WS 31
Denied translations

30.09.2019, Teil 1: 14:00-15:30 Uhr / Teil 2: 16:00-17:30 Uhr, Raum A702

Organisiert von / *organized by*:
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Similar to 'negotiation', translation or interpretation are notions which are often poorly defined in anthropological research. In translation science, translation is understood largely in the concrete sense, that is, as a mediation between speakers of different languages. In the definitions of cultural studies and actor-network theory, translation is used in a figurative sense, i.e. as a translation of difference, and offers exciting analytical lenses, particularly with regard to questions of co-optation, the transformation of meaning across contexts and the impossibility of translation. The risks of these theoretical apparatuses lie in the overload of the translation concept with diverse and contradictory meanings, so that it does not have clear analytical purchase. The proponents of a "translational turn" (Bachman-Medick 2014) also see the need for a concretization of the category.

In empirical research, anthropologists encounter translations not as an analytical concept but as a linguistic practice that raises very specific research questions: How do actors translate their statements – and their associated ideas – into other languages or other fields of action and knowledge? We propose that the potential of anthropological research lies in questioning and developing the current theoretical approaches to translation in the context of field research.

Against this background, the workshop is interested in the end of translations: Which statements are not translatable for actors? In which situations do they refuse translation? What is incommensurable? Ethnographic material on the non-translatable opens a perspective on epistemological questions, in the field of anthropology as well as linguistics. It also focuses on the political relations and asymmetrical power relations in which issues are translated – or not.

Vortragende Teil 1/ *Speakers part 1*:

Heath Cabot (University of Pittsburgh)
'I speak for you': interpretation, credibility, and trust in asylum advocacy in Greece
This paper examines how interpreters at a Greek asylum advocacy NGO "translated" not just language but issues of trust, mistrust, cultural difference, and emotion in encounters between NGO workers and asylum seekers. -- "I am an interpreter. I speak for you." This is how an Iranian interpreter described the work of interpretation at an NGO devoted to asylum related legal aid work in Athens, Greece. Drawing on ethnographic research between 2006 and 2013 (in other words, before the recent "refugee crisis"), this paper looks at how interpreters do not just "translate" language but also negotiate the terrains of trust, mistrust, cultural difference, and emotion in encounters between NGO workers and asylum seekers. I explore commentaries on ideologies of language interpretation from the position of interpreters themselves as well as decision makers. I also ask what the work of interpretation offers for understandings of ethnographic knowledge and the po-sition of the ethnographer herself. Like the figure of the dragoman, the Ottoman anteced-

ent of the interpreter, interpreters in Greek asylum bureaucracies emerge as crucial to the functioning of intergroup relations but their linguistic competence and capacity for cultural brokerage persistently render them susceptible to mistrust.

Jonas Bens (FU Berlin)
Translating transitional justice:
A law and language ethnography of the International Criminal Court in Africa
The International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague conducts criminal trials to bring justice in the aftermath of massive human rights violations – at the moment exclusively in cases from the African continent. Besides bringing individual perpetrators to justice, the ICC is engaged in large-scale tran-sitional justice projects in which the trials shall change mass audiences' sense of justice about the violent past. Translation is the key process to achieve that goal: on the one hand in a narrow sense by translating trial proceedings from English and French into African languages, but also in a wider sense by translating between competing normative orders, cultural systems, and sentiments of justice. The multiple audiences of transitional justice are at the same time being translated back into the transitional justice events. Based on ethnographic fieldwork both at the International Crim-inal Court (ICC) in The Hague and at outreach events the ICC has conducted in Northern Uganda, it is argued that translating transitional justice opens up spaces of indeterminacy in which actors are only able to make meaningful connections to some, some of the time. Based on ethnographic fieldwork at the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague and at ICC outreach events in Northern Uganda, this paper analyses the manifold processes of translation that characterize tran-sitional justice proceedings and the spaces of indeterminacy they open up.

Tilmann Heil (University of Leuven)
Hitting the end of the road?
Translation as part of learning for life among Senegalese transnationals
In this paper I draw conceptual conclusions from the translation practices of Senegalese in three field sites (Senegal, Spain, Brazil). Non-translatability is hardly admitted since it would mean to acknowledge failure in migration defined as the university of mobile life. -- Since starting fieldwork twelve years ago within the networks of Senegalese at home and abroad, migrations during which they went, among others, into very different contexts such as Spain and Brazil, translation both in the literal and conceptual sense has been part of my conceptual apparatus in order to address their practices of tackling differences encountered and their explanations given to me. Mostly practicing believers, Sufi Muslims or Catholics, often from the Senegalese hinterland and going through rough living and working conditions in crisis-ridden Spain and Brazil, non-translatable encounters are easy to imagine, especially regarding ethical concerns of a good life and proper behaviour. I explore to what extent such limits to translation are admitted or eternally pushed further given that a well-known narrative of their migrations is to have inscribed in the university of life and admitting failure to translate would equal failure of their life project. Translation thus is a core part of learning and understanding which equals living in the case of my interlocutors. How then to deal with non-translatability conceptually?

Kristina Pelikan (Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute Basel/TU Berlin)
Translation(s) in transdisciplinary research projects
Within transdisciplinary research projects, various translation processes take place in which ide-olo-gies and knowledge systems cause difficulties, as examples from a project with Maya in Gua-temala will elucidate. Leading to power issues and epistemicide, these difficulties will be discussed in re-gard to research ethics. -- Analysing internal project communication, the proposed presen-tation will focus on transdisciplinary research projects. Transdisciplinarity shall be seen here as collaboration between scientists of different disciplines and project partners from outside aca-demia (Obrist & Zinsstag 2017). Within transdisciplinary communication, translation processes be-tween individual languages (such as English or Spanish) as well as within these languages (intralin-gual translation) take place. All translation processes refer to transfer and interpretation of con-cepts – as examples from a transdisciplinary research project with Maya (Berger-González et al. 2016) as project part-ners will elucidate. Different ideologies and knowledge systems cause diffi-culties in the translation processes as well as in the collaboration itself. Translation and the choice of languages to be used is an issue of power, inter alia, due to less acquisition and transfer of knowledge in a foreign lan-guage. Trying to avoid epistemicide (Bennett 2015), the proposed presentation will discuss these issues with regard to research ethics (Pelikan et al. in progress).

Discussant: ***Bernd Meyer*** (Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz)
Bernd Meyer ist promovierter Sprachwissenschaftler und Professor für interkulturelle Kommuni-kation an der JGU Mainz. Seine Forschungsthemen sind der Umgang mit Mehrsprachigkeit in In-stitutionen, spezifische Probleme des Gesprächsdolmetschens und die Nutzung von Forschungs-ergebnissen für den Aufbau von ehrenamtlichen Dolmetscherpools.

Vortragende Teil 2/ *Speakers part 2*:

Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan (LASDEL Niamey/EHESS Marseille)
On the metaphor of translation
Metaphorical meanings of « translation » in anthropology (see Geertz, or Callon). have a stimulat-ing effect but also involve different bias. Travelling models in social engineering will provide an example of the ambiguity of the notion of translation concerning top down adaptations and bot-tom up reactions. - The concept of « translation » in a metaphorical meaning has been recently imported in development studies, borrowed from Callon and Latour, who have named their own approach « sociology of translation ». But it is unclear who translates what to whom. Translation in such an extended meaning is a stimulating notion. But a semiological bias is at work, as it has already been the case with another famous metaphorical version of translation by Geertz (trans-lating one culture in another one). Travelling models in social engineering provide a relevant ex-ample of the limits of metaphorical expressions such as « translation » or « vernacularization ». The process of implementation in various contexts includes different form of « adaptation » from policy makers, but also different forms of reactions from local stakeholders. The various behaviors and representations of all the actors involved can hardly be put under the sole label of « transla-tion », although the translation metaphor may illuminate some specific parts of the process.

Konstantin Gaaze (Moscow School of Social and Economic Science/Moscow Carnegie Center)
Incommensurability: ontological, ethical and epistemological aspects
In addition to ontological and ethical grounds of "incommensurability", some epistemological can be found. I will demonstrate this on an example of the concept of "threat", essential for understanding how Russian leadership and elite deliberate on security, uncertainty and relations with West. Michael Lambek developed a category of "incommensurability" on a fundament of supposition of differences in ontological presumptions embodied in grammar (Lambek, 2008a) and ethical presumptions embodied in orders of values (Lambek, 2008b). I argue that incommensurability can be produced also by differences in epistemological presumptions, differences of parts and ways of assembling them into "modern rationality" (one of its local clones) as a device. I will demonstrate this on an example of the concept of "threat", which is widely used in Russian leadership and political elite as a generic concept, describing uncertain future, relations with West, above all, the USA, country's perspectives. According to the hypothesis of the Soviet mathematician Vladimir Lefebvre, this cultural variation of incommensurability can be explained in terms of the history of cybernetics in the West and in the USSR, which grew on different models of thinking, biological and psychological respectively (Lefebvre, 1986). Generalization of "untranslatability" of this kind, according to my hypothesis, may give us some new ideas about politics and policies of securitization in different states.

Bernd Meyer (Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz)
Translation, and other forms of participation
While the naïve or normative concept of translation perceives translators as invisible non-participants, the descriptive concept of translation implicitly or explicitly includes other linguistic actions, such as explanations, coordinating activities, or even the act of remaining silent. I will argue that it is therefore necessary to distinguish different forms of participation of translators and interpreters in multilingual communication. -- Pragmatics is the analytical framework that explores the links between linguistic structure, language use, and social action. Within this framework, translation can be understood as a supportive activity by which someone enables others to communicate across linguistic and cultural barriers. Thus, translators and interpreters primarily reproduce linguistic actions of others in languages of others, facilitating mutual understanding. However, while primarily battling with linguistic barriers, they are often also handling asymmetries of knowledge, power, or status. Their specific interactional footing allows them (or even requires) to go beyond what is needed for translation alone. Thus, while the naïve or normative concept of translation perceives translators as invisible non-participants, the descriptive concept of translation implicitly or explicitly includes other linguistic actions, such as explanations, coordinating activities, or even the act of remaining silent. I will argue that it is therefore necessary to distinguish different forms and layers of participation of translators and interpreters in multilingual communication. My paper will be based on discourse data from ad hoc interpreting in medical settings.

Discussant: *Thomas Bierschenk* (Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz)
Thomas Bierschenk ist promovierter Soziologe und Professor für Ethnologie an der Johannes-Gutenberg-Universität Mainz. Er forscht derzeit zum Umgang deutscher Polizei mit kultureller Diversität.