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Translation spaces: parallel shifts in Translation and Intercultural Communication Studies and their significance for informal translation and intercultural practices in international development field

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Abstract

This article addresses the relationship between translation, intercultural communication and international development practice as encountered in the field. Through tracing parallel developments in the academic fields of translation studies and intercultural communication studies, it highlights the move from static concepts of language, nation, and culture to the fluid exchange spaces of multilingual and intercultural encounters. In-the-field examples of international development challenges are examined and discussed in the light of these theoretical shifts. We propose (a) that both fields of study can learn from each other, (b) that translation training should account for the messy intercultural spaces of contact zones, and (c) that guidance on intercultural practice be further developed to benefit those working in the field.

Introduction

The academic field of translation studies has shifted in recent years away from a variety of approaches which focus on texts and cultures to a new emphasis on the role of the translator. With this move, translation studies has been reconfigured as a form of social practice (Wolf 2009) which has ethical implications in the context of unequal power relationships in NGOs.

A parallel shift can also be found in the field of intercultural communication studies, which 30 years ago might have been understood as communication across 'cultures', with 'cultures' often objectified as essentialist, static entities of practices and behaviours belonging to a specific national, linguistic or 'small culture' group. More recent theoretical approaches to intercultural communication favour a conceptualization of culture as a process of meaning-making, and critical approaches remind us that the power aspects of any communication event cannot be ignored as part of the context. These shifts from a product to a process orientation in the field have also led some translation scholars to consider their work through a lens of intercultural communication.

This article will discuss examples from practice in NGOs to problematize and interrogate the underlying conceptualisations of translation and intercultural communication as evidenced by typical practices in the field, asking how process-oriented approaches might contribute to the reconfiguration of translation and intercultural communication in the workplace, and what possible benefits there may be for this.

The following questions, as proposed in this special issue, will likewise be addressed:

What can insights into translation in NGOs add to the ongoing discussions in other research disciplines such as sociolinguistics, development studies and international relations?

What can we learn from these disciplines in order to better comprehend the phenomenon of translation in NGOs?

What insights and tools can translation studies offer to NGOs?

We have chosen to turn the first of these questions around, focusing on the parallel shifts in the fields of translation and intercultural communication studies and their relevance for international development practice as encountered in the field, largely in-country. Much work is currently being undertaken in the headquarters of large charities (for example, Oxfam, Save the Children, and Amnesty International) with regard to the development and visibility of translation policies, including the choice of major, strategic languages for translation (see for example, Tesseur, 2014; and Combeaud Bonallack 2018; Sanz Martins 2018, this issue). However, the reality of translation issues for the development worker at the frontline of in-country development is often a messy, complex, informal and unplanned combination of languages, community practices, power relationships and motivations (both internal and external). This complex context could benefit from a deeper understanding from both the academic community and the international development field as a whole. The three authors of this article represent academics in both translation and intercultural studies, with one having worked as a development professional for over 30 years in a wide range of development contexts.

Development is a highly contested concept ridden with paradoxes (Kothari and Minogue 2002). In practical terms development is often presented as a universal 'global project': Millennium Development Goals, the current Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and Universal Human Rights all suggest universalism. The overarching aim of the SDGs is to: "leave no one behind" (United Nations Statistics Division n.d.) but paradoxically those who are targeted by these goals face significant challenges in accessing the information about the goals in a language they can understand (McEntee-Atalianis 2017).

The Study Group on Language and the UN, composed of UN staff, academics and some practitioners, critiqued the SDGs for neglecting the need for better communication and calls for increased attention to languages and local vernaculars important for communities that are marginalised by ethnicity, race, and space. According to the press release reporting on the Study Group's first international symposium (Study Group on Language and the UN 2016), "the dominance of certain languages, particularly English, in international development discourse" creates "the illusion of a unified global effort." While development experts may be fluent in English, many of the people they seek to serve know none of the major world languages. Thus, "dialogue tends to go in one direction: from the planners to the planned," and "often language prevents dialogue in a spirit of reciprocity and equality between planners and people." There is clearly "an urgent need to include language at the planning, implementation and assessment stages" of the SDGs.

For international NGOs (INGOs), there are competing and pressing needs when making choices about translation. The need to communicate with different stakeholders is often visualised as a chain of accountability (often called the 'aid chain'). NGOs raise funds from multiple donors (governments and individuals). Public facing documentation including project reports and evaluation is generally produced in the donors' language. Most INGOs operate in countries where the first language is not English. Formal translation of internal project and procedural guidance is required to ensure that staff of the NGO can understand and comply with project requirements. Choices are made about which organisational policies and procedures must be available in which languages. In INGO partnerships with national

NGOs in country, the strength of the relationship is often dependent on developing a shared language.

At the lower end of the aid chain, communication with communities or project beneficiaries is often in a local language, a language sometimes shared by project staff. In this multi-lingual context, translation is often done in an impromptu way, orally and informally, as and when it is needed. The project workers may find themselves trying to make sense of translated sources (such as procedural guidance) and translating (orally or in writing) into local languages for the project beneficiaries where possible.

Currently there is more attention paid to language(s) and (if necessary) translation at the top end of the aid chain, following Mawdsley et al.'s (2002) view that the top end which is strongly affected by global development fashions, wields the power and focus away from opportunities for a locally designed diverse mix of projects, ideas and practices These local project spaces where people need to communicate across cultures tend to receive less attention and are often under-resourced.

As the NGO sector has grown in scale, it faces increasing pressure from donors to provide evidence that development projects are making a difference. Managing NGOs has become increasingly difficult as reporting requirements and upward accountability increase as the funds for core costs and administration decrease (Wallace 2004). The demands of reporting against results have continued to multiply and, in this context, NGO staff dedicate significant time and resources on high quality reporting in the donor language while project staff spend less time in the field (Green 2008). The pressure from donors on the NGOs has intensified over recent years. Although the rhetoric is often about accountability to "the poor", in reality, meeting the needs of the next level up in the accountability chain overrides the needs of all other stakeholders (Wallace 2004); upward accountability trumps all. In this context, attention to the space where ideas and concepts are translated in the field is likely to remain under-explored. While recognising the important work being developed by policy makers at the top end of the aid chain (see for example, Tesseur 2014, Footitt 2017), this article considers language, translation and communication practices **at the bottom end of the aid chain**, in the space where development projects aim to have an impact on poor people, and which has perhaps received less attention. If clear language and translation policies are not yet in evidence at the top end, what happens at the point of delivery raises further questions which need addressing. Communication in this local space is often multi-layered and multilingual; translation is often ad-hoc, unprepared, executed as and when required, and messy.

The nature and delivery of development projects is local, and the needs and project responses aim to be context-specific. The lexicon of development language is full of buzzwords and fuzzwords (Cornwall 2007) which are understood and applied differently by agencies and individuals within them. As Rist (cited in Cornwall 2007, 473) comments, some concepts are "untranslatable" such that the translated concepts have a different meaning from the original. The challenge of translation and language is a characteristic of large international organisations and a source of frustration, as the experience of staff quoted in Footitt (2017) shows:

> The issues of choosing which language to work in and coping with the lack of professional translators have dogged Oxfam for years. While it is a multicultural organisation, English is still the dominant medium, and many field staff are excluded from key debates because they lack proficiency in English. Oxfam has never been able to decide whether to use English and recruit and train staff in English, or whether to be multilingual and invest in translation resources, which would be costly. The problems and conflicts of language come up in every major exercise undertaken by the organisation, and yet the issue continues to be unresolved
>
> (Wallace and Burden 1994, 28 cited in Footitt 2017, 528-9)

Multilingualism, in the development community, is often managed through a translation process which occurs in the background (Marinotti 2016). There is an implicit assumption that the appropriate language channels will be used to disseminate the correct and relevant information to the target populations, but little consideration is consciously given to enhancing two-way linguistic communication in the decision-making process to avoid misunderstandings or communication failures (ibid).

As can been seen from the Language Symposium at the UN (2017) some attention is being paid to language and translation by the UN, academics, practitioners and some larger INGOs. For example, from its creation in 1995, Oxfam International has grown from a confederation of 13 organisations in 2008 to 20 organisations in 2018. Collectively they operate in 90 countries. Oxfam International translates some materials into languages considered to be the most important from the perspective of the organisation (also see Sanz Martins 2018, this issue). They most commonly prioritise external-facing communication (e.g. websites, videos) and some legal and operational guidance for technical and humanitarian work.

This attention to language at the centre of organisations, in headquarters and often for external audiences does not help to advance an understanding of how ideas are translated and understood at the frontline of development delivery by practitioners in the field. In this context translation and communication is a highly social activity; it is often informal, multilingual, and under-explored. Attention to language involves paying attention to diversity, culture, and multilingual processes in “contact zones” (Footitt 2017). Developing organisational lexicons does not generally involve communities where the concepts are given meaning and put into practice and translation is often done on the hoof. Footitt (2017, 535) describes this as “muffling the chorus of language and voices”.

What does this mean, however, for translation and intercultural communication practice outside of academia, in the workplace with its concomitant time constraints? While the goals of NGOs working in international development are inextricably linked with questions of agency, civil society development and sustainability, NGOs are subjected to the same time and financial constraints as any organisation.

The development of translation theory from linguistic approaches to translation as social practice in the context of International Development

Throughout the history of translation theory, the challenges of translation have been frequently expressed in terms of a choice between two conflicting aims: e.g. source text/culture orientation v. target text/culture orientation, form v. meaning, domestication v. foreignization. However, in the last three decades the source-target binary approaches to translation have moved towards a sociological orientation in both translation and interpreting studies, with a focus on the agency of translators and interpreters and the social context in which translation and interpreting take place (Angelelli 2014). Globalisation and technological advances have led to a more fluid notion of what a text is. This can be seen for example in the area of news translation, where the nature of the text is fluid rather than fixed: Bielsa refers to the ways in which journalists need to “edit, rewrite, synthesize, add and alter information” for different audiences (Bielsa 2009 cited in Wolf 2013). This fluidity is characteristic of the sociological turn in translation and is also of particular relevance to the spoken and written acts of translation and interpreting which take place in NGOs in developing countries.

The nature of translation and of text is complex and difficult to define in the context of NGOs in international development (ID). The situations in which translation activity takes place vary according to the developing country and the activities of the NGO concerned. In general, as co-author ID consultant Sarah Methven explains above, the translation of formal texts, policies and procedures is generally done with the aim of ensuring compliance across the organisation and to donors. In this case materials in a dominant language are selectively translated into the dominant country language, such as French or Spanish. This is not always the same language used by NGO staff in project communities. This communication between the NGOs and the people in the communities often involves informal oral translation and interpretation which is not based on a text in the form of a written script. For NGOs in developing countries the process of translation is therefore related to the way in which different types of information need to be mediated between people from different cultures. As such, it reflects a new focus on the role of the translator.

In this context Footitt (2017) broadens the concept of translation to incorporate the notion of intercultural communication in the sense that it is a profound and mutually beneficial exchange between the two parties involved. This approach is derived from Ricoeur's assertion that translation is a process of mutual exchange whereby one gains a deeper understanding of oneself through engagement with the other. Ricoeur defines this process as "linguistic hospitality". Footitt explains that:

> The notion of translation as an activist performance situating intercultural openness within a process of mutual exchange potentially moves the development debate on NGO and 'beneficiary' interactions away from one-sided NGO listening, or 'beneficiary' feedback, towards a paradigm of conversation, transnational exchange, and narrative plurality.
>
> (2017, 521)

This development in the process of translation transforms the role of the NGO from that of a one-sided listener to that of a participant who is on a more equal footing with the people in a developing country. This type of mutual intercultural exchange outlines a new type of translation space which is essential to our understanding of parallel shifts in theories of translation and intercultural communication and their significance for NGOs.

In this translation space for example, NGOs may commonly recognise and address power relationships within a 'target' community (often previously colonised) such as gender power relations and tend to recognise the importance of community led planning in an attempt to build up local capacity. However, NGOs are often less able to relinquish the power of a project plan, as they are accountable to donors for its delivery. In this context adhering to a project plan can marginalise community perspectives in the process.

House (2017) links the focus on the role of the translator to a recognition of the ethical responsibility of translators for the translated texts which they produce. Drawing on Emmanuel Levinas' work on subjectivity and ethical responsibility House suggests that translators now need to "gain a heightened transcultural consciousness causing them to reflect on their translational actions and the complicated ethical relationship between author, text and translator." (2017, 160) This notion that the translator should aspire to "heightened transcultural consciousness" acknowledges the responsibility of the translator in the workplace who may need to develop a stronger awareness of ethical considerations, for example, when translating on behalf of individuals who have experienced injustice or exploitation. Indeed, in the experience of Sarah Methven, co-author of this article and development practitioner, when a practitioner is carrying out field research or project evaluations, the conversations with people in the communities need to focus on oral communication using language and metaphors understood within the community. In this context a direct translation into a local language is unlikely to be adequate. The notion of "heightened transcultural consciousness" (House 2017, 160) is very helpful in this context where a translation of the interviewer's question would be inadequate, and the NGO translator would need to have cultural and interpretive skills which go well beyond the ability to translate (practitioner examples of translation at community levels are explored further below).

In words which echo Venuti's fierce denigration of an ethnocentric approach to translation (1995) House argues that the translator with a heightened transcultural awareness should "actively resist the perpetuation of ethnocentric values and the seamless integration of the foreign into one's own cultural system." (2017, 161) The translator therefore has to make decisions based on ethical considerations which need to be prioritized above the linguistic and cultural elements in the text. In this sense translation becomes a form of social practice which has implications in the workplace in the real world.

This recognition of the significance of the external context in which a text is produced and translated further expanded under the influence of globalization, leading to new developments in the nature of the work undertaken by the translator and in the role of the translator. The need to translate in situations of war and conflict, for example, has led to rethinking the terms of both the process and the product of translation, and to a more evident need to consider its ethical implications (Wolf 2011). These evolving translation scenarios reflect particular social features of translation; ones whose aspects are currently "undertheorized." (Wolf 2011, 1) Wolf attributes the "paradigmatic shift" from the cultural to the sociological to a newly acknowledged and formerly neglected aspect of the translation process: the notion that translation can be viewed as a form of social practice and in this context, translators become social agents. From this perspective translation is seen as inseparable from its social context and every aspect of the translation process is interpreted in sociological terms: from the social position of the translator to the choice of translation strategies to depict the translator's political stance to production and distribution of the translation.

Of relevance to the context of NGOs in international development are the agencies and agents involved in the translation process and the influence they may have on the production of the Target Text. Marais' innovative work (2014) conceptualising translation in the context of development in South Africa, and by extension other contexts of international development, clearly illustrates a shift in the approach to the agents involved in the process of translation. By focusing on "locality or space as one of the defining factors in the conceptualisation of translation" Marais "frees translation studies from its overdependence on literary texts as objects of study when investigating agency…" (2014, 4) which signals a decisive move away from theorists like Venuti whose work focuses on the translation of literary texts.

Along the lines of translation as social practice, Cronin (2003) considers its implications in relation to unequal power relationships in the context of globalization and asks whether the translator could be in a position to challenge the asymmetry between Dominant and Minority cultures and thereby promote a more democratic relationship between them. He stipulates that there should be "an activist dimension to translation which involves engagement with the cultural politics of society at national and international level[s]" and suggests that the social responsibility of the translator should be promoted in translator training institutions. Wolf similarly stresses the connection between translation and activism by suggesting that the focus on the agents and agencies involved in translational activity could be "ultimately triggering what might be called an "activist turn" in translation (2013, 7).

Moving beyond the linguistic and cultural features of translation to the social and political responsibility of those involved in the translation process leads to the need to acknowledge the importance of ethical behaviour. In her analysis of seventeen professional codes of ethics for translators, McDonough (2011) notes that only two principles, confidentiality and competence, are common to all 17 codes. Across these codes, competence is difficult to define as a practical guideline for translation as they tend to include references to the somewhat subjective notion of fidelity. This is visibly apparent in the following conflicting assertions in extracts from two different codes of translation ethics:

a. “I will endeavour to translate or interpret the original message faithfully to satisfy the needs of the end users” (ATA code of Professional Conduct and Business practices, Article A)

and

b. “Every translation shall be faithful and render exactly the idea and form of the original…” (IFT The translator’s charter, Articles 4 and 5 (cited in McDonough 2011, 10)

The recommendation that a faithful translation should lead to a target (a) or a source (b) oriented approach may appear to be confusing. However, this ambiguity is arguably appropriate in the context of international development where, as previously mentioned, the nature of the Source Text is not amenable to clear categorisation. In the context of translational action taking place in NGOs, the reference to “end users” could be taken to refer to both the NGO staff and the people in developing countries. In this sense the stipulation in extract (a) that the needs of the end users should be prioritised appears to be more relevant to translation in NGOs where the social circumstances in the geographical location are key to conceptualising the approach to translation, as previously demonstrated for example by Marais (2014).

Translation as social practice, then, can also be understood as a form of intercultural communication. A number of authors have sought to make stronger connections between translation and intercultural communication studies (e.g. Schäffner 2003; Liddicoat 2016; see also the 2011 special issue on translation and intercultural studies in the journal Language and Intercultural Communication). The inauguration in 2006 of the International Association of Translation and Intercultural Studies (IATIS) as well positions translation within the broader field of intercultural communication, describing itself as a “world-wide forum designed to enable scholars from different regional and disciplinary backgrounds to debate issues pertinent to translation and other forms of intercultural communication" (IATIS 2014).

In her 2003 article, Schäffner discusses the similarities and differences between the two fields of study, noting that studies in intercultural communication have developed in their own right not simply as a lens through which to view certain practices in translation theory and practice. This article will now consider briefly the contributions intercultural communications studies can make to the discussion on the role and scope of translation and intercultural studies in NGOs.

Shifts in intercultural communication studies: from cross-national comparison to critical contexts of meaning-making in the context of international development

The term 'intercultural communication' has in the last 20 years become a recognised field of study, not without its challenges, developments, and contradictions, however.

Often cited as having originated in the United States Foreign Services Institute (FSI), where it had become clear that training intelligence agents for linguistic proficiency was insufficient for their needs, intercultural communication was introduced as a concept by Edward T Hall who was hired as an anthropologist to develop an interculturally-focused programme. However, according to Moon (1996) he was quickly "re-oriented" towards a less complex, more comparative approach to studying culture(s), identifying for example low-and high-context cultures or non-verbal communication patterns across national groups. The tensions are still evident today between complex anthropological approaches on the one hand and the more pragmatic goal-oriented cross-cultural comparisons of, for example, national cultural dimensions of individualism and collectivism (e.g. Hofstede 1991). These latter approaches have fallen foul of strong criticisms of essentialist stereotyping and marginalisation of less dominant groups within a nation-state among others (Williams 1992; Holliday 1999; Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004).

Comparative approaches on the surface have many practical uses. Firstly, they allow for quick decisions; for example, a website designer wishing to localise a charity website into a language/culture of an African country, might take dimensions of collectivity into account and highlight pictures of family interdependence over individual success. Alternatively, international charity websites may choose to offer stories of individuals' successes. In some countries this may be seen as excessive focus on the success of one person who has perhaps succeeded as a result of significant family contributions (intellectual, financial and personal) and community intervention, support and sacrifice. Comparative approaches are also useful in terms of understanding the validity of others' practices. As opposed to viewing others' behaviours as inferior or unethical, (e.g. not treating a contract as binding), a recognition of differences in value systems can contribute to the equalising of perspectives, recognising that 'some people/groups do it differently'. For example, an examination of communication behaviours in a Dutch-Ghanaian development education project (Nijhuis et al., 2012) found differences in communication preferences in the Ghanaian group (face-to-face as more effective than for example email). They attributed this to the high-context Ghanaian culture in contrast to the low-context Dutch culture whose members were comfortable with emails as a way of getting things done. In such situations, a recognition of different cultural preferences for communication can be extremely helpful to avoid negative reactions. In their joint educational development project, Nijhuis et al. (2012, 617), recognise that success is not about a 'quick fix' of communication, but requires an ongoing attention to the processes in project development.

The fixedness of the cultural dimensions as described above, then, have more recently been replaced with a more social constructionist approach focusing on fluidity and flows (Risager 2006, UNESCO 2013). Intercultural communication is not a neutral field of study (we also raise the question of impartiality in translation studies later in this article). The recognition of the political and power-positions within any intercultural interactions are paramount (Dervin et al., 2011). When analysing intercultural communication discourse, Scollon and Scollon (2001) state that the central question intercultural communication researchers should be asking should be 'Who has raised culture in this interaction, for what purpose and with what consequences?' The question of what we define as culture, however, remains elusive and can only be defined by the context within which the communication event is taking place. A broad description of national cultures, then, while seemingly attractive, is often meaningless without context, a focus on cultural practices, and on processes of meaning-making. This emic approach belongs more to the realm of anthropology than to cross-cultural comparison, although the latter may have led us to the former. It is akin to Agar's (1994) suggestion (with reference to language shock) that, once we have identified 'difference' in practice (s), it is important not to jump to conclusions and tie down behaviour as something fixed, but to use these differences to ask open questions such as: 'What is going on here?' It is interesting to note that Hall's original focus on anthropology, rejected by the US Institute, has come to be understood as one of the cornerstones of intercultural communication studies.

It is not surprising then that in intercultural studies there has been much focus on the intercultural person, often understood as a mediator between cultural groups, operating in the –in-between-, as an interpreter in the broadest sense of the word, able to shift frames of reference and adopt others' perspectives (see also the term 'brokering' as used by Lewis and Mosse 2006). Influential work in this area includes Byram's (1997) work on intercultural communicative competence, outlining a range of objectives whose specific outcomes would be determined by goals within a particular context, and Kim's (2001) strong transformative and adaptive focus on the intercultural person who is not the same as a "universal person," but an "expanded psychological orientation beyond national and ethnic boundaries." (2001, 196)

Schäffner (2003, 96) notes that one difference between translation and intercultural communication is that the translator is often only present in communication contexts through the translated text: "The translator is usually not immediately present when his or her product is received; this also means that he or she is not in a position to check any feedback. This is different for people who act in their own role in contexts of intercultural communication." Building on this, we would add that the translator (and indeed interpreter) works primarily with texts- other people's texts and is by definition constrained by these texts as pre-created artefacts. The intercultural communicator, on the other hand, is not necessarily constrained by texts, written or spoken, but works with a more open space, and may also create these texts themselves. In a development not unlike the focus on translation spaces referred to earlier in this article, the Council of Europe's White paper on Intercultural Dialogue (2008) specifically aims to open spaces for mutual respect and exchange between "ordinary citizens." Greater focus on developing such spaces for mutual exchange could provide an important response to the upward accountability focus of many international development projects by redressing the balance and improving downward accountability.

The focus on the person in intercultural communication studies invites the question of how far an intercultural person may be considered an interpreter. Indeed Byram (1997, 61) describes one of the intercultural savoirs as "skills of interpreting and relating." This form of interpreting includes for example identifying ethnocentric perspectives in a document or event and explaining their origins (ibid), and areas of conceptual or linguistic misunderstanding such as the use of terminology. The intercultural communicator, therefore, has greater freedom than a translator/interpreter. Koehn and Roseneau (2002), outlining the qualities of "transcultural competence" for international development, argue for a wide range of process-oriented skills, as well as a number of communicative facilitation skills, including skills in **using** an interpreter, and skills of "mutual self-disclosure." The question of articulating one's values openly is considered as fundamental by Byram through his notion of *savoir s'engager*, (political education/critical cultural awareness) and in the form of intercultural responsibility at work (Guillherme et al., 2010). Power relationships, once made visible, can be more easily resisted, or contested. Openly making one's values known to others so that people can understand the contexts of your position, is also an ethical position, and allows others to understand your perspective, without necessarily having to adopt it. With regard to taking ethical action, Ting-Toomey (1999) proposes that a derived ethical position is preferable to either an ethnocentric or ethnorelative position; this would involve considering questions such as:

1. Who or which group perpetuates this practice in this culture?

2. Who or which group resists this practice and with what reasons?

3. Who is benefiting? Who is suffering (voluntarily or involuntarily)?

4. Should I condemn, go along with it, reject the practice, withdraw from the cultural scene, or act as a change agent?

(adapted from Ting-Toomey 1999, 274)

How far is a translator/interpreter able to position themselves ethically, and adopt multiple perspectives in their professional role? Enshrined in the UK Institute of Translation and Interpreting (ITI)'s code of conduct, is a faithfulness to an original text as identified in the following:

> 4.1 Members are required to act in accordance with the following professional values:
> (a) To convey the meaning between people and cultures faithfully, accurately, and impartially.
>
> (Institute of Translation and Interpreting, 2016, 4)

The idea of achieving impartiality in translation is a somewhat unrealistic notion which is reflected in the choice of subjective criteria such as faithfulness as an aim in translation (as seen in the conflicting interpretations of faithfulness in translators' codes of ethics above). Baker and Maier assert that the new emphasis on 'accountability' in all professions needs to be taken into account in translator and interpreter training to reflect the fact that translators and interpreters have the ethical responsibility to be aware of the impact of their translation and interpreting activity on the lives of people in the real world, particularly in situations of war and conflict (Baker and Maier 2011, 3). In the context of NGOs therefore the need for a translator to adopt an ethical stance in the often-informal translation scenarios of the 'contact zones' suggests that impartiality is unlikely to be the aim of the translation. Pratt (2008, cited in Footitt 2017, 520-521) defines the 'contact zones' as "the space and time where subjects previously separated by geography and history are co-present, the point at which their trajectories now intersect" in the multilingual and intercultural world of international development.

Many of the translation situations on the ground in NGOs are complex, multilingual (not bilingual), immediate, and often not pre-planned. How far do requirements such as that of the ITI fit with the lived reality of NGOs?

International Development: Practitioner examples

The following section provides examples from my experience in almost 30 years as a development practitioner. I started as a volunteer working with women in Lesotho, teaching carpentry through the local language Sesotho. Cultural and linguistic differences became immediately apparent to me while working through Sesotho. For example, there is no concept of squareness and therefore no term for it in the language as most construction was built in the round out of stone. Most students had been brought up in rondavels: a traditional circular African dwelling with a conical thatched roof. Strong wooden joints use right angles (square) and are essential for small projects such as tables and chairs which is what the women wanted to make. After my experience in Lesotho, I moved to Mozambique and worked as a photographer, researcher, and project manager. I then became a programme advisor in the Southern Africa region working in five different countries. I later joined INTRAC and worked as a consultant on civil society capacity building projects in Africa and Asia. Since 2008 I have been a freelance consultant working for a range of clients, European NGOs, and Donors. I have been fortunate that in most of these roles I have worked directly with communities and local organisations supporting change. At a community level, translation is mainly oral, with limited opportunities to cross-check meaning or triangulate understanding. Below I present three examples, which I would say are typical of the field experience.

Example 1

In the early 1990's I was hired in-country to carry out research and project design for a participatory livelihoods project. I later became the project manager. The project was based in a remote rural area in Nampula, a northern province of Mozambique. The purpose of the project was to support communities to recover and develop their livelihoods in the context of post-war rehabilitation. The project was multi-faceted and included: support to agriculture production and marketing; access to primary health care and nutrition; and access to education and clean water. An overarching aim of the project was to empower men and women through a participatory development process, whereby groups were facilitated to make their own objectives and decisions about what they wanted to change. The project supported the groups' capacity to manage their own activities. In the longer term some groups were supported to form their own associations, which enabled them to have more formal relationships with local government and private sector traders. Community-based organisations were encouraged and supported to make their needs known to local government, organisations, and the private sector, in order to reduce their isolation and create sustainable relationships for future activities. An implicit intention behind the community groups was to develop trust across the community in the post-war period.

The research and project teams were composed of Mozambicans and international staff. The Mozambican staff came from different parts of the country, with some from Nampula. The national staff all spoke Portuguese, while international staff had varying degrees of competence in Portuguese. The community where the project existed mainly spoke a local dialect of Makhua. The Makhua language had developed as a local dialect, with a recognised difference between the Makhua spoken in the province interior, the coastal region and to some extent urban vernacular (Kröger 2005). Amongst the community members, Portuguese fluency was low and was not used in community conversations. Basic education had been delivered in Portuguese during colonial times. Following independence, the Government had started to promote education in the local language (ibid). The disruption caused by 16 years of civil war meant that many people had not attended school. Apart from older males, who had attended colonial primary school, few people spoke Portuguese. Women had often not been to school or had left early and had not had significant exposure to Portuguese. No project staff were fluent in the Makhua dialect of the interior.

During the training for the participatory research, a game of Chinese whispers was used to encourage staff to check on what they heard and when feasible validate their understanding with additional questions. Staff were also trained in using visual participatory methodologies that aimed to overcome language challenges.

Initial explanations of the INGOs presence in the community during participatory planning exercises relied on male community leaders translating from Portuguese spoken by Mozambican project staff to Makhua. All stakeholders were grappling with new ideas and ways of working. The community was more familiar with emergency relief being delivered by external agencies rather than with long-term development projects. They were not used to consultation nor to the idea that they had a role in defining what they themselves as a community wanted to change. Participatory techniques, which use diagrams and visualisation to overcome the lack of shared language, were equally foreign to the community.

During three years as a project manager, I focused on developing staff capacity, facilitating groups to encourage community ownership and decision making. The community-group methodology was constantly reviewed and negotiated with staff with the aim of increasing ownership and local leadership, although for both staff and community the main interest was in completing activities, rather than taking ownership. The participatory development process underpinning the approach was new to the community, and the long-term benefits of community managed interventions as a way of building ownership and sustainability were not really a priority for communities whose prime interest was to get a functional school as soon as possible.

During the war, schools had fallen into disrepair, with most teaching conducted in the open-air and very prone to being cancelled because of rain. For the community, a key priority that emerged during the consultation was to have all-weather schools. Community participation in school building was the approach adopted. Men and women contributed to the gathering of construction materials, and men were mainly involved in building the school. During the construction process, the NGO staff facilitated management by a community committee. Yet the absence of a shared language meant that older male community members often functioned as ‘bosses’, representing the community and mediating between the project and the community. As a project which had the overall aim of empowering the community this could appear to be a success. However, it illustrates that in the absence of a shared language, the project could do little to encourage equitable division of labour or enable women to have a say in how the activities were organised. The project probably did more to support patriarchy than break it down.

Nevertheless, our project became famous for what was understood by external actors as a successful community driven participatory project and not least the installation of the new infrastructure. We received visits from other INGOs, donors and even the President of Mozambique, none of whom could speak the local vernacular and as such were not able to converse with the community about the value of the project, which was largely explained by the Mozambican staff. The community appeared to enjoy the attention, not least as it was a sign of greater connection to the outside world after 16 years of isolation.

With hindsight we were never fully able to grasp what the community understood about what we were trying to achieve, as our concepts and ideas were virtually untranslatable into the local language. At best, they benefited from additional resources, we benefited from their goodwill and on the whole, we managed.

Example 2

For the last 15 years I have worked as an independent consultant in governance in many different countries in Africa for many different clients, both designing and reviewing projects, and learning from them. All these pieces of work involved talking to communities, mainly rural. English has never been the primary language in the communities involved.

Governance projects focus on improving the relationship between the citizen and the state, often mediated by local organisations, also known as civil society organisations. Many of these projects have as their aim the empowerment of community voices to advocate for change with those in power, district, or national governments. The concept of advocacy is often untranslated, and as such it is one of the most elastic terms in the development lexicon.

Fairly quickly I learnt that advocacy had become an essential buzzword for project proposals. In most cases proposals didn’t elaborate or define how the term would be used in practice. I had my own dual interpretation of advocacy, i.e. as a way for communities to claim their rights from local government and for a project to use evidence from their projects as a basis for dialogue with local authorities about policy implementation and policy change.

During evaluation work I was often confronted with a difference between my own understanding and what was being done in the field. Evaluating a NGO programme in central rural Mozambique in 2015, the English project framework documents included advocacy and influencing activities. Very few of the Mozambican staff spoke fluent English and as the project framework had not been translated into Portuguese, any understanding of what the project was upwardly accountable for, was limited. In this context, staff would tell me they were doing 'advocacia' and it was only during conversations with the community that the projects' use of advocacy emerged. It turned out to refer to activities that raised awareness about more nutritious and diverse diets, or lessons in how to improve farming techniques. All of this was a far cry from citizens articulating their needs and making them known to decision-makers.

Example 3

While working as a trainer for INTRAC in the early 2000s, I was invited by a French NGO umbrella organisation to deliver training in organisational capacity-building. As someone who had not worked in a Francophone country and had very limited school French, I worked with a French speaking colleague from Belgium. I would often start the training by checking on language skills in the room and apologising for my lack of French. I was really surprised by the response to this from French NGO staff: "we want to learn the English approaches, and we want to learn them in English." At this stage the concepts of capacity building had been developed in an Anglophone context. Some of the words and buzzwords were simply not translatable.

Discussion

In the multilingual and intercultural context of development practice, the meanings of concepts, as we've just seen, are fluid. The informal, ad-hoc translation and interpreting practices at the bottom end of the aid chain may often have greater influence on how communities understand what a project is about than guidance written in HQ. In this situation meanings can be very fluid, for example, Sarah notes:

> NGO staff may adopt and translate key concepts such as participation or advocacy and practice it in a way that fits more with the culture and context than the source meaning: The slippery use of language is not always unconscious. NGOs are aware of funders' buzzwords and will often mimic the language of donors and funders while adapting and interpreting and making it meaningful for their own organisational purpose, context, and needs.

This has also been noted by Rossi (2006) who states that aid givers (development workers) and aid receivers (communities) exploit development discourses to suit their own needs. Lewis and Mosse (2006) use the term ‘broker’ to describe the role of development worker as translator and for focusing on the negotiation of meaning and identity in a variety of settings. This negotiation of meaning explains how communities and project staff were using the concept of advocacy in a way that fit with the local culture. Sarah also notes:

> In my experience this negotiation of meaning is particularly visible where the values underpinning certain concepts such as participation or empowerment are counter to local culture. For example, working on projects in Rwanda, project staff carefully interpret such language to avoid potential conflict with local authorities for whom the idea of an empowered citizen could be understood as a direct threat to state authority.

NGOs are often conscious of how power influences the ways in which different members of the community access or benefit from project interventions; less attention is paid to how power differences influence North-South relations and even South-South relationships between local staff of an INGO and a national NGO. In this context, awareness of the power of language, the need for translation and good communication skills are often ignored, even during processes of establishing collaborative working relationships. As Fowler (1991) points out, mutual understanding and shared values are often assumed more than negotiated. The concept of translation spaces and intercultural dialogue, together with the notion of Ricoeur’s linguistic hospitality (see earlier, and Footitt 2017) might usefully be explored by greater focus on the processes of these relationships; initial consideration of Scollon and Scollon’s (2001) mediated discourse analytical approach and Ting-Toomey’s (1990) intercultural ethical questions could be a useful starting point for uncovering the power processes which tend to receive less attention.

There has been a move to develop stronger awareness of translation issues within NGOs themselves, including the strategic decisions made with regard to which languages to use as official, and which languages to translate documents into, (see for example Tesseur 2014). However, much of the translation which takes place in international development is in the field and on the hoof, which can mean that it is often unplanned and unplannable, dynamic in nature, and not always conducive to textual preparation. For an interpreter this is particularly difficult. Sarah notes in her work as an NGO practitioner “When I work with a local consultant – particularly if they are a translator- they will usually ask me for a clear set of questions which I will be asking, so they can prepare their translations. However, what I often need is an open conversation with a community, and this element can sometimes get a bit lost".

Conclusion

This article set out to respond in particular to the questions addressed in this special issue, most notably through a cross-disciplinary, professional dialogue aiming to benefit from respective disciplinary insights.

We here summarise our ideas and our key suggestions. We have considered how both Translation and Intercultural Studies focus on translation and have sought to understand synergies which to date have not been fully recognised, (Schäffner 2003). The parallel developments in both these areas of study are strikingly evident. To recap:

What can insights into translation in NGOs add to the ongoing discussions in other research disciplines such as sociolinguistics, development studies and international relations?

We addressed this question from the perspective of parallel shifts in translation and intercultural communication studies. Influenced by broader philosophical and historical moments such as the rise in social constructionism, critical approaches, and a focus on the person, both translation studies and intercultural communication studies have moved from what could be seen as a national-'essentialist' focus on language and culture to one that recognises fluidity of meaning and which draws attention to processes over products, and people over texts. As shown in Sarah's example of the multi-layered linguistic contexts of rural Mozambique, language cannot be aligned in parallel with country or 'culture' (that is, the nation=culture=language equation is very unhelpful). Linguistic proficiency in Mozambican Portuguese is not going to provide answers for developing a shared understanding in rural Nampula (see Example 1), although some knowledge of Portuguese may have been useful to discuss the meaning of some key terms used in a range of communication contexts. What could also be helpful, however, is to develop a broader understanding of the translatability (or not) of key terms, the fact that the meaning of a key term such as advocacy in one language can be different in another language, and that this meaning is unlikely to be applicable in local NGO offices and in the field. Because key concepts can be so fluid in their meaning, and can vary so significantly in their national and local contexts, it demands an intercultural approach to translation which is part of the fabric of all international development projects, with space given for discussion of 'What do we mean and what do you mean?' This closer focus on negotiating and clarifying fluid meanings within a process-oriented approach to translation and intercultural communication needs addressing both within academia in terms of translation and intercultural training, and in the field, as a necessary practice.

What can we learn from these disciplines in order to better comprehend the phenomenon of translation in NGOs?

The role of the translator as a broker between perspectives and able to negotiate meaning (Lewis and Mosse 2006), or as intercultural/transcultural mediator with intercultural competence, to use Byram, and Koehn and Roseneau's terms, is perhaps no more about linguistic proficiency than a heightened awareness of language, multiple understandings, power, and the processes of making meaning in specific complex local contexts. Here, translation studies can learn more from intercultural communication studies; translation spaces need to be about listening, generating possible understandings, managing, and living with ambiguity, articulating these understandings, making suggestions, and negotiating meaning, for example. Flexibility, curiosity and openness, the hallmarks of intercultural communication competence (Byram 1997, Fantini 2006), are clearly of significance here. Translators operating interculturally in these ways need to be ethical, and open about their perspectives, values, and purpose.

What insights and tools can translation studies offer to NGOs?

The examples in this article from Sarah's long-standing development career offer a glimpse into the challenges of translation and intercultural communication in a range of contexts; much of her work is built upon years of experience learnt in the field and through experience in a range of NGOs. How must life be for a less-experienced, newer project worker in the field or indeed in the HQ of a donor organisation, struggling to make sense of the complexity of their work? Here translation/interpreting studies can provide inspiration from their codes of professional practice. While the current guidelines for translators and interpreters do not fit easily in the international development field, they offer a useful starting point for building on the work of intercultural competence, which has yet to be developed into professional and ethical guidelines for those working in the field.

There are implications too for those who run training and education programmes in translation and intercultural communication studies. A quick look around university translation programmes will reveal that they most commonly develop highly proficient users of two languages, but in the context of international development at the bottom of the food aid chain, the role of a translator does not follow the specialised, high-proficiency route that is typically associated with professional translation. Rather, we are suggesting that all development professionals need to gain the skills and qualities of an intercultural communicator and a translator. They should have a heightened awareness of the role of language(s) in the communication process, and ultimately strive for success of a project. Moreover, when translating they will also need to develop a range of additional (or different) intercultural skills, including flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity, adaptability, and reflexivity. It could be beneficial to develop tracks in translation programmes which include the development of intercultural skills, translating for informal situations, and dealing with the messy reality of fluid, multilingual translation and intercultural spaces (see also Footitt 2017).

Regardless of how we define the clearly overlapping fields of translation and intercultural communication, this article has noted the important parallel shifts in concepts and approaches from both areas and recognises the relevance of these shifts to current issues in international development practice. Intercultural/transcultural competence frameworks can contribute significantly to reconceptualising translation and/as intercultural communication, and the long-standing experience of professional working practices in translation studies can provide a way forward for a more systematic focus on the processes of translation and intercultural communication in international development.

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