture, theory does not advance via the massive ruptures of “paradigms”. Theoretical attention shifts less comprehensively, in a delicate feedback loop with the problems and processes of the surrounding society, via “turns”. Different “turns” can coexist, in a kind of eclectic theoretical constellation (Bachmann-Medick 2007; on the problem of the figurative language of “turns”, see Snell-Hornby in this issue). Given this academic landscape, an expanded translation concept (whether metaphorical or analytical) will not necessarily result in a “translational turn” – unless it moves through three stages that characterize “turns” in general: 1. expansion of the object or thematic field; 2. metaphORIZATION; 3. methodological refinement, provoking a conceptual leap and transdisciplinary application (for more detail on the question of when a turn becomes a “turn”, see Bachmann-Medick 2007, 25–7).

Thus, only when the conceptual leap has been made and “translation” is no longer restricted to a particular object of investigation, but moves right across the disciplines as a new means of knowledge and a methodologically reflected analytical category, can we really speak of a “translational turn”. At that point scholarly thinking and perceptions themselves become translational as moves gather pace towards border thinking, towards greater interest in interstices and a focus on mediation. In this framework translation is an analytical concept for social theory, action theory, cultural theory, microsociology, migration studies, history, the theory of interculturality, and so on, that no longer remains on the merely metaphorical level but is worked out on the basis of empirical processes (see Martin Fuchs in this issue).

A further interdisciplinary translation step could enable these incursions of the translation category to benefit, in turn, from the disciplinary skills of translation studies. Translation studies’ “fine-tuning of meanings” (Fuchs 2009, 27) and its work on translation in a strict sense, on “translation proper” (see Dizdar in this issue), offer a basis to steer the translation concept, currently somewhat distracted, back into more specific channels; after all, a “translational turn” should not mean reducing all social and cultural phenomena to translational relations. With this in mind, the present special issue aims to encourage the pursuit of a “translational turn” on three levels, each of which should be critically examined in the light of the expertise of translation studies:

1. on the level of an expanded horizon from textual to cultural translation, or from the translation of language to the translation of action – including pragmatic, existential transfer situations;
2. on the level of epistemological impulses – without cordoning off the power relations and asymmetries of global relations;
3. on the level of the appropriation and transformative development of translation-oriented approaches in what is now almost all the humanities and social sciences – up to and including the critical notion of “humanities as translation studies”.

Expanding the horizons of translation studies – translational perspectives

Translation as contextualization

A “translational turn” in those disciplines concerned with the study of culture presupposes the cultural turn in translation studies since the 1980s, a move that extended translation’s purview beyond the transfer of languages or texts, opening it to questions of cultural translation and of the frictions and complexities of cultural life-worlds themselves (Snell-Hornby 2006, 164–9). In the process, the familiar categories of text-related translation, such as original, equivalence or faithfulness, were increasingly supplemented by new key categories of cultural translation such as cultural representation and transformation, alterity, displacement, discontinuity, cultural difference and power.

For a long time, reflection on cultural translation in translation studies drew its impulses chiefly from ethnographic research and its critique of representation (Carbonell i Cortés 1997; Simon and St-Pierre 2000; Wolf 2002; Yamanaka and Nishio 2006; Sturge 2007). These offered methods of cultural contextualization which helped a “translational turn” take root within translation studies itself. Cultural contextualization fostered the linking of smaller units in texts (symbols, forms of address, narrative patterns, communicative situations) to larger, culturally specific and historical patterns of thinking and signification. But, conversely, these efforts of cultural contextualization still need the procedures and positions of textual translation to gain important correctives to a critique of representation that risks sweeping generalizations: it is never whole “cultures” that are translated. In contrast, a more concrete than metaphorical translation perspective makes the wider spheres of culture and practice accessible in smaller units of communication and interaction. It allows larger complexes of communication like cultural transfer, cultural dialogue or cultural comparison to be almost microscopically dissected – not least in terms of concrete translational activities by agents as cultural brokers. There is still unused potential in ideas such as Susan Bassnett’s early call for translation theory as a general theory of transactions, dependent on the specific translational actions and negotiations of cultural brokers:

Today the movement of peoples around the globe can be seen to mirror the very process of translation itself, for translation is not just the transfer of texts from one language into another, it is now rightly seen as a process of negotiation between texts and between cultures, a process during which all kinds of transactions take place mediated by the figure of the translator. (Bassnett 2002, 5–6)

The expansion of the translation category in the course of a more comprehensive “translational turn” is perhaps all the more ground-breaking in that the translator and, especially, the translation scholar always sets the micro and macro levels in a necessary interrelation: the smaller formats, textual and interactional analyses, are related to wider translational frameworks and vice versa. Translations are thus inserted into broad views of

relations of power and dependency and into a discursive environment such as Orientalism or colonialism (Asad and Dixon 1985, 177; Venuti 1998, 158). Translation history is made part of the history of colonialism, part of a global “regime of translation” (Sakai 2009, 75) or of a “biopolitics of translation” (Solomon 2009, 53). In these moves outward to wider horizons, clearly the role of language, and with it “translation proper”, cannot be ignored. However, in the disciplinary framework of translation studies, “translation proper” itself suggests a concept of translation which undermines representationalism – a multilayered, complex concept that is constantly generating difference and hybridity and confounding tendencies towards homogenization through what Dilek Dizdar refers to as its “third-party position” (2009, 96). Dizdar’s essay shows how “translation proper”, as a language-oriented procedure, can offer valuable insights for the investigation of “in-between” positions and “ethical implications” as opposed to mere transcodings, thus making more visible the translation process and the actions of translators themselves. Mary Snell-Hornby (in this issue) sees another criterion from the field of translation studies that is essential for cultural contact and its analysis: the endeavour to focus translation procedures on their capacity for reception by a target audience, and then to ask how far the term “translation” itself, still all too vague in its usage, is translatable. These points offer a potential to ground the expanded translation perspective even more thoroughly in larger cultural analyses.

Translation as self-translation and transformation

The tension between “translation proper” and an expanded understanding of translation in the humanities and social sciences absolutely needs to be retained and constructively explored – not least in order to demonstrate how strongly even individual translation practices are conditioned by more comprehensive hegemonic relationships, the asymmetries of the global “regime of translation”. Connections like these are especially significant at the level of language policy. The struggle of regional languages like Gikūyū or Yoruba against the overbearing power of the world languages makes the translation issue a particularly explosive one, as becomes clear in the impressive autobiographical essay by Ngūgĩ wa Thiong’o in this issue. He describes from his own experience how the asymmetries of languages and translation are also relations of violence. They subject speakers, including authors, to demands for translation – and political enforcements of translation – that affect their very existence. The power relations between European and African languages in these situations are experienced bodily as linguistic repression or terror. Ngūgĩ wa Thiong’o’s encounters with translation from the Kenyan Gikūyū into the global lingua franca of English result in self-translation in a double sense: his translations of his own books, but also translations of his own self – a life lived in and as translation. At stake here are translation challenges which, as Jon Solomon argues in this issue, always already imply the “myth of global English” (2009, 66). But even this now mythologized global language leaves gaps for intervention, oscillating as it does between the conflicted poles of “complete translatability” – attended by translation as a medium for the configuration of the “flexible personality” – and a contrary national linguistic self-assertion and articulation of difference (ibid., 67).

At this stage the perspective of a “translational turn” opens the door for further study of the politics of translation. That will involve discussing, on the one hand, global linguistic asymmetries in the framework of what Solomon calls a “biopolitics of translation” (2009, 53) and, on the other, the level of experiences, actions and the constraints imposing translation and self-translation on subjects and agents in the

framework of “translation as a social action”. In this special issue, the latter aspect is examined in particular depth in Martin Fuchs’s essay. Fuchs shows how the Indian “Untouchables” or Dalits try to translate their concerns into a universalist Buddhist frame of reference, so as to find a point of contact with other social contexts and thus gain recognition. Translation appears here as an intentional, active “reaching out to others”. We see how far-reaching the perspective of the “translational turn” can be, not least for the analysis of practices by social groups which, through their pragmatic negotiations, use translation “as a mode of agency” (Fuchs 2009, 32). Analysing social action in this way indicates how little, in translation circumstances like these, the bipolarity so often – and problematically – associated with the translation process really holds. When translational actions need to capture universalist “third terms” (such as Buddhism) as reference points, the situation is evidently multipolar. Translation here is more than just a bridge between two unrelated poles, more than a one-way transfer process; instead, the concept is a complex sociological, relational one which opens up translation to reciprocity and mutual transformation.

The ground for this far-reaching notion of translation as transformation was prepared by the postcolonial debate. Certainly, postcolonial studies has largely focused on transforming Europe’s understanding of itself as an “original”, critically re-mapping and reorienting previously dominant notions of centre and periphery, breaking open fixed identities and attacking the principle of binarism in favour of hybrid mixing. Yet postcolonialism’s attention to the patterns of power in all kinds of translation relations (see Niranjana 1992; Spivak 2000; Tymoczko and Gentzler 2002) has importantly set out the terms for considering mutual translation and transformation as a conflictual process. It is a viewpoint that oversteps traditional understandings of translation relations as relations of equivalence, breaking apart the assumption of firmly drawn positions or spheres, let alone of “faithfulness” to the “originals” of tradition, “roots” or identity. Instead, it is the transgressive and transformative aspects of translation that, as Zygmunt Bauman argues, are the precondition for “reciprocal change”:

Cross-cultural translation is a continuous process which *serves* as much as *constitutes* the cohabitation of people who can afford neither occupying the same space nor mapping that common space in their own, separate ways. No act of translation leaves either of the partners intact. Both emerge from their encounter changed, different at the end of the act from what they were at its beginning. (Bauman 1999, xlviii)

Culture as translation – cross-cultural translation

The far-reaching approaches to translation as transformation incorporate a dynamic that will ultimately trigger a translational reconceptualization of the notion of culture itself: “culture as translation” (Bhabha 1994). Cultures are not unified givens that, like objects, could be transferred and translated; they are constituted only through multifarious overlaps and transferences, by histories of entanglement under the unequal power conditions of world society. Countering tendencies to standardize, to affirm identities and to essentialize, a translation perspective can bring to light specific structures of difference: heterogeneous discursive spaces within a society, internal counter-discourses, right up to the discursive forms of acts of resistance. Drawing on this concept of a “translational” culture, Judith Butler makes the category of translation a transnational key category of cosmopolitanism, in which the constitution of a world culture is an unending process of cross-cultural translation (Butler 2002, 49–50).

However, perhaps the formula of a “translational transnationalism” (Apter 2001, 5) should not be too quickly adopted as a way of making global language and translation policy and practices the gateway to an enlightened cosmopolitanism. A “translational turn” might, rather, start from the confrontation with concrete issues and work towards a consideration of the historical, social and political conditions that could allow cross-cultural translation to even take place. Several pointers in this direction should be mentioned. Firstly, Bhabha’s links between the transnational and the translational can be taken quite literally in this case. They go beyond mere wordplay to indicate a task for transnational cultural studies awaiting further elaboration: “Any transnational cultural study must ‘translate’, each time locally and specifically, what decentres and subverts this transnational globality, so that it does not become enthralled by the new global technologies of ideological transmission and cultural consumption” (Bhabha 1994, 241). Secondly, the translation category can encourage us to spell out not only “culture” and “cultural studies”, but also “globalization”, in a translational sense. Thus, Michael Cronin’s “globalization as translation” (Cronin 2003, 34) refers to the decentring of global processes as well as an agent-oriented view of globalization. Translation allows the citizens of a global civil society to achieve a “bottom-up localization” and thus advance the active formation of relationships and networks (Cronin 2006). But – thirdly – the study of global translation processes also requires careful reflection on the historical dimension. Such work calls for a reinterpretation of the transition of non-European nations (such as India) to capitalism and the distinctive forms of multiple modernities: no longer as the result of linear processes of universalization, but as the result of historical distinctions and translational ruptures.

Epistemological dimensions of a “translational turn” and their global implications

Displacement

“Translation is the agency of difference” (Haverkamp 1997, 7; my translation) – but a statement like this, which is if anything multiplied by the “translational turn”, requires specification. Nor can that specification remain only epistemological, countering holistic approaches and the supposed purity of the concepts of culture, identity, tradition, religion and so on. It is imperative to provide historical detail when analysing processes of cultural translation; Walter Mignolo and Freya Schiwy call this the necessity of “theorizing translation across the colonial difference” (Mignolo and Schiwy 2003, 4). Crucial in a historical approach, not least for the continued elaboration of the “translational turn”, is the attempt to rethink the new epistemological and methodological orientation with a fresh emphasis on global relations and the global regime of translation.

Global relations, with their displacements and multiple cultural affiliations, insist on a new view of the translation concept that is political and sensitive to power. In place of the popular notion of translating as bridge-building, it might therefore be more stimulating and realistic to focus on the fractures and disparities in the translation dynamic. After all, the in-between situations within translation relations are closely linked to the interstitial existences arising from global migration, exile and diaspora. As early as 1923, Walter Benjamin’s essay “The task of the translator” displaced the original by relocating its historical survival into the transformative work of the translation. Benjamin’s emphasis on the productive force of translational discontinuity – as opposed to translation as reproduction of meaning and representation of the original – finds special relevance today in its encouragement to retranslate in the wake of postcolonial rewritings of history.

Recently, initial attempts have been made to consider the process of migration, too, in the light of translation (Papastergiadis 2000).

A translational view of migration is still at a very early stage, but it promises to benefit from the analytical capacities attributed to translation in the course of the “translational turn”. These shed new light on the translational character of cultural phenomena in general: their non-holistic structure, their hybridity and multiplicity. In this regard, our understanding of translation has now developed to include important processes of displacement and alienation, of distinction and mediation. The path has, at least, been cleared for new methodological approaches to the “interstitial spaces” so celebrated by the humanities, by examining them as “translational spaces”: as spaces where relationships, situations, “identities” and interactions are shaped through concrete processes of cultural translation. Geographically relevant relationships between translation studies and urban studies emerge from this, as can be seen in, for example, translation scholar Sherry Simon’s investigation of the contact zones, language communities and many-language migrants of the divided city of Montreal (Simon 2006). But beyond this, “in-between spaces” unfold their greatest potential in an epistemological and analytical respect: translation-oriented lines of approach encourage the search for concepts that cross-cut binary pairs and break open formulaic clusters. For example, a translational view of “interculturality” makes plausible the concept’s constitution out of individual translation steps, thus giving new visibility to easily-forgotten elements like understanding, mediating, misunderstanding, resistances and so on. This kind of translational approach makes complexity more transparent and easier to handle – useful not least in the case of “master narratives” and synthesizing terms, like modernization, identity, society or culture, that can be disassembled when examined in terms of translation processes (even at the risk that a translational fragmentation and blurring like this might yet again be a European or Western strategy).

From universalization to cross-categorical translation

Will the “translational turn”, then, succeed in transforming universalizing European models, theories and frameworks, the concepts and categories themselves? Or are these still necessary in order, as Boris Buden argues, to open up a “new universalist perspective” in the face of the “particularisms” proliferating worldwide (Buden 2005, 17; my translation)? To be sure, alongside the search for a “universal basis for communication”, the search “for the specific cultural origin of the self” (Shimada 1997, 260; my translation) remains very much present. It is this dilemma which opens up a promising if conflictual field for translation issues. One-sided claims to universalization premised on Eurocentric categories are certainly being called into question more and more vehemently, especially from outside Europe. Under particular fire is the European translation privilege and its long tradition of translating other cultures and languages exclusively into the European context. In future, current trends to reverse that line of vision are likely to gain in importance within critical reflection on translation. That will mean the West increasingly being subjected to and subjecting itself to translation processes from other directions and with a view to other (Asian and African) localizations and translation traditions (see the papers in Hung and Wakabayashi 2005; Hermans 2006) – ones that show how “translation processes genuinely play a fundamental role in the ways all non-European cultures see themselves” (Shimada 1997, 261; my translation).

It is becoming ever more dubious to assert global communication yet ultimately only to ground this in universalizations that remain all too firmly in Western hands. The

assumption of global distribution on the basis of universalizing transfers is, at least, no longer uncontested. It is beginning to be filtered through a close scrutiny of global, reciprocal translation processes. This move is supported above all by studies that try to identify points of articulation for the mutuality of translation, like the shared effort to find “third idioms” (with reference points like religion, as discussed by Martin Fuchs in this issue, or human rights, Tsing 1997). Such approaches cannot survive without the impetus for a reconceptualization of translation reflection coming from outside Europe – at present especially strongly from Asia. Non-Western conceptions of translation are being formulated with clear reference to a “translational turn”, with a critique of Eurocentrism informing the emphasis on reciprocal translation and theoretical exchange (Hung and Wakabayashi 2005; cf. Ning 2007; Ning and Yifeng 2008).

In this respect, Dipesh Chakrabarty’s work “displacing” the question of translation shows just how closely epistemological and global problematics interlock with issues of cultural and translation policy, and thus how greatly they contribute to the incomparable life-world relevance of the “translational turn”. His influential *Provincializing Europe* proposed that we consider translation not only “cross-culturally” but also “cross-categorically” (Chakrabarty 2000, 83) – explicitly challenging Eurocentric, universal points of comparative reference and instead opening the door to non-European categories of investigation. For example, it must be possible to translate the Hindi term *pani* into the English term “water” without having to pass through the pre-given category in the Western knowledge system, H₂O (ibid.). For Chakrabarty, only a comparison that does not resort over-hastily to general terms of mediation and leave the *tertium comparationis* unreflected can help create a shared plane of mutual cultural translation.

Chakrabarty shows how “cross-categorial translation” demands a historicized and contextualized approach to universalizing investigative categories such as democracy, human dignity or equality. He argues that a political historiography in non-European countries like India and under postcolonial conditions is possible only through a process of translating European key categories of modernity – translating here in the sense of “translation-as-displacement”. Chakrabarty presents the example of the whole “series of displacements of the original European term ‘the proletariat’” in India – towards “subalterns”, “masses”, “peasants”, even Hardt and Negri’s concept of “multitude” (Chakrabarty 2006, 101). Devika’s study of “translating feminist concepts largely produced in first-world contexts into the local language” in 1980s Kerala State, India, is another innovative investigation of this kind (Devika 2008, 183). Her work underlines the “instability of translation” in the process of a “specific shaping of modernities in colonies and postcolonies” (ibid., 185), especially through a “state of being ‘in translation’ [...] beyond the mere logic of the text” (ibid., 193). Both examples show that translation as a differential concept must be thoroughly historicized.

The importance of this kind of approach for the development of the translational turn becomes clear when we undertake cultural comparison and use the perspective of concrete translation processes to examine issues like a global, transnational historiography that takes into account “entangled histories” (Randeria 2002). Its relevance is most striking, however, in the question of re-evaluating universals in transcultural traffic. Because there are no homogeneous spaces of reference in the global sphere, it is essential to attend carefully to culturally specific settings, conditions, deep structures and translational perspectives, including those of our own research in cultural and translation studies. Which concepts are we working from? How far can we still consider research categories like modernization, development, capitalism, labour, feminism and so on to be universally valid? What kinds of translation processes are necessary to open up such analytical terms

transculturally and find functional equivalents for them in the spheres of action and conceptual systems of non-European societies?

A translational turn across disciplines: humanities as “translation studies”

Translation within disciplines

Before the term “cross-cultural translation” can justifiably be used, then, new reflection on the problem of “cross-categorical translation” is necessary – and this seems to be one of the greatest challenges for the translational reorientation currently permeating the various disciplines. Its urgency would be increased if the humanities as a whole were to become a globally open translation studies. Envisaging this second, or even third, step in a “translational turn” seems reasonable in the light of the stimulating recent translation-oriented approaches in the humanities. One example is the energetic debate within comparative literature on restructuring the entire subject. There, the reach of the “translational turn” is such that it expands the object of comparative literature’s attention into political contexts and examines it from the vantage point of “translation zones” (Apter 2006, 5), showing how “philology is linked to globalization, to Guantánamo Bay, to war and peace, to the Internet” (ibid., 11). Comparatist analyses of cross-cultural texts, language wars, linguistic creolization and multilingual situations (Apter 2006) are already making significant contributions of this kind. In the case of an emerging translational migration studies, in contrast, more detailed work is needed to identify what it might mean to redefine migration using the concept of translation and self-translation as a continuing process of transformation: “In an age of global migration we also need new social theories of flow and resistance and cultural theories of difference and translation” (Papastergiadis 2000, 20). On the level of sociological translational analysis of intracultural social problems, too, initial foundations have been laid staking a claim to cultural theories of translation for the analysis of the integrational tasks of modern societies. Those tasks might well, indeed, be characterized as relations of translation; at any rate, they could make good use of translation processes in the search for strategies to regulate conflict or further integration (cf. Renn, Straub, and Shimada 2002).

Finally, the discipline of history, increasingly transnational in its orientation, has recently begun to rediscover translation. Translation is understood here as a specific, historical process associated with colonialism and decolonization, missionary history and concept transfer (Richter 2005, 13; Howland 2003 reviews the literature). Historians are increasingly looking for creative reinterpretations of basic political concepts like liberty, democracy and human rights, for challenges to develop new historical and political terms in place of those proposed by the West (cf. Liu 1995; Sakai 1997), in the end also for practices of explicit non-equivalence. It is precisely processes like these, however, that alert us to possible limits to the “translational turn”, at least if it remains too strongly fixated on its earlier concerns with verbal language. There are a few attempts – for example in religious studies – to use the concept of cultural translation as an “analytical tool for image transmissions and religious conversions in general” (Bräunlein 2008), necessitating increased attention to translations of images. Interpreting religious transfers from this translation perspective reveals that transformation, reinterpretation and active appropriation are mediated across long distances by means of a visual and performative practice of “image acts”. This is a standpoint particularly suited to driving the “translational turn” in a direction that has so far been largely ignored, one importantly addressed by Birgit Mersmann in terms of a “cultural visual studies as translation research” (2004, 107; my

translation). As Mersmann complains, “visual cultural translation is still under-represented in translation theory” (Mersmann 2009), yet visual translation has a particular explosive force arising from the all-encompassing transcultural worlds of media and images in which we come face to face with cultural differences and opposing visual cultures, even visual taboos (an example being the photographs from Abu Ghraib).

Translation between disciplines

I have touched on just a few examples to indicate the large scale on which translational approaches are currently pervading the various disciplines of the humanities, thereby putting into scholarly practice the first step towards a “translational turn”. A second step might see the translation perspective used to mine disciplinary links and overlaps themselves for possible transformations of subjects and their conceptual systems, since “when concepts enter different genres they do not remain intact” (Beer 1999, 186). In the emerging knowledge society, translation is more than just a medium of cultural contact or a procedure for intercultural encounter. It can also become a model for disciplinary linking, where the individual disciplines make themselves as susceptible as possible to connection with other areas of knowledge and explore their “contact zones” (see also Bachmann-Medick 2002, 286–90). In contrast to the “smoother” category of interdisciplinarity, the translation category has the advantage of explicitly addressing the differences, tensions and antagonisms between disciplines or schools of thought. Increased attention to such conflicted contact zones could be particularly rewarding for a translation and thus transformation of scientific concepts through their reformulation in other contexts, conceptual systems and genres. A fascinating example of this is the current debate between neurosciences and humanities over “free will”.

Humanities as “translation studies”

A third stage in the “translational turn” might be to harness the characteristic self-reflexivity of the translation category to help us consider our own research in the analysis of culture as itself a task of translation – humanities as a kind of “translation studies”. On the one hand, this draws attention to the internal structure of knowledge acquisition in the *Kulturwissenschaften* and other research on culture: pluralized relations and phenomena arise precisely through the disruption of concepts of wholeness and unity, by indicating the multiple strata – and contradictions – that each translation process inevitably accretes. It is important here that the work of the *Kulturwissenschaften* should not be centralist but should begin with the investigation of margins and interstices (between cultures or between disciplines). Contact zones between the self and the other, thus border spaces and overlaps, must be explored as spaces of translation. In terms of the theoretical landscape, this is an appeal to translation epitomized in what we have called “turns” (Bachmann-Medick 2007, 384–9).

From this vantage point, a further dimension of translation for the humanities becomes visible: the possibility or necessity of translating between different, locally specific knowledge cultures within the *Kulturwissenschaften* or cultural studies itself. Even within Europe, tunnel vision still all too often restricts the view to Anglo-American approaches alone. What other approaches are being “lost in translation”? This translation task becomes even more relevant beyond Europe – an example would be Latin American cultural studies, only very recently coming to international attention after its previous marginalization. Here, “cross-categorical translation” can help to broaden awareness in a

way that will draw stronger contours for a critical globalization of the humanities, cultural studies or *Kulturwissenschaften* of the future.

If the study of culture is to be not only globalized but transformed, starting from what are from the European viewpoint its “margins”, it will, in Stuart Hall’s view, have to make use of translation processes: “Cultural studies today is not only about globalization: it is being ‘globalized’ – a very uneven and contradictory process [...] What interests me about this is that, everywhere, cultural studies is going through this process of re-translation” (Hall and Chen 1996, 393). A full decade ago, then, Stuart Hall was already insisting on the need for European cultural studies not only to translate itself into the processes of internationalization and modernization, but also to make itself translatable for Asian and African cultural studies. Importantly, Hall decouples translation once and for all from a European “original”:

translation as a continuous process of re-articulation and re-contextualization, without any notion of a primary origin. So I am not using it in the sense that cultural studies was “really” a fully-formed western project and is now taken up elsewhere. I mean that whenever it enters a new cultural space, the terms change. (Ibid., 393)

For this as yet unfulfilled project of humanities in translation and as translation studies, we must intensify the search for methods and research concepts that do not remain restricted to Western knowledge traditions but that arise in the course of a “global conversation” (Jacob 1999, 112).

The critical accents Naoki Sakai sets in his essay go straight to the core of this set of issues. Sakai’s main object of criticism is an overly harmonious notion of global conversation, of translation as communication between national languages, against which he sets the discontinuity of translation processes. His article elaborates the epistemological and political conditions under which the humanities and the *Kulturwissenschaften* might operate as a critical translation studies: namely, by trying to comprehend and overcome the global system of translation as a regime of “national monolingualism”, as a modern schema of “co-figuration” of national languages (in the sense of countable units) by means of which boundaries – and with them exclusions – are brought about. In this system, translation as a critical categorical perspective has an absolutely strategic function. Sakai and Solomon have elsewhere shown by example what humanities as “translation studies” can mean: “comparative cultural theory that is attentive to global traces in the theoretical knowledge produced in specific locations” (Sakai and Solomon 2006, v). Their point is far from being that cultural studies like “travelling theories” should spread hegemonically from the USA across the whole world. Rather, cultural studies needs to face up to the simultaneous production of knowledge and theory “in disparate sites” – and undertake to publish it multilingually: perhaps in Chinese, English, Japanese and Korean at the same time, as the multilingual series “Traces” does (Sakai and Solomon 2006). Theory is, of course, no longer at home only in the West. A project like “Traces” with its “dislocation of the West” (ibid., 18) could be seen as a fitting complement to Chakrabarty’s historical project of “provincializing Europe”. The convergence suggests that the “translational turn” in the humanities finds its greatest scope at the points where disciplines make themselves pluralized and translatable within an emerging global knowledge society – against the grain of a “unilateral regime of translation”.

This special issue tries to mark out the contours of a “translational turn” on a conceptual level, to examine some initial case studies and encourage more of their kind. It aims to provide an impetus for the expansion of the translation category into the most varied of areas, while also critically scrutinizing and delimiting that category. For not

everything that is called translation generates a “translational turn”. In individual cases we must ask very carefully what insights are really gained, what empirical research is furthered by working with the category of translation, and whether we might not merely be witnessing the start of a new metaphor’s triumphal march. One thing, though, is already clear. A “translational turn” in the humanities relies on concrete and critical sensitivity to cultural translation processes in their political dimensions and underlying structures: their implicit strategies, their claims to power and hegemony, their manipulations and acts of violence – as well as the opportunities for intervention that they offer. “Translation” is emerging more and more as “a matter of war and peace” (Apter 2006, 3). Ultimately, the move from what is still an ivory tower of theory and research onto the hard ground of social and political relationships in “global communication across cultures” would, in Mary Snell-Hornby’s words, be “a truly revolutionary ‘translation turn’” (2009, 50).

Notes

1. In the following, I will use the term “humanities” in the widest sense, not excluding the social sciences.
2. I use the German term *Kulturwissenschaften* (literally, the “cultural sciences”) here and throughout this Introduction not in order to limit myself to the German-speaking area, but to indicate a slightly different concept of cultural research than that pursued by Anglo-American cultural studies: one that is less focused on popular culture, less clearly political, more historically oriented and more interested in a large, epistemologically reflexive discussion of “culture” in general.

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