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Source: *Profession*, (2010), pp. 25-34
Published by: Modern Language Association
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/41419858
Accessed: 08-11-2018 00:38 UTC

Translation and the Figure of Border: Toward the Apprehension of Translation as a Social Action

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We are urged to acknowledge in knowledge production today the increasing significance of the problematic of bordering. The problematic has to be specifically marked as one not of border but of bordering, because what is at issue is not the old problem of boundary, discrimination, and classification. At the same time that it recognizes the presence of borders, discriminatory regimes, and the paradigms of classification, this problematic sheds light on the processes of drawing a border, of instituting the terms of distinction in discrimination, and of inscribing a continuous space of the social. The analytic of bordering requires us to take into account simultaneously both the presence of border and its drawing or inscription. One might call this focus on bordering the new bordering turn, as it has been most rigorously pursued by Étienne Balibar and by Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson.

At this stage, I do not know whether a focus on bordering has gathered momentum across different disciplines. But the bordering turn must be accompanied theoretically by the translational turn: bordering and translation are both problematics projected by the same theoretical perspective. Just as bordering is not solely about the demarcation of land, translation is not merely about language.

In this essay I pursue a preliminary investigation concerning the discussion of translation beyond the conventional domain of the linguistic. Yet

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the first issue that must be tackled is how to comprehend language from the viewpoint of translation—that is, how to reverse the conventional comprehension of translation that always presumes the unity of a language.

Translation almost always involves a different language or at least a difference in or of language. But what difference or differentiation is at issue? How does it demand that we broaden our comprehension of translation? From the outset, we have to guard against the static view of translation in which difference is substantialized; we should not yield to the reification of translation that denies translation its potentiality to deterritorialize. Therefore it is important to introduce difference in and of language in such a way that we can comprehend translation not in terms of the communication model of equivalence and exchange but as a form of political labor to create continuity at the elusive point of discontinuity in the social.

It is possible to distinguish the type of translation according to the type of difference in or of language to which translation is a response. To follow Roman Jakobson's famous typology of translation (261), one may refer to a project of overcoming incommensurability as a type of translation—interlingual translation—from one natural language to another. Or one may talk about an act of retelling or interpreting from one style or genre to another in the same language as an instance of translation—intralingual translation. Furthermore, one may cite an act of mapping from one semiotic system to another as a distinctive type of translation—intersemiotic translation. In this typology, however, the unity of a language has to be unproblematically presupposed. Were it not for that supposition, it would be hard to discuss a different language, different from the original language, in an interlingual translation. Neither would it be possible to designate the inside of a language or to refer to a language as the same in an intralingual translation. Thus we are forced to return to the question, What difference?

My inquiry moves from the question of what is different in or of language to another question: What is different from the language? This is to say we must entertain the question of what language is, how the linguistic differs from the extralinguistic, and how the domain of the linguistic is constituted. In the scope of difference in and of language, however, we are still caught in the mode where the unity of a language is assumed. By difference, then, do we still understand that one term in particularity is distinguished from another against the background of the same generality, just as a white horse is different from a black horse among horses in general? Do we have to understand difference necessarily as a specific difference? Can the sort of difference at stake in translation be appropriately discussed in terms of the species and genus of classical logic?

Many in One

The world accommodates one humanity but a plurality of languages. It is generally upheld that, because of this plurality, we are never able to evade translation. Our conception of translation is almost always premised on a specific way of conceiving the plurality of languages. We often resort to the story of Babel when we consider the unity of humanity but the necessity of translation. But can we assume this unity in plurality trans-historically? That is, can we conceive of discourses in which the thought of language is not captured in the formula of many in one? Are we able to conceive of language in an alternative way?

How do we recognize the identity of each language—that is, justify presuming that languages can be categorized in terms of one and many? Is language a countable, like an apple or orange and unlike water? Is it not possible to think of languages, for example, in terms of those grammars in which the distinction of the singular and the plural is irrelevant? What I am calling into question is the unity of language, a certain positivity of discourse or historical a priori we apply whenever a different language or difference in language is at stake. How do we allow ourselves to tell one language from another, to represent language as a unity?

My answer to this question some twenty years ago (*Voices*) is that the unity of language is like Kant's regulative idea. It organizes knowledge but is not empirically verifiable. The regulative idea does not concern itself with the possibility of experience; it is no more than a rule by which a search in the series of empirical data is prescribed. It guarantees not empirically verifiable truth but, on the contrary, "forbidding [the search for truth] to bring it[self] to a close by treating anything at which it may arrive as absolutely unconditioned" (Kant 450 [A 509; B 537]). Therefore, the regulative idea gives only an *object in idea*; it only means "a *schema* for which no object, not even a hypothetical one, is directly given" (550 [A 670; B 698]; emphasis added). The unity of language cannot be given in experience because it is nothing but a regulative idea, enabling us to comprehend related data about languages "in an indirect manner, in their systematic unity, by means of their relation to this idea" (550). It is not possible to know whether a particular language as a unity exists or not. But by subscribing to the idea of the unity of language, we can organize knowledge about languages in a modern, systematic, scientific manner.

To the extent that the unity of national language ultimately serves as a schema for nationality[1] and offers a sense of national integration, the idea of the unity of language opens up a discourse to discuss not only the naturalized origin of an ethnic community but also the entire imaginary

associated with national language and culture. A language may be pure, authentic, hybridized, polluted, or corrupt, yet regardless of a particular assessment about that language, the very possibility of praising, authenticating, complaining about, or deploring it is offered by the unity of that language as a regulative idea. But the institution of the nation-state is, we all know, a relatively recent invention. Thus we are led to suspect that the idea of the unity of language as the schema for ethnic and national communality must also be a recent invention.

How should we understand the formula of many in one, the plurality of languages in one humanity, when the unity of language has to be understood as a regulative idea or schema for an object in idea? For Kant, a regulative idea is explicated with regard to the production of scientific knowledge; it ensures that the empirical inquiry of some scientific discipline will never reach any absolute truth and therefore is endless. Every scientific truth changes as more empirical data are accumulated. Kant also qualifies the regulative idea as a schema—that is, an image, design, outline, or figure not exclusively in the order of idea but also in the order of the sensational.

From the postulate that the unity of national language is a regulative idea, it follows that this unity enables us to organize various empirical data in a systematic manner so that we can continue to seek knowledge about the language. At the same time, it offers not an object in experience but an objective in praxis, toward which we aspire to regulate our uses of language. The principle is not only epistemic but also strategic. Hence it works in double registers: on the one hand, it determines epistemologically what is included or excluded in the database of a language, what is linguistic or extralinguistic, and what is proper to a particular language or not; on the other hand, it indicates and projects what we must seek as our proper language, what we must avoid as heterogeneous to our language and reject as improper in it. The unity of a national language as a schema guides us in what is just or wrong for our language, what is in accord or discord with the propriety of the language.

Of course, *translation* is a term with much broader connotations than the operation of transferring meaning from one national or ethnic language into another, but in this context I am specifically concerned with the delimitation of translation according to the regime of translation by which the idea of the national language is put into practice. I suggest that the representation of translation in terms of this regime of translation serves as a schema of cofiguration: only when translation is represented by the schematism of cofiguration does the putative unity of a national language as a regulative idea ensue. This schema allows us to imagine or represent what goes on in translation, to give to ourselves an image or representa-

tion of translation. Once imagined, translation is no longer a movement in potentiality. Its image or representation always contains two figures, which are necessarily accompanied by spatial division in terms of border. Because the unity of a national or ethnic language as a schema is already accompanied by another schema for the unity of a different language, the unity of a language is possible only in the element of many in one.

Translation takes various processes and forms, insofar as it is a political labor to overcome points of incommensurability in the social. It need not be confined to the specific regime of translation; it may well lie outside the modern regime of translation. The modern is marked by the introduction of the schema of cofiguration, without which it is difficult to imagine a nation or ethnicity as a homogeneous sphere. As Antoine Berman taught us about the intellectual history of translation and Romanticism in Germany, the economy of the foreign—that is, how the foreign must be allocated in the production of the domestic language—has played the decisive role in the poietic—and poetic—identification of the national language. Without exception, the formation of a modern national language involves institutionalizations of translation according to the regime of translation.

Most conspicuously manifest in eighteenth-century movements such as Romanticism in Western Europe and *Kokugaku* ("National Studies") in Japan, intellectual and literary maneuvers to invent a national language mythically and poetically were closely associated with a spiritual construction of new identity, in terms of which national sovereignty was later naturalized. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue, it makes "the *relation* of sovereignty into a *thing* (often by naturalizing it) and thus weed[s] out every residue of social antagonism. The nation is a kind of ideological shortcut that attempts to free the concepts of sovereignty and modernity from the antagonism and crisis that define them" (95). This foundation for the legitimation of national and popular sovereignty was proffered as a natural language specific to the people, which ordinary people spoke in everyday life. This historical development is generally referred to by literary historians as the emergence of the vernacular. The emphasis on ordinary and colloquial languages went with the reconception of translation and the schematism of cofiguration.

In the archipelago off the northeastern shore of the Qing Empire in the eighteenth century, a small number of intellectuals, usually grouped under the heading *kokugakusha* ("National Studies scholars") by present-day historians, began to discuss something like a people. These scholars claimed the significance of their learning only inside the restricted context of Japanese national history. In general education as it was taught in village tutoring schools in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (a long time before the introduction of universal national education in the 1870s),

the canonical texts were primarily the classics of Confucian and Buddhist traditions. There hardly existed an acknowledged need to distinguish Japanese from Chinese texts or to teach Japanese children Japanese classics. Just as we do not insist on finding the features of national character in the texts of the Qur'an and the Bible or in the textbooks of mathematics and biology today, most people in East Asia did not seek national history in the classics. The trope of lineage was much more decisive in the succession of religious pontificates, poetry schools, and dynastic heirs. Social formations were not organized on the basis of a desire for national or ethnic identity; people lived free from the tenets of nationhood, and accordingly the classics they worshipped stood indifferent to national identification.

The National Studies' insistence on a distinction between the Chinese orientation of the canonical texts of the day and the Japaneseness inherent in a few selected ones was novel and eccentric. Such Japanese texts were the *Kojiki* ("Record of Ancient Matters," an imperial and mythic history compiled by the Japanese court in the eighth century), *Manyôshû* ("Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves," an eighth-century poetic anthology), and *Genji Monogatari* (*The Tale of Genji*, a novelistic narrative privately written in the Japanese court in the eleventh century). The *Kojiki* was a historiographical attempt by the ancient Japanese imperial court to construct the histories of the Yamato dynasties and the imperial lineage. Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801),[2] a leading scholar of the eighteenth century in the National Studies movement, reconstructed this entire work, more than a thousand years after its initial compilation, on the assumption that a Japanese national or ethnic language existed when it was originally transcribed; he thereby translated the *Kojiki* into a self-consciously Japanese text (Sakai, *Voices*, chs. 7 and 8). Motoori insisted on reading the text of the *Kojiki* on the explicitly declared premise that it was written in the Japanese language.

According to Jakobsonian taxonomy, this translation project would be intralingual as well as intersemiotic but never a translation proper, precisely because of Motoori's insistence on the transhistorical existence of the Japanese language. Motoori attempted to institute the discernibility of the intralingual translation from translation proper by translating the *Kojiki* into the forty-four volumes of *Kojiki-den* in essentially phonographic notation. What is the nature of the drastic displacement he brought about in the regimes of interpretation and translation?

Before the massive disruption initiated by the new discourse of the eighteenth century, a formation had existed in which what Jakobson calls translation proper (261) was not an archetype to which all the other types of translation, including intralingual and intersemiotic, were subordinated. How, then, should we assess the significance of Motoori's insis-

tence on the Japanese language? Should we take for granted that the *Tale of Genji*, for instance, was mainly written in Japanese characters of *kana*, unlike many contemporary documents, which were composed in the Chinese logography of *mana* or sometimes in literary Chinese? There could be no clear distinction between intralingual and interlingual translations before the eighteenth century.

In National Studies, as well as in treatises by some Confucian scholars of the *Kogaku* ("Ancient Studies") affiliation, there was not merely an introduction of one more commentary on the ancient text but in fact the creation of a new set of regimes whereby the classic text was read anew, rewritten, and re-created. Therefore it is impossible to understand the works of National Studies simply in terms of Motoori's discovery of the ancient Japanese language, Japanese grammar, phonetics, and syntax, and so on—that is, in those terms believed to have existed before the *Kokugaku* and *Kogaku* scholars' interventions. What Motoori achieved by reading the *Kojiki* was the establishment of the possibility for knowledge of the Japanese language to emerge. In other words, he and others invented the Japanese language as an object in idea of systematic knowledge in the eighteenth century. Previous canonical works clearly lacked a sense of national affiliation compared with his translation of the *Kojiki*. Though some of them were in what were called Japanese notational systems, they were not thought to belong to the tradition of specifically Japanese literature. A few other well-known texts of the eighteenth century can be seen as testimonies to these epistemic changes, but they do not highlight the new possibility as dramatically as Motoori's intralingual and intersemiotic translation. The intellectual and literary maneuvers by the *Kokugakusha* inaugurated the modern prescription of the national imaginary. We cannot fail to recognize the aura of modernity in National Studies precisely because, generally speaking and even beyond the context of Japan's history, the imaginary affiliation with nation and national culture and tradition is modern. To the extent that we take the modern regimes of reading, writing, reciting, translating, and so forth for granted, however, we tend to assume the modus operandi sustained by these regimes to be universally valid. Continuing to project this historically specific modus operandi into the past, we become incapable of imagining the possibilities of regimes other than that of national homolingualism.

Translation as Continuity in Discontinuity

Returning to the question of the relation between translation and discontinuity, I probe how our commonsensical notion of translation is delimited by the schematism of the world (i.e., our representation of the

world according to the schema of cofiguration) and conversely how the modern figure of the world as international (i.e., the world consisting of the basic units of the nations) is prescribed by our representation of translation as a communicative and international transfer of a message between a pair of ethnolinguistic unities.

The measure by which we are able to assess a language as a unity—again, I am talking not about phonetic systems, morphological units, or syntactic rules of a language but about the whole of a language as langue—is given to us only at the locale where the limit of a language is marked, at the border where we come across a nonsense that forces us to do something in order to make sense of it. This occasion of making sense out of nonsense, of doing something socially—acting toward foreigners, soliciting their response, seeking their confirmation, and so forth—is generally called translation, provided that we suspend the conventional distinction between translation and interpretation. The unity of a language is represented always in relation to another unity; it is never given in and of itself but in relation to an other. One can hardly evade dialogic duality when determining the unity of a language; language as a unity almost always conjures up the copresence of another language, precisely because translation is not only a border crossing but also and preliminarily an act of drawing a border, of bordering. Hence I have to introduce the schematism of cofiguration in analyzing how translation is represented.

If the foreign is unambiguously incomprehensible, unknowable, and unfamiliar, it is impossible to talk about translation, because translation simply cannot be done. If, on the other hand, the foreign is comprehensible, knowable, and familiar, it is unnecessary to call for translation. Thus the status of the foreign in translation must always be ambiguous. It is alien, but it is already in transition to something familiar. The foreign is simultaneously incomprehensible and comprehensible, unknowable and knowable, and unfamiliar and familiar. This foundational ambiguity of translation derives from the ambiguity of the positionality generally indexed by the peculiar presence of the translator, who is summoned only when two kinds of audiences are postulated with regard to the source text: one for whom the text is comprehensible, at least to some degree, and the other for whom it is incomprehensible. The translator's work consists in dealing with the difference between them. It is only insofar as comprehensibility is clearly and unambiguously distinct from incomprehensibility that the translator can be discerned from the nontranslator without ambiguity in the conceptual economy of this determination of the foreign and the proper.

It is important to note that the language in this instance is figurative: it need not refer to any natural language of an ethnic or national community

such as German or Tagalog, since it is equally possible to have two kinds of audiences when the source text is a heavily technical document or an avant-garde literary piece. *Language* may refer to a set of vocabulary and expressions associated with a professional field or discipline, such as legal language; it may imply the style of graphic inscription or an unusual perceptual setting in which an artwork is installed. One may argue that these are examples of intralingual and intersemiotic translation, respectively. But they can be postulated only when they are in contradistinction to translation proper. The propriety of translation presupposes the unity of a language; it is impossible unless one unity of language is posited as external to another—as if, already, languages were given as countable, like apples. These figurative uses of *translation* illustrate how difficult it is to construe the locale of translation as a linking or bridging of two languages, two spatially marked domains.

Considering the positionality of the translator, we can now approach the problematic of subjectivity. The internal split in the translator, which reflects the split between the translator and the addresser or between the translator and the addressee—and furthermore the actualizing split in the addresser and the addressee[3]—demonstrates the way in which the subject constitutes itself. This internal split in the translator is homologous to the fractured I, the temporality of "I speak," which necessarily introduces an irreparable distance between the speaking I and the I that is signified, between the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the enunciated. Yet in translation the ambiguity in the personality of the translator marks the instability of the we as the subject rather than the I, suggesting a different attitude of address, which I have called "heterolingual address" (*Translation* 1–9) and in which one addresses oneself as a foreigner to another foreigner. Heterolingual address is an event, because translation never takes place in a smooth space; it is an address in discontinuity.

Rejected in homolingual address is the social character of translation, of an act performed at the locale of social transformation where new power relations are produced. Thus the study of translation will provide us with insights into how cartography and the schematism of cofiguration contribute to our critical analysis of social relations, premised not only on nationality and ethnicity but also on the differentialist identification of race or the colonial difference and discriminatory constitution of the West.

NOTES

1. Here I rely on the classical notion of nationality in British liberalism. According to John Stuart Mill, nationality means that "a portion of mankind are united among themselves by common sympathies which do not exist between them and

any others—which make them co-operate with each other more willingly than with other people, desire to be under the same government, and desire that it should be government by themselves or a portion of themselves exclusively. This feeling of nationality may have been generated by various causes. Sometimes it is the effect of identity of race and descent. Community of language, and community of religion greatly contribute to it. Geographical limits are one of its causes. But the strongest of all is identity of political antecedents; the possession of a national history, and consequent community of recollections; collective pride and humiliation, pleasure and regret, connected with the same incidents in the past" (391).

2. Following the convention of names in China, Korea, and Japan, personal names are written in the order of family name, then given name. Thus Motoori Norinaga means "Norinaga of the Motoori family."

3. The split cannot be limited to translation. As Briankle Chang suggests, the putative unities of addresser and addressee can hardly be sustained, because the addresser is split and multiplies, as is figuratively illustrated by the Plato-Socrates doublet in Derrida's "Envois" (Derrida 1–256). As to communication in general, Chang argues, "Because both delivery and signing are haunted by the same structural threat of the message's nonarrival or *a*destination, the paradox of the signature also invades communication. Communication occurs only insofar as the delivery of the message *may* fail; that is, communication takes place only to the extent that there is a separation between the sender and receiver, and this separation, this distance, this *spacing*, creates the possibility for the message *not* to arrive" (216).

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