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CULTURE
IN TRADUZIONE:
UN PARADIGMA
PER L'EUROPA

Cultures in translation: a paradigm for Europe

a cura di Irena Fiket,
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DAVIDE SCALMANI
PREFACE

This publication is the result of a two-day international conference held on 18-19 October 2017 at the Italian Cultural Institute in Belgrade (IIC), co-organized by the IIC and the Institute of Philosophy and Social Theory of Belgrade University (IFDT) in collaboration with the University of Turin and the EU Delegation to Serbia.

The idea of organizing in Belgrade a symposium on philosophical aspects of translation inviting Italian and other international scholars appeared immediately interesting for our Institute. Translation is a main focus of our activities in the field of bilateral cultural exchanges in Serbia. I see it as a part of the cultural European perspective that is being relevantly discussed in the wider region. Pretty soon the idea grew into an international conference that resulted in a quite an ambitious project, substantiated by theoretical approaches, enriched by experiences, proposals and reflections of the practitioners, writers and book industry actors.

The days of the conference, graced by a very fertile intellectual environment, produced several outstanding contributions and a very stimulating and open discussion among the participants and the attentive audience. Translation emerged as a subject that deserves an extensive range of studies from different angles and that gives access to refreshing perspectives on the core issues of our societies and cultures. The common discussion touched some of the problems that are influencing the public discussion on European identity and values, cultural policies and linguistic diversity. Far from closing up in an erudite and ineffective jargon dispute, discourse on translation can be key to crucial transformation of the permanent dialogue of cultures in a European outlook.

The conference and the proceedings could not have taken place without the help of many individuals and institutions. I warmly thank each and every one for their generous effort and sincere dedication. It has been a real pleasure working with such a fine group of people. I would like to thank first the IFTD (University of Belgrade), partner in the organization: Petar

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BOJANIĆ PETAR, FIKET IRENA, HRNJEZ SAŠA AND SCALMANI DAVIDE
INTRODUCTION

The practice of translation and role of translators have become central in the contemporary world. While the practices of translation in the past were reserved for cultural and national elites who needed to bring classical texts, such as the Bible or Greek classics, into their own culture, translation today permeates everyday life and various aspects of society, becoming one of the most important features of the multilingual world. This is especially relevant in a European context which is historically constituted as a space of cultural and linguistic differences and where translators always played an important role. But only in the last decades, with the institutional organization of Europe, a need for translation has gained new political and social dimensions. Current debates on the cultural and political identity of Europe, on a common European language, on different linguistic heritages in Europe etc., touch, in one way or another, the principle of translatability and therefore the possibilities (and limits) of exchange between cultures on the European continent. The linguistic and idiomatic plurality of Europe shows that its cultures are already in process of translation, translated or product of translation, inevitably entangled in other cultural horizons.

The practice of written translation from ancient languages has been part of the national education of European countries for a long time. Even today at school students learn early, and most often unconsciously, that to translate well one needs certain qualities that the teaching itself does not seem able to provide fully. In this way, since adolescence, the idea is taking shape that translation is a test of linguistic sensitivity and intelligence, a challenge to the ability to understand and communicate that is at the center of our own self-perception and self-esteem. Those of us, who go further for professional reasons in the practice of translation, become increasingly aware of the non-eliminability of the problems glimpsed at school, which are often surprisingly well hidden within modern languages as well. Surprises always arise from new unforeseen circumstances, at least until one gets to consolidate the habit of expecting them. Translation anxiety then

decreases and one can equip oneself to handle the unexpected more effectively. We can try to look around better, try to get more insight into the forest of meanings and to travel more quickly the labyrinth of languages in search of useful traces to get out of it.

Dictionaries and encyclopedias, words and meanings, signs and contexts: nothing should be overlooked; everything can turn out helpful. Translating is a complex practice that goes through discourses and fields, models of knowledge and power. It has to do with relationships and not only with objects that can be described in a conclusive way. Conceptualizing translation is an operation that underlies many others: tell me how you define the practice of translation and I will tell you what models of reason, language, communication and power are behind it.

Needless to say, there are no complete instructions and from this game of translation one never gets out really satisfied, but adds more tracks on a map and opens up new paths. One would say that for the translator, completely immersed in the contingency, there is no absolute to be revealed. The situation of the translator would therefore be the metaphor of the existential condition of the human being, condemned to live by translating. We have overcome the nostalgia for a language that no longer exists or has never been: the idealized ancient Greek of some European intellectuals between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for example. We have developed a skeptic attitude towards a solution that is not there yet or will never be; be it the *mathesis universalis* or the perfect digital translator machine. It is precisely this situation that encourages us to challenge the contemporary debate with urgent and radical issues that are carried inside the translation problems and revealed by its fundamentally ambiguous statute.

This volume brings together contributions of scholars from a wide range of disciplines (philosophy, translation studies, linguistics, literature, political theory etc.) as well as translators, in order to discuss and explore relevant issues of translation theory and problems of translation practice in view of European plurilingualism. More specifically, the focus is on translation as intercultural practice as a way in which cultures enrich themselves and experience other cultures as well as their own limits of expressivity. Our volume, therefore, proposes the analysis of translation from different perspectives in order to grasp better its complex nature aiming to shed light on the importance of translation and plurilingualism in a rapidly changing world. By doing so we hope to offer some valuable insights into (not only) European cultural diversity as it is to be understood as a community of cultures in translation. The bilingual character of this volume (texts are in English and Italian, some of

them are translations) and participation of the scholars from five different countries (Italy, Serbia, Montenegro, Slovenia, France) is a coherent instantiation of main ideas that gave birth to this volume.

Still, we feel that we should also express our disconcertion regarding the language in which we are writing. Not because this language will soon no longer be the official language of any country of the European Union, or that we are effacing the so-called ‘European plurilingualism’, found in the rationale of this volume. Rather, it is that when we are using one language, we exclude all other languages. Our consolation, however, is that what we are now reading before you is already a translation, that our activity now is already necessarily “European” par excellence and indeed in accordance with a position keenly formulated by one who, since Leibniz, wrote best about a universal language. “The language of Europe,” says Umberto Eco, “is translation”. This is a translation.

The one thing on which we wish to insist in our Introduction is that by defending translation and the right to translation, we are actually defending the right to the ‘untranslatable’¹. ‘Untranslatable’ is not merely a translation that has missed its target or what resists reduction or simplification, that which is authentic or native to a language. It is at the point of the ‘untranslatable’ where begins the discussion, negotiation, differentiation of ours and yours, or, to wit, the point at which war could erupt or philosophy spring. (Philosophy never takes place in a single language, but always between languages, in distinctions, or even in opposition to other languages.) And it is this ‘untranslatable’ that implies translation, or provides the imperative: Translate! Keep translating! Peace! We translate, so we might with others decide what is best for all, to learn how to understand and accept what is untranslatable in each. It is for this reason that translation is a European issue, necessarily bound with democracy, community, peace. One who abandons Europe or resists Europe truly overestimates and confuses what is ‘one’s own’ or ‘untranslatable’ (these being provincial mistakes), such as this quote by the philosopher Franz Rosenzweig, at the moment of writing a soldier of Austria-Hungary, who finds himself in the vicinity of Belgrade in December 1915: “Pacifism (*Pazifismus*) conflates (*verwechselt*) *latere*

1 There is an anecdote often retold in French, although it might have taken place in German and been translated into French. Namely, at a conference in Cerisy in 1955, someone asked Martin Heidegger (who, to be sure, understood French): “Pourquoi vous complaisez-vous dans l’intraduisible”? Why do you wallow in the untranslatable? To which he responded with a question: “Intraduisible en quelle langue”? Untranslatable in what language?

lipe (pure language; *klare, reine Sprache*) and Esperanto.”² The history of translation is of course always the history of the untranslatable. Five years later, in a letter to Scholem of 10 March 1921, Rosenzweig says:

Übersetzen kann nur, wer von der Unmöglichkeit innig überzeugt ist.

In Italian: *Tradurre può solo chi è intimamente convinto dell'impossibilità.*

In English: *Only he who is fervently convinced of the impossibility can translate.*

Only one deeply (truly, intimately, to one's core) convinced of the impossibility of translation can begin to translate. Perhaps translation can happen, says Rosenzweig, but only after the bearer of this act first concludes and accepts, entirely and without either remainder or condition, that translation is impossible. Translation appears when the true impossibility of translation is revealed. Only then. And only then follows the essential paradox, for at once everything is untranslatable and nothing is untranslatable. All we are left with is to forever patiently dwell between these two hyperboles, as Jacques Derrida recommended.

In the first text *Children of Science* Aleksandra Mančić is offering some answers to the questions such as: can translation be a paradigm for Europe and its cultures? Can translation help us to understand European cultural legacy and political commonality? Can European political and cultural framework take the form of a practice of translation? Convinced in the power of translation as a source of knowledge and a high-way of communication, author suggests that monolingual experiences – as Latin was for the scientific world since the Middle Ages, or as English appears to be in our own time – are threat not only to the science, arts, philosophy, but also for the communication. Citing examples from the mid-17th Century and the last decades of the 16th Century, and putting them into direct relation to our own time, Mančić sees multilingualism, which asks for translation, as an invigorating practice

In the second chapter, *Globalization and the Translation of Imaginaries*, Michael Oustinoff underlines the importance translation has today in our globalizing societies. Developing his argument through the text by approaching relevant issues of translation, such as untranslatable or, as he calls it, the paradox of translation and reflecting on what is gained and what

2 Esperanto, the machine, Google translate, brings with it pseudo-understanding and pseudo-peace and pseudo-harmony precisely because it does not know and ignores what is 'untranslatable'.

is lost in translation, he is arguing that today, when producing any kind of text or speech (communication), we can no longer do this in monolingual way, ignoring the existence of other languages and the possible translation of this “original” communication. In that sense, the communication we are producing will always be influenced by its possible translation. Oustinoff remind us that today, we must take into account the globalization of imaginaries, the process in which the communication is crucial.

Translation as experience of difference is the starting consideration in the essay of Silvana Borutti (*L'antropologia e la traduzione come modello della comunicazione interculturale*). Borutti develops her argumentation by taking into consideration anthropological perspective in the context of intercultural communication. The case where an anthropologist, a field researcher, encounters a member of some distant culture, is the case which exemplifies what Borutti calls “the ontological untranslatable”, i.e. partiality of the relation with another culture. For an anthropologist who attempts to decipher the cultural code of another culture, translation is not simply transposing of an original text into another context, but it is the constitutive part of his or her comprehension: anthropologist comprehends insofar as he or she translates. His or her description of another culture is an interpretative translation, an ongoing dialogue with the other. The concept of the ontological untranslatable leads Borutti to put forth the idea of asymmetrical alterity: the alterity is not our alter-ego, our image in the mirror, but a singular difference. Asymmetry of the otherness implies therefore an asymmetry of the intercultural communication which shall be untied from the ideology of multiculturalism.

In the text *The Limits of Translation: The Power of the Untranslatable with Jorge Luis Borges*, presented in the fourth chapter, Đurđa Trajković reflects on the limits of translation, that is, what translation cannot do as a positive attitude to think resistance to the globalization and market. By introducing the weak concept of the untranslatable, she argues that the power of the untranslatable as articulated by Jorge Luis Borges, Argentine writer and poet, revolves around exposing the non-identity between measure and translation which makes visible the incommensurable and untranslatable as a failure of translation. Paradoxically, failure marks the reminder that lies at the heart of every translation as a resistance to totalizing claims to the assumption of translatability. By using the example of “Pierre Menard” and drawing from Jacques Derrida, she concludes that making visible the untranslatable is not only matter of testing the logic of language, but it is also a political as well as critical attitude, which could reinvigorate the Humanities and World Literature.

In the fifth chapter *I dottori del triennio – doktori trogodišnjih studija? Le sfide della traduzione giurata dall'italiano in montenegrino e viceversa*, Deja Piletić analyses the linguistic and extra-linguistic characteristics of legal texts, in the first place public documents, for which the translation, from Italian into Montenegrin and vice versa, is more often requested. The analysis comprises the comparison between lexical, grammatical and stylistic features, as well as the (non) cultural correspondences present on the extra-linguistic level, that can emerge in the translation process of this type of texts. The specificity and difficulties of legal translation with respect to other types of specialized translation, author argues, are reflected in the fact that in no other type of specialized translation the sociocultural realities underlying the text to be translated are as significant as in legal texts. In this regard, the question of competences and how they are acquired, that author of this text is also discussing, appear to be very relevant for the practice and theory of translations today.

The chapter *Intersemiotic legal translation. How to visualize a legal text?* written by Olimpia G. Loddo focuses on the intersemiotic legal translation and it is based on the analysis of the interpretation of verbal signs expressing legal messages by means of signs of visual semiotic systems. Author shows us that this sort of translation carries the peculiar problems of legal translation, since this translation should fit, not only within the rules of another semiotic system but also, within the rules of a specific legal language. Although intersemiotic legal translations are always *athetic* (i.e. they do not produce any new rule) and therefore they cannot solve the problems of translation, they can surely be seen as useful tools that can help to overcome several significant legal and linguistic barriers.

In his contribution *Translating Animals* Luca Illetterati builds his discourse on translation upon an intimate connection between human way of being and experience of translation: the beings that speak and communicate are also beings that inevitably translate – translating animals. The chapter underlines the originarity and authenticity of translating activity by interpreting the opening words of the book of John: at the beginning was translation. This line of thought is developed in order to show how the paradigm of translation expresses in an appropriate way the finitude of human existence. Moving through different examples from the history of art and culture (e.g. Valerio Belli's medal dedicated to Plato, Veronesi's "intersemiotic" translation of Bach's composition, Borges's story on Pierre Menard, etc.) Illetterati demonstrates how translation surpasses its merely linguistic meaning, since it concerns the sphere of human experience of difference, of failure, loss and incompleteness.

By doing so he calls attention on the famous proverb that translation is impossible but necessary. The point is that this dual nature of translation is a condition of the plurality of human comprehension and therefore of tradition, of historicity of languages.

And for Gaetano Chiurazzi also translation is experience of loss and difference, expressed in terms of incommensurability of languages. In his text *Storicità della traduzione: asimmetria, irreversibilità, entropia* Chiurazzi writes not only about translation as historical phenomenon, but also suggests an immanent connection between history and translation – translatability of history in a certain sense. This conclusion can be derived from the main character of translation that he puts forward in the article, i.e. irreversibility: both history and translation are irreversible processes, characterized by the impossibility to go back and obtain the same result, the same significance. The irreversibility of translation process is consequence of the incommensurability of languages and goes hand in hand with fundamental asymmetry and analogousness of translation. In this sense translation is more similar to some vital biological processes determined by entropy. Calling our attention to Plato's mythos on Chronos, Chiurazzi concludes that such entropic character of translation induces us to re-think translation politically: translation does not re-establish a simple equilibrium and symmetry, and therefore does not correspond to the old vision of justice as talion (eye for an eye), but introduces new meanings, brings transformations, modifies and creates the history.

The double bind between political significance of translation and translation as political engagement come to the forefront in the ninth chapter written by Adriana Zaharijević (*La traduzione politicamente impegnata della filosofia: il caso del termine agency*). In order to argue for a political engagement of translation Zaharijević employs term *agency*, whose translation in Serbian language is not univocal and unambiguous, raising various philosophical questions. Zaharijević's article, translated here in Italian, offers a linguistical and philosophical analysis of the concept of *agency* and akin concepts, such as act, action, efficiency, etc. discussing their translation in Serbian language. The author opts for a translation of *agency* that underlines its potential and dynamical meaning, i.e. *moć delovanja* in Serbian: agency as power to act. Discussing Foucault's theory of power and processes of subjectivation and focusing mostly on Judith Butler's considerations on performativity and political agency, Zaharijević argues that her translation in Serbian (as "power to act") is politically engaged, and therefore it invites to act, think and repeat differently. Translator's choice here is paradigmatic, and it shows that trans-

lated word is never neutral. It is a performative translation, an engaged word that produce effects in the context of target language.

The volume concludes with the text, *Traduzione e trasformazione. Tre modelli, una proposta* in which Zdravko Kobe discerns three models of translation and proposes the fourth one. In the first model, named “translation without transformation”, translation is neutral and mechanical communication of the message seeking for equivalences in languages. Contrary to this, translation as transformation constitutes the second model of translation, which can be found in classical theoreticians of translation such as Schleiermacher and Benjamin. While in this model translation is a productive act that influences not only the contents of translation but also its context, the third model represents transformation without translation, radicalizing the transformative effects of textuality and exalting the situation of heterogeneity and differences deprived of a unitarian horizon. Since three models can be exposed historically (the first one is classical and corresponds to Enlightenment, the second one to Romanticism, and the third to Postmodernity), Kobe sketches out a further model of translation that can be operative in actual social and political conditions: this model brings together translatability of languages and the idea of universality, whereby, following Hegelian dialectics, the universal is translated in other universal, and universalization of languages means also their transformation.

As it has already been said, this volume is an attempt to defend the right to the “untranslatable”, and in this sense it refuses to search for a perfect language. In the same way it counters monolinguality and hegemony of one and only language or any kind of linguistic or cultural imposition that would suppress translation and the untranslatable. Cultures in translation means exactly this: the otherness is always already involved in the life of culture, the untranslatable inevitable, constituting the possibility and horizon of our relation to history, language, culture and Europe. Cultures in translation are nothing but the living, changing, resisting cultures. And therefore, not only impossibility of translation, but translation of what is impossible, moving the limits, discovering new possibilities, an experience of the constant research of new ways of being and living together. Thus, we can repeat with Eco that language of Europe is translation. However, this statement is not a definite conclusion but the starting point of interrogation. Our common language is translation: What kind of translation? Is it translation that creates the common or just mediates already existing forms of commonality? Translation as communication and dialogue, or (and) translation as social relation? Translation that informs or (and) translation that transforms? Translation that reflects its historical

and social conditioning or translation that disregards or downplays its historicity? This set of questions is a sign that there is still a lot to discover, question and problematize apropos translation. The ten essays contained in this volume, with their cross-cultural framework and cross-disciplinary approach, are a contribution to the debate.

