Translating Academia.

Implications for Knowledge Production in the Social Sciences and the Humanities[1]

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The aim of this special issue, which brings together academics from various disciplines as well as specialized translators of academic texts, is to explore the role of translation in knowledge production in the humanities and the social sciences, with an emphasis on existing practices in Southern Europe. It seeks to contribute to key theoretical debates on universalism and particularism in relation to the production of disciplinary knowledge in the contemporary period and to empirically illuminate widely extended but often neglected, mostly hidden translation practices relating to the participation of academics from semi-peripheral linguistic backgrounds in international academic exchanges.

There is increasing interest in global, postcolonial and decolonial approaches which have brought home the need to identify the inequalities that intervene in the production of disciplinary knowledge. In this context, it becomes necessary to also acknowledge the presence of a pervasive monolingual vision (Bielsa, 2020) that is enhanced by the contemporary centrality of English as the academic lingua franca, and can even be unwittingly reproduced in some postcolonial and decolonial theory. This special issue is centered on the productive translation work of authors and translators and the politics of translation in a highly unequal academic field. It offers a window on the continuity of writing and translating in the production of disciplinary knowledge, illuminating the way in which academic writing is, in different ways, already born translated (Walkowitz, 2015), that is, as a multilingual exercise of interpretation and intervention in a post-monolingual world (Yildiz, 2012).

In this introduction, I set the stage for the contributions that follow by providing some context on the linguistic landscape that characterizes contemporary academia and on the significance of academic translation, many forms of which, although widespread, have remained unacknowledged and ignored.

The stampede towards English

Today, old Enlightenment dreams about the universal language of science seem to have become a reality. However, it is not Descartes' methodological rigour or the mathematical visions of Leibniz that have made it possible, but what Abram de Swaan once described as a stampede towards the dominant language (2001, p. 21). In becoming, during the second half of the 20th century, the world's hypercentral language and its very first lingua franca of truly global reach, English has exercised an irresistible pull on academics from the most varied geographical and disciplinary areas, who have resolutely embraced it if not as a regular working language certainly as their most valuable publishing language.

The move into English does not just express a voluntary decision taken by hundreds of thousands of individuals who seek to participate in international academic debates but must also be seen as the inescapable imposition of the mechanisms which have transformed universities while firmly placing them at the direct service of advanced capitalist economies like any other industry. Although it has often escaped from reflection in predominantly anglophone accounts of what has been described as dark academia (Fleming, 2021), it is an essential component of today's global university system. In non-anglophone semi-peripheral contexts, where the economic incentives that have given shape to a new academic management class have never materialized and meritocratic and productivity measures are often imperfectly applied, one rule of the new system has unfailingly prevailed with systematic and comprehensive force: the privileging of English as the medium of publication and, increasingly, of teaching and intellectual exchange, indirectly imposed by the use of metrics such as World University League Tables and, especially, journal impact factors, which have been single-handedly adopted at the local level by governments and universities as universal measures of scientific value.

The allegory of a stampede appropriately identifies not just the massive, crowd-like character of the movement towards English, but also the speed in which its unquestioned hegemony has been consolidated. In Spain, if only twenty-five years ago

publishing in English was a valuable but still voluntary asset, today it is a compulsory requirement for anyone who seeks to secure an academic job. The situation is not much different in other non-anglophone national fields, within and outside Europe (Lee and Lee, 2013; Curry and Lillis, 2018). In academic institutions all over the globe, English-language publications have become naturalized as international by default, no matter how parochial they might be, whereas any other language is merely seen to serve as a medium for the local application or public dissemination of knowledge and not cutting-edge research. Linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992), which values certain languages and not others in a competitive market, has become the most pervasive, although often unacknowledged, face of the neoliberal university, at least outside the centre. It seems that nothing other than a desolate landscape can remain after a stampede, and the hegemony of academic English has typically been seen to signal the erasure of other languages of science, which can no longer be sustained after everyone has left, as well as the homogenization of academic discourse. However, this is far from being the case.

A multilingual landscape

The monolingual scientific culture that is often presupposed in accounts written by anglophone authors can only be a reality within the Anglo-American centre of the academic space and, arguably, not even there because of the practices of multilingual academics, who constitute a substantial part of the workforce. By contrast, most of the world's researchers in the social sciences and the humanities today exist in highly multilingual spaces where the simultaneous use of different languages for research, writing and teaching has become routinized. As Linus Salö has observed in the context of Sweden, the story is not one of English prevailing, but rather coexisting with other languages as lingua franca (2017). Thus, while English serves as the main language of publication particularly in the natural sciences, medicine and technology, the position of Swedish holds fast in the humanities, with the social sciences lingering between these two poles (2017, p. 23). These differences, which are also typical of other national fields, can be attributed in part to the various publics that the social sciences and the humanities cater for: an international academic audience, local and/or regional (depending on the particular language) publics of researchers and practitioners (users

of applied research), and the educated general public. The latter is particularly significant in the humanities, where monographs published in the local language have traditionally constituted a prized source of academic and broader intellectual prestige. Beyond the world of publishing, ordinary multilingual use is widespread in academic meetings and in teaching, so that the dominance of English is de facto limited.[2]

In a study of academic writing practices in Hungary, Slovakia, Spain and Portugal, Theresa Lillis and Mary Jane Curry focused on the decisions that multilingual scholars face in writing for publication (2010). These academics typically devote, at their own cost, significant amounts of time and resources to using English, a language that they have often insufficiently mastered, as well as simultaneously publishing in other languages, thus remaining connected to a complex range of audiences and/or communities. Their choices are shaped by a politics of academic text production that privilege English as the universal medium of what counts as globally relevant knowledge, while enforcing the values and practices of the Anglophone centre. The study also shows how the mediation of what Lillis and Curry call literacy brokers to refer to all kinds of direct intervention by different people in the production of texts (including translators, editors, proofreaders, friends and colleagues, reviewers and journal editors), as well as transnational network brokering (which connects semi-peripheral academics to relevant scholars in the centre), is fundamental for securing publication in Anglophone-centre journals.

While both these studies confirm that the use of English (particularly for publication in journals) is growing in the social sciences and the humanities, they also reveal a multilingual landscape in which scholars are regularly involved in making decisions and choices about their publishing languages and strategies in light of the audiences they seek to address, in spite of the fact that in all these non-Anglophone national contexts publishing in English functions as the key criterion of scholarly evaluation.[3] Thus, while young scholars in history might find in English a more suitable medium for their position-takings in the context of marketization and internationalization, so that English becomes a weapon in their disciplinary struggles (Salö, 2017, p. 133), highly successful scholars might reconsider the focus of their professional energies and intentionally shift their

orientation and linguistic stakes to aim their publications at local applied audiences (Lillis and Curry, 2010, pp. 42–43).

Japanese translation scholar Naoki Sakai has called attention to how writing for two different audiences enabled him to understand translation without recurring to the categories that are presupposed by the schema of interlingual translation, which relies on the discourse of the nation-state as grounded on the cultural homogeneity of its members (1997). A focus on communication (which presupposes a homolingual community constituted by a putative 'we') eliminates that one must first 'address' (Sakai, 1997, p. 6), something to which multilingual scholars writing for different audiences must remain permanently attentive to. This not only facilitates an acute perception of the politics of location in relation to knowledge production, but also a new consciousness on translation based on what Sakai has called heterolingual forms of address that do not take national, ethnic or linguistic affiliation for granted and which ultimately erode the hierarchical marking of initial enunciation and subsequent translation (Sakai, 1997, pp. 7–8; see also Fernández in this issue). It is impossible to understand such writing without regard to translation, not only because of the factual intervention of the latter at different stages of textual production, as is empirically explored in this issue, but also because for multilingual scholars they are intrinsically interconnected in complex forms of address. As Sakai asserts, in relation to his own writing:

> …it is perhaps misleading to say that the essays were first enunciated and, then and separately, translated. Not only because of my delayed acquisition of the English language but also because of the essays' heterolingual address to the readers, they may as well be said to be translated as they were written, and written as they were translated. As I became aware that I had ineluctably come to occupy the position of the translator as I was writing within a so-called bilingual address, the writing of an essay could no longer be comprehended without regard to translation. (1997, p. 8)

Translation holds the key to the old Enlightenment dream of a universal language of science, but this cannot be realized through the transparency and homogenizing pressures of global English and requires, on the contrary, what Sakai sees as forms of heterolingual address between a nonaggregate community of foreigners who do not ground togetherness on sameness, or what Goethe described, through his concept of world literature, in terms of generalized interlinguistic exchanges in a cosmopolitan space (Eckermann, 1850; Bielsa, 2014).

The misery and the splendour of translation

'During a colloquium attended by professors and students from the Collège de France and other academic circles, someone spoke of the impossibility of translating certain German philosophers' (Ortega y Gasset, 2000 [1937], p. 49). Translation is an ordinary component of academic exchanges in a multilingual field – I am quoting in English the opening sentence of a classical text originally written in Spanish that relates a conversation taking place in French. Yet, for Ortega y Gasset, the misery of translation concerns the apparent impossibility that is referred to in the sentence above, which makes the task of the translator an inherently utopian one. In our present context, the misery of translation is also connected to the way in which it is reductively approached and misunderstood, often seen as no more than an instrumental procedure through which preestablished meanings or contents are moved or transferred between languages, and more generally dismissed as unworthy of our efforts or investigations, because of widespread cultural preconceptions regarding its derivative, if not directly treacherous nature.

These misgivings are even perceivable in accounts that revalue multilingualism in academic writing while seeking to investigate the constitutive role of language in knowledge production. Thus, in Lillis and Curry's book, we are told that their multilingual research subjects tend to avoid translators for both economic and academic reasons:

> scholars are overwhelmingly dissatisfied and suspicious of using translation; of course cost is one key issue, with many scholars not able to pay the fees that

> might secure a high quality translation, a point recognized by professional translators. Scholars do not blame translators per se, but rather the fact that it is very difficult to find a translator who is sufficiently familiar with their subfield specialism to produce meaningful texts. (Lillis and Curry, 2010, p. 95).

It may be that these reservations inform the view of their research subjects, rather than that of the authors of the study themselves; however, they are not questioned or subjected to further scrutiny. It is because this negative view is shared among research subjects and researchers alike that what Ortega y Gasset described as the misery of translation is disallowed before it can even be articulated.

Within sociology, John Law and Annemarie Mol have pointed out that 'when 'international' academic conversations restrict themselves to using the intellectual tools available in English, they become limited and parochial' (2020, p. 264), calling for the intellectual inspiration that can be found in 'non-English' linguistic repertoires and the promise of enriching academic writing with other terms. Yet, they reduce translation to an operation of replacing elements of one linguistic system with those of another, taming words that are difficult to translate while detaching texts from their contexts (2020, pp. 269–70). In this conception of translation, translators' 'primary task' is 'to minimise its betrayals', while the situation of authors who write in English whilst living in another language is seen as quite a different one because 'they are writing directly in English from the beginning' (2020, p. 270), implicitly taking for granted the view of languages as distinct and separate unities that they themselves have earlier criticized.

All the contributions in this special issue start out from the opposite standpoint to call attention to the key presence of translation in diverse types of scholarly writing practices in multilingual settings, examining translation as constitutive of academic knowledge production. They focus on translation's most neglected and hidden forms of intervention in the production of texts which adopt English as their original language of publication, without which the functioning of the academic lingua franca in a multilingual space would be impossible. Even though the relevance of translation in the international circulation of academic texts and the intellectual history of disciplines is

generally recognized, particularly in the case of the classics and their many rewritings (see, for instance, Batchelor and Harding, 2017; Sapiro, Santoro and Baert, 2020), the production of this type of texts, which formally appear as English-language originals is, as we have seen, considered to predominantly escape from the vagaries of translation. This is not only because of the general mistrust and the reductive views of translation that I have already alluded to, but also because of current editorial practices and rules in Anglophone journals, which facilitate, if not push, for its structural subsumption and invisibilization. This concerns a substantial amount of texts that are not formally published as translations in Anglophone journals and, to a lesser extent, academic books. It is necessary to insist that these systematically ignored forms of translation have become a necessary aspect for the production and reproduction of English as academic lingua franca in a global academic space, just like photographic reproductions of works of art are ubiquitous but taken for granted and presumed transparent in our relation to the artistic tradition (Bielsa and Aguilera, 2024). In both cases, attending to their certainly covert but not therefore less significant presence can be conducive to the most surprising revelations.

Only if we take translation seriously enough to recognize that this apparently most humble of occupations demands that the translator responds to authorial rebellions against established usage and accepted linguistic norms with equally subversive texts while confronting the natural incongruity of languages, which are shaped by different social experiences, will we be able to grasp what the task of translating involves: the splendour of translation. In Ortega y Gasset's text it is a different character, a 'great linguist', who gives voice to this task, not without first alerting us to the fact that 'transubstantiation is impossible': 'Translation is not a duplicate of the original text; it is not—it shouldn't try to be—the work itself with a different vocabulary.' (2000, p. 61). Rather,

> The simple fact is that the translation is not the work, but a path toward the work. If this is a poetic work, the translation is no more than an apparatus, a technical device that brings us closer to the work without ever trying to repeat or replace it. (ibid.)

In an age in which we no longer live by models of the past, by the weight of tradition, a new historical consciousness can allow the humanities, as opposed to the natural sciences, to be reborn. This requires 'a gigantic task of new translation' involving not just the 'literary pieces that were valued as models of their genres, but rather all works, without distinction' (2000, p. 61), which have become important simply as a path to different ways of existing. This new social use of translation demands a different, more conscious form of translation that abandons literary elegance in favour of an apparatus that can represent the life from which that work emerged and that in many cases no longer exists:

> I imagine, then, a form of translation that is ugly, as science has always been; that does not intend to wear literary garb; that is not easy to read but is very clear indeed (although this clarity may demand copious footnotes). The reader must know beforehand that when reading a translation he will not be reading a literarily beautiful book but will be using an annoying apparatus. (2000, p. 62)

In our present time, such an annoying apparatus may very well hold the key not just of 'an audacious integration of Humanity' (2000, p. 57), past and present, but also of a new relationship with the natural sciences that allows us to envisage and construct radically different futures in the face of climate change.[4]

Politics of translation

In the context of translation's contemporary social significance, politicizing translation must be considered one of if not the central task of a translational sociology (Bielsa, 2023). This is why I proposed the notions of assimilatory and reflexive translation, which undertake the necessary conceptual work that is required for a new theorization of the politics of translation as part of broad ongoing debates in the social sciences and the humanities. This theorization develops not just relevant conceptual tools that can be used to assess and empirically analyze different kinds of translation practices in a wide diversity of domains, but also a vocabulary that connects translation to other significant

cultural and political practices of our time. It also serves to raise consciousness about the nature of translation as much more than a mechanical process of word substitution, to which traditional conceptions of linguistic equivalence and instrumental notions of communication or transfer have contributed. Two of the articles in this special issue (by Cussel, Bielsa and Bestué and by Cussel, Raigal and Barranco) provide a first empirical application of this approach, investigating how it can contribute to new knowledge and critical perspectives on academic translation.

More generally, each one of the contributions of the special issue deal with the politics of translation in their own distinct way, because the nature of such an unequal academic field makes it unavoidable. It was Karen Bennett who originally described widely prevalent practices of academic translation in Portugal as a form of epistemicide, in a pioneering article that was the first to empirically investigate how professional translators help Portuguese authors shape their writing for publication in English (2007). In this issue, she reexamines her initial contribution in light of the wider academic recognition of multilingualism and translanguaging practices, which may well be indicative of new openings to more unconventional and less rigid translation strategies. The nature and status of plain English, whose apparent neutrality is linguistically constructed (Bennett, 2007, pp. 152–53; see also Bennett in this issue), becomes in this context an obligatory matter of reflection. Just as the term international is now used, particularly in multilingual settings, as a substitute word to designate Anglophone, plain English has become an ingrained routine in the writing practices of academic authors and translators, who unquestionably assume it is intrinsically linked to the clarity of science (in addition to Bennett's piece, see Cussel, Bielsa and Bestué, and Kelso et al.). This not only marginalizes the more dialectical syntax that has typically prevailed in forms of argumentation which have enjoyed the highest prestige in German, French or Spanish academic prose (not to speak of other non-European languages of science my knowledge of which is more limited), but also alternative writing practices from Anglophone authors who do not submit to empiricism.

While many scholars from the semi-periphery precisely seek assimilation into the rules of plain English, so that their work becomes indistinguishable from that of Anglophone

authors (Cussel, Raigal and Barranco) and highly competent academic translators do not adequately question the ready-made connection between plain English and science, or think that breaking with dominant conventions would only lead to their work failing to achieve publication (see Kelso et al.; Cussel, Bielsa, and Bestué), from a more reflexive standpoint the contributions of this special issue delineate alternative writing practices that might facilitate, rather than erase, more genuinely diverse dialogues in a truly international space. Such practices are more in keeping with the clarity of a scientific discourse that is constructed through an annoying apparatus, as in Ortega y Gasset's vision of ugly translation, rather than through the deceptive clarity and neutrality of plain English. In other words, a recognition of the value of multilingualism must necessarily lead to a different politics of translation that does not abide to the conventions of plain English, but can rather be conducive to what I will provocatively call plane English to designate a language that is not seen as the property of natives but as a translocal space of encounter where people from diverse linguistic backgrounds and traditions address each other, a language in motion. And if plain English has been seen to signal the homogenization of academic discourse, plane English might very well become an experimental laboratory where hegemonic linguistic conventions are subtly remade or subverted so that alternative worlds, experiences and ways of thinking suddenly become more visible.

In an essay that reflects on his relationship with language, Theodor Adorno referred to an incident that facilitated his decision to return to Germany after long years of exile in the US: the aggressive editing to which an article he had submitted for publication to the journal of the Psychoanalytical Society in San Francisco had been subjected, so that 'the entire text had been disfigured beyond recognition, the fundamental intentions could not be recovered' (1998, p. 211). The article finally appeared 'in a quite faithful German translation' (ibid.). This episode should alert us to the fact that breaking with the conventions of plain English is not just a matter of 'sharing English between native and non-native speakers on more equal terms' (de Swaan, 2004, p. 145), but also of removing the straightjacket that is often placed on those who seek to publish in Anglophone journals, non-native and native speakers alike, and maybe even more

relevant for native English speakers, who do not easily have recourse to the alternatives that are open to multilingual authors.

To realize the continuity and inseparability of writing, interpreting and translating is a necessary starting point to examine the politics of translation that shape the production of social scientific and humanistic knowledge at all stages of research and which play a constitutive role in the scholarship produced. This is examined in more depth in the contributions by Fernández and Gibb which, unlike the other articles of this special issue, are not principally centered on the politics of academic writing but examine wider aspects of researching multilingually. As Fernández reminds us, for an academic working across cultures research becomes an act of translation, a reflection which is also at the heart of social anthropology (Asad, 1986; see also Gibb in this issue) and comparative sociology (Turner, 1980). Silencing language can only lead to a mystification that places fieldwork outside the scope of serious critique (Borchgrevink, 2003). Documenting and analyzing the process of language learning and the ways in which levels of fluency affect the research process promotes a heightened awareness of researching multilingually (Gibb and Danero Iglesias, 2017; Gibb, Tremlett and Danero Iglesias, 2019). This awareness also relates to the extensive but often forgotten use of interpreters in social science research (Sepielak, Wladyka and Yaworsky, 2019, 2023). Sociologists translate and write multilingually, specialized academic translators often have a social science background, interpreters mediate fieldwork exchanges, contributing to the research produced often in unanticipated ways (Palmary, 2011). Only a critical examination that contemplates the multiplicity of these distinct and overlapping practices can attest to the partiality and contested nature of the meanings that shape and are in turn produced in social science and humanities research.

Collaborating on translation

This special issue is the main outcome of the research project 'Political Translation', funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (2020-2024), which set the stage for the collaborative efforts of a small group of scholars from the disciplines of sociology and translation studies. In 2022 we organized a workshop where first research

results were shared with other scholars, academic translators and journal editors and complementary perspectives presented and discussed. It is from this somewhat enlarged circle of interlocutors that this special issue has emerged.

In particular, I wish to acknowledge the generous contributions of members of the association Mediterranean Editors and Translators at all stages of this project. Connections with specialized academic translators belonging to this organization were established early on and proved instrumental for securing interviewees, thanks to the publicity circulated through their networks and word of mouth.[5] It is a great pleasure that the value of these contributions finds expression not only in our empirical study (Cussel, Bielsa and Bestué) but also through their own authorial intervention in this special issue (Kelso et al). The role of these professionals in the production of academic knowledge is fundamental, but unacknowledged and unseen. Indeed, it is because of her translating work for Portuguese academics that Karen Bennett first became aware of the significance of this practice, an experience which she then transposed to her own research. The breaking-down of the traditional barriers that distinguish writers and readers, which Walter Benjamin already envisaged in 'The Author as Producer' (1999) [1934], is highly relevant in the scientific relations of production of our time, pointing towards a transcendence of the specialization of intellectual production and the politicization of translation. The centrality of both academics and translators, as well as the overlapping of their practices already alluded to earlier, is a distinctive contribution of this special issue which also alerts us to the social significance of a science that is not only for the benefit of scholars but for an expanded community of users.

Intensive collaboration on and through translation between a multitude of academic authors and their translators is also one of the key findings of both our research project (Cussel, Bielsa and Bestué) and the survey of language professionals conducted through translators' associations (Kelso et al.), a phenomenon that has seldom been reflected upon and which merits further investigation. Indeed, contrary to what the widely used American Council of Learned Societies' 'Guidelines for the Translation of Social Science Texts' (Heim and Tymowski, 2006) suggests, the two studies presented here highlight how it is academics themselves, rather than publishers or journal editors, who hire the

services of translators, as well as the prevalence of far more assimilatory forms of translation than what the guidelines recommend. This attests to the pressing need to account for widespread forms of translation in the semi-periphery of the academic field, as well as to reflect on how the nature of these extensive and ordinary collaborations between academic authors and translators might challenge the dominance of highly unequal conditions for the production of knowledge in the social sciences and the humanities in an international space.

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[2] At least in Spain, there is a silent resistance from students to English language reading lists and seminars devoted to the discussion of English texts are often poorly attended, even by last year students. In my teaching I have had to gradually switch from English-abundant compulsory reading lists to lists of texts that are exclusively in Spanish and Catalan. It is remarkable how, in a multilingual context where language switching between these two languages is ingrained to the extent that people often do it without even noticing, this resistance to English uptake persists.

[3] It is important to remember that in other peripheral non-Anglophone contexts English does not play such a significant role in scholarly evaluation, particularly in countries where universities have not become research-led institutions. This is the case of Argentina, for instance, where a segmented system prevails in which different evaluative cultures coexist and international publications in English are not a determining factor for university evaluations (Beigel, 2014).

[4] Translation is currently being recognized in medicine and the natural sciences as part of a more general translational turn, which also involves the social sciences and the humanities (Bachmann-Medick, 2016). However, approaches to what has been conceptualized as knowledge translation, aimed at clinical and policy applications of scientific and medical research, have tended to rely on simplistic assumptions to insist on the separation of objective scientific knowledge from cultural determinations while downplaying the complexity of translation. This is why there is a perceived need to integrate these accounts with work from the humanities and the social sciences (Engebretsen, Fraas Henrichsen and Ødemark, 2020; Ødemark and Engebretsen, 2022). Regarding the wider significance of translation for our present challenges see Bielsa and Aguilera (2024), particularly the introduction and the 'Tesis sobre la traducción'.

[5] We are also grateful to all the academic authors who participated in this study as interviewees, and who also contributed by facilitating connections with their translators.