Identity and Translation Trouble

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INTRODUCTION

TRANSLATION AND IDENTITY

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1 This Grey Language of Translation Studies

A glimpse at the frequency of the concept of identity in a few international Translation Studies (TS) journals with a long publication history, namely *Babel*, *Meta*, and *Target* shows a rise in its popularity since the late 1990s. Searches in bibliographic databases Web of Science and Scopus show that in the articles published since 1992, the first entries mentioning "identity" in their abstracts, titles or cited references appear in 1996. A more or less steady rise in the percentage of such papers can be observed since 1998 and in the past few years, since 2013, nearly fifteen per cent of articles have been explicitly dealing in one way or another with identity. This sudden and rapid advance might seem surprising at first, but when we consider that to a certain extent, translation is always an act of renaming and renaming is–in return–bestowing identity, it is almost natural. When it comes to names of people(s), geopolitical units, social strata, historical periods, and similar entities, power relationships manifested through the transformation of the viewpoint in translation become markedly visible. This direct connection of identity and translation is surely one of the underlying reasons why, in the last two decades and a half, the interest of TS in the issue of identity has been on the rise. Another one is the popularity of the concept of identity in social life and humanities and social sciences in general. A deeper consideration of these international (or transnational) position-takings by TS and other disciplines would not have been possible without investigations into language and power and the gap between the sign and the world that allowed thinkers to move away from essentialism and positivism. Overcoming essentialism and structuralism is a prerequisite in creating the present conceptualisations of translation between languages or different media.

> And the proper name . . . is merely an artifice: it gives us a finger to point with, in other words, to pass surreptitiously from the space where one speaks to the space where one looks; in other words, to fold one over the other as though they were equivalents. But if one wishes to keep the relation of language to vision open, if one wishes to treat their incompatibility as a starting-point for speech . . . then one must erase those proper names and preserve the infinity of the task. It is perhaps through the medium of this grey, anonymous language . . . that the painting may, little by little, release its illuminations. (Foucault 1994: 8-9)

To write about translations of identities and identities of translations and translators also in a way means to create the "grey language" that is able to trace the trajectories of cultures, texts, and moving subjects as "translated beings" (Malena 2003: 9) without the comforting belief in equivalence.

An important factor that has made the concept of identity interesting for TS in the past two-and-a-half decades is the internal development of the discipline–the so-called cultural turn (Snell-Hornby 1990) of the 1980s which opened TS to a more explicit and intense interest in culture, society, politics, and individuals involved in the process. The present volume investigates some of the facets of the relationship between translation and identity spanning from reflections connoting identity of humankind and individuals as defined by their language(s) through explorations into the habitus (Bourdieu 1983, 1991, 1996, 1998) and experiential complex (Miko 1970: 14; Popovič 1983: 33, 121) as parts of a professional translator's identity to case studies investigating transcultural and hybrid identities, inscriptions, manipulations, and annihilations the (differences of the) source texts undergo. Before introducing individual contributions, I will give a short selective overview of the relationship of identity and TS.

2 The (Scope and History of the) Concept and Its Connections with TS

The semantic scope of the concept of identity spans several areas which overlap with TS theoretical interest. In the following section I will outline several such clusters with an accent on their development in the late 1980s and 1990s until they became established in the discipline. Because of the boom of the concept in the last fifteen–twenty years, to give an overview of the post-2000 views on the subject would mean working with almost all literature that has been published on the subject of translation and/or interpreting and that would surpass the function of an introduction to the present volume. What I wish to do instead is to give the papers included in the volume their grounding in the developments of the idea so that the vast scope of the topic of identity and translation makes clearer sense with respect to the composition of the volume. It must also be noted that not all the papers in this publication start from the same theoretical basis and thus reflect not only the individual identities of the researchers, but also–to a certain extent–the specific identity of the scope of TS in individual regions (Central Europe [Slovakia], Eastern Europe [Ukraine], Northern Europe [Latvia], and Western Europe [Ireland]).

2.1 Identity and the Text

In philosophy, basic distinction is made between qualitative identity, which requires a certain degree of sameness, and numerical identity, which "requires absolute, or total qualitative identity, and can only hold between a thing and itself" (Noonan and Curtis 2014). In this sense, identity has a long history which goes back to ancient philosophy (Izenberg 2016: 9). The scope and content of quantitative and qualitative identity and the problem of identity over time (and space) can be glimpsed in such notions as the spirit of the original; it also served Schleiermacher to negatively define imitation as practice in which "identity of the original is abandoned" (1992: 149) and was certainly also in the background of discussions of the concepts of equivalence, invariant and shifts as tools that helped build TS as an autonomous research field. The main problem of identity and translation in this respect was determining the necessary degree of qualitative sameness of the source and target texts with variations in compared units and their qualities. Different authors postulate various relationships between equivalence and identity: Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) speak about an identity of situations as the grounding predisposition which makes equivalence possible (35); Nida (2000), on the other hand, verbalises the relationship in this way: "The total impact of a translation may be reasonably close to the original, but there can be no identity in detail." ([126]). An example of a definition that uses identity as a quality that helps determine what a translation is is Popovič's (1971) explanation of stylistic or translational equivalence. In one of his definitions it is the functional equivalence "in which components of the original are replaced so that the semantic invariant correspondence is preserved and the translation aims at expressive identity" (152; my translation). In his detailed discussion of interlingual identity, developed in 1984, Frawley comes to the conclusion that

> identity may be granted across linguistic codes, but this identity is actually useless in translation. We must purge ourselves of this rampant notion that identity somehow saves translation. . . . The true interest in translation

> stems from the fact that recodification is an uncertain act, and the uncertainty results from the inevitable structural mismatch of the codes, though single semiotic elements may be identical. . . . The act of translation involves a complicated juggling of codes, a healthy disregard for identity, and an uncertain leap into the production of a new code and new information. (Frawley 2000: 256, 262)

In the following decades, the view of translation as production and performance gained a greater explanatory power and the desire for the original in TS was deconstructed together with the notion of the all-preceding original.[1] It was difference, not identity that came into the foreground–one of the volumes on theoretical and philosophical problems of translation was named *Difference in Translation* (Graham 1985), equivalence was revealed as an illusion (Snell-Hornby 1988) and TS revisited Benjamin's views of translation from the early 20^{th} century, adopting Derrida's critique of the metaphysics of presence, in which "'origin' is itself dispersed, its 'identity' undecidable. A representation thus does not re-present an 'original'; rather, it re-presents that which is always already represented." (Niranjana 1992: 9). The historical gendered thinking on translation and its metaphors was also challenged (Chamberlain 1988) and feminist deconstruction of identity relativized identity as a categorising element as such:

> Gender and translation participate in this economy of contamination, unable to maintain a separation of same and different, original and copy. This is the turning of the troping of metonymy... the mimetism of ludic repetition or supplement that exposes the operations of representation as the production of value within an economy of meaning configured by a specific set of overlapping signifiers. The metonymic infiltrating the metaphoric making (im)possible philosophy/theory, translation and gender. Instead of an exchange of signs constituting the identity of differing groups, there is only the change of signs in a combinatory of provisional groupings that announces the reign of the signifier. Reading from one signifier to another, connecting one signifier with another... Translating with the signifier, as it is contaminated by another while past and future configurations commingle, thickening the web of relations... (Godard 1991: 111; suspension points in original)

[1] This, obviously, does not deligitimise foreignising strategies: only by revealing the illusory effect of domesticating translation can "the numerous conditions under which the translation is made, starting with the translator's crucial intervention in the foreign text" (Venuti 2004: 1) be revealed.

Later in the 1990s, Matte's "Translation and Identity" (1996) attempted to utilise part of the 20th century philosophical discussion on identity and difference (Heidegger, Derrida) and similarly concluded that translation as a process and its result cannot be explained by the concept of (textual) identity, but rather through the notion of difference. Identity in this sense seemed no longer productive for conceptualising entities TS was interested in.

2.2 Collective Identities

Once the problem of equivalence was more or less sidestepped (but not abandoned–see, e.g., Pym 2004) by functional approaches, further development in Descriptive Translation Studies and new transdisciplinary inspirations, the focus shifted from the text to culture and investigations into translation/interpretation and collective (ethnic, gender, linguistic, national, cultural, regional, etc.) identities came into focus. Some of the ideas currently discussed in papers concerned with cultural identity had been, in different forms, present in earlier reflections on translating–especially with respect to creation and establishment of languages and political (or national) units–e.g., Bohuslav Tablic, a Slovak translator and poet, wrote in his preface to his translation of Alexander Pope's *An Essay of Man* published in 1830 that his motivation for translation was to enrich domestic literature and language "by translating useful books, written in more educated European languages." (Tablic 1830: [iii]; my translation). However, as Simon (1996) writes in the preface to her *Gender in Translation*, "to position translation within cultural studies . . . means . . . that the terms 'culture,' 'identity' and 'gender' are not taken for granted but are themselves the object of inquiry" (ix); identity as such had to be addressed explicitly in order to enable researchers to view the *us* versus *them* opposition for a long time taken for granted from a critical perspective, or to explicitly challenge the "Eurocentric hegemonic binarisms" (Inghilleri 2017: 16).

Identity in the contemporary sense of the word, i.e. "identity as *substantive self-definition* . . . which purportedly determines what I believe and do" (Izenberg 2016: 10) started to be commonly used after Erik Erikson (1956) coined "ego identity" in the 1950s. Identity in this sense–identity of the individual self–might be interesting for investigating translators' idiolects, the reception and production of translation, and for the study of translator's personal identity in contrast to his/her specialised habitus (perhaps in the context of the norm/convention breaking behaviour that results in changes of the field), but TS has been more intensely interested in collective identities. These, as Izenberg (2016) concludes, had not been explicitly addressed before the 1960s when "Erikson's concern with individual identity was overtaken by social and political upheaval. . . [and] focus shifted from the individual to issues of collective identity and identity politics" (26).

With the cultural turn, geopolitical redefinitions of borders, second-wave feminism, and increased geographical mobility and information flow, collective identities ceased to be taken for granted. TS–like other disciplines–also opened up to absorb and make use of the feminist and postcolonial questioning of canons and power relationships and the constructionist character of identity-formation: "The unequal character of interdiscursive relations . . . implies that identity construction can be seen as ideological: in establishing its identity, a discursive practice constructs, reproduces, or subverts social interests and power relations." (Robyns 1994: 406). One of the first separate volumes that attempted to explicitly address the issue of collective identity and translation was *Us / Them* (1992), edited by Gordon Collier. The volume did not focus on TS theory very much, but it did succeed in outlining some of the topics that continue to be addressed within TS to the present day (the identity-forming power of language, identity-enabling and destructive power of translation, hybrid postcolonial identities that challenge the presuppositions about relationships of source and target languages and cultures, women's identity and their language in Cixous's sense, multiculturalism within political units, minority and hybrid identity, non-national identity, etc.).

2.2.1 Gender and Identity

The movements across the Western world in the late 1960s also brought forth the second wave of feminism which spread to individual fields of human practice, including translation and research. Gender was introduced as a category of analysis (Scott 1986) and gender identity also started to be addressed from the TS point of view. The parallel development of TS and second-wave feminism was, in Bassnett's view, not accidental:

> In general terms . . . the significance of much of the work by theorists such as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Elisabetta Rasy . . . was their refusal to continue looking at the world in terms of binary oppositions. . . . Similarly, one of the principal concerns of Translation Studies in the 1970s was the need . . . to get away from the binary concept of equivalence and to urge a notion of equivalence based on cultural difference, rather than on some presumed sameness between linguistic systems. (Bassnett 1992: 64)

TS conceptualisations of identity in the context of gender were often inspired by feminist translation practices or went hand in hand with them (this especially concerns Canadian feminist translations published since the late 1970s). Babara Godard, drawing on Irigaray's (1985) idea of "gestural code of women's bodies" (134) and other silenced codes and the notion of "repetition and displacement of the dominant discourse," (Godard 1989: 46) saw feminist discourse as translation and the activity of the feminist translator as "womanhandling"–replacing the self-effacing translator and "affirming her critical difference, her delight in interminable re-reading and re-writing" (50). The feminist impulse helped Godard move away from equivalence "grounded in a poetics of transparency" (47), see translation as production, not reproduction and feminist discourse as a model for translation. Jean Delisle (1993), also drawing on feminist translation practice in Canada, described feminist translation as weaving the identity of a woman into the language of translation (208). Feminist TS deconstructed stable (and essentialist) identities and started to view them as results of activity, as performative:

> Identity is no stable effect of a coherent entity but is constituted through the technology of language where the "I" or subject of enunciation remains contingent and provisional to institutional policies and practices articulated in historically differentiated discourses subject to contestation and to change. (Godard 1997: 92)

Sherry Simon in her *Gender in Translation* (1996), inspired by Judith Butler's (1990) view of gender as the effect of institutions/discourses/ practices (xi), wrote that "gender, therefore, is never a primary identity emerging out of the depths of the self, but a discursive construction enunciated at multiple sites" (Simon 1996: 6). She felt it necessary to assert that "gender is not always a relevant factor in translation. There are no *a priori* characteristics which would make women either more or less competent at their task. Where identity enters into play is the point at which the translator transforms the fact of gender into a social or literary project." (ibid.).

In the following years, inspirations from feminisms, gender studies, and queer studies (Harvey 1998, 2000, 2003; Keenaghan 1998) furthered discussions of gender (and sexual) identity in translation, broadening and problematizing further the issue of performative/discursive gender identity–both in languages, and with respect to the author and translator. Some of these issues will be discussed in my section on identity of the translator below.

2.2.2 Ethnic, National, Linguistic, etc. Identity

The role translation played in the history of creating nation-states was touched on by Even-Zohar (1993) and a historical TS perspective was also taken in *Translators through History* (1995), edited by Jean Delisle and Judith Woodsworth in which linguistic, ethnic, cultural, national, and minority identities were addressed in a retrospective look (translations of the Bible are said to have helped preserve ethnic identities; the way in which minority languages serve as a source of identity; the role translation played in creating national identities). Cultural (especially national and minority vs. majority) identity was also discussed in *Culture in Transit: Translating the Literature of Quebec* (1995), edited by Sherry Simon. In 1996, Woodsworth published an article explicitly addressing the relationship of translation into/from a minority language and identity. Her research focused on the way translators saw the aim of their activity. She asserted that "the translators' decisions take place in the framework of political or ideological factors and are determined by their vision of what the function and consequence of their work might be" and that "translation serves to stimulate and preserve the [minority] language, enrich the indigenous literature and strengthen a sense of cultural identity" (Woodsworth 1996: 212). She concluded that

> by translating works that have enjoyed prestige, authority or simply wide distribution in the source culture, the translator confers credibility on the target language text and the target language itself. The motivation for translating, beyond personal affinities, is political. Translation is a means of strengthening the minority language and culture, of helping to ensure its survival, and hence of promoting national identity, or a new vision of "nationhood." (235)

Subsequently, TS inquiries into cultural identity experienced a boom and nowadays, the bibliography of papers and volumes on translation and cultural identity is very long and encompasses historiographical probes into translation in various geographical locations as well as investigations of contemporary problems of cultural identity (transcultural, transnational, diasporic, and hybrid identities; enlargement of the EU and European identity; war conflicts; migration; minority literatures in a globalised book market; ethical aspects of domesticating translating strategies into a major language). Even a mere attempt to assemble a bibliography of the post-1995 volumes and papers on the topic would surpass the scope of this introduction. Perhaps it is enough to direct the reader's attention to some of the chapters in the present volume (Kolomiyets, Palkovičová, Malinovská, Gavurová, Skrābane, and Olejárová), since these might serve as examples of some of the topics researched in this area of interest.

2.2.3 (Professional) Identity of the Translator/Interpreter

With translation gaining academic attention and with developments of/in the field of TS, the status and identity of the translator–historically usually seen as subservient or even suspicious–came into question. An interesting parallel between the author and the translator and the patriarchal views of the relationship between men and women was drawn by Lori Chamberlain (1988). After analysing the metaphorics of translation, she concludes that although the paratexts on translation traditionally attempted

> to cloak the secondary status of translation in the language of the phallus, western culture enforces this secondariness with a vengeance, insisting on the feminized status of translation. Thus, though obviously both men and women engage in translation, the binary logic . . . defines translation as, in many ways, an archetypal feminine activity. (467)

Erosion of Western binary oppositions through deconstruction, feminist, gender, and postcolonial studies hand in hand with developments in the discipline of TS and work done by translators' organisations challenged the traditional hierarchy of the author/original and translator/translation–this is, as Bassnett (1992: 66) remarks, reflected in terminology (original versus source text, translation versus target text) and also in the fact that the translator and her/his identity have become a separate object of study for TS with some researchers and translators explicitly making it their agenda to problematize the identity of the translator (Niranjana 1992), lift translators from their "shadowy existence" (Venuti 1992: 1), "illustrate the roles they have played in the evolution of human thought" (Joly 1995: xiv), "draw attention to the 'translator-effect'" (Flotow 1997: 35), "win for translators greater cultural authority" (Venuti 1998), etc.

One of the fruitful discussions on the translators' identity that started in the 1990s was inspired by sociological models of thinking. Becoming a translator came to be seen as socialisation (Toury 1995) and acquiring a specialised habitus in Bourdieusian sense (Gounavic 1997; Hermans 1999; Simeoni 1998). Further discussions on this topic revolved around the tension between norms/conventions/habitus and the conscious decision-making process, the potentially norm-breaking agency of the translator. It may be noted that these issues resonated with the performativity of gender identity in Butler's (1988) sense of "social agent as an *object* rather than the subject of constitutive acts" (519) and Parker and Kosofsky Sedgwick

(1995) who tend "to stay on the 'intentional,' 'active,' side of the argument around discourse" (Flotow 2011: 13).

In more recent years, translators, their identity and professional status and the identity of translation as a process have been more and more often analysed in the light of fast-evolving technology and the high demand for commercial translation. The dehumanizing effect of instrumentalisation of language and translation and the cyborg identity of the translator have been conceptualised and criticised from the positions of language and translation ecology and didactics of translation (Cronin 2002, 2006, 2013, 2015, 2017; Dizdar 2014).

3 The Contents of the Current Volume

The authors of the present volume address the problem of identity and translation from various positions. Individual papers outline the theoretical aspects of the ecology of translational attention with language as a defining aspect of human identity in the context of global economy (Cronin), present certain Ukrainian translations and versions as spaces for inscription of the identity of the target culture in which translation is an explicitly political act (Kolomiyets), analyse the creation and dissolution of a field of Slovak translations of Hispanic American fiction with underlying questions of modelling and manipulating identity of the other through translation and tensions between a minor literature and world literature/global book market (Palkovičová). Further in the volume, the reader will encounter a probe into the transcultural approach to translation in the Slovak cultural space of the 1980s where identities of various cultures mix and binarism in translation is overcome (Malinovská) and a look at the habitus and identity of a translator in Central Europe and a call for strengthening the agency of translators (Djovčoš). The remaining three chapters bring a probe into the complex hybrid identity of migrants (Gavurová), a call for a more effective export policies that help preserve and promote cultural identity and diversity (Skrābane), and an analysis of translations that foreground the requirements of the target context and the ways they recreate and destroy complex identities (Olejárová). Several of these chapters employ the methodology that has lately received–as Venuti (2013: 6) points out–less scholarly attention, namely close reading of translations.

Michael Cronin addresses a paradox in the economy of attention (Gamboni 2014) with respect to translation: while translation plays a central role in facilitating information flow between linguistically diverse locales, it seldom elicits appropriate attention itself. He sees instrumentalisation of language and translation as a threat to linguistic ecosystems and proposes an ecology of translational attention that would seek recovering Language Commons–the linguistic resources that should be preserved for future generations. Instead of turning attention to individual domains of translation (such as literary translation, technical translation, localisation, etc.) or post-national linguistic identities, Cronin draws attention to the language as a resource common to all humans, as something enabling human survival and shaping the identity of humanity. Depleting Language Commons may thus deprive future generations of opportunities to acquire diverse individual and group identities.

Lada Kolomiyets explores translations and poet's versions as spaces allowing for a visible, explicit inscription of the identity of the target culture. Post-Soviet Ukrainian identities can be glimpsed in what she terms as farcical translations of Yurii Andrukhovych and Oleksa Nehrebetsky, who markedly shift allusions of the source texts in their translations and through this deconstruct the remnants of Soviet identity in the general Ukrainian public. Translation thus becomes a powerful deliberate political action which propels establishing of an alternative cultural trend with travesty as a basic model of self-identification in post-socialist, postcolonial Ukraine.

Eva Palkovičová traces the history of Slovak translation of Hispanic American fiction in the socialist and post-socialist era. Her cultural approach is based on grasping and contextualising the norms and political circumstances governing individual phases in the translational import of Hispanic American fiction into Slovak cultural space. This diachronic curve is modelled as a gradual (near-)creation of the field of magic realism (with elements of magic realism also entering the works of Slovak writers) in the era of prescribed socialist realism and its rather abrupt dissolution caused by developments in source literatures and the radical change of political and economic situation in the target context. Her in-depth analysis of cultural, political, and economic circumstances of Slovak cultural space, publishing policies and texts–translations, paratexts and archives–also draws a picture of the model of the identity of Hispanic American literature as created by the agents and audiences in the target context.

Zuzana Malinovská proposes a shift in approach towards translation of ethnic writers into Slovak as a language of limited diffusion, which, she argues, had already started before the end of the communist totalitarian regime and rapid globalisation of the post-communist cultural spaces. The chapter demonstrates the shift from the traditional intercultural approach which establishes a dialogue between two identities (but also accentuates the possible tensions and conflicts between cultures) to the transcultural approach, which emphasises movement, interlinking and mixing of cultural identities and enables a complex hybrid identity to be conceptualised and expressed.

Martin Djovčoš looks at the problem of translators' identity from the sociological point of view with identity seen in direct connection to habitus. The author reinterprets Bourdieu's notion of habitus through the concept of experiential complex, introduced in 1970 by the Slovak scholar František Miko. Miko defined the experiential complex as the unity of experience (ideas, thoughts, feelings, interests, and stimuli) that forms the basis of communication, i.e. conditions–similarly to habitus–behaviour. At the same time, Djovčoš attempts to grasp the gist of Central European identity, which he considers highly evasive due to the turbulent political history of the 20th century. He also questions the narrowly understood socialisation of translators and calls for a more complex and reflexive approach which would enable translators to make more responsible decisions.

The core of Miroslava Gavurová's chapter is the hybrid linguistic, ethnic, and religious identity of economic migrants and its portrayal in the 1941 novel by Thomas Bell and its Slovak translation (1949) by Ján Trachta. The paper concentrates on a close reading and in-depth analysis of emotional, economic, linguistic, social, and cultural aspects of the hybrid identity of migrants living simultaneously in two sharply different contexts (the outside world and the intimate domestic environment as a space imitating the lost homeland) and with a fractal-like heritage of their "original"–the mother tongue of the Slovak immigrants to the United States in early 20th century was a mix of the very young official version of Slovak with German, Hungarian, Czech, and various dialectal elements. The Slovak translation to a great extent normalised and erased the hybrid identity of the immigrants–not only the English-Slovak linguistic identity of the migrants and the text, but also that of the mixed vernacular they brought from their home. This might have partly resulted from a conscious strategy of the agents involved in the translation and publishing at that time to build a model national literary language. However, the inconsistencies (in some cases, hybridity is added to places where the source text did not indicate any) in translation of linguistic hybridity also partly sprang from underdeveloped models of translation of this kind of text.

Astra Skrābane unites the sociological aspects of translation processes with a close reading of translations in her paper. Her approach is, to a certain extent, more traditional–she views the poetry of a significant Latvian woman writer as an expression of Latvian national identity and its (predominantly) supply-driven export (Vimr 2015) via translations is portrayed as behaviour enabling and preserving cultural diversity in global or international communication. Besides tackling the issues of modelling the identity of a cultural space through translations, the chapter's appendix (Appendix B) introduces a bibliography of the poet's translations containing more than 30 items in various languages and looks at the poet's self-translations into German, which challenge the unproblematic and undifferentiated personal and national identity encoded in her work.

Barbora Olejárová investigates the recreation of Quebec identities in two English and one Slovak translation of Gabrielle Roy's 1945 novel. Given the geopolitical positions of both Quebec and Slovakia, it might be quite surprising that it was published only 4 years after the original, some 30 years before the translation in the closest larger cultural space (the Czech translation was published in 1979). The interest of the Slovak translator and publisher in a novel exploring French-Canadian identities can be explained by the policies of the target culture–the Živena publishing house, founded in the 1930s and active until the communist totalitarian regime came to full power, specialised in publishing fiction–mainly translations–written by women or for women. Olejárová looks at translating the complex identity of the characters in the novel as it is manifested in their language. Her findings show that the agents in the Slovak cultural space (the translator and the publishing house) were not interested in recreating the hybrid identity in the translation–their focus was probably more on the events forming the identity of the female protagonist (economic struggle, romantic involvement, etc.).

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CHAPTER ONE

TRANSLATION AND POST-NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE DIGITAL AGE[1]

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Abstract

If the notion of economy is based on the management of scarce resources, attention in a media-saturated world has become the most precious resource of all. There is a paradox, however, that haunts translation in this new political economy of attention and that is the attention that is or is not paid to translation itself. In the de-regulation of language, translation becomes the Invisible Hand in the market of communication. However, to see language as purely instrumental without considering the ends to which it is employed is to allow strategies of legibility to be employed in ways that may be deeply damaging to human flourishing. The ecology of translational attention proposed here is concerned with recovering the Language Commons and research into how routinized, unreflective or narrowly utilitarian notions of language impoverish the Language Commons and deplete the expressive resources of future generations.

Are you all sitting still and paying attention? The familiar injunction of the schoolmistress has become the watchword of the new economy. If the notion of economy is based on the management of scarce resources, attention in a media-saturated world has become the most precious resource of all. Already in the mid-1990s Michael Goldhaber was arguing that with the emergence of digital technologies, traditional factors of production would decline in importance relative to that of attention

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(Goldhaber 1996a, 1996b, 1997a, 1997b). Thomas Davenport and John Beck in the *The Attention Economy: Understanding the New Economy of Business* (2001) predicted the monetization of attention where the attention of consumers would be so sought after that they would be supplied with services free of charge in exchange for a few moments of their attention (213). We would be paid to pay attention. This is, in a sense, what has happened with Google where users can use extremely powerful search engines seemingly free of charge.

From the point of view of an economics of attention, two challenges immediately present themselves. The first is how to protect attention from information overload to ensure an optimal allocation of this scarce resource (the vogue for time management courses) and the second is how to extract the maximum amount of profit from the capture of this scarce resource (Kessous, Mellet, and Zouinar 2010: 366). It is in the second sense, of course, that search engines come at a price. For Google, the user is the product and her attention span has a lucrative exchange value. The more she pays attention, the more Google gets paid for her to pay attention. What these developments highlight is a fundamental shift in economic emphasis from production to promotion. In information-rich environments, a series of media gates exist to filter information to potential users or consumers. Not all of these media gates have the same power co-efficient. An ad in a local college newspaper will not reach the same audience as an ad on prime time television. If the absolute cost of diffusing information has fallen dramatically over the centuries–it is substantially cheaper to post a blog in the 21st century than to print a book in the 16th–the cost of getting past the filters of preselection has risen exponentially (Falkinger 2007: 267). In other words, as societies are more and more heavily invested in various forms of mediation, from the rise of the audiovisual industries to the emergence of digital technologies, it is less the production of goods and services than the production of demand through the capture of attention that absorbs increasing amounts of resources. Getting people to take notice is the main income generator for what Kenneth McKenzie Wark has famously dubbed the "vectorialist class" (Wark 2004). Contrary to a popular misconception McKenzie Wark argues that information is never immaterial. It must always be embodied at some level. The vectors are the hard drives, the disks, the servers, the cables, the routers but also the companies and investment funds that are needed for information to be stored, archived, retrieved and to circulate between humans in space and time (Wark 2012: 143). The importance of this class in the United States is borne out by the figures cited by Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee in their *Race Against the Machine* where they point out that the share of income held by equipment owners continues to rise as opposed to income going to labour. While payrolls have remained flat in recent years in the United States, expenditure on equipment and software has increased by an average 26% (2011: 45).

There is a sense, of course, in which gaining people's attention may be a central feature of the new economy but is not necessarily novel in human experience. People have been trying to get others to sit up and take notice for millennia. As Richard Lanham points out in *The Economics of Attention: Style and Substance in the Age of Information* (2006), the central thrust of the art and science of rhetoric for more than two millennia has been to find ways of soliciting the attention of audiences. Lanham argues that much of what has been debated under the heading of "style" in literary criticism, art history, aesthetics has largely been a matter of how writers and artists have sought to corner the attention of their readers or viewers in a field of competing media or stimuli. That the late moderns have not been the first to deal with the consequences of information overload is clear from the experience of Renaissance humanists and 17th century philosophers who were both excited and bewildered by the informational munificence of the printing press. One such scholar, Robert Burton, author of *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) detailed this media invasion:

> I hear news every day, and those ordinary rumours of war, plagues, fires, inundations, thefts, murders, massacres, meteors, comets, spectrums, prodigies, apparitions, of towns taken, cities besieged in France, Germany, Turkey, Russia, Poland, &c., daily musters and preparations, and such like, which these tempestuous times afford, battles fought, so many men slain, monomachies, shipwrecks, piracies and sea-fights, peace, leagues, stratagems, and fresh alarms. . . . New books every day, pamphlets, currantoes, stories, whole catalogues of volumes of all sorts, new paradoxes, opinions, schisms, heresies, controversies in philosophy and religion, &c. (Burton 1927: 14)

Tables of content, indices, references, bibliographies were among the devices employed at a textual level to filter this informational excess and at an epistemological level, an interest in Cartesian style methods came from a wish to make sense of this abundant "news" (Blair 2010). Any attention to regimes of attention will necessarily have to relativise its arguments in the light of previous historical experiences but it is nonetheless evident that the advent of digital technologies have added a significant new dimension to what Davenport and Beck call the "attentionscape" (Beck and Davenport 2001: 49) of late modernity.

A problem not mentioned by Burton but implicit in the spread of his interests is language. There is no way to make sense of the “towns taken” and the “cities besieged” in France, Germany, Turkey, Poland, and Russia if there are no means of obtaining and translating the information from the cities and towns that have fallen or that remain under siege. In other words, you can only pay meaningful attention to what you can understand and translation in a multilingual world is central to the task of language mediation. That translation is a constituent part of information-rich environments is borne out by the exponential growth of the localisation industry (Jimenez-Crespo 2013). The demands for translated data in globalised markets are apparently insatiable. In 2012, Common Sense Advisory estimated the size of the translation service industry to be $33.5 billion and a report by IbisWorld claimed that translation services are expected to keep on growing and reach $37 billion in 2018. These predictions tally with the forecast by the US Bureau of Statistics that the translation industry is likely to grow by 42% between 2010 and 2020 (Pangeanic 2015). The translation service provider Pangeanic concluded that, “globalization and an increase in immigration will keep the industry in demand for the coming years despite downwards costs pressures on the services” (2). Of course, a central rationale for investment in translation is the shift in emphasis, that we mentioned earlier, from production to promotion. In globalised markets, with attention an increasingly scarce resource, one way to make people sit up and pay attention is to offer them products in their own language. “Legibility” of supply encourages expansion of demand. This is the rationale behind the typical sales pitch from a web localisation company such as Language Scientific:

> Website localization or website translation is the process of modifying an existing website to make it accessible, usable and culturally suitable to a target audience. More than 1/3 of all internet users are non-native English speakers, and according to Forrester Research, visitors stay for twice as long (site stickiness) if the website is in their own language. As companies look to expand into new markets, reach a global audience and increase international sales, the benefits of website localization are clear. (Language Scientific 2015)

One of the consequences of this upward shift in translation demand on the foot of attention capture in globalised markets is the emergence of a new kind of scarcity, not only of attention but of translators. The response of the language services sector to growing demands for translation has been the accelerated interest in the technologization of the word. As Pangeanic put it in their promotional literature, “the advent of machine translation