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Abstract:

Two fundamental features of globalisation are the overcoming of spatial barriers and the centrality of knowledge and information. These developments, which result in the increased mobility of people and objects and a heightened contact between different linguistic communities (mass tourism, migration, information and media flows) signal, in spite of the predominance of English as a global *lingua franca*, an exponential growth in the significance of translation, which becomes a key mediator of global communication. Yet language and translation have been systematically neglected in the current literature on globalisation.

This article critically examines current theories of globalisation and interrogates their lack of attention towards translation. It formulates an attempt to understand the significance of translation in a global context, conceptualising its analytical place in globalisation theory and its key role in the articulation of the global and the local.

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Globalisation is generally associated with the shrinking of our world and the possibility of instant communication across the globe, as is emphasised by widespread metaphors of accelerated mobility, such as those of flows and of the information superhighway, which create an image of the world as a network of highly interconnected places in which space is overcome. This article will endeavour to show how the present focus of globalisation theory on mobility has obscured the complexities involved in overcoming cultural and linguistic barriers, and made the role of translation in global communications invisible. It will argue that translation is central for an understanding of the material conditions that make possible global connectedness and that a focus on translation has important consequences for the way that globalisation is understood.

The focus will be on the present phase of globalisation, starting in the late 1960s and designated by Roland Robertson as the 'uncertainty phase', a period characterised by the intensification of global interconnectedness and the heightening of global consciousness. This is generally related to several key developments. The first is the new extreme mobility of capital, associated with the deregulation of financial markets and new information technologies which dramatically enhanced communication capabilities of firms (Castells, 2000: 96). Secondly, Harvey (2000) emphasises the fall in prices and time needed to move commodities and people, and the overcoming of space as a crucial factor. The movement of people involves not only both highly skilled and unskilled labour, but also holidays and travel, which have become widespread after the fall in price of train and car travel first, and later of the jet plane (see Lash and Urry, 1994). Thirdly, Robertson points to the sharp acceleration in the means of global communications and the consolidation of a global media system. Today, through the use of fibre optic cable and satellite technology, it is possible to communicate instantly and cheaply with virtually any place and to follow significant world events from our television screens with images and commentary in real time. These developments have led to the shrinking of the world or time-space compression (Harvey 2000) and to the constitution of deterritorialised social relations in which spatial distance is overcome.

Lash and Urry, and other theorists of cultural globalisation such as Appadurai, have centred on the circulation of material and non-material goods, conceived in terms of flows (of capital, people, commodities, information and images), pointing at its increased profusion and speed in the last decades. Thus, for Appadurai the "mobile and unforeseeable relationship between mass-mediated events and migratory audiences

defines the core of the link between globalization and the modern" (1996: 4). Just as print capitalism, and in particular the newspaper, made it possible to imagine the nation by linking a community of people distant in time-space (Anderson, 1983), electronic media have created diasporic public spheres, through which, in Appadurai's view, a post-national order is inaugurated (Appadurai, 1996:10).

On the other hand, Lash and Urry refer to Giddens' conception of time-space distantiation, further stressing the consequences of the 'speed-up' and 'stretch-out' in the circulation of flows: "this acceleration, which simultaneously 'distantiates' social relationships as it 'compresses' time and space, is leading to an emptying out of both subjects and objects. This accelerated mobility causes objects to become disposable and to decline in significance, while social relationships are emptied of meaning." (1994: 31). Globalisation and the increased speed of flows not only lead to the flattening of both objects and subjects, but also generate a new sense of time derived from electronic time, which Lash and Urry call instantaneous time. Instantaneous time takes place at a speed beyond the realms of human consciousness, brings a decline in significance of clock time and is the final stage in the abstraction of time.

The implications of such a conception of hypermobility and speed are maybe nowhere clearer than in this notion of instantaneous time, which can be taken to generate an accompanying loss of meaning in any realm of social life. Thus, for Lash and Urry, "…the instantaneous character of contemporary time facilitates its *use* by powerful organizations which often result in a flattening and a disembedding of social relations. But the use of instantaneous time can also be enabling for ordinary subjects. They can view and evaluate different cultures at the flick of a switch, or via high speed (or almost instantaneous) transport. This enables the rapid and extensive juxtaposition of, and comparison between, different cultures and places" (1994: 243).

How can cultures be grasped, let alone evaluated, "at the flick of a switch"? Can they be examined and compared without recurring to translation? While mobility, by necessity, generates the need for translation between different cultural and linguistic contexts, theories focused on the global circulation of flows deny or minimise its very existence. One reason for this is that their emphasis on instant communication makes translation processes in global communication invisible. This is related to another, more fundamental reason for obscuring the role of translation: the very focus of these theories on the circulation sphere, which precludes any sustained analysis of translation (or indeed, of any other necessary infrastructure) as a precondition for the global circulation

of meaning. Global flows become in this way phantasmagoric and opaque to understanding, as Appadurai's insistence that they are 'complicated' and even 'mysterious' indicates (1996: 34-35). Thus, while this author does recognise and make various references to the importance of the translation of concepts such as 'freedom', 'rights' and 'democracy' in different political and cultural contexts, he cannot provide an adequate explanation of the structural role of translation in cultural flows because of his very conception of the absolute primacy of the circulation sphere. But before entering into a discussion of translation as a precondition for global communication, the most elaborated conception of the space of flows, Castells' theory of the network society, must be critically examined.

For Castells, globalisation is linked primarily to the revolution in information technologies of the 1970s, which become the motor of the expansion and rejuvenation of capitalism at the end of the 20th century, just as the steam engine was the motor of the first industrial revolution. Informationalism, characterised by the fact that the main source of productivity is the action of knowledge upon knowledge itself (2000: 17), is thus for Castells the new material basis of the socio-economic restructuring of the 1980s that gave rise to the network society.

Castells captures the new spatial organisation of the informational society through the metaphor of the space of flows. The space of flows is characterised by the fluid mobility between those places that are connected to global networks and, at the same time, by spatial fragmentation and discontinuity: "the switched-off areas are culturally and spatially discontinuous: they are in the American inner cities or in the French *banlieues*, as much as in the shanty towns of Africa or in the deprived rural areas of China or India." (2000: 33). The fragmentation of the space of flows finds its expression in the new industrial space, characterised by the technological ability to separate the production process in different locations, as well as in mega-cities, which are connected in a global network and increasingly less related to their regions.

Castells shares with Lash and Urry a belief in the "gigantic leap forward in the reach and scope of the circulation sphere" (2000: 100) and points to the increasing autonomy of global financial flows from their economies, a result of the nature of informationalism. However, he does not ignore the centrality of production. He dedicates extensive chapters to the transformation of work and of the capitalist firm. Moreover, his whole analysis of the network society is developed on the premise that information technology is the new material socio-economic base. His attention to the

productive forces and the key role that Castells attributes to knowledge and information in the network society would seem to indicate that translation, as an important means for their global transmission, should occupy a significant place in his theories. Yet, it is completely absent from his account of the network society. This absence is all the more striking if one thinks that Castells is a Catalan, coming from a bilingual society in which language use is highly politically charged, who writes in English and has found, through a language that is not his own, a global audience. In addition, in his book he explicitly thanks his Russian wife for providing him with access to other languages. The reason for his silence on translation is thus not naivety about linguistic diversity or the politics of translation, but must be sought elsewhere. A clear indication in this respect can already be found in his prologue to *The Rise of the Network Society*, where he asserts that "…a new communication system, increasingly speaking a universal, digital language, is both integrating globally the production and distribution of words, sounds and images of our culture…" (2000: 2). Castells does not see translation as an important process in the network society because he does not believe that linguistic diversity intervenes in its globalised core. In the distinction he makes between the spaces and times of capital and labour, a space of flows, of the instant time of computerised networks, and a space of places, of clock time of everyday life (2000: 506), the first is implicitly conceived as monolingual, while linguistic diversity, linked to place and not to the hypermobility of flows, is seen to belong to the realm of the second.

Castells' position in this respect is what Michael Cronin would characterise as neo-babelian, and expresses a "desire for mutual, instantaneous intelligibility between human beings speaking, writing and reading different languages." (Cronin, 2003: 59). Yet, in Castells' deterritorialised network society it is not English which becomes the global lingua franca, but the digital language of science and technology, a language not of countries but of multilocational, global networks. Thus, for Castells, the tools of informationalism are "…new telecommunication networks; new, powerful desktop computers; ubiquitous computing devices connected to powerful servers; new, adaptive, self-evolving software; new, mobile communication devices that extend on-line linkages to any space at any time; *new workers and managers, connected to each other around tasks and performance, able to speak the same language, the digital language*." (2000: 212, my emphasis).

This reduction of linguistic diversity is highly problematic. In the first place, as Cronin has shown, the neo-Babelian option does not make translation disappear, but

merely transfers it thus rendering it doubly invisible. Translation is now carried out by the speakers of other languages from and into the dominant language, thus redoubling its intensity but erasing it from public view. Secondly, Castells' neo-babelianism cannot address actually existing translation practices that are a response to globalisation. By focusing only on the language of technology, Castells chooses to ignore how linguistic diversity is dealt with at the very core of the network society, be it through processes of localisation of technology or through the news stories that the media report worldwide, translated and in real time.

The analytical place of translation in globalisation

Globalisation juxtaposes elements from distant cultures abstracted from the social contexts in which they have emerged, creating a fragmented and discontinuous experience. In this experience of simultaneity of the world's geography a key social relation that is obscured is translation, which necessarily mediates between different linguistic communities. Globalisation theory which focuses primarily on mobility and flows is compelled to repeat this negation, because its very focus on the circulation sphere prevents it from being able to appropriately deal with the social processes and relations that shape contemporary globalisation.

A notable discrepancy from this is Sassen's perspective on global cities. Sassen explicitly denounces the partiality of theories that emphasise the hypermobility of capital and information, the capacity for instantaneous transmission around the world rather than the infrastructure it presupposes (1998: 202). Her account of global cities, by focusing on the social and economic processes that occur in the most fluidly connected points or nodes of the space of flows, solidly articulates the relationship between the global and the local in specific places, also breaking with views such as those of Castells and Bauman (1998) which emphasise the distinctive time-spaces of hypermobile capital and place-bounded labour. Thus, Sassen argues that:

> "A focus on the work behind command functions, on the actual production process in the finance and services complex, and on global market *places* has the effect of incorporating the material facilities underlying globalization and the whole infrastructure of jobs typically not marked as belonging to the corporate sector of the economy. An economic configuration emerges that is very different from that suggested by the concept of information economy. We recover the

material conditions, production sites, and placeboundedness that are also part of globalization and the information economy." (1998: xxiii)

The global city, "with its vast capacities for controlling hypermobile dematerialized financial instruments and its enormous concentrations of those material and human, mostly place-bound, resources that make such capacities possible" (2000: 218), contains dynamics of both mobility and fixity. It is this articulation of the spatialities of the global and the national that constitutes the global city into what Sassen calls an analytic borderland, a frontier zone which requires its own theorisation and specification (2000: 220).

The conception of the global city as a frontier zone, a key place for the articulation of the global and the local, for the organisation of the material infrastructures that make globalisation possible, introduces an important theoretical move in globalisation theory. Sassen provides a general framework within which it is possible to theorise basic processes, such as translation, that are a precondition for the circulation of meaning on a global scale. I will maintain that translation, as a key infrastructure for global communication (Held, 1999: 345), can also be conceived as an analytic borderland where the global and the local are articulated, and is thus, in cultural globalisation, the equivalent of global cities in economic globalisation. Only by challenging the invisibility and transparency of translation, which obscure the social conditions under which it is performed as well as its role in mediating between cultures, will the mechanisms of cultural globalisation be more fully understood.

Moreover, if globalisation is defined in terms of increased connectivity, it is possible to identify a basic similarity between globalisation and translation when we remind us that "…translation is all about making connections, linking one culture and language to another, setting up the conditions for an open-ended exchange of goods, technologies and ideas." (Cronin, 2003: 41). An exploration of the processes of global connectivity on a concrete, material level is the fundamental contribution of translation to an understanding of the nature of globalisation.

Globalisation as translation

The asymmetries of globalisation and the current inequalities in the production of knowledge and information are directly mirrored in translation, and this becomes visible when the directionality of global information flows starts to be questioned. Thus, some accounts of globalisation have pointed at the number of book translations from

English and into English as an indication of the power distribution in global information flows, where those at the core do the transmission and those at the periphery merely receive it (Janelle, 1991: 56-58; Lash and Urry, 1994: 28-29; Held et al, 1999: 345-46). The global dominance of English is expressed in the fact that, in 1981, books in English accounted for 42% of translations worldwide, compared with 13.5% from Russian and 11.4% from French (Janelle, 1991: 57). At the same time, British and American book production are characterised by a low number of translations: 2.4% of books published in 1990 in Britain and 2.96% in the United States (as compared with 9.9% in France in 1985 and 25.4% in 1989 in Italy) (Venuti, 1995: 12).

For Lawrence Venuti, the dominance of Anglo-American culture is expressed not only in the low number of books that are translated into English, but also in the form in which they are translated according to the values of the target culture and thus following a domesticating strategy based upon fluidity and transparency. Domesticating translations minimise cultural and linguistic difference under the appearance of transparency; they "invisibly inscribe foreign texts with English language values and provide readers with the narcissistic experience of recognizing their own culture in a cultural other" (1995: 15).

More generally, transparency and invisibility also characterise the role of translation in globalisation. Firstly, the conception of instantaneous communication, of the unimpeded transmission of information flows, implies translation's invisibility and, at the same time, places new demands on translation. The first of this is transparency, which allows for the fluidity of connections between linguistic communities. The second is associated with the increasing importance of speed, a consequence of time-space compression, which generates, according to Cronin, the pressure to approximate more and more to the ideal of instantaneous transparency (2000: 112). The need for instantaneous communication in real time generates the need for simultaneous real-time translation in which the human factor is finally eliminated.

Accordingly, Cronin notes the paradoxical nature of translation in the circulation of global information flows:

"The network underpinned by information technology brings Anglophone messages and images from all over the globe in minutes and seconds, leading to a reticular cosmopolitanism of near-instantaneity. This cosmopolitanism is partly generated by translators themselves who work to make information available in the dominant language of the market. However, what is devalued or ignored in

the cyberhype of global communities is the effort, the difficulty and, above all else, the time required to establish and maintain linguistic (and by definition, cultural) connections." (2003: 49)

Nevertheless, the global dominance of English needs to be qualified and should be examined more carefully. Mary Snell-Hornby thus characterises the global lingua franca as follows: "…there is the free-floating lingua franca ('International English') that has largely lost track of its original cultural identity, its idioms, its hidden connotations, its grammatical subtleties, and has become a reduced standardised form of language for supra-cultural communication – the 'McLanguage of our globalised 'McWorld' or the 'Eurospeak' of our multilingual continent." (2000: 17). International English, which in this sense can be viewed as a bad translation of itself, is a deterritorialised language that has lost its essential connection to a specific cultural context. It thus expresses in itself the fundamental abstractions derived from what Anthony Giddens approached as disembedding or the lifting out of social relations from their local contexts of interaction.

Furthermore, there is an important political dimension linked to the global dominance of English that is emphasised by Bourdieu and Wacquant in their discussion of the "new planetary vulgate" voiced by employers, international official, high-ranking civil servants and media intellectuals. According to them, this Newspeak is the result of a new form of imperialism which "consists in universalizing the particularisms bound up with a singular historical experience… so today many topics directly issued from the particularities and particularisms of US society and universities have been imposed upon the whole planet under apparently dehistoricized guises" (2001: 2). The consequences of this new cultural imperialism are pervasive and far-reaching: "By imposing on the rest of the world categories of perception homologous to its social structures, the USA is refashioning the entire world in its image: the mental colonization that operates through the dissemination of these concepts can only lead to a sort of generalized and even spontaneous 'Washington consensus', as one can readily observe in the sphere of economics, philanthropy or management training." (2001: 4).

However, the very fact that categories and concepts cannot be imposed directly but need to be translated or adapted to new cultural contexts identifies this view as one-sided and translation as a key process for the mediation between cultures. Before briefly focusing on the main forms translation adopts in the global circulation of information it is thus worthwhile to remind us of Venuti's views on domesticating translation (see

above), his characterisation of translation as a fundamentally ethnocentric act (1998: 10) and his emphasis on the violence that is exercised through it, which is echoed in his very definition of translation: "Translation is the forcible replacement of the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text with a text that will be intelligible to the target-language reader." (1995:18). This intelligibility implies a necessary degree of hybridisation, through which a dominant discourse is effectively altered and rewritten in new terms. An account of globalisation as translation needs to examine carefully the articulation of the global and the local as the dialectics between the dominance of English and translation as violence, between the imposition of the new planetary vulgate and domestification as an ethnocentric act of appropriation of the Other.

Globalisation has caused an exponential increase of translation. The global dominance of English has been accompanied by a growing demand for translation, as people's own language continues to be the preferred language for access into informational goods. An area of significant growth in the translation industry over the last two decades has been the activity of localisation, through which a product is tailored to meet the needs of a specific local market (2003: 13). In an informational economy characterised by instantaneous access to information worldwide, the objective of the localisation industry becomes simultaneous availability in all the languages of the product's target markets (2003: 15). Translation values and strategies in localisation and *e*localisation (web site localisation) are not uniform but combine elements of domestification and foreignisation to market products that have to appeal to their target buyers but, at the same time, often retain exoticising connections to the language of technological innovation (for an example, see Cronin, 2003: 16-17).

Similarly, translation plays a pivotal role in the global circulation of news, which are primarily produced by a limited number of powerful organisations such as Western news agencies. A feature of the globalisation of news in the last decades is that while there has been an increase in the circulation of news at an international level, the number of global producers has remained strictly limited and their power and significance in the market has increased, which has led researchers to point to trends towards the homogenisation of international news. For example, in her analysis of the international circulation of images, Marchetti speaks of the "circular circulation of images" and sees increasing homogenisation as expressing US and, to a lesser extent, British domination (2002). However, with respect to the international circulation of words, translation is a necessary mediating factor, and shapes in important ways the

production of news both in the news agencies themselves and in the media organisations that subscribe to them. Homogenising tendencies and the imposition of categories developed by the centre need to be examined alongside domesticating strategies aimed at a fluid communication with target readers and exoticising devices through which the discourse of the Other is staged in the media (think for example of English translations of Osama Bin Laden's tapes or Saddam Hussein's speeches). Therefore, translation plays a central role in negotiating cultural difference and in shaping the dialectics between homogeneity and diversity in the production of global news.

Conclusion

Accounts of globalisation have primarily focused on the increased capacity for instant communication worldwide, ignoring the necessary preconditions for achieving it. The increasingly important role played by translation in the production and circulation of global information flows has been made invisible and transparent, and this has lead to the assumption that information can circulate unaltered across different linguistic communities and cultures. An analysis of translation as a key infrastructure of globalisation offers a way of exploring the articulation between the global and the local on a concrete, material level. In particular, it allows us to conceptualise and empirically assess how cultural difference is negotiated under globalisation and how present trends towards cultural homogenisation and Anglo-American domination are mediated at the local level through strategies of domestification and hybridisation.

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