

## FROM TRANSLATION TO ORGANIZATION TO INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS: AN ACADEMIC NO MAN'S LAND

José Lambert\*  
Katholieke Universiteit Leuven  
Universidade Federal do Ceará

Jean-François Brunelière\*\*  
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

**Abstract:** Universities claim to represent a crucial component in the contemporary world of knowledge, which involves a given degree of self-criticism and the redefinition of a few priorities. The recognition of new departments, such as Translation Studies (TS) is obviously part of this historical movement of self-criticism, and TS itself reflects similar processes in its own history, or rather prehistory. Although TS claims to have integrated Globalization and the new international world into its academic program, exactly how it will combine its initial self-definitions (built around translator training) with academic definitions (What is translation? How can past and present translation phenomena be accounted for? How do language policies, multilingualism, media discourse or communities, not to mention ranking, fit into all this?) is its challenge for the coming years. Without excluding topics from the initial moments of the new discipline (such as training or

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\* José Lambert: Possui doutorado em Filologia Românica pela Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (1972). É presidente de honra do CETRA e editor-fundador da revista Target (junto com Gideon Toury). Atualmente é professor visitante do Programa de Pós-graduação em Estudos da Tradução na Universidade Federal do Ceará (UFC). Fortaleza, Ceará, Brasil. E-mail: [jose.lambert@arts.kuleuven.be](mailto:jose.lambert@arts.kuleuven.be)

\*\* Jean-François Brunelière: Doutorando do Programa de Pós-graduação em Estudos da Tradução na Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC). Florianópolis, Santa Catarina, Brasil. E-mail: [jfbruneliere.traducao@gmail.com](mailto:jfbruneliere.traducao@gmail.com)



nation-state interaction), we propose to explore and exploit what can be learned from organization by making use of the contemporary business world (in this case the international car industry), which is a No Man's Land within the coalescing traditions of the new discipline. And in this little-known world, fundamental new insights are waiting to be gathered.

**Keywords:** Translation Studies. Organizations. Communication streams.

## DA TRADUÇÃO À ORGANIZAÇÃO AO BUSINESS INTERNACIONAL: UM “NO MAN’S LAND” ACADÊMICO

**Resumo:** As universidades se colocam como componentes essenciais do conhecimento mundial. Tal estatuto implica um certo nível de autocrítica e a redefinição de algumas prioridades. O reconhecimento acadêmico de novos departamentos, tais quais os Estudos da Tradução (TS), faz claramente parte do movimento histórico de autocrítica, e TS, por sua vez, reflete o mesmo processo na sua própria história, ou talvez pré-história. Embora TS pretenda ter integrado a Globalização e o novo mundo internacionalizado no âmbito dos seus programas acadêmicos, o desafio para os próximos anos será na combinação entre as suas definições originais (construídas em torno da formação de tradutores) e definições acadêmicas (O que é a Tradução? Como os fenômenos tradutórios, passados e presentes, podem ser retratados? Como as políticas linguísticas, o multilinguismo, o discurso das mídias e os rankings entram nisso?). Sem excluir tópicos estudados desde os princípios (como a formação ou as interações entre nações), propomos explorar o potencial da área das organizações e do mundo contemporâneo dos negócios (nesse artigo, da indústria automobilística internacional), que pode ser considerado um No Man's Land dentro das tradições da nova disciplina. Estamos convencidos de que ideias novas e fundamentais poderão surgir desse mundo ainda pouco explorado.

**Palavras-chave:** Estudos da Tradução. Organizações. Fluxos de comunicação.

### Are academic structures forever?

Whenever universities begin to cooperate, as they are supposed to do, they realize that one of their difficulties is how their

structures – their panorama for the fields of knowledge – are no less differentiated than their habits. Even when two universities are separated by only a wall or a street, their universe of knowledge is full of surprises.

Any ambitious university beginning to develop a curriculum on translation matters will realize that one of its first responsibilities, before moving into new initiatives, will be to wonder about its actual position, with respect to the various positions of other individuals, centers and institutions. Scholars from any discipline know what “the State of the Art” means: thus, before moving ourselves into action, we had better take note of what has been achieved and what is being planned around us, perhaps also in faraway lands and territories. It is on the basis of such a (self/)evaluation that universities can begin formulating practical measures and making decisions about such things as nominations, particular classes and seminars, cooperation or research projects, etc. Any new project, any decision, is inevitably linked with particular traditions and implications, and, implicitly or explicitly, has its own past. And this is often part of a constructivist strategy: as has been explained about nations and political communities in Anderson (1983), we (re)create our past in view of the future that we are dreaming of.

Such cultural and historical constraints have particular relevance for new curricula such as Translation, or rather Translation Studies (TS), which has been a new challenge since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (LAMBERT, 2011; LAMBERT, 2013; PYM, 2010<sup>1</sup>). And

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<sup>1</sup> It is on purpose that our article deals with TS, and not with Translation Theories: Holmes was very much aware of the limitations of “theories”; Gideon Toury added several arguments to the revision of “theories”. The world is full of translation theories, from East to West and from South to North, although the percentage of them that has scholarly ambitions/status is limited. In his panoramic survey, Anthony Pym shares Holmes’ and Toury’s views on “theory” (more is needed than theories for dealing with a *discipline*). While taking many theoretical concepts seriously, he indicates how and why only the Holmes-Toury “maps” claim to promote TS as an academic discipline (see also the introduction of the first edition of Target (Toury; Lambert, 1989)). But this institutionalization took place in more recent years.

scholars involved in cultural research will link such considerations with geo-cultural questions about the *wheres* and *whys* underlying the new curriculum. Since translation has unavoidable connections with the position of the communities in which it is embedded, priorities in Canada will be different from those in Western Europe, the Middle East, Africa, China or Australia – globalization notwithstanding. But new communities feel stronger the moment they have partners abroad. In academic communities, it is fine to have the feeling that partners are everywhere around. Nowadays, such movements would be called global, but a few decades ago, scholars did not yet use that concept and spoke instead about of “universals”: was this a kind of bluff?

Universals are a serious problem in most academic disciplines, or is it so only in the Human Sciences? Translation, regardless, appears not to be a simple matter – except, perhaps, for the man in the street, as well as for the academic world until a few decades ago. And even among our colleagues in Academia since TS was shaped into a field of academic expertise (which can still only be found in a very limited number of universities) you may hear the following: “*Translation*, what do you mean, what’s that?”; “What exactly do you worry about, in TS?”; “What exactly do you translate?”; “Oh! You are a theorist!?”. Could we therefore assume that the definition of our object of study will ever be unproblematic? In matters of scholarship, most questions of language or translation are delicate because they are never reduced to scholarship; they also depend on communication and communities (such as business, political, economic or religious), and they are becoming more and more deterritorialized (Deleuze; Guattari, 1976), would this be a more comfortable way into universals? One of the first reasons why curricula, hence universities, are space-and-time-bound is that they have didactic goals, they are submitted to learning constraints and, hence, they are a substantial component within the (world of) *communities of practice* (Wenger, 2010).

From a more pragmatic perspective, the new discipline labeled TS needs to be contextualized within the academic environment,

which is a tricky component during the construction of any discipline. There was no doubt about such an awareness in the first construction of TS, i.e. in the very different and particular backgrounds of the first fathers, James Holmes and Gideon Toury: since then (between the 1970's and the 1990's), our world has not gotten any simpler, either within TS or elsewhere. And much more is at stake than just language(s), whatever a given generation of scholars tended to assume until 1975. Internationalization and Globalization have played a role in the new approach to communication as well as to technology, culture(s), communities, etc. In (European) neighbor universities situated within one and the same nation, often separated by only a few kilometers, language and communication often happen to belong to different faculties, certainly to different departments. Would translation and TS be a less problematic issue in larger countries?

Previous establishment of many new curricula and institutes, already demonstrated how constructivist trends can influence new academic initiatives: the so-called traditions that have prepared our contemporary academic maps are often heavily indebted to modern imagination, they owe a lot to “the creation of tradition” (Hobsbawn; Ranger, 1983), certainly from the moment languages are involved.

Communities with strong neighbors – who sometimes may have come (uninvited) from other continents – such as Latin America or Africa tend to (have) import(ed) their priorities (“Colonization” or “Self Colonization” ?) as well as to (have) struggle(d) against them. In Belgium, a so-called academic *Tabula Rasa* after 1968 was responsible for the split of the bilingual university on the basis of language (Dutch/French) and had a serious impact on the involved linguistic communities. It reoriented the leading political parties and redefined many key relations with neighbor cultures and international partners. The battle around new identities was heavily influenced by choice of lingua franca (English in northern Belgium, French in the south). Redefining your (best) neighbors implies a redefinition of yourself. And while universities do not simply

coincide with countries, they condition at least part of the national dynamics: this is very often one of the reasons for their creation. The symbolic capital of communities depends, of course, on the *mind*, the *brains* and the *books*. Through the ages, Universities (Lambert; Iliescu Gheorghiu, 2014) have always been a privileged part of the international communities that help shape the linguistic and cultural profiles of political and social communities. In our contemporary world, as illustrated by student or staff exchanges (e.g. Erasmus), migrations (e.g. North America after World War II (WWII)), the so-called Bologna Declarations or by the Brazilian Science without Borders project, governments claim to make systematic use of academia in view of their international policies, and it would seem quite stubborn not to devote any explicit attention to the language components of all this.

Whatever intercontinental history may teach us, the creation and development of new centers for translation (or TS) in any place around our globe is an exceptional opportunity as well as a responsibility.

Indeed, new initiatives/ disciplines happen to be a source of hesitation and conflicts, primarily because they imply at least a limited redefinition of previously established departments and their resources. It was and is predictable that any community with international ambitions, such as universities, might get excited when one or two dozen “translators” come and join them. But what would the average staff members or even the managers expect from TS: cheap resources for doing dirty jobs in international projects, which are booming anyway? This was one of the first reasons why after WWII new networks for translation training were created in a few well-selected countries. The fact is that, without excluding training from the new curriculum (see Holmes and Toury), TS was conceptualized as an academic discipline, not the new service that those in power were dreaming of. Such conflicts were not new at all, they were even part of the Higher Education heritage in many countries – and not only in Western Europe (cf. Canada, Australia, Hong Kong, Taiwan). In Eastern Europe, in the Middle East

(Israel, Turkey), in South Africa, in Latin America, they happened to develop as part of the new globalizing university, especially since 2000.

### **From Global Villages into Globalization**

One of the privileged assets of translation and TS is precisely that they reflect symbolic functions of communities in both their internal and external dynamics. In fact, the sudden interest in translation matters after WWII, at least in certain parts of the world, had obvious links with the intensification of internationalization (Ong, 1982). It has taken our planet a few decades to recognize the waves of Internationalization as a profound movement that even generated a new terminology (*Globalization*, to start with). However, Internationalization/Globalization has commonly been recognized as merely an economic and political phenomenon. Only recently, perhaps more or less around the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, has it become clear that technology and communication (and hence culture and communities) cannot be separated from economic changes<sup>2</sup>. Most of our contemporary universities claim to be fundamentally involved in the globalization movement and take the ranking race seriously. How this will ever be possible without changes in their local and internal landscape, especially their language policy – and not only in electronic publications – will sooner or later be(come) an issue for general management, both local and global.

The integration of universities and research into the new world of knowledge indeed confirms that more is at stake than a reshuffling of business worlds, or, in academic communities,

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<sup>2</sup> This is not a surprise for whoever reads Ong's (1982) amazing book which predicted more or less the impact that the Internet (i.e. communication technology) was going to have on our planet (the basic idea of the book is that, through the ages, the means of communication have always had a serious impact on the kind of communities in which they function).

that more is at stake than simply the dissemination of more texts along more channels in more languages. As far as languages, multilingualism and translation are concerned, the question will be whether only a few small departments will be affected, say literary studies, linguistics, perhaps history/historiography, or if there is an inherent link with sociology, economics, anthropology, medicine, etc.? And why would any research be needed: what would be the *use* of PhDs in TS (or rather: what would be the academic function and position of PhDs and research projects)? One fascinating answer to such questions has been delivered, both in academia and in international business, before the question of translation became an academic issue, i.e. the use of email and the Internet. Electronic communication channels have been planned within universities and multinational corporations (MNCs) without any real participation of translation experts, except perhaps to the extent that the first generation of Machine Translation (MT) experts has been partly recycled as experts in Localization, which means that they have been approached as a new Industry and service rather than as a new science. It is interesting to observe how particular MNCs have approached electronic communication, even MNCs with an internal translation department. It seems, however, that in most cases, neither translators nor translation teams have been involved. As a post-war Prime Minister said: “*D’abord j’agis et puis je pense*”<sup>3</sup>.

### **Redefinition of neighbors**

One of the paradoxes of universities is that they are so different: the world of knowledge does not have single identity. And it is not sure that the idea of Globalization has had any standardizing impact on the internal structures of many disciplines, except maybe a stronger awareness of planet-wide trends. The big disciplines

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<sup>3</sup> One of the famous principles adopted by Achille Van Acker, who was four times the Prime Minister of Belgium between 1945 and 1958.

such as engineering or medicine may tend to demonstrate the opposite. TS, however, as a new and still underdeveloped one (it is not visible in all universities) appears to be dispersed from both the synchronic and the diachronic perspective. Many universities link it with both linguistics and literary studies. It may also pop up somewhere in theology or biblical studies. The creation of a full department where PhDs are devoted to translation does not necessarily have an impact on “traditional” departments, where research on translation may simply continue. Although it is true that universities claim to support interdisciplinarity, the question is whether the actual academic map for research on translation reflects *interdisciplinarity* or *para-interdisciplinarity*. What has often been called *the Birth of the Discipline*, in historical terms, first illustrates chaotic trends: research on translation was in the hands of say (comparative) literary scholars on the one hand, and (applied) linguistics on the other hand, as Mary Snell-Hornby (1987; 2006) has put it in several influential publications. But the technical (Translation Training (TT)) and the technological (MT or, in the best cases, Localization), had and still have a rather autonomous status somewhere between the other areas. During the years when Translation Theory was supposed to represent the entire field, i.e. until, say, 1975, it seemed utopian to work without (general) linguistics; currently, however, there are not many linguistics departments or handbooks that recognize translation and – much less TS – among their canonized subareas. The explicit and programmatic evolution into one common appellation (at least in English) and into the definition of norms in translation matters has considerably changed the picture, but since the circulation of scholarly communication has invaded the Internet, it is very questionable whether much more has been retained from the institutionalization than a name and a worldwide publication market. At least, after having disseminated via a broad group of smaller bi or multilingual countries (Israel, Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, Finland, Canada, Belgium, etc.) – not to speak about international organizations – and interaction between several

disciplines, TS is now dynamic on five continents, including North and Latin America. This does not mean that translation scholars all recognize either TS as their home or the more or less unique map of the discipline (Holmes, 1972) as their Bible. It also does not mean that all areas and subareas of TS are booming.

Striking conflicts within the so-called discipline involve to the non-theorized split between TT and TS (which in fact goes back to the 1950's) and systematic discussion of the research program established twenty years later. And whereas TT claimed to focus heavily (first of all?) on translation in business, this was – and still is – the area most lacking in research concepts.

This is why one of the priorities within TS in general, including TT, could be to learn from research on translation in neighboring disciplines, after having broadcast, of course, that neighbor disciplines might learn from TS (Janssens et al, 2004).

So far we have hardly insisted on internal university structures as a shaper of the priorities and options of scholars. It may already be obvious, however, that the structuring of departments and their members is submitted to organizational principles that either promote or reduce given (interdisciplinary) options. To the extent that universities still heavily represent national traditions, especially in matters of language and culture, it would be amazing if a field like TS did not reflect particular traditions.

### **Social research, sociology or what?**

For quite a few years, translation scholars have been observing internal developments in their discipline, which they are likely to qualify as “turns”. The so-called sociological turn is one of them. Why not? The sociological background of the norms concept was stressed much less by Holmes than by Toury, but one may say that it has taken a long time before it has inspired translation scholars. Interdisciplinarity has at least become a new key issue in the literature about TS, although, strangely enough, specialized TS

publications and bibliography have so far rather systematically ignored the ubiquity of translation in a few particular areas of social research.

For more or less two decades, groups of scholars from (social) psychology, economics, anthropology, etc. have been meeting as the European Group for Organization Studies (EGOS). In the good old days of debates between linguists and literary scholars about translation, the idea that translation experts had to worry about the research planned by colleagues from experimental psychology, psychoanalysis or anthropology did not look utopian. But what could one learn from economists, sociologists, or “social research” in general? It was not fully unknown that *translation* was ranked very highly in many research areas outside of the philological traditions, but what kind of compatibility might there be between the various scholarly discourses on translation in such different environments? Hence neither the scholarly journals in TS nor the bibliographies try to explore what is being done outside of TS, whatever this may mean. The recent possible links with “organization” or with “Organization Studies” happen to be a big surprise.

Is translation really an object of systematic research, including empirical research, outside of TS ?

In fact it is not exactly since yesterday that questions such as language, multilingualism, translation are much more than the fascination of individual scholars within EGOS. Whatever their real goals may be, members of this group have published several very sophisticated articles on: (1) language; (2) multilingualism and, more recently, (3) translation as a key component of social/cultural dynamics, e.g. in business environments. Piekkari et al. (2013) focus on translation behavior within a new merger in the Baltic-Scandinavian world. It is with sophisticated empirical methods that the article demonstrates how in a given new multinational company almost all employees produce translations for their employer by resorting to family, friends, neighbors, etc. rather than the official translation team within the company. For translation scholars representing TT or TS, it will be hard to deny that in the new

multinational society, translation is taking a collective face. Given the very sophisticated research techniques used, this publication revises the many (ideological?) discussions about the individual translator (and the “death of the author” from the Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault years) and translation as systems. There is, of course, much more involved.

The idea that translation – only in business environments? – is also submitted to organizational concepts that do not originate in the boss’s office adds much to our (still heavily philological?) universe of languages. The decision process (Levy, 1967) is not strictly individual: it cannot avoid confronting members and hierarchies within communities. How can translation research function without taking into account the idea of organization (management, money, power, etc.) in any community? It has been more or less twenty years since universities have become the center of scholarly knowledge in matters of translation, i.e. in matters of research, sometimes also in matters of training, and yet these same universities continuously produce translations (e.g. for their website) without consulting their scholarly teams. This clearly reflects organizational power in a key area of the global world of knowledge. So far TS has not invested any real energy in this area of internationalization: except for a few initiatives that, unfortunately, need to be discovered and promoted.

The pages that follow will briefly report on several such initiatives. We shall argue in favor of systematic (empirical and cultural) research about the heart of the matter – language – and, hence, multilingualism and translation in contemporary MNCs around the world. The idea is to go for systematic empirical research and not just for case studies. Which implies the interaction with theoretical and methodological frameworks, as has been made clear in Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS). The empirical-descriptive exploration of many cultural areas has been rather spectacular in many particular traditions of translation, from past and present. It is just a pity that so far the idea of empirical-descriptive research in say business communication is more or less virgin. Do we need to stress that the bibliography around exactly such areas within

Organization Studies is far beyond the formulation of theoretical and methodological models?

### **Particular moments**

A few months ago, three scholars from Organization Studies published *Language in International Business The Multilingual Reality of Global Business Expansion* (Piekkari et al, 2014). Neither their title nor their scholarly background leaves any ambiguity about the globalizing perspectives that inspire their book, which reflects years of expertise and cooperation as well a successful scholarly tradition (EGOS), that now attracts several new partners. It is the intention of the authors to provide a concise book for students and scholars in a booming discipline. Thus, they may represent an interesting bridge for TS into the analysis of language issues in business life: all the more since one chapter of the book concentrates on “Translation”.

For both EGOS and other groups of scholars, the road into MNCs (the real focus of “organizational” research at EGOS), first via language(s) (“the Linguistic Turn”) and then, gradually, also via multilingualism and translation has been a long one. In their circles, the different books on “Culture” by Geert Hofstede have had an enormous impact. But little by little, more sophisticated approaches appeared to be necessary: approaches in which cultures did not simply coincide with nations, and where languages were not excluded from the beginning. One of the many attempts to integrate the language issue was *Understanding Organizations through Language* (Tietze et al., 2003). It was no surprise, however, that in this new program particular provinces remained unexplored, e.g. the translation issue. Almost two decades earlier, two Belgian members of the EGOS group started exploring the areas between international communities, organization, language, discourse and translation, partly in the shadow of an international center at KULeuven that claims to train translation scholars for

their future task. One of the results was an article: (Janssens et al, 2004), in which concepts from psychology, economics, TS and even Literary Studies were explored in view of a new interdisciplinarity, as suggested in the title: “Developing language strategies for international companies: The contribution of translation studies”.

Their initiative was not entirely virgin, neither for Steyaert and Janssens nor for Lambert and CETRA (see, e.g. Hermans et al. 1994; several books and articles by Janssens and Steyaert, also in Dutch), but the only real goal could be to stimulate large-scale international exploration. In the years between 2006 and now, both an intensification and a widening of the research on language took place. In two of the Workshops (EGOS 2009; EGOS 2010) a delegation from CETRA participated and formulated the following extension of the hypotheses on language(s):

- Languages do not coincide (at all) with nations;
- There are no monolingual communities;
- There are no bilingual communities without translation (CETRA, 2010);
- There are no language policies without a translation policy (Meylaerts, 2010, p.229)

Several other hypotheses might be added, such as the awareness of the normative traps (the goal of empirical research cannot simply be to formulate how translation ought to work). The main contribution of CETRA is summarized in one title (“*Strategies under the waterline: language, lingua franca and translation*”): one of the key ideas of Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) is that translation tends to aim at invisibility, hence any definition or theory about translators or companies is in fact an object of study and cannot be taken as academic theory.

Similar meetings have been planned in recent years, within EGOS or involving Rebecca Piekkari, and in several related articles the translation phenomenon is accepted as part of the language phenomenon. When noticing that one chapter in Piekkari et al.

(2014) is entitled “Translation”, one must recognize that there is an obvious consistency in the approach to languages. To what extent CETRA and TS have really noticed such movements in the international research landscape will be examined below. Why the (possible) interdisciplinary exploration of the global world of business and organization is commencing only now is another story, as well as the exact compatibility between EGOS, DTS and TS (see Gambier and Van Doorslaer’s Translation Studies Handbooks series). The idea of invisibility, which has become fashionable in TS since Venuti (1995) (see also Pym’s (1996) review), was not unknown at all in TS. In Venuti’s perspective anyway, where it is not applied to business environments, it is exactly the strategy to be avoided.

The EGOS meetings indicate how different resources and institutions are in social research, on the one hand, and in the philology departments, those “soft sciences”, where TS is established. Long-term collective projects about translation matters in industry would have no chance of being supported by national research foundations. International resources may be available from the EU, one of the biggest employers of translators in the history of mankind, but only for projects deemed compatible with the sponsor’s views on translation and communication, which are mainly defined as a service<sup>4</sup>. Hence it is not surprising that CETRA’s TIME project (2010-2014) about new needs in translation as communication concentrated much more on governmental and non-governmental areas than on international business. But at least one of the presentations during the final colloquium (TRIG 2014, Brussels: [http://eu-researchprojects.eu/time/TRIG\\_2014](http://eu-researchprojects.eu/time/TRIG_2014)) focused on the MNC matter<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Whatever has been written on TS as a success story, the new discipline has no independent status, no specific commission in the research foundations. TS has to rely on the goodwill of good neighbors such as linguistics, literary studies, etc. This is a matter of academic organization.

<sup>5</sup> (BRUNELIÈRE, 2014).

## **A No Man's Land among the research areas?**

It is paradoxical that TS seems not to have developed any scholarly model for its exploration of the communications component, i.e. for one of the keys to the Globalization phenomenon. Would translation scholars feel happy to know that good neighbors are doing the job for them!? The truth is that they are in search of new definitions. First of all because it has been assumed by the intellectual world, for the last half a century, that translation is first of all – let us say it again ! - a *service* provided by translators, at least as long as machines are not intelligent enough to replace human beings. An enormous percentage of the bibliography on translation issues has concentrated on one (the individual translator) or the other (machines), i.e. on the best (and cheapest) possible production of “translations”, whatever this may mean. “The translation problem” is often reduced to this by business communities and very often, as well, by intellectuals: from the man in the street to the top of Academia. And there are indeed remarkable scholarly publications devoted to translation training and machine translation. The real revolution in TS has been exactly the moment when scholars as well as the academic and political decision makers in society have accepted the idea that “good practices” could not survive without fundamental research, - that it was not sufficient to have “good theories” and “efficient practices”. It is only since 1975-1976 and especially in recent decades that the translation issue has been accepted as a matter for academic research up to the highest level. But the distinction between translation training and research on translation remains quite often implicit and, consequently, integration into the interdisciplinary academic community is still difficult. The idea that there are two – or more – different translation problems (Translation as Art, Translation as Science) has not died out since the 50s, particularly in relation with business life.

Among TS experts, the lack of awareness about the problem is still more striking – and not merely for lack of empirical research that take advantages of the impressive and growing body of

literature around business and globalization. It is much more due to implicit world views from the nation-state age, i.e. that have not embedded with the source/target dilemma in the worldwide circulation of communication.

Even since Globalization has become a hot topic in TS, the business world has indeed been treated as a more or less peripheral object of study in the discipline. It can be assumed however that MNCs are the archetype of what may occur in translation issues, in terms of product as well as in terms of process. In international business, more than just language is involved, however: legislation, local cultural components, competition between partners, every factor assumes specific features and depends on market conditions. In case products don't need to be adapted, discourse at least requires flexibility. Besides this, MNCs must take into consideration the kind of partners they have, from local and global providers up to the governments of the various nations in which they are embedded, not to mention the world of the press, labor unions, NGOs, workforce, etc. Of course, one privileged partner is the client, who likes being addressed in his own language. Thus, there is no doubt about the fundamental importance of the language issue. However, quite a few companies tend to ignore this when referring to the need for a working/corporate language (i.e. the *lingua franca*), since this monolithic option would liberate them from language issues once and for all, and, as a bonus, from translation requirements as well.

Among corporate solutions for dealing with foreign activities and the associated language issues, several Business (rather than TS) scholars mentioned: (1) the intervention of intermediaries who explore new markets (by taking care of contacts, hence of linguistic solutions); (2) the hiring of local staff members (but this only moves translation issues up one level: i.e. from employees to managers, or from managers to the general headquarters); (3) investment in language training (especially in matters of corporate language for managers in contact with other companies, or in the historical language of the company if different from the corporate language) – something indispensable for contact with the top management

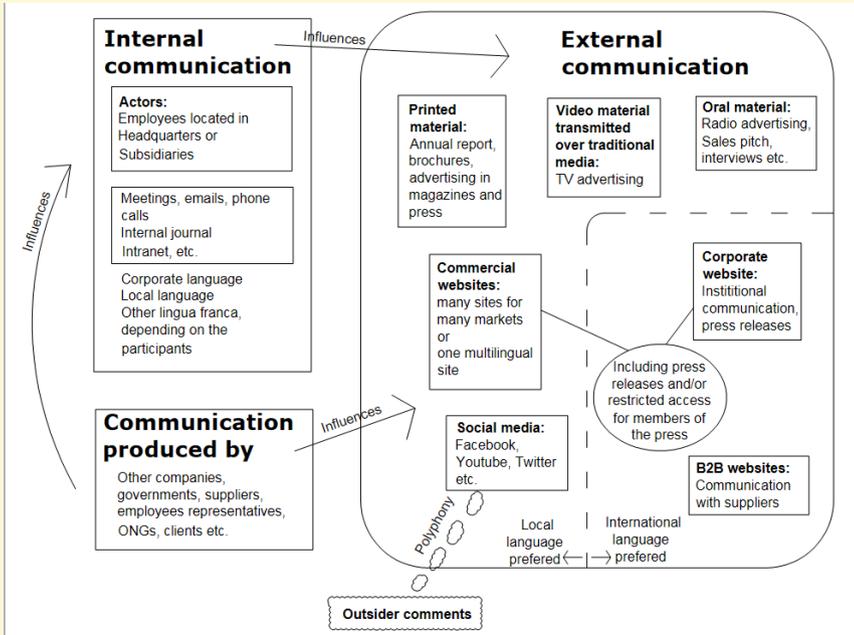
at headquarters, or (4) strictly technical translating/interpreting tasks (Piekkari et al, 2014). It is worth noting that scholars with a Business Studies/Organizational Studies background deal with a narrower concept of translation than the one we intend to use. In principle, within TS, every discourse and all documents circulating on the different markets are linked by a translational relationship to the models/prototypes in use elsewhere (e.g. in the historical market where the home company is active). The observation of translations within MNCs leads into both organizational issues (who produces what? Who translates what?) and the norms that operate within this complex Polysystem. Norms are defined along DTS and Toury's (1995) principles, i.e. not as value judgments or methods to be adopted/avoided. As far as the translation process is concerned, several publications (developed in research traditions other than TS) deliver new options, and warrant further exploration. Piekkari et al. (2013), already mentioned, demonstrated how the production of certain translations is often provided by non-professional translators. Whether translations are outsourced or handled by specific internal services is another issue MNCs that deserves to be mapped (among the options). As far as translation products are concerned, there are, again, quite promising new perspectives.

### **New Roads and New Projects into Global(izing) Business**

Within different communication channels and in view of very different audiences, MNCs produce an impressive amount of documents belonging to more or less familiar genre/text types, but oriented toward different markets and in different languages: this is a unique field of observation for researchers, entirely linked with contemporary expertise. We refer to documents such as (in no particular order): annual reports, products catalogues, press reports, manuals, advertisements (printed, radio, video), websites (for corporate or commercial use – either multilingual or parallel monolingual sites), etc. In order to visualize the research to

be conducted, perhaps it would be better to display the system as a schematic: what should be observed is how the exchange mechanisms function exactly.

**Figure 1:** MNCs are dealing with different layers of communication



Source: Authors

### Comments on figure 1

The impact of internal communication should be visible on many levels of external communication. The question is how more remote external areas like governments, suppliers, unions, etc. may interfere. And only future developments will teach us what social media can represent in the MNC picture.

It is important to distinguish between internal and external communication. The former is the privileged place for language policy (corporate language, lingua franca), while the latter is mainly dealt with in the client (local) language, except for a few ‘globalized areas’ (worldwide and financial communication).

It is easy to imagine how immensely rich the mapping task is, and how this research area can help us understand and evaluate the globalization phenomenon. It would be nonsensical to claim that we are analyzing the communication flow on a world level without attempting to access one of the most dynamic and most representative subareas of international communication. If our researchers hope to discover the keys to the system, they must be prepared to scrutinize its most secret parts. How could we plan the identification and interpretation of the crucial norms underlying contemporary global communication while reducing our documentation to literary activities or to the localization of tourism Websites?

Our schematic Figure 1 provides a panoramic view of (although without any concrete insight into) the circulation of a message within a company, i.e. before being distributed. Who first writes anything? Who is actually “the author” of the message? Where, i.e. within what kind of a unit, is the message (re)written? Within how much time will it leave the unit? Who will alter it or perform the final revision before publication? Chances are slim that messages/documents to be distributed in different channels and more or less simultaneously were produced in different offices; there must be production centers, distribution teams and, among them, channels for the circulation of communication.

We might represent the situation with the aid of a prototypical case, in figure 2.



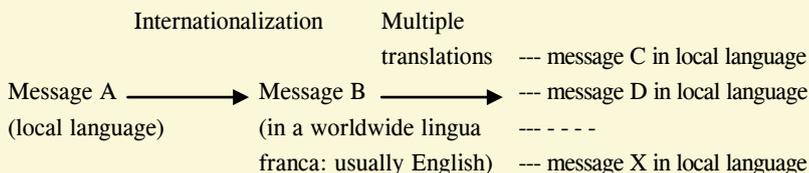
## Comments on Figure 2

At first sight, an external observer might think that many languages are used for producing a great diversity of messages, but only a few of them are actually produced in local language. Many messages indeed happen to be the complex results of translation(s).

Moving from center to more peripheral units, phenomena such as translation and indirect translation become prominent.

Notice that Figure 2 is quite different from other ‘canonized’ views on the international diffusion of messages, such as that of localization, which could be summarized as follows:

### Figure 3: Typical Localization process



The combination/compatibility of (some sectors of) Figure 2 with localization is possible, however, and still requires investigation.

### A prototypical situation : the automotive sector and PSA Peugeot Citroën

Let us illustrate in a more detailed way the principles explained above by examining a highly globalized multinational company, PSA Peugeot Citroën, an automotive manufacturer. Let us observe how two different types of discourse are being produced and distributed worldwide.

The first type is for corporate use and includes institutional press releases (everyday life in the multinational, summaries of annual reports, new plants, news from the stock market, etc.). Analysis of such documents released on the company's Brazilian website (Bruneliere, 2013) indicates that there are, in fact, three subtypes. First, there are Brazilian press releases that relay information from the company's global website (released in English and in French, but, of course, produced in one language and translated into the other), which means they come from the center where discourse is actually generated (in France or in England, probably from the PSA world communication center, in France). One can imagine then, that when a bilingual version is available, a single language has been used as the main basis and that the other can serve as an auxiliary device for resolving questions. On the Brazilian website, there also are press releases that have no equivalents on the global website, although a Spanish version of these can be found on the Argentinean website. These texts have less strategic function and deal with regional events: they are obviously produced in Brazil or Argentina (and may or may not they been evaluated/counterchecked by the European headquarters). Finally, there are those press releases that appear on the Brazilian website only; they deal with issues specific to Brazil and it is hard to imagine that they were produced elsewhere (although whether and how they might be controlled or evaluated by the European center is another matter).

All these streams are represented in Figure 2, in which messages apparently produced by the semi-central unit B (Ab, B and Cb) are in fact largely redistributed (Ab and Cb are shared – after translation – with the Central Unit A and the semi-central unit C, respectively). Only a few of them (B) are real local messages.

The second type of discourse that can be found is communication produced for consumers, such as brochures describing car models. One striking feature of brochures released in different markets is their inter-relationship. But texts, photography and layouts that are only partially common indicate that a certain amount of regional latitude is also allowed in the production of a global communication.

The chronology of the worldwide commercialization process distribution is not a surprise: starting in West Europe, with clear indications that France is the epicenter, the product generally reaches Africa, Asia and Latin America months or years later, and with a limited range of models. The production of promotional brochures follows the same patterns as the new model launch campaigns, including even their updating. Examining the chronology of the distribution process for products and promotional discourse helps indicate where production centers are located. It also demonstrate at which centers distribution is the (almost) exclusive function and, hence, where only preexistent discourse is dispatched. And when, at a later stage, new models are distributed to still more peripheral markets, chances are quite real that documents available in a given language will be used as a basis for further retranslation.

This is how, in Figure 2, a peripheral unit (D) can produce a message (Abd) on the basis of a previous message (Ab, in the same language or not), which is itself already a translated version of the original message (A) produced by the central unit and made available for a semi-central market.

In such peripheral units, messages distributed (D) with apparently acceptable local features (e.g. Algerian texts in French) or with assumed foreign origins (e.g. English in Saudi Arabia) can also come directly from the central unit (A = D). One could imagine that, when the market is too small, translation is not perceived as worthwhile by the company, and local clients will have to accept reading documents with the (more or less obvious and accepted) sense that they have not been adapted for them.

When languages used in given texts are taken into consideration, it becomes clear that different production patterns are possible. The original text (French or English, in this case) may be sent directly to far away countries for translation there; or it may be transferred to an intermediary regional language at a rather early stage, before being translated again into more peripheral languages. What deserves to be observed and analyzed is precisely the dynamics of circulation and, even more, the decision making process.

The design and the commercialization of models worked out for specific markets may become an argument for redefining the position of the production units. In cases of long terms industrial changes, the position of the text production unit tends to follow the market position of the production units (e.g. for PSA, from the historical market, France, into China, first market in 2014 and with more promising perspectives). Whenever a new production center becomes a leader in terms of sales and new product launches, there is a good chance that the full dynamics of communication, including language transfers, will also be reshuffled.

This is exactly the dynamics that Figure 2 aims to represent.

In global companies, where the driving factor, as well as the fundamental justification, is sales figures, the position of the decision makers and the results of their choices does not really depend on the nationality/language of the client; the company will always create the necessary partnerships to provide potential clients with its products and, consequently, prepare the adequate communication to reach them. Of course a key question is to what extent more or less external conditions (e.g. exchange rates, regional economic crises, joint ventures) impact a company and its communication planning. It might arrive at a the point where a company no longer master its own decisions about the selection of channels/options or the global control of its own discourse and image. Strategic changes in the position of production centers are not the only shifts MNCs must face. Going from traditional means of communication into electronic ones reshapes communities on some level<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> This is obviously the case with Belgian banks, where English has become “one of the Belgian languages” and where it has almost completely replaced German, the official third national language, German (as Ilze Bezuidenhout’s PhD thesis, devoted to the languages in Belgian banks since the Age of the Internet, demonstrates; see also Kingsley’s (2010) study on banks in Luxemburg). Internet English, the everyday language of the so-called Eurocrats, the habits of previous generations of immigrants and social media are redesigning the social landscape of “Bruxelles Capitale”, which occupies a central position in Belgium as well as

## **Beyond MNCs, back into everyday life?**

At this moment in history, it seems that, in several particular areas around the planet, the combination between the mobility of communication and the mobility of people is leading into communities that even our most revolutionary theoreticians (McLuhan 1964, Ong 1982, Wenger 2010) have not really been able to predict. However, as the world press illustrates on a daily basis, the so-called social media together with political, religious and military channels accelerate and strengthen the deterritorialization movement.

For quite some time, the production of translation or the translation process has been called “a black box”. The attempt to replace it (or complete it) by machines has become more or less successful, at least in terms of practices. For a more basic solution, more fundamental research is needed. In our attempt to penetrate the secrets of internal communication within multinational companies, we are probably entering several black boxes, the traditional representation of “the translator”, while contextualizing him within his organizational everyday world. It seems that our efforts are largely compatible with the organizational approach, though our questions are not simply identical. And no one can exclude that different organizational or anthropological approaches may complete or correct the picture.

The main difference however between the EGOS based research and our own is that we are still in the conceptualization moments of empirical-descriptive research whereas the EGOS teams can explain their conclusions on the basis of previous research, e.g. on the efficiency of given options, or on the power of discourse and translation (Logemann; Piekkari, 2015), i.e. on internal (and external) conflicts of position. In the time-and-space-based

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in the European Union. Without the mobility of communication, multilingualism would not have replaced the traditional Flemish – Walloon conflicts of the last two centuries.

situations under observation, language and translation services are more than just services (“translators never just translate”), they occupy particular power positions. As suggested by colleagues from the neighboring discipline, chances are that the specific “translatological” observation has a lot to say about the dynamics of discourse in this new world of globalizing communication, e.g. about “*local lies*” (Logemann; Piekkari, 2015). In specific cultures (or cultural subareas) the future development and the continuity of discourse may be(come) unintelligible without a systematic survey of trends, currents, models in translation.

The cultural dimensions of such a new formulation of the research questions are enormous. So far, both companies and governments have resisted this cultural research approach since their priorities revolve around money-making and political efficiency. To the extent that EGOS and other groups can correct and orient our leaders’ views on efficiency, e.g. while demonstrating how given priorities will lead into unexpected contradictions, cultural research is to be accepted as part of the collective goals of these gigantic multinational projects.

The most explicit complementarities between organizational and translational research are revealed in the critical borderlines of our mapping. To the extent that the size of our worlds is in full expansion, it is our task to discover how the new (kinds of) world order function exactly, and to what extent traditional rules disappear or persist. While (this kind of) Organization Studies stresses the power and conflict potential that may orient national languages, multilingualism, translation or company speak, experts from TS (and from sociolinguistics, etc.) are supposed to refine the organizational map by indicating to what extent the various discursive positions coincide or not with our everyday representations of national, social, business, religious or other borderlines. Discovering the new norms and models under the waterline, is what TS ought to offer, together with other partner researchers, to the academic and to the intellectual communities around the world.

But the mobility principle will also redefine both industrial and cultural world maps that we now take for granted. Walter Ong's (1982) theses on the impact of technological revolutions in communication (and societies in general) offer a key to the new communication images and strategies that companies have needed to operationalize in their Internet image. For business to cater to client bases that are more and more embroiled in the nonstop-communication of social media, continuous immediate updating is required. This necessitates reshufflings on the decision-making level, since traditional decision channels are too static, heavy and time-consuming to keep up. Taking into consideration the emergence of new streams of communication, the (relative) loss of power of well-established centers and the appearance of new media, which are much more demanding in terms of reactivity, it is almost predictable that new patterns will quickly appear in the communication distribution patterns of long-established companies worldwide.

Disciplines involving language and discourse have no choice but to update their concepts and questions. In fact, the question of whether or not the concept of translation (or language instead of discourse) will survive already looks like a very academic obsession.

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