Translations and Participation

An Overview on the Contributions to this Volume and the Issues Debated Across them

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This volume explores the interplay of translation and participation, two fundamental social dynamics which are usually scrutinized separately. While there is a great deal of literature studying issues of participation (e.g., Levasseur et al. 2010; Cornwall 2011; Fung 2004; Chilvers & Kearnes 2015; Halder & Squires 2023) on the one hand and translation (e.g., Gambier & Doorslaer 2010; Millán & Bartrina 2016; Bachmann-Medick 2016; Fernández & Evans 2018; Wolf & Fukari 2007) on the other, the investigation of their interrelations is still in its beginnings. Against this background, this volume features contributions from an international conference that assembled scholars from diverse disciplines, each of them focusing on how translation and participation interdepend from different angles.

To introduce this volume, we begin with an overview of the perspectives compiled herein, sketching each contribution by briefly relating it to the disciplinary background from which it originates. Due to the diverse origins, each contribution enriches the general understanding of how translation and participation intertwine in another way (see Section 1).

Even though the contributions draw on distinct conceptual frameworks and scrutinizes different cases of translational constellations, they deal with the same key issues concerning the dynamic intertwining

of participation and translation. Three of these issues will be outlined in this introduction.

First, we focus on the fuzzy simultaneity of establishing commensurabilities and renewing differences that is characteristic of translational practices and discuss its consequences for participation. Translation makes it possible to say or do the same, or at least similar, things in different social contexts. Connections are established across delineated contexts. Accordingly, participation is enabled across social boundaries. However, any translation has to start from the assumption that the contexts involved differ and, hence, the people and things within these contexts have to be treated differently. This implies constraints of who can participate, and in which ways in the activities of the involved social contexts. Each of the contributions to this volume sheds a different light on this two-sidedness of translation and its implications for how participation is facilitated and constrained (Section 2).

These constellations of 'sameness-in-difference', that translations yield, are peculiarly reflected within the highly contested debates on what constitutes a good or bad translation. Is an 'accurate translation' one that comes as close as possible to the translated source? Or should translations rather invent (new) ways of expressing what is meant within the horizon of the target context? The diverse contributions to this volume discuss various cases in which these contradicting norms compete with each other in different translational constellations. They thereby illuminate how these ambivalent relationships interfere with participation issues. Depending on what is translated for whom and in which situation, accuracy as well as inventiveness may enable or constrain fertile involvement (Section 3).

Since sameness and difference may both be desirable, and accuracy as well as creativity may be equally appropriate, there is no way of simply unraveling the intertwining between participation and translation. Any translation implies decisions about what differentiates one social context from the other, who is expected to participate in which of these contexts, and under what conditions. Consequently, translational practices are inherently political. They imply power-bound negotiations, shaping and reshaping the boundaries between social realms and influencing the

construction of identities within them. The cases discussed in this volume offer valuable insights into these politics (Section 4).

1 Disciplinary Perspectives

This volume includes contributions from translation and interpreting studies, social anthropology, sociology and from education research. Each of these contexts is experiencing a growing interest in exploring the interplay between translation and participation, although the considerations originate from diverse starting points within each discipline. Each background offers another perspective on the interdependencies between translational practices and social participation.

1.1 Bridging Language Barriers: Exploring Participation through the Lens of Translation and Interpreting Studies

The research field of translating and interpreting studies encompasses two variations of translation (cf. Kade 1968): 'literary translation' – the transfer of written texts from one language to another, and 'interpreting' – enabling verbal exchanges between speakers of different languages. Both strands discuss and question the conditions and requirements for and the responsibility inherent in the work of translators and interpreters. While translation is, of course, an established subject in this disciplinary context, participation is not problematized to the same extent in this research field. Two contributions to this volume stem from the fields of translating and interpreting studies.

Sebnem Bahadir-Berzig's paper, 'The As If of Integration, Participation and Empowerment: When Interpreting Undermines Borders and Boundaries', focuses on how participation is framed in interpreting situations. The author problematizes the taken-for-granted expectation that interpreting enlarges opportunities for participation. She discusses the case of interpreting in context of immigrants interacting with professionals, such as doctors, school officials or social workers. Since mutual understanding is crucial for achieving participation, the relevance of in-

terpreting is evident. Interpreters are expected to overcome "not only linguistic, but also social, cultural, political, personal, even digital barriers" (Bahadir in this volume, p. 67). Even though this interpreting work aims at bridging barriers, it reproduces differences at the same time. A closer look reveals that aiming to enable participation through interpreting results in a paradox: because of the ways in which the interpretative settings are established, translation not only opens up possibilities for participation, but also implies powerful constraints on involvement (see also Dizdar 2021). Taking a performative point of view on the work of interpreters, Bahadir shows that translations are more than and different from just mimetic acts: discussing translations as acts of interference and intervention reveals their ethical and political implications.

Referring to the concept of 'traductology', Hélène Buzelin discusses in her contribution, 'Translating as a Way of Producing Knowledge Across Boundaries', how the work of literary translators involves participating in multiple contexts of communication. She emphasizes that the knowledge required for a 'proper translation' cannot be solely informed by dictionaries but instead necessitates the active engagement of translators in various practices of reading and text production. This includes accomplishing different literary practices such as reading the original text (of course), secondary literature and further adjacent texts in the language of origin as well as in the target language. As the case discussed by Buzelin demonstrates – being written in a vernacular language (a Trinidadian dialect) – just reading would not be enough. Visiting different places where the languages are spoken, and immersing oneself in the environment where the dialect is used, becomes equally essential. Therefore, translations involve the process of shifting affiliations and identities back and forth, which produces a specific kind of experience accompanied by reflexivity. Buzelin emphasizes that new knowledge is created in this process, through which the ethnocentric structure of cultures is transcended. She therefore argues for an ethics of *métissage* "where translation and original, foreign and domestic, are inextricably linked and transforming one another" (Buzelin in this volume, p. 47).

1.2 Crossing the Boundaries between Social Contexts: The Social Sciences Perspective

While participation has been a topic of interest in the social sciences from their very beginnings, it is only in the last two decades that translation has gained considerable interest. Scholars from sociology and anthropology such as Latour (2005), Renn (2006), Star and Griesemer (1989), Tsing (2005) or Gal (2015) suggest a broader understanding of translation to be also applicable beyond language use in the narrow sense. In this vein, the use of the concept of translation emerges as a possible way of uncovering the processes of how participation is structured across different institutional, cultural, national or linguistic contexts (Czarniawska & Sevón 1996). As anthropological research highlights, translations involve attempts to integrate actors which usually are not part of a specific practice, culture or language regime. Latour (2005) and Tsing (2005), for instance, have shown how translations take place, when practices, meanings, objects or persons enter a novel context. Accordingly, translations render cultural, political or semantic elements intelligible, justifiable, durable or acceptable in social contexts different from the context of origin. Unlike translation and interpreting studies, studies in the social sciences focus on the constellations which emerge from translational practices rather than on the content being transformed and molded. Two contributions in this volume build on this research perspective. Both are concerned with translations across national contexts, yet with a different focus.

In 'Sameness-in-Difference: Politics Between Literary and Anthropological Translation', Susan Gal demonstrates from the perspective of linguistic anthropology how translations of literature become relevant for negotiations of national identity (see also Wrana 2023). Her paper examines the fascinating case of the ongoing controversy over the Hungarian translation of the British children's book *Winnie-the-Pooh*. She demonstrates how the well-known and widely used translation from the 1920s has become the subject of a heated debate about what should be considered Hungarian and what should not. It is no coincidence that these issues of nationality are debated in relation to texts transferred

from foreign contexts. Gal rather argues that every translation has a political dimension. She points out that "language ideologies invariably include ideas about translation: understandings about the relative value of particular languages in the social world" (Gal in this volume, p. 22). Her analysis illuminates how even the translation of a children's book enables and constrains the participation of different social groups across national, cultural and socio-political borders.

In 'The Recognition of Foreign Professionality: An Examination of the Organizational Translation Practices of Foreign Professional Knowledge and Skills in Germany', Anne Vatter scrutinizes the organizational procedures by which professional qualifications gained abroad are transformed into certificates suitable for the German labor market. Such procedures have only recently been made possible by German law with the purpose of facilitating the integration of immigrants in the labor market. Vatter shows that the process of translating qualifications is split up into different tasks carried out by different organizations. Since each of these organizations has different purposes and interests, a complex network of translations is established between them. Drawing on actor-network theory (ANT), the paper sheds light on the intricate ways in which translations function as a crucial mechanism in the negotiation of professional identity and social mobility within and across national contexts. Her analysis reveals how this complex organizational process of translating certificates both enables and constrains the possibilities for immigrants to officially participate in social life.

1.3 Translation as a Means to Enable Participation: Perspectives from Education Research

Within education research – the third disciplinary context covered in this volume – both phenomena, participation (as in Dewey 1916, Newberry 1959, and Halder & Squires 2023) as well as translation (as in Havelock 1967, Prain & Waldrip 2006, and Lee Pettman et al. 2020), have been recurring themes, yet the links between them have only recently begun to receive increased attention (Dinkelaker 2023). Since facilitating participation is a key aim of any educational work, questions

about how this goal may be accomplished and why education repeatedly fails to achieve it, are at the heart of education research. Questions of translation, on the other hand, are raised when it comes to discussing how scientific knowledge can be transferred in the contexts of the everyday lives of learners (Dewe 1996; Hof 2001; Negt 1971). While the term 'translation' was used rather metaphorically initially, in recent years a deeper conceptual engagement has emerged (Dinkelaker et al. 2020; Engel & Köngeter 2019). Yet, the interplay between translation and participation has not been systematically studied so far. The two articles in this volume attempt to advance the scrutiny of this interrelation in education research.

In his contribution 'Learning with Machines: Divisions and Transformations in the Era of Datafication', Jeremy Knox traces the effects of introducing digital data processing in education. He highlights how the translation of educational tasks into digital algorithms changes the definitions and measurements of learning, resulting in shifting frameworks of participation. Knox's case study provides a compelling case for how the introduction of foreign concepts and systems – in this case, digital algorithms – can have far-reaching implications for how participation is facilitated and constrained.

Jörg Dinkelaker's contribution, 'Doing Crossing Boundaries: Adult Education as a Translational Practice', explores how education can be conceptualized as a specific kind of translational practice that aims to increase scopes of participation. In his analysis, Dinkelaker identifies two distinct, yet interrelated, constellations of translation and participation: cross-boundary participation and cross-boundary communication. While both modes of engagement have been addressed in educational theory, he argues that the relations between them need to be further clarified. Dinkelaker contends that the specific constellation of translation that characterizes adult education can be defined by the intersection of both modes. This results in a complex and contradictory nexus of fostering participation in new cultural contexts, while at the same time transferring knowledge from one context to another.

2 Bridging or Renewing Differences?

Translations connect and divide. They build both bridges and barriers (Cronin 2006, Gonzalez/Tolron 2006). On the one hand, translations can be described as dynamics in which different linguistic, organizational or cultural contexts are aligned with each other. From this perspective, translations reveal the common elements between these contexts. They provide access to literature originally written in a foreign language, thus facilitating broader cultural exchange. In interpreting situations, people are enabled to communicate despite relying on different languages. Translations facilitate the dissemination of scientific knowledge, making it accessible and relevant to people's everyday lives. Qualifications acquired abroad can be used in new national contexts, fostering professional growth and societal and political integration. At the same time, however, translations restage differences. They start from the assumption that the involved contexts and systems of expression differ and that this difference is irresolvable. Translated texts inevitably differ from the original since, of course, different words and syntax need to be used. This also implies differing references and resonances within the new context. Differences therefore are not only bridged, but also iterated and renewed.

This complex interplay of what Susan Gal (2015) terms 'sameness-in-difference' has implications for how participation is affected by translations. Translations simultaneously include and exclude. On the one hand, they enable involvement and understanding across the boundaries of semiotic contexts while, on the other, they reproduce otherness. Actors are portrayed as belonging to different social contexts, having no immediate access to the related other side. The contributions to this volume address this two-sidedness of translations from specific perspectives, each shedding a different light on it.

In the case of the recognition of foreign qualifications discussed by Anne Vatter, the purpose of constructing sameness dominates. A recognized qualification in another country is now to be described in terms of an equivalent qualification in Germany. It is precisely this emphasis on matching that results in this procedure of recognition becoming a pro-

cess of denial and alienation. What cannot be expressed in terms of the German qualification system has to be ignored or rejected. Hence, Vatter's analysis, as well as highlighting the connections and similarities, also illuminates incommensurable differences emerging from translational efforts.

Emphasizing sameness may even lead to denying that differences even exist. Discussing the case of digital learning platforms, Jeremy Knox shows that the assumption of something (here, learning) being the same in two different contexts (everyday schooling and digital learning platforms) obscures how its meaning is profoundly altered as it moves between these contexts (see also Macgilchrist 2021). Knox illustrates, that different understandings and interpretations of learning by platform companies, public institutions such as schools, and users of digital learning platforms are aligned and connected with each other in order to make learning accessible in the digital sphere. Understanding this process of adapting 'learning' in digital terms as a process of translation reveals, by contrast, how the notion of learning changes from context to context. What is seen as a locally situated practice mediated by organizational procedures in one constellation appears as a convertible commodity accessible through digital interfaces in another.

Stressing differences in translational constellations, on the other hand, may open up broader perspectives on sameness. This is illustrated by Gal in reference to the rather loose translation of *Winnie-the-Pooh* into Hungarian. She shows how differences between the original and the translation reflect differences between middle-class British childhood in the 1920s and childhood in Hungary, and lays out how the ways, in which the relationship between rural and urban cultures and how the expression of emotions are depicted differ significantly between the two. It is this diverging of both versions that allows us a broader understanding of the situation of childhood and adulthood in the historical situation after the First World War and, beyond that, the interrelations between adulthood and childhood as a universal human condition. The 'outlandishness' of the Hungarian translation points us to broader common grounds. Those who insist on a particular kind of translation,

which sticks closely to the original, ultimately aim to narrow down the scope of commonalities, as Gal convincingly argues in her case study.

Yet, there are also translational constellations in which differences are emphasized, but no commonalities are opened up. In the case of community interpreting, discussed by Sebnem Bahadir-Berzig, the starting point of professional interventions is the assumption of deep differences. A need for sensitivity to cultural plurality is stressed, but integration is seen as disbanding, rather than bridging, differences. As long as sameness remains primarily defined by the 'host society', integration tends to remain within a framework of assimilation in only one of the related contexts. The author reveals, however, the often hidden and overlooked subversive acts in which interpreting undermines boundaries and definite categorizations.

In yet other constellations, the practices oscillate between emphasizing either sameness or difference as a necessity. Within the discussion about how social participation can be enabled by adult education, both ideals are pursued alternatingly, as Jörg Dinkelaker shows in his analysis of how adult education is described in terms of a translational practice.

The concept of *métissage* discussed by Hélène Buzelin goes beyond this juxtaposition of sameness and difference because it emphasizes the emergence of new ways of using language within the translation process. Rather than highlighting the differences between the language of origin and the target language, this concept underlines the difference in time that is produced by the act of translation itself (Berman 1992). Sameness-in-difference becomes a matter of relating past and future practices of language use.

3 Fidelity or Creativity?

Depending on how we look at the process of translation, we encounter either the establishment of commonalities or we identify the (re-)production of differences. This oscillating picture is reflected in the ways in which normative claims about translational practices are negotiated. On the one hand, emphasis is put on the need to translate as faithfully as

possible in order to do justice to the originally intended meaning. As a result of this account, some stress the demand that translations should resemble the original message and meaning as accurately as possible. On the other hand, it is also necessary to consider the context in which the translated text is situated and to adjust translations accordingly. This is why others emphasize the inventive and creative character of translations. They stress the need to adapt translations to the cultural and linguistic peculiarities of the target audience. In this view, translators are not merely more or less faithful reproducers of the original message, but rather active participants in the process of cultural exchange and development (Steiner 1973).

Which of these competing claims is emphasized usually depends on the situational context in which translations are accomplished. When it is about interpreting a testimony in a courtroom, for example, it may be argued that the translation should be as accurate as possible to reflect what the witness said. Conversely, when the translation of a poem is discussed, it may be stressed that creative transformation is necessary to convey its meaning. Requiring different degrees of precision or creativity in order to be translated properly, is, however, not only an issue of differing types of texts. The fact that these claims compete with each other and that their evaluation varies according to the situational circumstances also reflects that both demands – accuracy as well as originality – address important issues of participation. Accurate as well as inventive translations may facilitate as well as hinder participation. The constellations discussed in this volume exemplarily illustrate this. A closer look at the problematization of what constitutes a 'good' translation reveals that these conflicting demands for accuracy or creativity are inextricably intertwined – as illustrated by the contributions to this volume.

In the context of literary translation, creative adaptations are what is usually expected and appreciated. In the heated debates about the Hungarian version of *Winnie-The-Pooh* addressed by Susan Gal, the translation is contested because it is accused of differing inappropriately from the original. Upon closer examination it can be shown, however, that the problem to which the critics refer is not about how the original is inter-

preted, but about how Hungarian culture and language – that is, the target context – is portrayed. Paradoxically, the demand for fidelity to the British text is used here to intervene in debates about how Hungarian culture should be promoted.

In the case of recognition of qualifications from abroad, stabilizing the expectation of accuracy and commensurability is a major purpose. Yet, this demand for precision entails the consequence that untranslatable elements of the translated qualifications are systematically neglected. These neglects are, in turn, taken into account by some instances of the recognition process. Some of the instances involved in this translational process (such as counseling and companies) emphasize the specific, incommensurable backgrounds of the person's vocational biography – they are accurate to the original – while others (such as formal recognition and training) stress the universal and generic standards of certification – they are accurate to the conventions of the target context. A closer look at the performative, interfering nature of translations and an analytical focus on distortions and misunderstandings reveals the tensions between the need for adherence to the original expressions and that of adapting to the target context.

In the context of community interpreting, as discussed by Sebnem Bahadir-Berzig, interpreters are expected to accurately translate what migrants say in interactions with authorities (and *vice versa*). Yet, the interpreters are also expected to explain and elaborate on what each of the parties says in order to make the translation understandable in each different cultural context. The tensions between the need for adherence to the original expressions and the need for adapting to the target context are handled by producing two versions of the translation.

Jeremy Knox engages with how educational assessment practices are profoundly transformed when translated into the digital context. He highlights that these transformations take place largely unnoticed, which raises the question of whether a more deliberate discussion about the accuracy and the situatedness of the translation should be pushed.

Jörg Dinkelaker shows that when education is conceptualized as a translational practice it can be seen as a process in which the competing demands of fidelity to the original (the knowledge imparted) and fi-

delity to the target situation (the knowledge conceived) have to be constantly balanced. He highlights the challenges of nurturing and developing unique individuality on the one hand, and making individuals understandable and compatible within cultural conventions on the other.

The concept of métissage discussed by Hélène Buzelin transcends this question of whether to stick as closely as possible to the original or to be sensitive to the target context. Translations are seen as creating new ways of relating and assembling textual practices from differing contextual references. Any translation is seen as the accomplishment of a new way of merging and is a creative event per se. Yet, this process of 'interweaving' requires extensive efforts to accomplish appropriately, i.e. accurate readings of the original, as Buzelin lays out so impressively.

4 Politics of Translation

It has been repeatedly stressed that translation processes are inherently and inevitably political (Gal 2015; Bahadir 2020). Translations are acts of boundary-marking and boundary-crossing and therefore involve arbitrary decisions – be they conscious choices or unconscious actions. As these decisions have a direct impact on the framing of participation, they are a matter of ethical and political reflection. These issues concern the (trans-)formation of boundaries on the one hand (Section 4.1) and the construction of identities on the other (Section 4.2).

4.1 (Trans-)Forming Boundaries

Boundaries between contexts and languages are not only a precondition for translation, but translations themselves contribute to the formation of such boundaries. Thus, translations can lead to the transformation of how boundaries are drawn, as well as to the enforcement and iteration of existing modes of differentiation (and unification).

The distinctions between semiotic contexts such as languages, cultures or social worlds, which are implied by translations, reflect power differentials and hierarchical valuations. In some constellations, the

target context is considered superior, as in many cases of immigration work (Anne Vatter, Sebnem Bahadir-Berzig). In other situations, the context of origin is given a superior position; for example, when a piece of literature is translated into another language (Hélène Buzelin, Susan Gal), when scientific knowledge is transferred into the lifeworld of the recipients (Jörg Dinkelaker) or when a social practice is reframed through a new language as is the case in digitalization processes (Jeremy Knox). These hierarchizations shape how translations are constituted, which can be traced by comparing the diverse constellations scrutinized within this volume. The contributions in this volume investigate how boundaries of participation are transformed and negotiated by translations: they discuss which differences are denied and which are emphasized, reconstructing how differences and commonalities are defined and constructed.

4.2 (De-)Constructing Identities

Translations highlight that identities are linked to the social contexts in which they develop. Hence, translations alienate as well as nostrify. They relate and identify the ways in which identities and differences are constructed along the boundaries of the languages and cultures involved. In any given case there are multiple ways of relating to the differences between the two contexts – the origin and the target – of a translation. Who is addressed in what manner, and with what attributes, depends on how boundaries between contexts are delineated, how the inherent contradictions between bridging and overcoming these differences are handled and how the complexities between accuracy and creativity are dealt with. Hence, the scope of participation within and across the boundaries of social contexts depends crucially on the ways in which translational constellations are approached, established and dealt with. This involves questions of which frameworks of participation are established by translations and how identities themselves may be translated from one context to another. While any kind of language use implies specific frameworks of participation, translation – by raising questions of fidelity and creativity – stresses the constructedness of them.

The case of the Hungarian adaption of *Winnie-The-Pooh* illustrates how ideologies about who belongs to a particular social context – here, the Hungarian nation – are implicated in the ways a translation is carried out. The same correlation can be observed in the case of the translation of educational notions of learning into the language of digital algorithms, discussed by Jeremy Knox.

Some specific kinds of translation are not primarily concerned with the translation of texts describing and inscribing participation, but with the translation of identity constructions themselves (Pelizza 2020). Once a person has crossed the borders of a social context, identities have to be translated in order to enable participation as illustrated by the case of the recognition of foreign qualifications discussed by Anne Vatter. The categories and frameworks of participation used in the respective social contexts are related to and distinguished from each other. How commonalities and differences are defined and processed becomes a matter of contested negotiations. In educational contexts, this political question of translating identities becomes the dominant work, as Jörg Dinkelaker points out. This work is carried out against the backdrop of differentiated cultures of knowledge use and knowledge production.

Discussing concerns about the ethical and political implications of translations finally brings to the fore the question of the positioning of translators. Their participation in both related social contexts and their responsibility for weighing up the competing demands of the translational situation requires that their (professional) identities undergo constant reflection and balancing. The situatedness of any translation highlights the responsibility of translators not only to recognize the specific social contexts of both the translator and the translated entity, but also to recognize the limits of their own understanding. Since any translational constellation is permeated with power lines and hierarchies, navigating between the risks of usurpation on the one hand and disregard on the other, involves dealing with the currents and gradients which arise from that. In the context of community interpreting, Sebnem Bahadir-Berzig describes how the translators' positioning is discussed in relation to how the need for translation is defined, by whom and how the transla-

tor is purposefully deployed while, in the context of literary translation, Hélène Buzelin highlights the relevance of reflected experience.

These diverse perspectives on the ambiguous aspects of how translations and participations are dynamically intertwined make it obvious that claiming straightforward answers to translational issues is bound to fall short. Rather, thoughtful negotiations are as unavoidable as they are desirable. Our hope is that the compilation of contributions in this volume will play a valuable role in fostering these essential discussions.

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