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PUTTING MEANING BACK INTO DEVELOPMENT; OR (SEMIO)[1] TRANSLATING DEVELOPMENT

ABSTRACT

Studying the relationship between translation and development is a fledgling enterprise. Apart from my own work, a number of studies and projects have been attempted in this regard. Apart from the above, thinking about development in translation studies is also constrained by the fact that most of this thinking is done in terms of interlinguistic translation. In a world that is increasingly developing in the direction of multimodal communication, this bias cannot hold. Furthermore, literature on how societies develop from the (multimodal) semiosic interactions between people is growing and challenging the linguistic bias that is inherent in translation studies.

The paper addresses both of the above limitations by (1) contributing to the theoretical underpinning of the relationship between translation and development through (2) presenting a Peircean view of semiotics which includes his notions of degenerate signs, i.e. signs without interpretants. The theory explains that many social habits (development patterns or trajectories) take place at an unconscious level and at a prelinguistic level. In order for translation studies scholars to contribute to the debate on the emergence or development or society, they need to be able to (also) study the degenerate signs which human beings construct in response to their environment.

The aim is to combine Peircean semiotics (also referring to secondary literature on Peirce) and complexity thinking in order to present the parameters of a theory of development from a translation perspective.

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1   I use the term '(semio)translation' with the brackets for a number of reasons. First, I have argued elsewhere (Marais 2019) that all translation is semiotranslation, which renders the term 'semiotranslation' obsolete. I maintain the '(semio)' because my arguments in this regard is not yet widely known and leaving it out might lead to confusion. Last, I do not agree with all views on the nature of 'semiotranslation'. In particular, I differ from Robinson's (2016, pp. 181, 220) interpretation that semiotranslation refers to a particular particular type of translation that aims to provide clarity and express hope.

1. INTRODUCTION

Studying the relationship between translation and development is a fledgling enterprise. Apart from my own work, a number of postgraduate studies and projects have been attempted in this regard. As the whole of Africa is usually regarded as a "developmental context" or "un(der)developed" (see criticism against this view in Marais & Delgado Luchner, 2018), the sociological turn in translation studies dictates that a debate about the nature and implications of 'development' should be high on the agenda of translation studies in Africa. In socio-economic terms, translation in Africa is constrained by a particular developmental context while simultaneously contributing to the development of that context.

Thinking about development in translation studies is constrained by the fact that most of it is done in terms of interlinguistic translation (Delgado Luchner 2015; Footitt 2017; Tesseur 2020). In a world that is increasingly shaped by multimodal communication, this bias cannot hold. Furthermore, literature on how societies develop from the (multimodal) semiosic interactions between people is emerging from fields like philosophy (Searle 1995; 2010), anthropology (Deacon 2013; Parmentier 2016), sociology (Latour 2007; Luhmann 1995) and development studies (Pieterse 2010) and challenging the linguistic bias that is inherent in translation studies.

Chibamba's (2018) and Ajayi's (2018) recent doctoral theses further argue for an intersemiotic correction in translation studies, and this position is supported by my own work (Marais 2017; 2019; Marais & Kull 2016). These arguments raise a number of questions: Why does interlingual translation not suffice, and if it does not suffice, how should one conceptualise translation? What is development, and how can one study the relationship between translation and development? I turn to these questions below.

Methodologically, this paper is a conceptual exploration. I address both of the above limitations by (1) contributing to the theoretical underpinning of the relationship between translation and development through (2) presenting a Peircean view of semiotics which includes his notion of indexicality. The theory explains that many social habits (development patterns or trajectories) take place at both an unconscious and a prelinguistic level. In order for translation studies scholars to contribute to the debate on the emergence or development of society, they need to be able to (also) study these, in Peircean terms, degenerate signs that human beings construct in response to their environment.

The paper combines Peircean semiotics and complexity thinking in order to explore the parameters of a theory of development from an intersemiotic translation perspective.

2. WHY INTERLINGUAL TRANSLATION IS NOT ENOUGH

Chibamba (2018) argues that the nature of translation practice in Zambia is such that relatively little interlingual translation takes place. Rather, much more emphasis is placed on forms of what is generally called 'intersemiotic' translation. The reasons for this practice has to do with the colonial history in Zambia, which has had the effect that most people in Zambia can communicate in English to some extent. This means that the health-communication campaigns that Chibamba investigated do not go to the trouble of translating (interlingually) health information into local languages, as common wisdom in translation studies would dictate.

Rather, they spend their efforts on intersemiotic translations such as translating messages into song or into animations (Chibamba 2018). If one supported the maintenance of minority languages, one could bemoan the lack of translation, but my aim in this paper is neither to prescribe nor to evaluate translation practices for their maintenance of minority languages or multilingualism. Rather, I am interested in a descriptive approach that account for the data from developing contexts. The data from Chibamba's study show that, in the context of health communication in Zambia, intersemiotic translation predominates.

For his part, Ajayi (2018) argues that he needs to exclude interlingual translation from his study of precolonial Nigeria because there are no written records from precolonial times to work with. Because of the oralate nature of precolonial Nigerian culture, he uses intralingual and intersemiotic translation in his study (Ajayi 2018, p. 21) to allow him to study oralate and multimedial communication. In the context of political communication in precolonial Nigeria, he focuses on the intralingual translation of 'oral forms [*that*] are expressed in esoteric and/or obscure language, requiring mediation on various levels and of different kinds' (ibid, p. 25) because of the fact that much of it was oracular in nature (ibid, 28). Further elaborating on a variety of divination practices, including the use of drumming, Ajayi (ibid, pp. 42-56) argues the necessity of a theory of intersemiotic translation for studying the development of national consciousness in Nigeria. On the one hand, the divination signs, as messages from the supernatural, have to be translated into ordinary language, and on the other hand, these translated messages need to be communicated via drums, among others, which also entail translating the messages into a different material form.[2]

To the data above, I could add recent work I have done on the 'linguist's staff' in which I argue that a significant part of communication in precolonial times in Africa took place through intersemiotic translation (Marais 2020), like it actually does in all contexts. While precolonial Africa was not without written texts, e.g. North Africa in ancient and Islamic times, Sub-Saharan Africa was dominated by oralate cultures during this time, and examples of 'translation proper" would be relatively scarce. However, this does not mean that precolonial Africans constructed meaning verbally only. The 'linguist's staff', as a symbol, was used to communicate without using words because the carved figures on the staff indexically referred to a particular proverb, without the proverb being recited verbally. By choosing a particular staff for a particular occasion, the 'linguist' translated the verbal message to be communicated into a visual one, hence multimodal communication.

The implication of Chibamba's and Ajayi's work is that multimodal communication is a fact of life when one considers development. This multimodal communication was inherent in oralate cultures, but it is also made possible, among others, by developments in computer technology in post-writing (postcolonial) cultures. Other reasons for considering intersemiotic translation practices are that language is not the only way in which humans communicate. It is well known that information is exchanged through all five senses, that human beings are able to interpret, for instance, facial expressions and gestures. Sociologists like Latour (2007) and philosophers like Searle (1995; 2010)have argued further that society and culture do not emerge from linguistic interaction only but from broader semiotic work.

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2   I should reference Talento's (2018) excellent PhD in which she studied, among others, precolonial translations in East Africa. This study shows that not all precolonial translation practices were oral and that East Africa had a written culture prior to colonization. The implication is that interlingual translation is not irrelevant to studying development, just that it cannot account for all features of development.

From the above, it seems reasonable to conclude that a theory of translation needs to conceptualise translation more broadly than interlingual translation. I turn to this in the next section. However, the semiotic work that underlies the emergence of society or culture is also broader than communication, as it includes the construction of meaning regardless of whether it is to be communicated (Marais 2019, pp. 148-9). Societies and cultures do not emerge only from the communication of existing ideas between people or between institutions, if you want to go the Luhmann way. Societies and cultures emerge from the semiotic work that relates human organisms to material reality, be that physics, chemistry, other organisms or technology, through the work that brings material reality into the understanding of human beings (Eco 1997; Latour 2007). This form of translation, which I called object translation, is what turns things in the world into objects of knowledge (Deely 2009), and as such, it is the basis of our relationship with reality. I also explore this in the following sections in more detail, but the point I wish to make here is that translation studies should not study communication only but also the creation of the ideas that are communicated. Semiosis and the translation process on which it depends are not limited to communication. Rather, communication is part of what happens in semiosis

The next question is, then: What does an expanded notion of translation entail?

3.   AN EXPANDED NOTION OF TRANSLATION

Jakobson's ([1959] 2004) distinction between intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic translation is well known in translation studies and cited often:

- Intralingual translation or *rewording* is an interpretation of **verbal** signs by means of other signs of the same language.

- Interlingual translation or *translation proper* is an interpretation of **verbal** signs by means of some other language.

- Intersemiotic translation or *transmutation* is an interpretation of **verbal** signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems. [emphasis on 'verbal' added by the author]

As I have argued elsewhere (Marais 2019; Marais & Kull 2016), this conceptualisation is based on Peirce's notion of translation, which states the following:

> […] conception of a 'meaning,' which is, in its primary acceptation, the **translation** of a sign into another system of signs […] (CP 4.127) [emphasis added by the author]

The glaring difference is that Peirce, for whichever reason (Marais 2019, pp. 14-16), did not restrict his thinking about translation so that it has to include language (i.e. verbal signs), either on the source or the target side of the equation – or both. I thus argue that Peirce provides a broader view of translation that is applicable to more practices, including those where language does not play any role. In fact, I would argue that Peirce's conceptualisation of translation would accommodate any translation, even machine translations produced by the products of information technology and artificial intelligence. In my discussion of translation (Marais 2019), which entails working out the full implications of the Peircean idea and rejecting the limited Jakobsonian one, translation is a technical term that refers to the semiotic work done on meaning, irrespective of the aim of this work. The aim of the translation work could be to create or to transfer meaning or to model reality or the like, but the underlying process, namely creating new interpretants by imposing constraints on the semiotic process, remains the same.

Translation thus refers first to a process, not a substance. The process can result in products or artefacts such as printed texts or musical scores or photos, but, in my view, the process is primary. This process entails work in that it is aimed at constraining the possible meanings that could be constructed from the presented set of signs.[3] The aim of this constraining process is to facilitate intersubjectivity or communication. The translation process is always a process in time because semiotics is subject to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which means that all states tend towards equilibrium unless work is performed on them. Just as one needs to constrain energy to be able to perform work with it, semiotic 'raw material' has to be constrained in order to communicate or understand or create new knowledge. This process of constraining semiotic material, or doing work with semiotic material, is what I call translation. It is an irreversible process, which is why one cannot do back translations that are exact replicas of source texts (see for instance Baker 2018, p. 7). Even copies made by a photocopier are not exactly the same because they have been made at a later point in time. In order to express this basic temporal nature of translation, I suggest replacing the terms source and target text with 'incipient sign system' and 'subsequent sign system' (Marais 2019, pp. 123-125). While this renaming does not solve the problem of binary thinking in translation studies, it at least addresses the dominance of the spatial understanding of translation (e.g. St André 2010).

An incipient sign system is not only or absolutely a source, if one understands source to mean that which gives rise to something else, or instance of origin. Rather, an incipient sign system is the effect of constraints that have been applied to semiotic material, structuring it in such a way that it constrains the possible meanings that a receiver could construct. It is also a constraint on the possible meanings that can be constructed from it. In this sense, it is the effect of semiotic work, i.e. translation, and the cause of semiotic work, i.e. translation. It is an emerging structure in a given moment in time, giving rise to further emerging structures or to be used to construct further structures. The source of any meaning lies either in the collective human semiotic process, to which Robinson (2016, pp. 183-200) refers as icosis, or in the constraints that are operative on a particular set of semiotic material. An incipient sign system is thus a moment in the semiotic process that had been stabilised, structured, formalised in time and that has a constraining effect of the subsequent meanings that emerge from their relationship to the incipient sign system. Though Nord (2001) put it in different terms, her notion of the source text as an offer of information on the basis of which the target text is created is apt in this context. The source text is not the determinant of the target text, but it offers existing semiotic material which serves as starting point for the emergence of more meaning (in another language, in this case). This also links with Lefevere's (1992) notion of rewriting. As Lefevere points out, reality offers many cases where one text is written based on a previous text or collection of texts (e.g. news bulletins, Van Rooyen 2019). This possibility is founded in the very working of semiosis, creating signs based on previous signs, ad infinitum.

The translation process could also, however, involve space. While the dominant notion of translation as transfer (carrying over) has been quite contested (e.g. Tymoczko 2007, pp. 54-106), translation does sometimes entail changes in space, but always changes in time.

The next question is then: What kind of process is translation? In my view, it is a semiotic process. Conceptualising translation semiotically means that one includes language but does not limit translation to language. Translation, seen semiotically, is a process that can be

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3   Literary texts play with this notion of constraints and even try to subvert it, but the very fact that literature tries to subvert it confirms the existence of constraints.

performed on any system of meaning, irrespective of the medium or modality of that meaning. Whether the meaning is in the form of sound, like speech, or in visual form, like writing, or in any other form does not matter. This theory of translation can account for all of these. This kind of thinking usually draws the point of critique that it turns everything into translation. That is not what I have in mind. What I have in mind is that all meaning-making and meaning-taking processes entail a translational aspect, and this translational aspect of all of reality is the interest of translation studies. Translating a photo into a dance entails many aspects, such as aspects of colour, space, movement, kinetics, aesthetics and muscle power. These are not translational in themselves. Rather, relating the colour in a photo to a movement in dance entails the translational aspect of the process. Thus, not everything is translation, but all meaning making has a translational aspect.

Translation is also a complex process. The processes of living organisms, including their semiotic processes, are complex because these are emergent, non-linear, sensitive to initial and boundary conditions, hierarchically nested and non-reductive (Deacon, 2013). This means that, even for interlingual translations, there is no one cause that can explain the translation and no translation has one effect only. Complex phenomena like translations are embedded in a complex web of cause and effect, i.e. non-linear and non-reductive. It also means that the outcome of a translation process cannot be predicted fully before it has been done, which is what is meant by calling it an emergent process. If you add one and one, you will always get two, but if you give someone the same text to translate, you might never get the same translation, depending on the length of the text, the time lapse between translations and other factors. Complexity thinking theoretically supports the well-known fact in translation studies that giving the same text to two persons of different ages or different genders or different socio-political background (which are initial conditions in complexity thinking parlance) might render widely differing end products, which means that translation is an emergent process that is sensitive to initial conditions Robinson 2011). Furthermore, complex processes like translation usually consist of parts and themselves are parts of larger wholes, i.e. they are hierarchically nested.

Based on the above, I suggest that we redefine translation as follows:

- *Translation is negentropic semiotic work aimed at constraining meaning-making processes in order to create social and cultural trajectories.*

This definition, which I worked out in detail elsewhere (Marais 2019), conceptualizes of translation as work performed on semiotic material to steer the semiosis in a particular direction or trajectory. For instance, combining colour and line in a painting in order to guide or steer the viewer in the direction of observing a woman rather than a man would be one case of such semiotic work, putting ideas into material form. As another example, changing poetic conventions in poetry to start a new aesthetic movement also entails semiotic work to create a trajectory or pattern. The semiotic work is done by constraining the initial possibilities. For instance, once a poet has decided to use the sonnet form, she is constrained by particular conventions concerning sonnets. In this way, each piece of semiotic work constrains what can follow.

To explore the implications of this conceptualisation further, I suggest that one considers the Peircean semiotic triad (left-hand triad, Figure 1). The representamen is the physical-material sign-vehicle that is perceivable via the senses, in this case the written word 'dog'. This representamen determines or constrains an object in such a way that an observer

can form an interpretant or meaning. By writing the word 'dog', a sign maker constrains the meaning-making options for a sign taker/interpreter. The interpreter can observe that the sign maker did not write 'hog' or 'hag' or 'don', which means that this particular set of material constraints performs the work of guiding the interpreter. In this sense, De Saussure's notion that synchronic difference in any semiotic system accounts for the meaningfulness of signs would be correct. The representamen is a difference that makes a difference. The word 'dog' refers to any concept of dog (or to any real dog), which is why I used a non-particular drawing here. If I were the interpreter, the interpretant would be 'My dog, Fido' because I am now thinking of a particular dog. The interpretant, 'My dog, Fido', then becomes the representamen in the next step in the interpretation process. My dog, Fido, is a rat terrier (photo in right-hand triad, Figure 1), and she makes me feel loved and protected). Figure 1 demonstrates, through the squiggly dotted line, the semiotic process where an initial representamen leads to an interpretant, which becomes a second interpretant, ad infinitum – unless the process is stopped for pragmatic reasons.
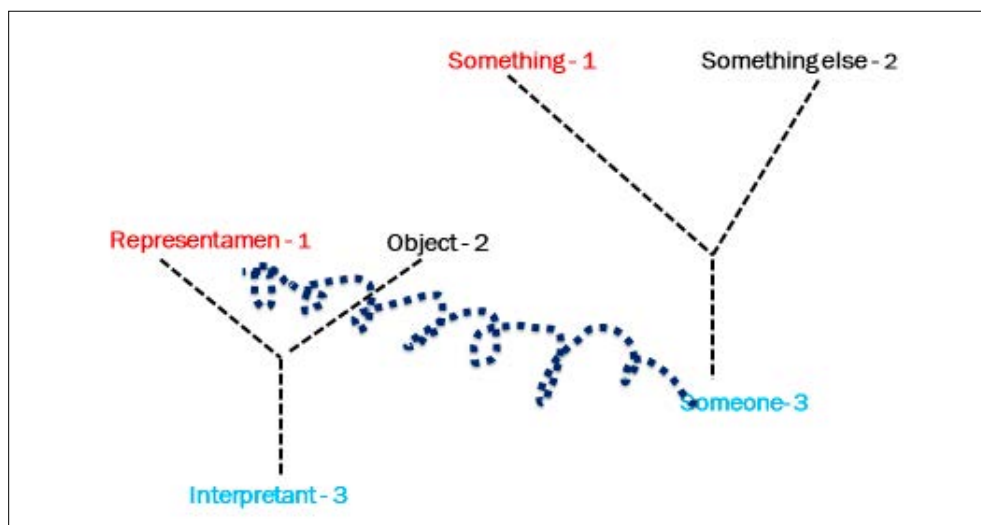

Figure 1: The Peircean semiotic triad

According to the definition above, any movement in time and space by any of the three components (representamen, object, interpretant) or any change to any one of the three components or any of the relationships between them constitutes a process of translation. This means that if the representamen is changed from sound waves (spoken words) to ink patterns (written words) one has a translation. It also means that if the representamen stays the same but the object changes, one has a translation. As an example, consider the word 'mouse' that is used for a rodent and for a piece of computer hardware. The meaning is translated because of a change in the object and thus in the relationship between representamen and object. My conceptualisation also means that a change to the interpretant entails a translation. Consider a Shakespeare play as a representamen that creates its object through the conventions of fiction writing. Now consider a reader, reading the same text as everybody before her, agreeing that the text refers to a particular object but deciding to interpret it differently. This is a translation process (for a detailed debate and alternative views

on this matter, see Marais 2019, pp. 11-82 as well as Eco 2001, 2004 and Steiner 1998). Put simply, a change to one is a change to all.

The point for my argument in this paper is that the representamens under consideration, in this case processes, practices and artefacts of development, could be anything. They need not be language. They could be dance, painting, architecture, social practices, agricultural practices, literally anything. For instance, scientific knowledge that is applied on a farm or in a factory or in the operating theatre undergoes a translation process. Management practice that is moved from a factory in Japan to a factory in South Africa undergoes a translation process. Cultural wisdom like *it takes a village to raise a child* that becomes the theme of a Hollywood movie undergoes a translation process. Political ideals like democracy that enters a previously colonial context like South Africa undergo a translation process.

4. WHAT IS DEVELOPMENT?

Development studies is a field of study that originated in the late 1960s, studying the phenomenon or idea of development, which was invented after World War 2 (see Coetzee, et al. 2001) for a detailed discussion about the history and trends of development). My point of entry in this chapter is Pieterse's (2010, p. 30) argument that development studies is in need of an encompassing semiotic theory. He makes this argument based on his analysis of trends in development studies. One of the main trends he identifies entails moving from a technical view of development in terms of macro-economic and macro-political changes to a view of development as a meaning-making response, performed by people or communities of people, to particular environmental constraints. In particular, theories of alternative development have focussed strongly on putting the meaningfulness of development initiatives on the table (Escobar 1995, p. 219). In Escobar's view, efforts to come up with alternatives to the neoliberal, Western notions of development entail a semiotic, meaning-making component. In particular, I draw from Olivier de Sardan's (2005) argument that development is not about all societies reaching the same end goal (usually what countries viewed as developed are now) or aspiring to be like the most successful economies or political systems. Rather, for him, development is an adaptation task, the need of all societies constantly to adapt to changing environments. This adaptation is, in Olivier de Sardan's view, a semiotic task, a task of making sense of the challenges and choosing meaningful responses. In his view, true development entails dealing with the meaning of the suggested changes, thinking it through and deciding whether it would be a beneficial adaptation under the current conditions.

In a co-authored article with Delgado Luchner (Marais & Delgado Luchner 2018), we combine Olivier de Sardan's views with the comparative views in traditional development thinking to suggest that development is an adaptive semiotic response under differential constraints. The notion of differential constraints is built on Salthe's (1993; 2009; 2012) notion of the hierarchical structuring of reality, which also leads to hierarchical observation. This means that, for every level of observation, one could construct a next lower level from which the level of observation emerges and a next higher level which constrains it. In development thinking, other countries or regional groupings would be a higher level that constrains the development of a particular country or community. We argue that a country like Namibia and a country like the UK both have development (adaptive) tasks confronting them, but under differential constraints. The UK develops from a much more powerful position than do Namibia (Marais & Delgado Luchner 2018, p. 383). The comparative aspect of development studies is thus

tweaked not to mean that 'developed' countries are the aim of 'developing' countries, but that some countries develop under more beneficial constraints than others.

In my view, the development of a society-culture is thus an adaptive semiotic response to a particular environment, which environment is constituted by other developing societies-cultures. The particular history or trajectory along which the particular society-culture has developed until the time of observation and the particular moment in history at which it is observed thus play a constraining role in that society-culture's development. Furthermore, the particular space in which it has to develop and the relative position of this space to other spaces of influence constrains its development. These factors, along with the myriad of lower-level factors such as social and intellectual capital, natural resources and the economic and political systems in a society-culture, all play a role in constraining its development. Development is thus a semiotic response to a variety of 'Others'. Development studies are conventionally interested in the interplay between economics, sociology and political science, and the fact that I understand development as a semiotic response does not rule out interest in the economic or political or sociological (or even technological) dimensions of development. Rather, as argued in the previous section, economics or politics or sociology all have semiotic aspects to them. From this perspective, economics entails meaning-making practices as far as means of living are concerned, and the logical implication would be that economics entail translation practices, which could be studied in translation studies. This is not the same as reducing economics to semiotics or translation. Rather, I argue that all aspects of society-culture have translational aspects, which should be studied in translation studies.

The (simplified) history of development studies could be viewed as a move from technical to human-centred conceptualisations of development (Nussbaum 2011; Nussbaum & Sen 1993). Part of this move, at which Pieterse (2010) hints, which has not yet been achieved is to try to understand the meaning of development, i.e. the semiotic dimension of development. Westoby (2013), Westoby and Dowling (2013) and Westoby and Kaplan (2014) have been working on a dialogic approach to community development, arguing that development practice should be dialogical, that development agents and the communities in which they work should negotiate the development process. I cannot fault these sentiments, save to argue that they need to be expanded to include all forms of meaning-making, not only verbal interaction. My claim is that development practitioners would benefit from semiotic knowledge and skills so that they are able to interpret the meaning of the practices they want to change with their development initiatives.

5. STUDYING THE MEANING OF DEVELOPMENT

The conceptual framework set out above raises a serious methodological problem for translation studies. If the translation process that one is studying includes language, one would be able, for instance, to study the lingual product or one could interview or observe the agents in the process. However, if the translation process does not include language, let us say from painting into dance or from theoretical knowledge into practice in the case of development, one needs a different methodology, for which sociology and anthropology have suggested alternative methods as I shall point out below. In the latter case, one does not have a lingual process to study, but one could still ask the agents in the process to explain the process, so you do have some access to the process. However, when you want to study the meaning of embodied social and cultural practices in order to understand the meaning

of development, you cannot ask the people involved with these practices to tell you, using language, what they are doing. The reason is that social and cultural practices are often embodied and take place at the level of tacit knowledge, embodied knowledge. This means that people may not be able to tell you why they do what they do simply because they do not 'know'. They do things the way they do because that is the way one does them. This is apart from the problem that asking people about something may bias their answer because they might suspect that you expect them to say something in particular.

The problem of tacit and embodied knowledge, or practice, has been on the agenda of anthropologists for very long. In order to overcome this problem, I thus suggest that translation studies turn to anthropology. In particular, Parmentier (2016) uses the Peircean notion of index in his methodology. Peirce conceptualised three types of relationship between the representamen and the object, namely iconic, indexical and symbolic relationships, which then allows one to identify three types of signs, namely icons, indexes and symbols. He defines an index as follows:

> I define an Index as a sign determined by its dynamic object by virtue of being in a real relation to it. Such is a Proper Name (a legisign); such is the occurrence of a symptom of a disease. (CP 8.335)

This means that an index is a representamen that stands in a real relationship to its object, in other words, the representamen and object are related because they stand in a cause-and-effect relationship or they are spatially contiguous so that the representamen points to the object. The 'real' thus refers to real cause and effect or real contiguity in space. This 'real' relationship between representamen and object with indexes would be in contrast to the relationship of resemblance in icons and the relationship of generality or law-likeness in symbols. In the case of a cause and effect relationship, a fever is the effect of the response of the body to the work of a virus or bacterium in an organism, thus being an index of the infection. The infection itself is not necessarily observable, but the fact that there is a fever points to the fact that there has to be some kind of infection. In the case of contiguity, a pointing finger is an index, pointing to the thing it wants to point out. In this case, the finger and the thing pointed at are spatially connected, not causally. A particular interesting index is the tracks left by an animal, human or vehicle. An expert tracker would be able to form a rich interpretant from a track, for instance inferring that the track was made by a lion, in particular a pregnant female, who walked in a particular direction at a (more or less) certain time. A skilled tracker would be able to infer even more information such as whether the lioness was healthy or tired and whether she was walking, jogging or running.

I am particularly interested in the cause and effect relationship in indexical signs. If one can take a track as the index of the animal or person or vehicle that caused it, one should also be able to take social or cultural practices/artefacts as the effects of the semiotic work that produced them. One could thus study the translation processes from which society/culture emerges by studying the indexicality of the products as traces of the processes that caused them. This would entail a process of inference, starting with the effect and making an argument about the cause(s). If one is able to be present at the time a semiotic process is playing out, one would also be able to study the processes themselves, focussing on what the process indexes about the values and ideas behind it. If society-culture, in particular as process or

development, is the effect of semiotic work, i.e. constraints on semiotic processes, it means that one would be able to interpret social-cultural phenomena as indexes of the semiotic processes, i.e. translations, which created them. A particular way of farming is the effect of generations of semiotic work, and before a development agency can move in and change it for the better (in their view), they would do well to understand the system of meaning behind the current practices. Even if they want to negotiate new developments with a community (Westoby 2013; Westoby & Dowling 2013), they need to understand the meaning of the practices they want to change. They also need to be able to explain the meaning of the new practices that they want to introduce.

Understanding the meaning of development is important because, as Olivier de Sardan (2005) points out, development always entails a clash of value systems or systems of meaning. In order to understand these systems of meaning, one needs some access to the semiotic processes behind current social/cultural practices.

Because the emergence of society-culture entails more than linguistic interaction, students of this emergence need to study the full scope of the semiotic work from which society-culture emerges. Such a framework provides one with a descriptive tool to account for the emergence of development processes, both on their own terms and comparatively. It also provides one with an interpretative tool with which to understand the emergence of development processes.[4] The comparative angle I suggest is not meant to be a normative comparison but a descriptive comparison, factoring in the differential conditions under which different societies/cultures need to develop (Marais & Delgado Luchner 2018)

The practical implications for development agents are that they would need time before the implementation of a project to sit with their partners and explore the meaning of existing practices. This practice is closely related to the dialogic approach to community development (Owen & Westoby 2012; Westoby 2013; Westoby & Dowling 2013; Westoby & Kaplan 2014), to which it adds the dimension of semiosis, expanding the narrowly linguistic approach of the authors. Development agents need to talk to the recipients, engaging in dialogue about the programs that they are suggesting. Owen and Westoby (2012, p. 307) suggest an initial dialogue at the start of a development process in order to clarify their intentions, position themselves regarding the expectations of the people they work with and negotiate common interests. In addition, I argue that it would be beneficial for the development process if these agents were also skilled in the ability to interpret the meaning of embodied practice and knowledge, able to interpret the meaning and value that practices have for communities.

To illustrate this idea, I respond to the data concerning one of the dialogues that Owen and Westoby (2012, p. 311-314) analyse. They present data from a dialogue that Paulo (a community development worker) had with a member of the community, Bruce:[5]

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4   One of the reviewers suggested that I take this argument further to suggest that the framework have predictive power. Because of the complexity assumptions with which I work, I am convinced that emergent social-cultural processes are not predictable because of (1) their sensitivity to initial conditions, (2) the role of constraints that are themselves emergent and (3) the uncertainty when more than two causal factors interact.

5   In the original, the narrative was dispersed through a number of pages of text. In order to clarify its relevance to my argument, I collated it here.

Narrative 1:

R1. [CDW/Paulo]: Hi my name is Paulo …, I am the new neighborhood worker employed at the local community center.

R2: [Bruce] Paulo, that center's been there for years – hasn't done any good in my opinion – we've still youth running riot, unemployment's high – you see all the rubbish on the street. The government's doing nothing.

R3.1 [Paulo/CDW] Sorry about all that, but as I was saying I'm new here and we're hoping to start a new project we want to get people involved in.

R3.2 [Paulo/CDW]: Seems like you've been living here for some time – could we have a coffee and you fill me in on the community issues?

R4. [Paulo/CDW]: So would you like to do something about one of those issues we've discussed?

R5. [Bruce]: Yeh, I guess I would if there were enough people to chip in and we could really make a difference. I'd love to be able to clean up the creek banks and walk along there without looking at all the rubbish. And maybe we could consider some regeneration of the river banks to stop the erosion.

R4. [Paulo/CDW]: So would you like to do something about one of those issues we've discussed?

R5. [Bruce]: Yeh, I guess I would if there were enough people to chip in and we could really make a difference. I'd love to be able to clean up the creek banks and walk along there without looking at all the rubbish. And maybe we could consider some regeneration of the river banks to stop the erosion.

R8. [Paulo/CDW]: Well why don't you do that. I'll talk with some of the folk I've met who might be interested. I'll also talk to my manager at the community center just to run it by them so that I could get involved.

R9. [Bruce]: Sounds great. ...

They demonstrate how Paulo engages by listening to Bruce and allowing him maximum agency in the process. While I cannot fault their suggestions, in my view, Paulo focuses too much on (rational) information and planning (action) and not enough on the values of the community and the meanings of certain practices that they want to promote. In particular, Paulo invites the community member (in turn R3.2) to 'fill me in on the community issues'. This is where a broader semiotic interest could contribute to understanding the way in which this community emerges through its semiotic work. At this point, adding questions about meanings and values to the questions about information and issues would enrich Paulo's understanding of the people he has to collaborate with and would prevent him from making the typical development mistakes of giving solutions that do not suit people. Paulo's semiotic work would include observing the community as they go about their practices, interpreting the social and material structures that they have put in place (or not put in place) in response to the environment they face. I am not claiming that an understanding of the underlying translation processes would solve all development problems, but that it could add to the intention in community development to drive these processes as human processes. Human processes are

never fully rational. Rather, they are entwined with emotions, values, assumptions, ideologies and judgements, to name but a few. In other words, human processes are semiotic in nature, being meaningful. If one then argues that development is a human process, it should imply that it is a semiotic process, too. I could perhaps formulate this better: Development processes have a human dimension, which means that they also have a semiotic dimension.

There might be cases where the solutions to development problems are so obvious that a fully semiotic analysis would just be bureaucratic schlepp, but then there would also be cases where the obvious is not the correct. For instance, in Paulo's case it might be valuable to understand why the previous community centre failed. To be clear, getting information like Paulo did is already a semiotic process, but it is a process limited to lingual interaction. Obtaining visual information, for instance, about artefacts and practices in the community and interpreting these as traces of meaning-making processes that caused them might provide a deeper understanding of the complexity (Kaplan, 2002) of development processes.

6. CONCLUSION

Studies on the relationship between translation and development would do well not to follow conventional translation studies in its linguicentric bias. Translation scholars, if they expand their notion of translation to include all semiotic processes, would be able to contribute significantly to the scholarly understanding of the emergence of society-culture. The expertise that they have built on the role of interlingual translation in the emergence of literary systems or cultural systems or even political systems could be transferred to study the role of all semiotic translation processes in the emergence of society-culture broadly speaking.

In particular, translation scholars who conceptualise translation semiotically rather than linguistically would be able to respond to Pieterse's (2010) call for a semiotic understanding of development. In a world that tends towards technique and planning as a technique, understanding is becoming increasingly important. Scholars and practitioners who are able to assist society-culture in understanding the meanings it makes, the reasons for those meanings and the possible changes to those meanings in order better to adapt to its environment will contribute to keeping society-culture humane. Like the subtitle of Henning and Scarfe's (2013) book on biosemiotics aims at 'putting life back into biology', a semiotic approach to development could put 'meaning back into development'.

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