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TRANSLATION STUDIES CONCEPTS: THEIR CONTEXTS OF CONCEPTION AND USE

ABSTRACT

In an attempt to address the title, this article will follow two lines of inquiry. It firstly will trace the development of several key concepts in Translation Studies and ethnography and show how these concepts have shifted in terms of interpretation and scope over time depending on the broader contexts in which they were used. In each case, the concepts were derived from observation of and reflection on translation. The paper will also point to theorization in anthropology (perhaps in contrast to philology) and how it stems directly from ethnographic observation and study in which translation plays an important role. In doing so, the paper will argue that these local insights have considerable staying power and theoretical reach, precisely because they are grounded in the lived experience that sustains them, which perhaps will make them adaptable in other places and situations far beyond their 'origin' or the place where the seed of insight germinated. This is considered important in relation to the theme of the special issue, namely community interpreting and translation in the African context, as many concepts emerge from studies of communities and their cultural contexts. Secondly, the paper draws on and discusses ethnographic data of translational practices in a social housing scheme to shed new light on intralingual translation as conceptualized by Jakobson (1959) and set out in a model by Korning Zethsen (2009). The data also illustrates how the various elements of intralingual translation belong in a broader economy of exchanges in the housing scheme.

Keywords: *translation studies, ethnography, community interpreting and translation, situatedness*

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper builds on the keynote given online at the 2021 ATSA conference at the University of Ghana. The title of the conference was Community Translation/Interpreting in the African context. This is important to mention, because the scholarship presented at the conference went a long way towards placing African translation studies on the map, as will other conferences to follow. Various ways of conceptualizing the African context, also in relation to translation, had already been suggested by African scholars at the 2018 ATSA conference. As I mainly approach translation (studies) from an ethnographic perspective, my contribution could not pretend to offer any insight on the African perspective, as I



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have never conducted any studies in an African country. Nevertheless, I was kindly invited by the organisers to give a keynote at the conference, for which I am eternally grateful. This was a truly daunting task. How could I do so as an European, while at the same time remaining sensitive to the many issues involved? In terms of scale how could I, in addressing the theme of the conference, move from “community” to “the African context” without getting stranded in generalities and commonplaces? What I could do, however, was to address such notions as “community” and “context” quite squarely and hope by a process of analogy that something of relevance to the African context could be transferred, analogy also being a form of translation (Even-Zohar 1990, Gal 2015). This would involve readers identifying similar translation and interpreting processes in their own communities and conceptualizing them in a way that pays full regard to the communities and contexts from which they emerge. This is common practice in ethnography, as the discussion in sections 2 & 3 of the article will illustrate.

The task then was to show how well-known key concepts emerged from the communities and contexts in which they were conceived and then trace a very brief history of these concepts (Susam-Sarajeva 2006). Another part of the task was to show how findings from non-professional (community) translation and interpreting practices at a social housing scheme (context) can be used to sharpen and extend the focus of an existing concept (Jakobson, 1959) and a model built upon it (Korning Zethsen, 2009).

Section 1 of the article will address a well-known pair of concepts commonly used in Translation Studies. Section 2 will address a number of concepts that originated in anthropology and that have since moved out and been adopted in various fields in the humanities. The link between translation and ethnography¹ has been there from the very outset, as will become evident in the discussion in this section. It is also argued that the origins of these concepts have played a vital role in their staying power and (troubled) histories. Section 3 will treat findings from an ethnographic study of non-professional interpreting and translation at a social housing scheme to illustrate how such findings can help us sharpen the focus on an existing concept and related model in TS. This is the section in which translation (studies) and ethnography come together. In this section, a TS model is used to explicate ethnographic data and data is used to further sharpen and increase the social relevance of a TS model. Section 3 will be followed by a Conclusion in which a few tentative comments will be made. Put briefly, the article wishes in its argument to stress the relevance of the following three issues:

1. where we are theorizing **from**;
2. the versatility of **rather old** concepts;
3. the **conceptual importance** of being somewhere.

2. SECTION 1 THE LEGACY OF FRIEDRICH SCHLEIERMACHER (1768–1834)

Friedrich Schleiermacher’s legacy is far too vast to cover here. Suffice it say that he was an eminent theologian and is considered the founder of hermeneutics. This section only deals with an important distinction he made in relation to translation, namely what he calls “*Verfremdung*” and “*Einbürgerung*.” He proposed these two ways of translating in a lecture ‘On the Different Methods of Translating’ (‘Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens’), which he delivered at the Berlin Academy of Sciences in June 1813. André Lefevere’s English translation (1977) was then picked up by Lawrence Venuti. The translation inspired Venuti to

¹ For a more detailed discussion see Flynn (2010, 2018) and Flynn in Meylaerts & Marais (2023) (forthcoming). For a study of translation, ethnography and the museum see Sturge (2007).

became the champion of Schleiermacher's distinction in his controversial book (Venuti 1998) in which he challenges the translation policy of American book publishers. Venuti rendered the two German terms in English as foreignization and domestication, but they could have just as easily been translated as "alienation" and "naturalisation." Both pairs of concepts fit Venuti's definition (borrowing from Schleiermacher): the former in each being that of bringing the reader closer to the author and the latter in each of bringing the author close to the reader. Moreover, naturalisation is more commonly used in other languages than English and as a result also in English,² and invokes notions of acceptance and inclusion in a nation. Alienation in contrast invokes that sense of estrangement one experiences on reading a work from another culture. Hence alienation and naturalization create a slightly different set of conceptual associations than the ones commonly linked to foreignization and domestication. Venuti has argued in favour of foreignization precisely to show the foreign origins of the works being translated (Venuti 1998), which is laudable in itself but not as obvious to achieve as it seems.

To recapitulate, here is Schleiermacher's famous proposal (in Lefevere's English translation):

'In my opinion there are only two roads. Either the translator leaves the writer in peace as much as possible and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer towards him. The two roads are so completely separate from each other that the one or the other must be followed as closely as possible and that a highly unreliable result would proceed from any mixture, so that it is to be feared that the author and reader would not meet at all' (Lefevere in Weissbort & Eysteinsen 2006:207).

It is clear from this quote that Schleiermacher is proposing two ways of translating. At the same time, much depends on what is meant by "as much as possible." Under "as much as possible," we can draw up a long list at the top of which are differences in language system, culture, etc. In a similar vein, Venuti's stance also led to a huge polemic on the meaning of the terms, (Paloposki 2011) but, as can be noted from the above quote, strictures of the polemic were already there in Schleiermacher's work: "as much as possible" is an extremely large grey area that needs a lot of clarification, not least in terms of methodology.

Furthermore, in constructing his argument, Schleiermacher sets different tasks for interpreters and translators. The former are involved in the immediate job of business and diplomacy and the latter with more elevated and specialised work in the arts and sciences (Schleiermacher 1963:1-2). As Theo Hermans points out in his insightful chapter on Schleiermacher (Hermans 2016:27-27):

"The dichotomy, [foreignization/domestication] however, is not real. The second option [domestication] is mentioned only to be dismissed ... [the first follows] his own conviction, which affirms the principle of essential identity between thought and expression – and this conviction forms the basis for the entire art of understanding speech and thus of all translation as well."

Hence, Schleiermacher's real focus regarding the translator was that of bringing the reader closer to the author. So in terms of relations, the translator is involved with (the work of) creative writers and scientists, writers and scientists being the foremost representatives of a culture or nation, which was in keeping with the Romantic view of the time. Moreover, his views

2 Since English paradoxically is the main language of publication in Translation Studies.

on the different methods of translation must also be understood as the logical consequence of his theory of language and of hermeneutics, (the theory of interpretation):

- a. "Hermeneutics is strictly the theory of understanding linguistic communication—as contrasted, not equated, with explicating, applying, or translating it.
- b. Hermeneutics should be a universal discipline—i.e., one that applies equally to all subject areas (such as the Bible, law, and literature), to oral as well as to written language, to modern texts as well as to ancient ones, to works in one's own language as well as to works in foreign languages, and so forth." (Forster 2017)

Understanding linguistic communication hence precedes translation, which is sound advice for any translator and offers a clear solution in terms of methodology. However, if "bringing the reader closer to the author" was Schleiermacher's main concern in translation, how come the dichotomy (foreignization and domestication) is still very much alive today, despite his rejection of its second part. Perhaps it is because each is still considered a viable method of translation, no matter what either might mean.

Schleiermacher's methods are in fact prescriptive, much like many other methods proposed before the advent of Descriptive Translation Studies (Toury 1995, *inter alia*). Despite his good intentions, Venuti's advocacy of the use of foreignization is also somehow prescriptive, even though it comes after the empirical shift brought about by Descriptive Translations Studies (DTS). But there is still a huge difference between using foreignization and domestication as translation methods and considering them as concepts that can be used as methodological tools to investigate existing translations. Viewed historically, I suggest that this only became possible and happened following the acceptance of the empirical underpinnings of DTS. Only then did foreignization and domestication become concepts and hence possible tools of investigation. In fact, both concepts are certainly easy to use in analysing existing translations. However, an analysis of any translation will show that instances of both are always present, despite Venuti's plea and also much to the frustration of young scholars who go in search of foreignization alone.

Many translations continue to be studied in terms of foreignization and domestication. For example, Bajčić & Dobrić Basaneže (2021) used the terms to study a corpus of European Union legal translations. At the same time, scholars are aware that setting up dichotomies of this type³ is problematic, not only because of the "either/or" thinking they invariably force upon us, and indeed even upon Schleiermacher in terms of the two roads he proposes, but also because of the assumptions such dichotomies are built on. In this respect in relation to literary translation, Cussel (2021) critiques foreignization and domestication for what she calls their "methodological nationalism." Schleiermacher would have had no problem with nationalism, but times have changed, and scholars have become increasingly aware of the unspoken nationalist underpinnings of these and other terms like "system," for example (*viz.* Simeoni's critique of the term in Pym et al. 2008:339).

The move away from prescriptivism brought about by Descriptive Translation Studies resulted in prescriptive notions being repurposed and harnessed for empirical studies, but as can be seen from the discussion above, the terms still carry their conceptual origins with them. However, translation corpora have also allowed us to test the analytical viability of former prescriptive notions, as Bajčić & Dobrić Basaneže's study illustrates. The concepts discussed

3 There are many more in TS, some of which go back to the beginnings of European thinking on translation: *viz.* St Jerome's distinction between "word for word" and "sense for sense."

in the next section have had a less troublesome though equally interesting historical journey through scholarship, albeit shorter by more than a century.

3. SECTION 2 THE LEGACY OF BRONISLAW MALINOWSKI

The two concepts discussed in this section are “context of situation” and “context of culture.” They were not posited as a dichotomy but rather as terms that fitted into and complemented each other. They have a very different genesis to the ones discussed in the previous section. Schleiermacher arrived at his methods through considerable reflection based on textual and philological scholarship. In contrast, Bronislaw Malinowski arrived at his concepts through reflection on ethnographic observation and encounters with the peoples of the Trobriand Islands. Each scholar was involved with meaning, though from quite different perspectives. Translation was pivotal for both, however.

Malinowski was invited to write a supplementary essay for a book by C. K. Ogden & I. A. Richards⁴ called *The Meaning of Meaning: a study of the influence of language on thought and of the science of symbolism* [1923]. The title is quoted in full here to draw attention to the fact that, like Schleiermacher much earlier, the authors were interested in the relation between language and thought, but also in the study of signs (symbolism) or what is now known as semiotics.

Like Schleiermacher, Malinowski was also inquiring into the relation between language and thought, but then across languages and cultures⁵ and hence was struggling with how to convey this through translation. Here is a quote from Malinowski’s supplement to the book:

“The ethnographer has to convey the deep yet subtle difference of language and of the mental attitude which lies behind it and is expressed through it⁶.” (Malinowski in Ogden & Richards [1923]1946: 300)

He provides us with this interlinear gloss to illustrate his struggle:

Tasakaulo	kaymatana	yakida;	
We run	front-wood	ourselves;	
tawoulo	ovanu;	tasivila	tagine
we paddle	in place;	we tum	we see
soda;	isakaulo	ka’u’uya	
companion ours;	he runs	rear-wood	
oluvieki	similaveta	Pilolu	
behind	their sea-arm	Pilolu	

(interlinear gloss, Malinowski in Ogden & Richards [1923]1946:301)

4 This is also the author of *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924), the founder of Practical Criticism who spurred on New Criticism in the USA and such critical notions as “the words on the page”, and “close reading,” from which Deconstruction took its lead.

5 Welche ursprünglich vielleicht um den Durchmesser der Erde von einander entfernt sind (who are in origin probably the diameter of the earth removed from each other“ As Schleiermacher put it (Schleiermacher 1963:1).

6 Is this not what a translator is confronted with and constantly has to do?

Malinowski spends a full 7 pages discussing this gloss and then states the following:

All this shows the wide and complex considerations into which we are led by an attempt to give an adequate analysis of meaning. Instead of translating, of simply inserting an English word for a native one, we are faced by a long and not altogether simple process of describing wide fields of custom, of special psychology and of tribal organisation which correspond to one term or another. We see that linguistic analysis inevitably leads us into the study of all subjects covered by Ethnographic fieldwork.

Here we can witness how he moved back and forth from the words on the page (of his fieldnotes) to the complexity of the interaction he had witnessed and participated in. He is telling us that there is more involved than denotational meaning or “of inserting simply an English word for a native one.” He is showing us how the utterance indexes a whole set of cultural practices that are tied to the context of their utterance. The comments stemming from his attempt to provide an “adequate analysis of meaning” are not unlike those underlying the basic realisation,⁷ arrived at so many years later, that led to the cultural turn in Translation Studies, i.e. that there is more to language than the words on the page and that this has to be translated too. It was his attempt to provide an “adequate analysis of meaning” that led him to formulate an important concept in this regard:

Again, it is equally clear that the meaning of the expression ‘we arrive near the village (of our destination)’ literally, ‘we paddle in place,’ is determined only by taking it in the context of the whole utterance. This latter again, becomes only intelligible when it is placed within its **context of situation**, if I may be allowed to coin an expression which indicates on the one hand that the conception of context has to be broadened and on the other **that the situation in which words are uttered can never be passed over as irrelevant to the linguistic expression**. (Malinowski [1923]1946: 305-306): “Context of Situation” – bold inserted here for purposes of emphasis)

Positing the notion of “context of situation” and recognising the importance of context⁸ for meaning making caused Malinowski to reflect further and make a striking remark on the conceptual tools that had been developed till then to study languages:

But the widened conception of context of situation yields more than that. It makes clear the difference in scope and method between the linguistics of dead and of living languages. The material on which almost all our linguistic study has been done so far belongs to dead languages.⁹ It is present in the form of written documents, naturally isolated, torn out of any context of situation. (Malinowski in Ogden & Richards [1923]1946: 306)

7 Delabastita and Grutman state that it was José Lambert who put this in motion in 1978: “...José Lambert, for instance, underscored the “cultural necessity of translation”, and stated in no uncertain terms that “la traduction doit être considérée non pas comme une question purement linguistique, mais comme une question culturelle” (Delabastita & Grutman 2021:12).

8 It must be pointed out that context is a basic component of Peirce’s semiotic model and is absent from de Saussure’s model.

9 It must also be pointed out that Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics was based initially on the study of the classical and sacred texts.

This remark and the reasoning involved bears considerable similarity to one made by Vološinov only a few years later:

We can state outright: linguistics makes its appearance wherever and whenever philological need has appeared. Philological¹⁰ need gave birth to linguistics, rocked its cradle, and left its philological flute wrapped in its swaddling clothes. That flute was supposed to be able to awaken the dead. But it lacked the range necessary for mastering living speech as actually and continuously generated. (Vološinov ([1929] 1986: 71)

It took some time before language would be investigated as a living organism, so to speak. This happened beyond the realm of formal linguistics and generative grammar in the work of Sacks, Labov, Schegloff, Hymes, Gumperz and Garfinkel, to name but a few.¹¹ In discussing an ethnographic theory of language¹² in a 1935 publication, Malinowski then points to a further encompassing form of context which he calls “context of culture”:

We see then that it is impossible to define a word by mere equation. Translation in the sense of an exact and exhaustive definition of meaning cannot be done by affixing an English label. Our paradoxical heading ‘Translation of Untranslatable Words’ is obviously based on a two-fold use of the term ‘translate’. If we understand by ‘translate’ the finding of verbal equivalents in two different languages, this task is impossible, and the Italian adage *traduttore, traditore* holds good. Translation in the sense of defining a term by ethnographic analysis, that is, by placing it within its **context of culture**, by putting it within the set of kindred and cognate expressions, by contrasting it with its opposites, by grammatical analysis and above all by a number of well-chosen examples such translation is feasible and is the only correct way of defining the linguistic and cultural character of a word. (Malinowski 1935:17)

These are very insightful remarks and would have proved useful in the debate on equivalence back in the day. The fact that context of situation and context of culture emerged from observations on translation would seem to make them ideal candidates for use in Translation Studies. The concepts would also offer us considerable methodological leverage when it comes to giving analytical form to the notion of cultural translation, something we will return to below. However, their close connection with translation at their point of origin faded into the background as the concepts began their journey beyond Malinowski’s work.

They were first picked up by John Rupert Firth (1890-1960), a student of Malinowski’s and introduced into the broader field of (socio)linguistics. After Firth, The scholar (a student of Firth’s) most associated with “context of situation” and “context of culture” is M.A.K. Halliday, the founder of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), who, it must be stressed, considers language a “social semiotic system.” By this stage, translation as such has all but vanished from view. The concepts were used effectively within the SFL framework to encompass aspects of language use, language in this case almost always being English, but not exclusively so. So the pivotal translational function of the terms were now squarely embedded in a new monolingual monocultural analytical model.

10 In *le Sens Pratique*, Bourdieu draws on what he calls Vološinov’s remarks on “philologism” to demonstrate how the struggle to ascribe one true meaning to a word means turning it into an instrument of power, etc. (Bourdieu 1980: 34-35)

11 See Stef Slembrouck’s website for a detailed discussion: <https://www.english.ugent.be/da>

12 Viz. Dell Hymes’s work on what he called “the ethnography of speaking” which began in the 1960s.

This does not mean the SFL has not been used as an approach to translation. The Translation Studies bibliography returned 64 hits for SFL, which is used actively by such renowned translation scholars as Jeremy Munday and Juliane House (in the same volume, 2022) and Sandra Halverson (2015), among others. Context of situation and context of culture are still part of the SFL apparatus, but I wonder whether the concepts might not be used with more purpose if translation scholars were more aware of their origins. Perhaps they already are, in which case I will leave things as they are. Instead we can return to cultural translation where I believe they can also be of use. The term cultural translation is originally part and parcel of ethnographic inquiry (Marcus 1998:186) and moved to Translation Studies about the turn of century. Ethnography had developed its own understanding of (cultural) translation and various means of dealing with it (see Silverstein in Rubel & Rosman 2003, for example). In the meantime, there has been considerable debate on the term: viz. Forum on Cultural Translation (2009-2010) in the journal *Translation Studies*. Here is a pointed quote from Maria Tymoczko on the notion of translation in anthropology:

Many fields have been tempted to latch onto terms meaning “translation” as an ostensibly easy way out of their theoretical problems, not realizing how complex textual translation is and how many theoretical problems the subject brings with it. Ethnographers and anthropologists have already gone down that road and found it a dead end: attempting to appropriate (textual) translation as a model for their own disciplines has not substantially illuminated their own processes, nor has it solved theoretical problems in their own domains.

It may not be as cut and dried as all that. The thing is, it was Malinowski’s acute awareness and experience of “how complex textual translation is” that led him to coin such notions as “Context of Situation” and “Context of Culture.” This has surely become clear from the discussion so far. He certainly did not arrive at them by pondering and debating what cultural translation might mean and how to define it outside of the contexts he identifies in his work. Even if we manage to find a viable definition for the term, we are still confronted with the unwieldy task of analysing translations in terms of “cultural translation.” Malinowski’s concepts would go a long way towards helping us, even outside their current SFL framework, especially given their “translational” origin. They certainly would have made arguments against “purely” linguistic translation redundant, if such a thing ever even existed. As Malinowski once put it:

But it is the insistent linking up of ethnographic descriptions with linguistic analysis which provides language with its cultural context and culture with its linguistic reinterpretation (Malinowski (5) in Summary of Part IV 1935:72)

Once again, it is worth noting that this is very much what translators are involved in on a daily basis. The fact that these concepts grew out of lived experience and engagement with language use and translation in cultural context has given them a long lease of life, something that makes them worth revisiting from a TS point of view. They are still with us a century later but unfortunately are far less conspicuous than foreignization and domestication.

Sections 1 and 2 provided brief sketches of the genesis and trajectory of two sets of terms that are of relevance to Translation Studies. The following section takes another tack and, instead of examining the respective histories of concepts, it will look at how a given TS concept and a model built on it can help us frame and understand translation and interpreting practices in a given situation and cultural context. By extension it will hopefully show how observations from that situation and context can reveal new ways of understanding and applying the model.

4. SECTION 3 TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETING AT A SOCIAL HOUSING SCHEME

As was mentioned in the introduction, the focus in this section is on intralingual translation (Jakobson 1959). Though Jakobson did indeed formulate the notion, it does not mean that others had not thought about before him. Commenting in 1813 on the many forms translation can take, Schleiermacher (1963:1) notes the following:

so on the other hand, we need not go beyond the confines of a given language to encounter the same phenomenon ... even contemporaries, who are not separated by a dialect but hail from different social classes and are not connected through their education or social contact may only understand each other through a similar sort of mediation.¹³

It is clear from the quote that Schleiermacher was already aware of the sociolinguistic and other social differences that necessitate intralingual translation, something that will also emerge from the analysis below. To explore intralingual translation and interpreting in the context of a social housing scheme in the city of Ghent (Belgium), we will draw on the various elements identified by Korning Zethsen (2009) in her description of the phenomenon. We will also draw on “forgotten” aspects of context as elements of social structure (Blommaert 2001) to further explicate the findings from the data.

The block of high-rise flats where the study took place has since been demolished and replaced by new low-rise housing. The community the block once housed has since been scattered and resettled. This draws our attention to a “forgotten” element of context (the third of three) or what Blommaert called “data histories”: “The time, place and occasion at which data are being gathered have an effect on the data: they are what they are because they occurred in that shape in that context” (Blommaert 2001: 21). We tend to think of communities as permanent entities but the people who participated in the events described below now live elsewhere and their “community” has been dispersed.

The data drawn on for this study comprise an in-depth interview with an artist/leader of a self-help project, documentation, recordings, and a book and documentary issued by the group. Extracts from the data will be used to illustrate and comment on Zethsen’s model and further show that the translation activity in the building belongs to a larger economy of practices. More specifically we will examine extracts from a long narrative on translation in the building, and observations of translation practices. All of the data, comments and observations have been translated¹⁴ from Dutch into English to make them accessible for a broader readership.

Before continuing, we will first outline a typical morning activity in the flats. Flat dwellers met at the letterboxes in the entrance hall and waited for the post. When the post arrived letters were either brought to a person’s flat or opened and read and translated on the spot by neighbour(s), depending on the difficulty/sensitivity of the correspondence involved. The translators (fellow flat dwellers) then told the other dwellers in dialect, or a form of basic English what a given letter (in standard Dutch) was about and what course of action to take: pay a service bill by a certain date, contact social services, pay insurance, go to the police station, etc. If there was a difficult issue involved, the translation was done in someone’s flat. One flat dweller had developed his own writing system which consisted of icons, numbers,

13 My translation with the help of DeepL.

14 There is a certain irony to all of this, which will certainly not escape the majority of people publishing in **English in Translation Studies**.

drawings and a grid. He used the system to note basic information on the opened envelopes after translation, including the type of bill, the amount to be paid and the due date for payment. He used a drawing of a bulb for the electricity bill, a flame for the gas bill, a tap for the water bill, etc. The grid had a vertical line for each day and a horizontal line through them to set off a.m. and p.m., and this was used to mark the day and approximate time of payment. This type of activity happened as a matter of course as part of the exchanges in the building. Languages services of this type were compensated for in various ways (doing odd jobs, repairs, running errands, giving short-term loans, etc., (Mauss: 2016)) by those who received them such that a sense of equality was maintained throughout. The logic was that some people are good at some things and others at other things and that is the way things work. Speaking of the people in the building, the artist put it this way:

“Yeah, yeah, that’s what they want, in fact, that it’s recognised, no matter how little it is, that they can pay for it and that we are working in a sort of egalitarian economy. That really struck me.”

As part of the project¹⁵ he was involved in with the residents in the building, he asked them to read little stories written by other people in the building. One woman was struggling with reading the story in Standard Dutch, so he asked her to read it out in her own dialect. This was his comment on the interaction, which he expresses in terms of translation:

And she’s the one who says at the beginning of the documentary: I’m going to say it in ‘Ghents’, because the texts she read in Dutch were no good, they didn’t sound credible and were very gloomy and that was because she was struggling with that Standard Dutch. So, I erased the recordings and then said to her: “ok, tell us in your own dialect.” And then it all fell into place, and it sounded great So, “taligheid” (having/possessing language/ being articulate) starts there. That’s where the matter and question of translation begins and yes (pause) credibility too, because for me as an actor/playwright it’s mainly credibility that’s important, much more than the correctness of the translation or the correctness of the word; it’s about how good someone feels in that language and how fluent and credible it is.

In this quote the artist takes the matter of translation beyond correctness and the use of standard language to point out other aspects of meaning-making - that of an indexical order and having to do with sounding credible and authentic. What is important for him is the “translation” of credibility and authenticity into verbal expression. At the same time, it is clear from this brief sketch and the quotes from the interview that the intralingual translation taking place in the building largely stems from literacy issues or what the artist calls “textual poverty:”

Interview Extract 1

S: And this belongs together with an abysmal poverty – and I can’t express it any other way – a poverty of text. So, it is not because people get a monthly allowance, have running water and electricity and a roof over their heads – that’s not enough. No, sometimes it’s not even about that; “taligheid” (having/possessing language/ being articulate) is also part of it, knowledge of who we are, of what’s going on in the neighbourhood, of the circumstances we live in, in order to make sure that those people can stay out of trouble. Many problems come about because people in fact have a sort of non-understanding of what’s going on around them, a non-understanding of why decisions are taken in the city about their own buildings; and this brings about terrible dissatisfaction and friction and

15 This was made into a documentary: here is a short excerpt <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6zGwoaFewE>

often it is us in society who fail in what we provide in terms of social services. We fail miserably, because the idea probably is 'they probably know that already' or 'that's not important' or 'we can always send them a letter when it gets that far or something like that' ... People... the language with which people are approached passes completely above their heads. This is not a single ..., for example, people who wrote letters daily to people living in social housing, they fell over backwards when they discovered the literacy issues in the building.

I: Yes, so they are what used to be called underprivileged?

S: Yes, yes! There is this textual poverty. And by textual I mean cultural text. This ranges from not being able to read what is hung up in the hall, because they can't read or because they are not used to reading, to ... that they would rather believe what the neighbour says about why they are demolishing the housing blocks rather than have access to decent media and get the right information themselves.

This extract is a perfect illustration of the first of Blommaert's three forgotten contexts: resources

Speakers can/cannot speak varieties of languages, they can/cannot write and read, and they can/cannot mobilize specific resources for performing specific actions in society. And all these differences – different degrees of proficiency ranging from 'not at all' to 'full mastery' of codes, language varieties and styles – are socially consequential: resources are hierarchized in terms of functional adequacy, and those who have different resources often find that they have unequal resources, because access to some rights and benefits in society is constrained by access to specific communicative (e.g. narrative) resources (Blommaert 2001: 21)

The encounters at the letterboxes bring Blommaert's words into very sharp focus but the sense of equality that reigns in the building backgrounds this obvious lack of resources by accentuating other resources and skills these people possess.

We will now attempt to frame the activity at the letterboxes in translational terms. Firstly, it involves intralingual translation which Jakobson defines as follows: "intralingual translation or rewording* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language" (Jakobson (1959:233). This instance involves the rewording of written Standard Dutch (correspondence) into oral Ghent dialect (a variety of Dutch) and also into the flat dweller's sign system, which perhaps could be classified as inter-semiotic translation, the third of Jakobson's triad of translational forms.¹⁶ The source texts range from service bills to letters from the police, insurance companies, etc., to other forms of official written discourse in Standard Dutch. The target texts were read and mediated orally through the local interpreter/ translator and include sets of instructions¹⁷ also transcribed into the flat dweller's sign system. The medium comprises spoken interpretation of written discourse, and from there in one flat dweller's case, back to written translation in a new sign system. The activity at the letterboxes revealed "hidden" intralingual translation in the multilingual context of the housing scheme, which housed people from all over Europe and beyond.

16 Marais would group the three under the term intersystemic translation (Marais 2019: 61)

17 This would fit perfectly into Vermeer's Skopos theory.

In relation to the above, we have pointed to the interdependence between this intralingual translation and forms of compensation for these language services that form part of a local economy of exchanges. Attention has also been drawn to connections between formats of text presentation and types of intralingual translation that stem from a lack of access to these formats, or what the artist called 'textual poverty.' We have also shown that literacy issues, and a lack of access to "standard language" underly the intralingual translation involved. This can also be understood as intralingual translation between different registers (often studied as expert-to-lay translation and interpreting), resulting from an unequal social distribution of repertoires (Gumperz, 1964 & Hymes 1972).

We will now examine the intralingual activity at the letterboxes in terms of Korning Zethsen's description of intralingual translation. Zethsen identifies 4 pertinent elements involved in (Intralingual) translation, namely "Knowledge", "Time", "Culture" and "Space". (Korning Zethsen, 2009). These four elements are usually understood in the following way. Firstly, knowledge is often explained in terms of knowledge differential. For example, the knowledge available in scientific journals would have to be translated intralingually to make it accessible for a broader readership; take popular science articles in newspapers for example. Time is usually understood in historical terms, as in translating texts from an older variety of a language, Middle English into Modern English,¹⁸ for example. Culture involves explaining cultural references that people who share a language may not understand because they come from different cultural backgrounds, American versions of English books being a case in point. The fourth element, space often involves the reduced amount of space afforded to transforming a full article in an academic journal into a newspaper article, for example.

In relation to our case, these elements take on a more urgent form. Knowledge and gaining access to it through (intralingual) translation is not designed to teach us about new developments in science, for example. However, it may be of critical importance to the person receiving the knowledge. This is closely linked to the second feature, time (after gaining knowledge). Time here is no longer historical but is understood as timespan, i.e. the amount of time needed once the knowledge has been transferred through translation and the degree of urgency involved in paying bills and staying out of debt, keeping appointments with social services, making sure you go to the police station at the appointed time. Culture in turn also involves distance but here a distance from, or a lack of access to cultural resources, stemming from the marginalisation of residents in the block of flats. Space then is not just the reduced amount of it on a page as being emblematic of a larger whole (of knowledge) that can be sought out by those who are curious and wish to improve their knowledge on a given subject. In this case, it involves making sense of signs in the building, for example, and, as a result, the sources of information they index in the larger world, like who to contact, where to go, what to do, etc. What we witness here are the context-specific purposes and meanings of these 4 elements and not what they might mean at some abstract illustrative level.

To return to Malinowski's "context of situation," it is important to reiterate part of the quote in section 2, i.e. "that the situation in which words are uttered can never be passed over as irrelevant to the linguistic expression." (Malinowski [1923]1946: 305-306). This also applies to everyday translation. Blommaert's forgotten forms of context (Blommaert 2001) helped sharpen our view of the translational activity involved and understand its causes. This contextualization also helped us sharpen the focus of Zethsen's model (Korning Zethsen 2009). In relation to "context of culture," it is hopefully clear from our case that the socio-economic order underlying

18 Something Tolkien was an expert in.

a given culture also has to be addressed. This order has pushed the people in the flats into marginalisation but did not stop them from setting up their own economy of exchanges in their daily lives in the building, an economy that was based on equality.

5. CONCLUSION

This article has tried to make a contribution to the special issue, albeit in an indirect way. By tracing the history of two sets of concepts, it has hopefully demonstrated the importance of context for the emergence of these concepts and how this has impacted their further use (Sections 1 & 2). In Section 3, the notion of context was used to gain a better understanding both socially and culturally of intralingual translation and how it came about in the community under study, including the model used to examine it.

To conclude, mainly but not only in relation to the case study, we would like to propose a term that might be suited to this and similar types of inquiries into translation, i.e. that of 'placing' translation – in contrast to 'siting' translation (Niranjana 1992). "Placing" is understood here as remembering and understanding: trying to find translation and how it is conceived of, and hence understand the (sometimes invisible) social contexts in which it takes place. This also means understanding the nature of the broader economy of exchanges involved in each case.

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