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Development and translation

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At this point in time, I do not think one can claim that development as a phenomenon or development studies as a field of study is, as such, a sub-field or a particular point of interest in Translation Studies*. One would not find monographs or even journal articles in which Translation Studies scholars venture into the field of development studies, as such. For their part, development scholars only on rare occasions venture into the field of translation, but then not necessarily into the conventional notion of translation proper (see Lewis & Mosse 2006). My argument is rather that the recent turns* in Translation Studies imply that Translation Studies is inadvertently becoming involved in issues of development. First, I shall provide a brief conceptualisation of development and development studies. Then, I shall indicate how one could conceptualise the relationship between translation and development. After that, I shall set out the prospects for the future of this interdisciplinary*** relationship, arguing that Translation Studies does not have a choice about being involved in notions of development.

1. Conceptualising development

Development is not only a highly emotional socio-political issue; it is also a much debated academic issue. Therefore, it is no surprise that conceptualising development is a contested issue. It ranges from highly Westernised notions of attaining technological and scientific advances or culture, i.e. modernising, to transferring advances to the less advanced, to very general views of adapting to historical reality (see Coetzee et al. 2001 for a good overview). As far as theoretical approaches are concerned, it ranges from systemic approaches to individual, personal approaches. It is viewed as a panacea by some and a curse by others. Similarly, the goals of development are contested. These may vary from transfer of knowledge, skill, technology and wealth to mere survival in modernity. How far development should go and what its relationship should be with local forms of knowledge are hotly debated issues. Critical approaches to development point out that development could be a mere cover for imperialist practices such as creating markets for the industries of developed countries.

Development studies is usually conceptualised as an interdiscipline in which economics, political science and sociology combine to study the phenomenon of

development (see, for instance, Coetzee et al. 2001). One does also find a growing interest in development from anthropology and postcolonial* fields such as African studies and gender studies (Lewis & Mosse 2006; Olivier de Sardan 2005).

Broadly speaking, one can conceptualise two main streams in development studies, i.e. macro and micro approaches. The macro approaches typically deal with macro-economic, ideological, and political matters such as capitalism and neo-capitalism, liberalism and neo-liberalism, socialism and Marxism. The micro approaches typically deal with participatory models, agency approaches and more practical approaches at grass-roots level. The last two decades seem to have favoured approaches that focus more on the micro, grassroots, personal, hermeneutical level, or, as has become a buzz-term, development from below.

One of the (very few) current theoretical efforts to connect translation and development is through the suggestions made by Latour when he uses the concept of translation in his action network theory. In particular, Lewis and Mosse (2006), who build on Latour, are the only reference I could find which, in the title, connect translation and development. Latour seems to be looking for a way in which various actors are connected into a system or network. This process, he conceptualises as translation. In their book, Lewis and Mosse (2006) take over Latour's (2000: 113) notion that "The adjective "social" now codes, not a substance, nor a domain of reality (by opposition for instance to the natural, or the technical, or the economic), but a way of tying together heterogeneous bundles, of *translating* some type of entities into another (translation being the opposite of substitution)". Latour thus views translation as a way of bringing widely different actors in a social project onto the same page, as it were. Latour, and a sociologist like Renn, (see Tyulenev 2011: 92–101) grapples with the problem of relating the variety of actions and actors in a social context to the social patterns or programs that emerge out the interactions. How is some form of unity created out of a variety of individual interactions? To answer the question, Latour says that actors are translated into a project, i.e. they are changed, while staying the same, to be become part of the project. In this way, he conceptualises the changing of various ideas into a hegemonic project. It is his way of dealing with difference and the transfer of difference into a social reality while the differences remain intact. This particular view of translation actually sees acts of translation as homogenising by moving actors into thought worlds of which they have not previously been part. What is lacking in this debate is a meta-theoretical perspective on the various conceptual uses of the term translation.

Another link between Translation Studies and development is suggested by the work of Chalmers (2005). In typical constructivist fashion, he problematizes the use of language in development contexts for its power to construct reality and thinking. The fact that this reality and ways of thinking about it are contested in contexts of development leads Chalmers (2005: 189) rightly to ask: 'Whose language counts?'

He does not, however, develop his thought to include multilinguistic contexts in which translation could play a role. It is precisely here, at the level of different languages and conceptualisations that the development context becomes of interest for scholars of Translation Studies.

As can be seen from the discussion above, the relationship between translation and development is, theoretically spoken, wide open and in serious need of conceptualisation.

2.   The relationship between translation and development

There seems to be at least three developments in Translation Studies itself that are suggesting that development is becoming a point of interest in Translation Studies. The first is the movement led by Maria Tymoczko (2006; 2007) to expand Translation Studies beyond its Western bias. She claims that Translation Studies is caught up in a Western bias that, amongst others, limits the focus of the field to phenomena that are written, that fall within the formal economy and that are professional in nature. This bias, she claims, causes a large number of phenomena to be left out of the purview of Translation Studies. Underlying Tymoczko's argument is a distinction between West and non-West. As has been argued before, this 'West' is a construction and one may even find phenomena that Tymoczko associates with 'non-West' in the West. As part of the issues of the non-West, it thus seems that the notions of developed/developing, though not without contestation, could be explored to conceptualise the issues to which Tymoczko refers. If this movement grows, and all indications are that it will, Translation Studies will shortly have to concern itself not merely with cultural and ideological differences between West and non-West but with theoretically having to grapple with the role of translation in the development of societies. To achieve this move, Translation Studies will need to change its focus from literary texts to communicative texts and from the formal to the informal economy, a move that is in progress but that has not yet been studied as to its relationship to development. Translation Studies will need to move away from a sterile type of analytical postcolonial studies that only analyse developmental or postcolonial problems as power issues to an approach that is able also to include an understanding of the impact of translation on development. It will need to engage with the notion of development, asking how translation is a factor in development and how development is a factor constraining or enhancing translation. One of the great divides in the current world is that between First and Third World, a topic which Translation Studies has not seriously engaged as yet on a theoretical level. Examples of small studies engaging with the informal economy is that of Makhado (2010) and Motsie (2010) in which they studied translators working

in rural areas and informal advertisements** and views around their translation respectively. Much more is needed, however.

Secondly, Translation Studies has, over the past three decades, moved from viewing translation as a linguistic activity and the translator, to some extent, as a conduit through whom meaning flows to viewing translation as a cultural/social/ideological activity and the translator as an agent of social change. Revisiting what Venuti (2006) labels as the 'Foundational Statements' of Translation Studies, one finds that St Jerome (2006) already makes use of arguments from the social reality of his time to motivate translation choices. For him, the choice of translation strategy impacts the well-being of his social reality. Much later, in an article which could be read as a philosophy of development, Friedrich Nietsche (2006) viewed translation as conquest. His argument boils down to explaining how civilizations develop: by conquering others, translating the best of their ideas into their own, and building on it. It is thus not surprising that the vision of the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN, n.d.), closely connected to the African Renaissance movement, is to translate large numbers of literary and scientific works into African languages. Building on the work by Bassnett, Gentzler (2008) is an exponent of the claims that translation is an agent in the creation of culture. He claims that both North and South American culture has significantly been influenced by (non)-translation. Milton and Bandia's (2009) book is an example of this trend to study the developmental implications of translation. Contributors to their book provide evidence of numerous historical cases in which translation programmes were employed to develop/Westernise/modernise societies. To this, one can add the work of Bandia (2008) in which he claims that African authors are developing African literature and reclaiming a cultural space by their hybrid** literary texts, which combine African orality** and conceptualisations with Western languages and textual technologies. The gap in the above works is that development itself and its relationship to translation are assumed rather than theorised.

Thirdly, the move in Translation Studies away for an exclusive focus on literary* and religious* texts to understanding the translation of communicative texts opens the door for studying the developmental impact of translation. The data from the study of communicative texts needs to be incorporated into Translation Studies in order to understand the impact of (the lack of) translation on the development of societies. Understanding how, in multilingual contexts, (a lack of) translation influences economic interaction, service delivery by governmental institutions, medical and legal services, academic research, religion, etc. could help scholars from various fields and even policy makers to understand society better. In this regard, one also has to keep in mind the developmental role of the work that has been done by community interpreters (e.g. Erasmus, Mathibela, Hertog & Antonissen, 1999).

3.   Prospects

It seems inevitable that Translation Studies will have theoretically to engage in research on the notion of development. Apart from it being inherent in the theories of translation as indicated above, Translation Studies cannot sit idly and allow the development crisis to pass by unnoticed. Recent calls for ethically responsible Translation Studies necessitate an intellectual contribution from translation scholars on the issues of development.

The move in development studies towards a micro-, agent-based approach to development opens up an interface with translation. One can conceptualise the interface in various ways, one of which would be Jakobson's notion that all interpretation is translation. In this sense, the approach claiming that development is a hermeneutical phenomenon in which people integrate the new, other information, skills and ideas into their existing frame of knowledge (Olivier de Sardan 2006) could be enriched by viewing development as a process of translation. It is another typical 'inter' situation, where differences meet, where someone is an 'other', and where the foreign has to be appropriated.

The point of interface which lies open is, to my mind, the following. Whether one conceptualise development at a structural, macro level as a system or a policy that has to be implemented or whether you view it as a hermeneutical, micro-level activity that has to be appropriated, one issue pertaining to development has not yet been considered: language. Inevitably, development implies the meeting of people speaking different languages and having different conceptualisations of reality. How do people from different language groups communicate when they meet in development project? How does knowledge travel from developed to un(der)developed areas when development policies are localised? What happens when knowledge travels from, say, First World contexts to, say, Third World contexts? How is the foreign (knowledge, skill, technology) indigenised when it arrives at a given locality? How do people negotiate the new into their world view? The question is thus twofold: First, linguistically, what happens in the process of development? How do development agencies communicate in a foreign language when they arrive at a development site? How are development policies translated, if at all? Second, conceptually, what happens in the process of development? How are foreign concepts, ideas, technologies, which are all linguistic or at least semiotic in nature, indigenised?

The problem with many development initiatives is that they seem to remain foreign. It remains one of the riddles of development why development sometimes succeeds and often fails. There seems to be no blueprint. From the perspective of Translation Studies, one could argue that development fails because it is translated neither into the language nor into the conceptual world of the recipients. A contrary case in point testifying to the success of translation in development is that of Bible

translation. Naudé & Miller-Naudé (2011: 324), for instance, claim that Bible translation is the reason why the church has become indigenised in Africa. Theorising the relationship between translation and development could contribute to understanding the workings of social development.

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