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Translating Beyond Europe

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What does it mean to bring together the notions of “Europe” and “translation” as was done in the title of the project “Europe as a translational space”? First, it means much more than how the common sense, or as we will argue, a historically specific, politically biased, culturally particular, and ideologically generated hegemonic mind understands both translation and Europe. To start with, let us take the notion of space also mentioned in the title. In saying that Europe is a “translational space,” do we actually mean that Europe is an already given space, in the sense of a political space, for instance, in which a lot of translations—meaning linguistic translation—take place? Or have we gone a step further by implying that translation, more than anything else, has been making Europe a common space, having understood translation in a sense much wider than merely linguistic? The latter option is obviously at odds with the historical narrative of the origins of Europe—having here in mind Europe not in a geographical, cultural, or mythological but rather political sense, concretely, the European Union.

In the service of Eros?

According to its “official” history, the European Union has two origins. The first is very moralistic: after the trauma of the World War II, Europeans decided to unite, believing that a political integration of the Continent would prevent a recurrence of violence and wars. The second almost cynically contradicts the first. It sees today’s European Union as having emerged from a purely economic interest during the 1950s. It is the common market, not the ideal of eternal peace, that brings Europeans together politically.

Despite its inner contradiction, the theory—or should we say the myth—of the two origins of European integration provides a generally liberal democratic framework for the common understanding of the role of translation within this process as well as a clearly predefined political stage on which it will perform this role. Needless to say, its role in this play is a positive one. Translation seems to occur on the good side of history, in order to help people to become integrated, to prevent conflicts and wars, to support welfare and promote overall human prosperity. Europeans want to become integrated, but there is an obstacle on the way to this goal—they lack a common language. Luckily, translation can help them understand one another. This is, however, completely in accordance not only with a naïve, common sense understanding of translation as being a neutral, purely linguistic tool for connecting people naturally divided by linguistic differences but also with the practically oriented theories of translation taught and applied in academic training of interpreters and translators. In this perception, translation appears as a linguistic practice that is a priori determined by its positive teleology. Regardless of where and how it is applied, translation, if correctly performed (i.e. if it complies with the principle of fidelity), will always have beneficial consequences for the given situation. In this way translation is imagined as being always already in the service of the Freudian Eros, whose general aim, in contrast to the destructive Thanatos, is to bind people together, create life, foster productivity and construction. This intrinsically positive meaning of translation is itself an effect of its understanding as a purely linguistic phenomenon, or more concretely, a merely linguistic tool of communication. It makes translation appear as a cognitively objective, politically nonbiased, socially neutral, economically productive, culturally stimulating, and morally innocent linguistic practice. This understanding of translation is especially substantiated by the common image of the translator or interpreter as having their proper place somewhere in between: here between two politicians talking, there between the producers and consumers of a product and generally between an author having written a text in one language and his readers in another, between the literature or philosophy of one culture and its recipients in another, in short, between two languages and/or

two cultures that are always already different, that is, "naturally" separated before translation arrives to help them connect and communicate with each other.

However natural and self-evident this image of translator and this understanding of translation appear to us today, they are in fact historically particular and ideologically framed. Moreover, in its past, the theory of translation conceived of this linguistic practice in a very different way. For German romantic philosophers and theorists of language and literature, translation is far from being socially neutral and politically unbiased. For Wilhelm von Humboldt, for instance, it always has a socially formative function; concretely, it plays a crucial role in what he calls *Bildung* (education, formation, building, creation) of a nation. It is precisely because of this function that translation cannot be morally neutral in itself. If a translator translating foreign texts is not lead by this interest, i.e. by the idea of the *Bildung* of his nation, his translation, instead of becoming a patriotic achievement, can become the opposite, making him guilty of acting destructively toward the language and culture of his nation and thus jeopardizing its very essence or, as we would say today, its identity. German Romantic translation theorists also differentiated between various methods of literary translation in a clearly political sense. They distinguished the so-called German school of translation from its French counterpart, which at the time—the era of the Napoleonic wars—had a patriotic political stance in mind. The idea of translator taking a position in the middle between the original text and its translation, a position equally distant from two different languages, cultures, or nations, was strange to Schleiermacher too. For him there is no space for neutrality and equidistance in translation. Either a translator leaves the readers in peace and moves the author toward them, making the text of the original sound as though it had been originally written in the language of the translation, or he leaves the author in peace and moves the readers toward him, estranging the language of translation.[1] The latter, so-called literalist (word for word) method, preferred by Schleiermacher, was considered to be "German." It favoured foreignizing rather than domesticating the language of translation, i.e. it welcomed the foreign (*das Fremde*, W. v. Humboldt) as an added cultural value for the language and culture of the translator. In short, it was teleologically inscribed into the politics of nation-building. This is why the "German" method was also considered "nationalistic." However, nationalistic or not, it was a deliberate political statement with concrete social and cultural consequences.

Middle-of-the-Road Translation

The image of translator as a middleman seems no less a political statement. And it is indeed one, meant to oppose nationalistic politics.[2] It projects into the figure of translator, who is situated on a middle ground between languages and cultures, a serious political agency, whose emancipatory, non-nationalistic effects emerge from mixing linguistic and cultural identities and promote subnational, intercultural communities. Precisely by introducing a third term, it also dismantles the binary structure of the traditional theories of translation and what is believed to be their intrinsically nationalistic character. Yet at the same time this concept of translation, in its political meaning, corresponds perfectly to the prevalent ideology of our age, Western liberal democracy as the final stage of human political history. It evokes its post-political or more concretely its post-conflictual character. There seems no better place for today's liberal democrat than in the middle, equally distant from all radical, exclusive statements, away from all the so-called extremes, neither right nor left, always neutral and objective in all judgments. The abstract idea of the middle ground as a proper place for an authentic democratic stance seems to automatically guarantee tolerance and a peaceful dealing with political disputes and conflicts. Understood in this way, the figure of translator resembles the statue of Justice carrying scales and wearing a blindfold—but without the sword. It symbolizes her ability to balance rightly between opposed arguments, so as to reach, without any prejudice or favor, a fair and just verdict: an embodiment of truth, impartiality, equality, fairness and, at the same time, of total innocence, since it is in no way in need of violence, not even punishment perpetrated to enforce the incontestable rule of law.[3]

A translator in the middle ground is always a good translator. Even if his translations are bad, they will always have good political consequences, in terms of liberal democracy, of course. Moreover, this figure evokes, albeit implicitly, another identification, a social identification with the growing global middle class being automatically perceived as the class substratum of liberal democracy.[4] Where else, if not in the middle, can a translator socially stand if he is to stand for global democracy?

The vision of translation as essentially taking place in—and culturally generating—the middle ground between different languages and/or cultures critically aims to undermine binary translation theories, accusing them of ideologically supporting nationalism. There is a baby, however that also gets thrown out along with the dirty bathing water of binarism—the agonistic character of the political. Translation becomes a political agency in itself, which—through mixing, deconstructing or hybridizing linguistic and cultural identities—automatically produces emancipatory effects. Yet the conflictual notion of politics that also includes violence, terror, or wars (actually quite a common form of political life—and death—in today's world) and cannot be performed by "innocent" subjects is not merely thoroughly excluded from this concept of translation; it is implicitly projected into the outside of the so-called Western democratic world as a sign of historical and cultural belatedness that will automatically disappear after the process of catching-up with the Western—meaning of course "universal"—norms and standards is successfully completed.[5] And consequently it is also excluded from what is ideologically perceived as the European political space today. Thus, wherever and however we throw translation within this European space, it will always land on its good side. In other words, every translation in the EU is an *eu*translation, in the sense of the Greek word "*eu*" ("good").

Everybody Wants to be an Original

This perspective is also clearly articulated when it comes to the concrete practice of translation in the European Union. In his beautiful book on translation *Is That a Fish in Your Ear?*[6] David Bellos argues that the language policy of the EU discloses a revolutionary turn: "Unlike all previous empires, communities, treaties and international organizations, the EU has no one language and no finite set of languages either. It speaks in all the languages that it needs, whatever they may be."[7] In other words, all languages of the EU—at the moment there are twenty-three—are recognized as official languages. The issue at stake is the principle of equality among languages, which has been institutionally recognized in the EU. Bellos sees in it a historical move based on a clear political will, resulting in new linguistic practices and generating new linguistic phenomena. As an example of such a new practice, he takes the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in Luxemburg. It has a single working language, namely French. Thus, all documents used by the court are either written in French or translated into French. However, the cases are brought to the court in the language of a particular member state, so that the language of the state becomes the language of the case. Nevertheless, no legal opinion of the ECJ is released and comes into effect until it has not been translated into all 23 of the Union's official tongues.

One would likely expect that there is a lot of work for translators in the ECJ. Wrong! The ECJ does not employ translators as such. Language professionals in this institution are also lawyers who have access to confidential material and work under the same procedural rules as lawyers, also offering advice on drafting. There is thus no clear boundary between the production of a law and its translation. This also means that no version of a law can be called translation since all versions are originals. According to Bellos, one of the scholars to have studied this linguistic practice puts it as follows: "the unique situational factors in the production of European jurisprudence have led to a hybridization of law and language." David Bellos believes that in this particular case "the meaning and grammar of twenty-four languages have begun to merge into an ECJ language culture that is all its own—sui generis, in Saussure's terms or 'Eurospeak' in common language."[8]

When it comes to translation in the EU, the case of the ECJ is not exceptional. Of course, there are lot of translations taking place in the institutions of the Union, yet to claim that its administrative departments create some sort of translational space, would be, at least officially, ... a politically incorrect statement. According to the basic language rule of the EU, no translation whatsoever takes place in its administrative institutions.

The language rule that is at stake here was originally laid down in article 248 of the Treaty of Rome in 1957. It reads as follows: "This Treaty, drawn up in a single original in the Danish, Dutch, English, French, German, Greek, Irish, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish languages, the text in each of these languages being equally authentic [...]."[9]

With each subsequent expansion of the EU, new languages were added to the list, each equally claiming authenticity. And yet, among an enormous pile of documents and texts produced by the EU ,there are no translations. All are, to quote again, "a single original in Danish, Dutch, English etc." So, everything is the original. There are no translations whatsoever. Isn't that curious?

However, below the surface that nominally only allows for originals, there is a huge translation machinery of the EU, the so-called DG Translation (Directorate-General for Translation), the European Commission's in-house translation service, which currently employs almost 1800 linguists and 600 support staff. So, the fact is that all the languages of the EU are involved in different forms and levels of translational practice.

If this is the case, then why this discrepancy between the reality of an omnipresent translational practice on the one side and the official disavowal of this translational reality on the other, concretely, the official insistence on originality and authenticity of all the products of this same translational practice? Why this disavowal of translation, the disavowal of the very translational origin of all the official documents of the EU? Why is the EU so ashamed of its translational practice and so keen to boast exclusive originality and authenticity of its words? Finally, why talk about Europe as a translational space when it is really the space of a disavowed translation?

Where Bellos believes to have discovered a revolutionary turn, we find but a continuation of the same pattern—the traditional linguistic concept of translation that perfectly serves the construction and reproduction of political communities based on sovereignty.

Translation: The Sovereign's Mother Tongue

For a sovereign, it is essential to speak a single language. While his word can always be translated in any other language, it can never be a translation itself. This is why his claim to originality and authenticity, as in the case of the EU, must necessarily disavow the translational practice that in fact makes the exercise of his power possible. And this is also why every attempt to envision Europe as a translational space cannot avoid this contradiction: not only is translation in the EU a necessary pre-condition of its political commonality; the very disavowal of this translation is a pre-condition of the same political commonality. In other words, as it is politically designed today, Europe cannot claim to be both a common political and a translational space.

Bellos seems to be completely blind towards this contradiction. Rather, being fully aware of a political cause behind the language parity rule of the Treaty of Rome—"it was invented by politicians for eminently political reasons"—, he explicitly emphasizes the progressive, or even revolutionary character of this political cause: the language parity rule "arose from the need to make all members of this daring new venture feel they had equal respect and equal rights."[10]

He wants us to understand historical and political progression in terms of a move of political communities from monolingualism to pluri- or multilingualism. The argument goes like this: while a sovereign previously

used to speak only one language, in the EU he now speaks many languages. Moreover, he doesn't discriminate among them: all languages and respective national communities are supposed to be equally treated. Isn't that progress?

But the question is, do the sovereign and his subjects speak the same language? In a democratic political community, where the sovereign is the people, this seems to be obvious. But it is not.

As it is well known, the space of articulation and reproduction of a sovereign power in a democratic community is called public space. Yet, even if this public space is grasped as monolingual in terms of a single, official, national language, it cannot be perceived as a linguistically and politically continuous space. Instead it is split in two: a space of what can be called the proper language of the community, which is in fact the language of its state, i.e. of the state institutions, that is the legislative institutions, and a linguistically non-homogenous and non-transparent space of political plurality in which particular religious or other *Weltanschauung* groups and different, ethnic, class, sexual, cultural, etc., minorities articulate their positions. While the state is obliged to address its citizens in a language understandable to all of them, every group or minority also has the right to use the language of its particular interests, which is not necessarily comprehensible to all, in the public space. The issue at stake is a divide within an allegedly homogeneous linguistic space that is structurally inscribed in the democratic order. On the one hand, it enables free democratic participation of citizens while on the other it guarantees neutral, objective, secular character of the state. But what then keeps such a political community together and regulates the relation between its two spheres? What makes it possible for the citizens to both talk freely to the public in their exclusive languages and, at the same time, be addressed by the state as equal, regardless of their particularities? It is—explicitly!—translation.

Take for instance John Rawls' "translational proviso" or Jürgen Habermas's reinterpretation of this democratic device that was introduced to guarantee the democratic character of a secular state challenged by the increasing religious claims to public space.[11] Both theorists allow for the right of religious communities to participate in public discussions with their particular religious arguments and claims, but under the condition that they are translated into the secular language of the state, supposed to be understandable to all citizens.[12]

The role of translation in this concept of the democratic public sphere is ambiguous. Not only does it bridge the difference between its monolingual, institutional spheres and the multilingual level of civil society, but—even more importantly—it separates these two parts, controls the boundary, and constantly filters moral, cultural, social, and political contents between them. Finally, what is perceived as one single language of the sovereign, or what we might also call the mother tongue of the state, is a sort of universalist extract of the language of the community—one which has been purified and filtered of its particularities, i.e. of all the meanings that express particular interests. For this language, we might say that it is literally a product of translation, which is a synonym for filtering and purification in this case.

Having this in mind, we don't see any reason to celebrate the EU as a historically new model of the post-monolingual commonality and a significant step forward in terms of transnational democracy, tolerance, equality, etc. However multilingual, multinational, or multicultural, the EU seems to replicate the old model of "one sovereign, one language!". The political logic of its commonality relies on a single language, the proper, institutional language of the community that is forged by translation as purification, filtering, and bordering. Whether this language still has the shape of a standardized national language or has already become a "hybrid of law and language," or what Bellos calls "Eurospeak," which consists exclusively of translational processes, is of less importance here, for in both cases, its political function as well as the political concept of commonality it is articulating and reproducing are the same.

Translating to Enlarge and Enclose

Before we tackle this problem, however, let us first recall another example of translational practice deployed by EU, which essentially contributes to creating a "United Europe" and is completely ignored by Bellos. It doesn't take place in the institutional core of the union but rather at its outer fringe as one of the most important mechanisms in the so–called enlargement process of the EU.

Let us take a concrete case[13]: in 1990, shortly after the first democratic elections in Croatia, which at the time was still a part of Yugoslav socialist federation, translators suddenly got very busy. The society that had been liberated from Communism needed a new democratic legislation and found it in the already existing Western codes of law. The rest was translation. In the process, the Austrian laws that regulated the status and functioning of the Viennese *Burgtheater* were translated from German—to be used by the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb. These translations simply replaced the already existing "socialist" laws. This is, symbolically, how the whole process of the so-called post-communist transformation, and subsequently, the Eastern enlargement of the EU, took place: democracy replaced "communist totalitarianism" by means of translation, which was understood and legitimated as historical progress in terms of democracy, tolerance, human rights, etc.

But what actually happened in this concrete case? First, a change in the property relation: the Croatian National Theatre was nationalized (!?). Yes, you read right, only then did it truly become state property, something it hadn't been before. In the socialist system it had in fact been so-called social property, a form of property that is neither state nor private. Further, the theatre manager—the so-called artistic director—was now directly appointed by the state. Previously, the worker's council of the Theatre had had right to ultimately decide upon the manager. Also, the people working in the theatre, i.e. actors, staff, etc., became state employees, which they hadn't been before.

Let us make now a leap into the present, an era marked by the current European crisis. One of its expressions, though not so prominent, can be found these days in Italy: the occupations of theatres in Rome (Teatro Valle, cinema theatre Palazzo), in Venice (Marinoni), in Catania (Teatro Coppola), in Palermo, Naples, in Rome, etc. Basically, these protesters are not only critical of how the state manages theatres and culture in general, especially in terms of particular party (private) interests that always prevail over the public cultural policy. They are also critical of the very idea of culture being defined by law either as a public or as a private good. They talk openly of an alternative in terms of a "common good" and insist upon their participation in the managing of their theatres.

Their critique and their claims remind us of the political, institutional, and historical traces of this same alternative that were erased more than 20 years ago by those above-mentioned translations. They were deployed to dismantle an existing self-management system and erase its institutionally anchored social and property rights, which had previously been denounced as historical trash; they were also deployed to silence a particular historical experience, the experience of social struggles fought in the name of common goods.

This too should be considered when we talk about Europe as a translational space. It is not a space that, as Bellos wants us to believe, from time to time heartily welcomes a new set of languages including them into its translational machinery under the principle of equality. Rather it is a space shaped by translations as a means of political domination, social destruction, property expropriation, and forced historical oblivion. And this is also Europe: a commonality that cannot speak, for it has been not only silenced but also enclosed by translations. "Enclosure," in its traditional meaning, is the name for the process by which commonly held property is made private.

A Dead-End Translation

It is no wonder that some say that Europe's commonality, from a linguistic perspective, is an outcome of translational practice. Yet this translational practice is based on a very particular understanding of translation, which implies certain ideological premises and has very particular political effects.

The issue at stake is a traditional understanding of translation grounded in the regime of homolingual address,[14] based on the assumption of two distinct languages, which, as transparent, homogeneous entities, exist as such prior to the act of translation. It consequently reduces the situation of translation to one single difference, that of a foreign language understood as a closed, homogeneous, internally transparent space that is automatically identified with an equally closed, autonomous space of a particular society, economy, political life, culture, etc.—a perspective that not only corresponds perfectly with the political reality of today's international system, the so-called Westphalian order, in which the world appears as a cluster of sovereign nation-states, but is, moreover, performatively involved in its reproduction.

So, the issue at stake here is not a political meaning of linguistic translation, but rather the political logic of a particular understanding of linguistic translation, concretely, the political logic of the homolingual address that is—peformatively!— implied in this understanding of translation, for we mustn't forget: a mode of address always has constitutive effects on both its subjects and its objects.

Applied to the practices of translation as they are performed and conceptualized in today's Europe, this means the following: Far from modestly but steadily contributing to a growing integration of a politically united Europe, translation often does the opposite. It draws the boundary lines, both within the EU and at its outer fringes, upon which it ideologically filters all sorts of political and cultural contents, creating and purifying the so-called Europeanness; it governs over the processes of enlargement by enclosing the European political edifice as a space of a homogeneous, transparent, contemporary, "good" interiority and at the same time does the dirty job of exclusions, constantly recreating Europe's "bad," i.e., obscure, incomprehensible, belated exteriority that is all too different to integrate; finally, it makes an open, conflictual, contradictory, unpredictable, in short, political challenge appear as already historically accomplished and its role in it as intrinsically positive and innocent.

As far as the idea of translation stays ideologically confined within the regime of homolingual address, blind for its essentially social and political meanings and effects, it will silence rather than forge new forms of democratic political commonality and thus, instead of facilitating a resolution to the current European crisis, contribute to its ever further intensification.

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[1] I am intentionally using the notion of "estrangement" here instead of a more common, and in this concrete case more justified, concept of "foreignizing." While the latter is derived from a correct translation of German "*das Fremde*"—which, according to Humboldt, is a quality that should be clearly felt in translations because it shows that the import of a valuable cultural content from abroad is able to improve the quality of the target language and culture, that is, to cultivate the nation of the translator, the concept of "estrangement," on the other hand, draws on the Russian formalist notion of "making strange," (*priyom ostraneniya*, which, according to Viktor Shklovsky (in his famous essay "Art as Device"), is the essence of all art as well as on the Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* (which in the past was usually translated as distancing or alienation effect, but today is known under more accurate translation: estrangement effect). Instead of being simply a valuable cultural quality that is useful for the process of nation-building, "the strange" is rather a deconstructive element in both language and culture that indicates the strangeness of what is considered to be authentically one's own. It is a "device of critique" that radically destabilizes the feeling of belonging and is felt as a crack in an enclosed, totalized, homogenous entity.

[2] For more on this concept see Pym, Anthony (1995): "Schleiermacher and the problem of blendlinge." In *Translation and Literature*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 5–30. Retrieved April 20, 2013, from

http://usuaris.tinet.cat/apym/on-line/intercultures/blendlinge.pdf

[3] On the connection between translation and "juridical ideology" see Močnik Rastko (2006): "Translation in the Field of Ideological Struggle." http://translate.eipcp.net/transversal/0606/mocnik/en.

[4] It is estimated that over half the world's population belongs to the middle class today.

[5] For more on how the concept of translation, especially in its cultural meaning, can be ideologically deployed even in the service of today's imperial domination, see also Močnik, ibid.

[6] Bellos, David (2011): *Is That a Fish in Your Ear?: Translation and the Meaning of Everything*. London, Penguin.

[7] Ibid., 237.

[8] Ibid., 248.

[9] Ibid., 237.

[10] Ibid., 238, 239.

[11] See Rawls John (1997): "The idea of public reason revisited." In *The University of Chicago Law Review*, vol. 64, no. 3, pp. 765–807, and Habermas, Jürgen (2005): "Religion in der Öffentlichkeit. Kognitive Voraussetzungen für den 'öffentlichen Vernunftgebrauch' religiöser und säkularer Bürger." In Habermas, J., *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion*, Frankfurt/M., Suhrkamp, 2005, pp. 119–155.

[12] Although Rawls and Habermas differ in question of who is supposed to provide this translation or where precisely it is to take place.

[13] In which, as translator, I was directly involved.

[14] The regime of homolingual address as defined by Naoki Sakai: "[I]t is not because two different language unities are given that we have to translate (or interpret) one text into another; it is because translation *articulates* languages so that we may postulate the two unites of the translating and the translated languages as if they were autonomous and closed entities through *a certain representation of translation*." N. Sakai (2007): *Translation and Subjectivity. On "Japan" and Cultural Nationalism,* Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, p. 2.