

From Transportation to Transformation:
On the Use of the Metaphor of Translation within Media and
Communication Theory

Rainer Guldin

Università della Svizzera italiana, Switzerland

Abstract:

This paper explores some of the common ground between media/communication and translation theory by focusing on the double metaphor of transportation/transformation. The first part of the paper deals with the more general theoretical implications of a possible interchange between communication and translation in view of the notion of spatiality and the paradigmatic change that has occurred in translation theory in the last few years moving from a transportation to a transformation oriented approach to the process of translation. The second part focuses on the work of a series of theorists who have made extensive use of the metaphor of translation to describe inter-mediatic and communicative processes: Marshall McLuhan, Vilém Flusser, Lev Manovich, and Michel Serres. This section shows that despite the use of a transformative definition of the functioning of translation the single authors have neglected to address the question of the actual nature of this transformative process. Finally, therefore, the paper discusses the relevance of the use of the metaphor of translation within communication and media theory in view of a closer definition of its transformative power.

Keywords: Communication; Flusser; Manovich; McLuhan; Metaphor; Serres; Translation

Résumé:

Cet article explore les similarités entre les théories des médias, des communications et de la traduction en mettant l'emphase sur la double métaphore de la transportation/transformation. La première partie de cet article aborde les implications théoriques générales d'une possible interchangeabilité entre communication et traduction selon la vision que la notion d'espace et du changement pragmatique ont été discutés dans la théorie de la traduction dans les dernières années, orientés vers une approche de la transportation à la transformation du processus de traduction. La deuxième partie met l'emphase sur le travail des théoriciens qui ont fait un usage étendu de la métaphore de la traduction pour décrire l'intermédiation et les processus communicationnels: Marshall McLuhan, Vilém Flusser, Lev Manovich, et Michel Serres. Cette section démontre que malgré l'utilisation d'une définition transfuge du fonctionnement de la traduction, les auteurs ont négligé d'adresser la question de la nature transformatrice du processus. Finalement, et par conséquent, l'article discute de la relevance de l'utilisation de la métaphore dans la traduction au sein des théories de la communication et des médias dans l'objectif de développer une définition plus près de ses pouvoirs transformatifs.

Mots-clés: Communication; Flusser; Manovich; McLuhan; Métaphore; Serres; Traduction

In this paper, I explore some of the common ground between media, communication, and translation theory by focusing on the metaphors of transportation and transformation implicit in the notion of translation (e.g., de León, 2010). The first part deals with some of the more general implications of a possible theoretical interchange between communication and translation. In this section, I deal with the spatial dimension inherent in the three interconnected notions of communication, translation, and metaphor, as well as with the theoretical shift from the notion of transportation to that of transformation. The second part examines the work of some theorists who have made extensive use of the metaphor of translation to describe inter-mediatic and communicative processes. This section is going to show that despite the use of a transformative definition of the functioning of translation the single authors have unfortunately neglected to address the fundamental question of the actual nature of this transformative process. The third part discusses the relevance of the use of the metaphor of translation within communication and media theory in view of a closer definition of its transformative power suggesting at the same time some of the tasks arising from a theoretical interchange between communication and translation theory. In this section, I am also going to consider a wider concept of communication concerning exchanges between different forms of discourse.

Communication and Translation

Communication and translation—and the notion of metaphor (Guldin, 2010)—are dynamic transformative processes that share some fundamental structural traits. Both are basically triadic, that is, they distinguish between a point of departure, a point of arrival and a space in between that has to be crossed in order to complete the process. In communication theory this triadic structure is explicitly stated: sender-channel-receiver. Roman Jakobson introduced the phatic function to stress the importance of the channel in ensuring successful communication. In traditional translation theory the third element is mostly implicit, as one generally speaks only of the source and the target text, that is, the point of departure and the point of arrival. The distance between languages, however, is a topic that has received frequent theoretical attention within translation theory. In the last few decades, furthermore, the idea of a third space separating source and target has become more and more important within translation studies (e.g., Bhabha, 1990; 1994). Both communication and translation, thus, imply movement across an intermediate space, as well as transportation of a specific content. In addition to this, both movements can be reversed at any time.

There are, however, also important differences to be considered. The relationship between communication and translation is basically inclusive as translation is contained within communication. Every translation can be considered as a form of communication between different languages. Any act of translation establishes a communicative bridge between two different languages or cultures. This is not necessarily true of the opposite. In fact, not every communicative act necessarily implies a process of translation, at least not in a literal sense. Every form of communication or inter-mediatic exchange can, however, be considered a form of translation from a metaphorical point of view. I will deal with this specific perspective and its theoretical consequences in the second and third section of this paper. Of the two perspectives defined by the relationship of communication and translation theory the second (i.e., viewing communication from the point of view of the translation) seems more promising as in this case the particular is used to explain the general.

As I have already pointed out, translation implies a movement across a space in between as well as the transportation of a specific content from one shore to another. In order to understand better the functioning of translation as a cognitive metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003) for communication and media one would have to ask what function is attributed to the space in between and to the actual significance of the movement across. More traditional views of translation that have played an important role within theoretical debate up to the 1980s (Venuti, 2004), for instance the notion of equivalence, focus primarily on the relationship of source and target text, stressing the necessity for (absolute) fidelity to the original. The success of a translation is, thus, measured solely according to the resemblance between source and target text. Within this theoretical framework that which actually occurs in the passage between the two languages is of secondary importance. The middle-passage is seen as a problematic gap that has to be overcome as best as possible. In this view, furthermore, the target is always clearly subordinated to the source text. The changes that inevitably occur in any process of translation are considered a sad loss or an unnecessary addition. Translation is a form of transportation.

Michael Reddy (1979) has summed up this particular view in his description of the conduit metaphor: language functions as a conduit in which words containing thoughts are transferred so that the reader or listener can unpack them and get direct access to the original intention. Ideas are objects and linguistic expressions containers. The conduit metaphor

presupposes that transportation does not change the message that gets transferred across the intermediate space between sender and receiver. Applied to the process of translation this would mean that translation implies the idea of communication as a mere sending. The translator takes ideas out of their containers and puts them into new ones (e.g., Reddy, 1979; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). In this view, content is fundamentally independent of the language it is articulated in. It can be stripped of its linguistic garments and clothed anew once it has been transported across. The conduit metaphor, thus, implies an idealized vision of communicative and translational processes that focuses exclusively on the safeguarding of the message to be sent across. A translation is successful if the full import of the source meaning has been carried to the other side. The space in-between does exist but does not have any decisive role in the transaction itself.

The translation theories developed in the last two decades have striven to move beyond such reductive views by focusing on the in-between space, that is, the single steps taken on the way from source to target language, and on the transformative power at work in any translation process. In order to criticize and ultimately supersede the transference/transportation metaphor in translation theory Celia Martín de León (2010) makes use of Round's (2005) distinction between two fundamental groups of metaphors: a group revolving around appropriation and the bringing across and a group revolving around imitation, recreation and reproduction. This distinction aptly sums up the paradigmatic shift that has taken place within translation theory in the last years.

Furthermore, the concept of translation has been successfully expanded from its previous primarily linguistic meaning to a more general concept encompassing a wide array of interdisciplinary and intercultural forms of transaction. In his foreword to *Übersetzung: Das versprechen eines begriffs*—Translation: The promise of a concept—, a collection of essays and interviews, Boris Buden and Stefan Nowotny write programmatically: “One could even say that the contemporary science of translation is, basically, [a] cultural theory specialized in phenomena of translation” [The author's translation] (Buden & Nowotny, 2008: 7). It is this new expanded understanding of the process of translation, which is a direct consequence of what has been described as the ‘cultural turn’ within translation studies, that I would like to take as my starting point for the following analysis.

Before moving on to the second section of my paper, I would like to mention briefly two other significant dimensions of the redefinition of the concept of translation as it has taken place in the last few years. First of all, the discovery of the middle-ground in translation processes is closely linked to a renewed interest in the figure of the translator him/herself and the essential role s/he plays in any translation (e.g., Tymoczko, 2008; Pym, 2000; 2002). The relevance of this aspect for the use of the translation metaphor in media and communication theory lies in the fact that, among other things, the work of the translator takes center stage again and with this all the processes associated with the act of translation. Focusing on the work of the translator implies also focusing on the single contradictory steps of the translation process itself. This renewed attention to detail, to the difficulties and disappointments of translation, could help reinterpret processes of communication shifting the attention from the problematic ideal of successful communication to the more pragmatic point of view of communicational failures and their possible amendments. I will come back to this point in the last section of my paper.

Secondly, Mona Baker (2006) and Maria Tymoczko (2007) have pointed to the importance of conflict, power and ideology in translational processes. This aspect would have to be incorporated in an analysis of the use of the metaphor of translation within media and communication theory. Significantly enough this very moment does not play any role within the work of the authors I will now turn to.

The Metaphor of Translation within Media and Communication Theory

In this section, I would like to turn to the use of the metaphor of translation within the work of a few selected theorists of communication and media theory focusing on their specific understanding of the metaphor.

In the last few years a lot of research has gone into the study of the concept of translation and its metaphorical uses within cultural studies at large, focusing on questions of alterity, hybridity (Bhabha, 1994) and cultural identity (Brisset, 2000), as well as on processes of intercultural exchange (Berman, 1992; 2000; Buden, 2005; Renn, Straub & Shimada, 2002). Another important area of enquiry studies the metaphorical implications of a gender-related perspective on translational interactions (Chamberlain, 1988; Santaemilia, 2005). More recently, the model of translation has also been used to explain the functioning of interdisciplinary exchanges and cross-disciplinary communication (Bachmann-Medick, 2006; Renn, 1998).

Little, however, has been done so far with regard to the use of the metaphor of translation within media and communication theory where it played a relevant part long before the onset of the translational turn in cultural studies (Bachmann-Medick, 2006) and the cultural turn within translation studies. In my paper I concentrate on some of the issues involved by choosing a few significant examples from the work of four media and communication theorists: Marshall McLuhan, Vilém Flusser, Lev Manovich, and Michel Serres.

Media as Translators: Marshall McLuhan

Chapter seven of Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media* book, first published in 1964, bears the title "Media as Translators". McLuhan uses the concept of translation for a whole series of transformative processes combining it at the same time on the conceptual level with the terms 'metaphor' and 'media'. The three, in fact, are used synonymously, enabling McLuhan to quickly shift back and forth through time and space layers. The thematic shifts and sudden stylistic accelerations reproduce on a formal level the functioning of media themselves as McLuhan describes them.

Media translates their users from one historical stage on an evolutionary line to another and back. The city has translated the nomadic and rural man into a new human being. Movies "translate us beyond mechanism into the world of growth and organic interrelation" (McLuhan, 1999: 12), whereas the "electronic technology . . . begins to translate the visual or eye man back into the tribal and oral pattern" (Ibid: 50).

"Technologies are ways of translating one kind of knowledge into another mode" and translation itself a "'spelling-out' of forms of knowing". "'mechanization' is a translation of nature and of our own nature, into amplified and specialized forms" (McLuhan, 1999: 56). Nowadays "we see ourselves being translated more and more into the form of information . . . we can translate more and more of ourselves into other forms of expression that exceed ourselves" (McLuhan, 1999: 57). In the course of history nature is translated into art. This, according to McLuhan, is called applied knowledge. The term applied "means translated or carried across from one kind of material form into another" (McLuhan, 1999: 58). And finally, "All media are active metaphors in their power to translate experience into new forms" (McLuhan, 1999: 57).

The spoken word is the first technology to possess this translational power and at the same time the model of all following media throughout history. All media translate as words do.

“Words are complex systems of metaphors and symbols that translate experience into our uttered or outered senses. They are a technology of explicitness” (McLuhan, 1999: 57). Words translate immediate sense experience into vocal symbols. Media do not only translate us from one world into another, they are the result of a translation process themselves. The wheel is an extension of the foot and the camera an extension of the eye. All these bodily extensions are, for McLuhan, forms of translation.

Translation, thus, basically not only carries across from one state to another, in doing this it reinterprets, reinvents and transforms, it spells out, makes explicit and amplifies. Translation as an active innovative force never implies loss but always gain and expansion. McLuhan even uses it to convey a utopian, fairy-like dimension of endless possibilities of transformation. In the “age of automation . . . all things are translatable into anything that is desired” (McLuhan, 1999: 58). New technology represents therefore an “image of the golden age as one of complete metamorphoses or translations of nature into human art that stand ready of access to our electronic age” (McLuhan, 1999: 59).

About half way through the chapter, McLuhan suddenly shifts gear focusing on the relationship of media and metaphor. “For just as a metaphor transforms and transmits experience, so do the media” (McLuhan, 1999: 59). As extensions of the human body media store and amplify experience, providing a new awareness and new insights. They get at one thing through another, just as metaphors do, and one would like to add, translational processes as well. The same way words translate experience, the media take care of the interplay of senses: “sight is translated into sound and sound into movement, and taste and smell” (Ibid: 60). In the present day electric age, finally, we witness the last stage of this universal ongoing translation process which is history itself: the translation of our central nervous systems into electromagnetic technology leading to a complete conversion of our lives into the spiritual form of information and a transfer of “our consciousness to the computer world” (Ibid). As the previous quotations have shown, McLuhan uses the notion of translation in a transformative dynamic sense. The same holds true for Vilém Flusser (1984; 1996) who, however, introduces a few more aspects, such as the notion of “re-translation” subverting the simple hierarchical duality of source and target text.

Translation and the History of Media Evolution: Vilém Flusser

In Vilém Flusser’s work codes, and media operate in Marshall McLuhan’s sense as translators and transcoders. Images transpose reality into situations, writing transfers the circular magical time of pictures into the time of linear history and the photographic camera translates history into programs (Flusser, 1984).

In *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, first published in English in 1984, Flusser develops a history of media based on a series of processes of translation and retranslation. In a ‘Lexicon of basic concepts’ at the end of the book, translating is defined as a “move from code to code”, a “jump from one universe into another” (Flusser, 1984: 61). The first step in this evolutionary process, based on an alternation of images and texts, consists in the creation of significant surfaces whose function is to make the world imaginable by abstracting it. These surfaces were meant to be mediations between man and world, but tended to hide the world by slowly absorbing and substituting it. “The world becomes image-like. . . . This reversal of the function of images may be called ‘idolatry’” (Ibid: 7). To counteract this tendency, texts were

invented. Their aim was to break up the hallucinatory relationship of man to image and to criticize imagination by recalling its original intention.

Some men . . . attempted to destroy the screen in order to open the way to the world again. Their method was to tear the image elements out from the surface and to align them. They invented linear writing. In doing so, they transcoded the circular time of magic into the linear time of history.

(Flusser, 1984: 7)

History, thus, can be defined as the “progressive translation of ideas into concepts” (Flusser, 1984: 60), of images into texts.

The dialectics of mediation at work in the passage from the first to the second step of evolution, however, leads to a second impasse.

The purpose of writing is to mediate between man and his images, to explain them. In doing so, texts interpose themselves between man and image: they hide the world from man instead of making it transparent for him. . . . Texts grow unimaginable, and man lives as a function of his texts. A ‘textolatry’ occurs, which is just as hallucinatory as idolatry.

(Flusser, 1984: 9)

The same way the pre-historic phase of images was overtaken by a historical phase of texts, post-history takes over from history and by inventing technical images attempts to make texts imaginable again. By doing this, post-history bends the progressive linear development of translation from images into texts back to its origins and beyond. Flusser describes it as a “re-translation of concepts into ideas” (Flusser, 1984: 61), that is, of texts into technical images. Technical images differ from traditional images in that the two are the results of dissimilar processes of translation. Traditional images have real situations as their source; technical images, on the other hand, start out from texts, which in turn have been written in order to break up images through translation.

Flusser’s history of media evolution as translation and retranslation has its origin in his vision of linguistic translation. The following description, which is most probably influenced by Skopos theory, holds true also for the progression described above. When we translate an English text into a French one, or an image into a text, one code feeds on the other: the French text, the meta-code, or the target language, swallows the English one, the object-code, or the source text.

In the case of retranslation the original relationship of the two codes is reversed: the object-code becomes now a meta-code. In other words: after the French code has swallowed part of the . . . English one, he is in turn swallowed by the English code, . . . so to speak with the English in his belly [translation by the author].

(Flusser, 1996: 343)

Technical images are transcodings of texts that have ingested images.

Translating, or transcoding as Flusser calls it at times, is seen as a form of radical criticism and transformation that leads in the end, however, to a falsification of the original

intention calling for a further liberating phase of translation. The same conception of an open-ended, always renewable form of translation, bending back on itself in a final recoding move, can be found in Flusser's own daily practice of translation and retranslation, as well as within the different attempts at creating a unified theory of translation he developed in the 1960s and 1970s. This is also where the metaphor of translation Flusser is using in his media theory originally comes from. In Flusser's interpretation of the practice of self-translation the notion of fidelity to the original is of little importance. What really matters is the creative transformative power of the translation process. Any translation process can, furthermore, be subverted by a subsequent process of re-translation abolishing any simple hierarchical and linear conception of the practice of translation. Because of this, Flusser takes up a unique position within the group of authors I have chosen here. A position that is astonishingly close to that of some of the most advanced theoretical stances of contemporary translation studies.

Cultural Transcoding: Lev Manovich

Another example of the metaphorical use of the concept of translation within media theory can be found in Lev Manovich's *The Language of New Media*, published in 2001. Contrary to the two examples already discussed, Manovich uses the metaphor of translation in a strictly non-evolutionary way. Among the five basic principles of new media, besides numerical representation, modularity, automation and variability, Manovich introduces the idea of a "transcoding principle" by which all cultural categories and concepts are gradually translated into the new format of computerized society. The "principle of cultural transcoding aims to describe what in my view is the most substantial consequence of the computerization of media" (Manovich, 2001: 45). Computerization turns all media into computer data. This explains the enormous importance of programming languages, that is, of software. In fact, Manovich claims that media studies would have to be renamed software studies. "The principle of transcoding is one way to start thinking about software theory" (Ibid: 48).

The process of translation Manovich talks about takes place between what he calls the cultural layer and the computer layer, the two essential dimensions of new media:

Because the new media is created on computers, distributed via computers and stored and archived on computers, the logic of a computer can be expected to significantly influence the traditional cultural logic of media; that is, we may expect that the computer layer will affect the cultural layer.

(Manovich, 2001: 46)

Examples of categories belonging to the cultural layer are story, plot, composition and point of view. Examples for the computer layer, on the other hand, are computer language, process and data structure. "In new media lingo to 'transcode' something is to translate it into another format. The computerization of culture gradually accomplishes similar transcoding in relation to all cultural categories and concepts" (Manovich, 2001: 47). For Manovich, this translation process is basically a substitution of all cultural categories and concepts "on the level of meaning and/or language, by new ones that derive from the computer's ontology, epistemology, and pragmatics. New media thus acts as a forerunner of this more general process of cultural reconceptualization" (Ibid). Manovich uses the notions of transcoding and translating mainly as synonyms without specifying if this passage implies simple substitution or a transformative moment.

Duction: Michel Serres

My last example is taken from the work of Michel Serres (1997) who uses translation to reflect upon communicative exchanges between different forms of discourse. All we get to know, says Serres in the introduction to *La traduction* is through systems of transformation. Along with induction, deduction and production there is translation that works through reproduction within the textual universe. Serres does not want to offer any abstract definition of the process of translation, but make practical use of it within a series of different areas: from philosophy to mathematics, from philosophy to painting and from thermodynamics to painting: Leibniz is retranslated into mathematics. La Tour translates Pascal. Turner translates Carnot. As Serres puts it: “It is not about explication but about application” [The author’s translation] (Ibid: 11).

As the following passage shows, however, his understanding of translation remains fundamentally problematic especially in view of the new radical transformative power attributed to the process by translation studies in recent years. In fact, Serres defines for the practice of translation a theoretical threshold that one would look for in vain in Vilém Flusser’s work:

Science could possibly be the sum of all messages optimally *invariant* with regard to any translation strategy. If this maximum is not attained we would have to do with other cultural areas. Deductive and inductive systems . . . remain more stable when it comes to *transportation* in general; below this threshold productive and reproductive systems . . . vary each according to its own difference. Their difference is actually their variation [translation by the author].

(Serres, 1997: 11, *emphasis added*)

Contrary to the view advocated here, stressing the importance of the transformative force of any kind of translation and to the other authors discussed in this section, Serres makes use in this passage of a more traditional notion of translation defined as simple transportation. He, furthermore, seems to imply that translation practices vary greatly from discourse to discourse, defining a threshold above which transportation and below which transformation apply. This reintroduces a clear cut border between the natural sciences and the humanities as well as the notion of a content that can be easily detached from its form. I argue that the notion of translation always implies a transformation of sorts, even if it concerns scientific information, and that if we define communicative processes at large as translations we would also have to accept its more radical implications.

In the last section of my paper, I would now like to focus on the possible theoretical implications of a strong notion of translation as transformation and the way it could be used to redefine communicative exchanges between different discourses.

Redefining the Concept of Translation

I would like to turn to a conversation between Doris Bachmann-Medick and Boris Buden in which the theoretical relevance of translation for cultural studies at large, and implicitly for communication and media theory, is being discussed. Contrary to McLuhan (1999), Flusser (1996) and Manovich (2010), Bachmann-Medick (2002) is looking for a conceptual redefinition of translation as an interpretative model.

On several previous occasions Bachmann-Medick (2002; 2006) attempted to redefine the use of translation as a cognitive model within a new culturally defined context. She also explored the use of translation movements across disciplinary boundaries highlighting the importance of the new transformative understanding of translation. Contrary to the smoother term interdisciplinary, the model of translation carries a strong methodological potential, aiming for zones of conflict and tension, thresholds, obstructions and moments of untranslatability. Translation is not so much about building bridges between unmoving and unmovable entities; it is more about shock, displacement and disarticulation. The practice of translation is a specific form of transformation which, because of its constant difficulties, enables one to concentrate on the single steps taken when moving from one language to the other rather than on the point of departure and arrival alone. If translation is defined as transformation the middle-ground comes into view and with it the single thorny problems typical of all translations: the hesitations, the successes, and the failures. Transformation itself slows down and opens up to a closer theoretical inspection. This new perspective could help understand communicative processes better.

In her conversation with Buden, Bachmann-Medick sums up the theoretical advantages of a cultural theory inspired by the practice of translation.

The category of translation is going to develop its . . . suggestive potential only if it reaches beyond traditional translational expectations like equivalence, “fidelity” to the original, appropriation and representation—that is, if its linguistic and textual dimension are opened up onto the wider horizon of cultural translation practices. . . . Cultural translation possesses . . . a crucial additional characteristic: the greater closeness to [everyday] reality. . . . Translation processes are border-crossing procedures with a view to difference (*Verfahren der differenzbewussten Grenzüberschreitung*) [The author’s translation].

(Buden & Nowotny, 2008: 29)

Translation is never a simple reproduction. It is always a reinvention of the original. Originals are not prior to their translations. They are created in the act of translation itself. This puts an end to all conceptions of authenticity and originality. The very problems experienced in the act of translation, the hesitations, uncertainties, obstacles, resistances, and impossibilities, that were previously concealed occupy now center stage. This view focusing on the difficulties and disappointments of communication and its frequent failures has also a critical dimension, especially within the context of present day generalized global flows of information.

It is the very complexity of the act of translation that calls attention to another of its salient features: the indispensability of mediation . . . but also the recognition of emerging disturbances, rejections, misunderstandings and conflicts. . . . In global processes of networking and trouble-free communication channels [for instance with cellular phones] immediacy is not only aimed at, but has become a sort of fetish—interferences are hidden and global processes of translation made invisible. . . . It is therein that lies the very potential of a critical, culturally redefined translation category: processes of mediation and spaces in-between can be rediscovered and recognized for communication. . . . This way it will become possible to break down indiscriminate conceptions of inter-culturality into single translational steps. [The author’s translation]

(Buden & Nowotny, 2008: 31-32)

A dynamic concept of translation should therefore not only stress the importance of transformation but also focus on the single difficulties along the way.

As in media and communication theory, however, the category of translation is generally and primarily still used as a metaphor within cultural studies. What is needed, then, is a conceptual reformulation of the category of translation, transforming it from a purely descriptive into an operative concept. In Bachmann-Medick's words: "[moving] away from the interpretation straitjacket, on to a practice of confrontation" [The author's translation] (Bachmann-Medick, 2002: 286). Two major problems would have to be considered first: the unrestricted compelling imaginative drive of metaphors and their unrestricted inflationary use which would have both to be curtailed. A selective and precise use of the metaphor, both with regard to its area of application and its cognitive implications is a *sine qua non* presupposition for its future use as an interpretative model.

As the few examples have shown, within communication and media theory the metaphor of translation has been mainly used to describe the transformative function of codes or media and their interrelation in a synchronical and diachronical sense. Codes, media and disciplines are all metaphorically linked by the common denominator of language as a system of interconnected signs. Beyond an insistence on transformative change through reformulation the metaphor, as it has been used so far, does not yield any other particularly thrilling insight. Furthermore, as already pointed out before, the authors discussed here failed to address the fundamental question of ideology especially when it comes to translational processes. Can the metaphor of translation, as it has been used within media and communication theory so far, be successfully reanimated and expanded?

According to Bernhard Debatin (2005), metaphoricity can be measured by two criteria testing its cognitive strength: emphasis and resonance. The first implies its translatability into unmetaphoric, that is, literal speech: Which aspects of the metaphor cannot be retranslated or paraphrased without any cognitive loss? The second, on the other hand, refers to its inner complexity: What are the different facets of the metaphor and how are they used to broaden and deepen the understanding of the subject? The translation metaphor as it has been used within communication and media theory seems to be low, both in emphasis and resonance. It is, however, not so much the metaphor of translation itself that lacks complexity and originality. The real problem is the restricted use it has been put to so far.

With regard to the criterion of emphasis the questions to be asked would, thus, have to be: What is unique about the concept of translation? What separates it from transformation and conversion? Resonance, on the other hand, could be increased by exploring the inner complexity of the concept of translation, as it has been redefined by the different approaches within translation studies over the last decades. Instead of insisting on the purely transformative dynamics one could, for instance, focus on differences between source and target and the changes occurring in the process. What exactly does, for example mean amplify, or reinvent? What is amplified? What is lost and gained in the process of translation? Is there, for instance, any possible theoretical link between McLuhan's idea of translation as a way to make things more explicit with the concept of "explicitation" as it was formulated in the course of the 1980s by Shoshana Blum-Kulka (2000) and Kitty van Leuven-Zwart (1989; 1990)?

As Hans Blumenberg (1998) has shown, the use of metaphors within scientific discourse is particularly telling and symptomatic in that it very often points to problems in need of explanation. Metaphors tend to be used in scientific areas still lacking precise analytical

concepts. Debatin (2005) calls this specific function of metaphors their meta-communicative potential. This is definitely the case for the manifold inter-mediatic transactions and transcodings described by Flusser (1996), Manovich (2010), and McLuhan (1999). Here, translation theory could offer a series of concepts tested in analysis and practical use that would help explain the complex interchanges going on. But, there is another much wider area of application for the metaphor of translation, pointing beyond the borders of media and communication theory. Translation theory could be called upon to explain the multiple and multifaceted communicative transactions taking place between different scientific approaches, between the natural sciences and cultural studies, activating the productivity of hybrid in-between-spaces and questioning preset frames of reference.

What can, finally, be learnt by translation studies from the use of the metaphor in media and communication theory? First of all, perhaps, the rediscovery of a utopian side of translation processes: their tendency towards a form of redemption in an ideal of impossible completeness. Add to this a reconfirmation of all those aspects that transcend the purely linguistic, so to speak the wider interdisciplinary vocation of translation studies which might in the end become a “Leitwissenschaft”, a leading science, within communication and media theory at large.

References

- Bachmann-Medick, Doris. (2002). Übersetzung im Spannungsfeld von dialog und erschütterung: Ein modell der auseinandersetzung zwischen kulturen und disziplinen. In Joachim Renn, Shingo Shimada, and Jürgen Straub (Eds.), *Übersetzung als medium des kulturverstehens und sozialer integration* (pp. 275-291). Frankfurt am Main: Campus.
- Bachmann-Medick, Doris. (2006). *Cultural turns* (Neuorientierungen in den kulturwissenschaften). Reinbek: Rowohlt.
- Baker, Mona. (2006). *Translation and conflict: A narrative account*. London: Routledge.
- Berman, Antoine. (1992). *The experience of the foreign: Culture and translation in romantic Germany*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Berman, Antoine. (2000). Translation and the trials of the foreign. In Lawrence Venuti (Ed.), *The Translation studies reader* (pp. 284-297). London: Routledge.
- Bhabha, Homi K. (1990). The third space: Interview with Homi Bhabha. In Jonathan Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity, community, culture, difference* (pp. 207-211). London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Bhabha, Homi K. (2005). *The location of culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Blumenberg, Hans. (1998). *Paradigmen zu einer metaphorologie*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Blum-Kulka, Shoshana. (2000). Shifts of cohesion and coherence in translation. In Lawrence Venuti (Ed.), *The translation studies reader* (pp. 290-305). London: Routledge.

- Brisset, Annie. (2000). The search for a native language: Translation and cultural identity. In Lawrence Venuti (Ed.), *The translation studies reader* (pp. 343-375). London: Routledge.
- Buden, Boris & Nowotny, Stefan. (2008). *Übersetzung: Das versprechen eines begriffs*. Wien: Verlag Turia und Kant.
- Buden, Boris. (2005). *Der schacht von Babel: Ist kultur übersetzbar?* Berlin: Kadmos Verlag.
- Chamberlain, Lori. (1988). Gender and the metaphors of translation. *Signs*, 13(3), 454-472.
- Debatin, Bernhard. (2005). Rationalität und irrationalität der metaphor. In Hans Rudi Fischer (Ed.), *Eine Rose ist eine Rose... Zur rolle und funktion von metaphern in wissenschaft und therapie* (pp. 30-47). Weilerswist: Velbrück Wissenschaft.
- Flusser, Vilém. (1984). *Towards a philosophy of photography*. Göttingen: European Photography.
- Flusser, Vilém. (1996). *Kommunikologie*. Mannheim: Bollman Verlag.
- Guldin, Rainer. (2010). Metaphor as a metaphor for translation. In James St. André (Ed.), *Thinking through translation with metaphors* (pp. 161-191). Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing.
- Lakoff, George & Johnson, Mark. (2003). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Leuven-Zwart, Kitty (van). (1989). Translation and original: Similarities and dissimilarities I. *Target*, 1(2), 151-181.
- Leuven-Zwart, Kitty (van). (1990). Translation and original: Similarities and dissimilarities II. *Target*, 2(1), 69-95.
- Manovich, Lev. (2001). *The language of new media*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Martín de León, Celia. (2010). Metaphorical models of translation: Transfer vs. imitation. In James St. André (Ed.), *Thinking through translation with metaphors* (pp. 75-108). Manchester: St. Jerome.
- McLuhan, Marshall. (1999). *Understanding media: The extensions of man*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Pym, Anthony. (2000). *Negotiating the frontier: Translators and intercultural history in Hispanic history*. Manchester: St Jerome Publishing.
- Pym, Anthony. (2002). Intercultures and the interface with nationalist culture. Retrieved on June 21, 2012, from <http://usuaris.tinet.cat/apym/on-line/intercultures/intnation.pdf>.
- Reddy, Michael J. (1979). The conduit metaphor: A case of frame conflict in our language about language. In Andrew Ortony (Ed.), *Metaphor and thought* (pp. 284-324). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Renn, Joachim, Straub, Jürgen & Shimada, Shingo. (Eds.). (2002). *Übersetzung als medium des kulturverstehens und sozialer integration*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus.
- Renn, Joachim. (1998). Übersetzungskultur: Zur grenzüberschreitung durch übersetzung als ein charakteristikum der moderne. *Sociologia Internationalis*, 36, 141-171.

- Round, Nicholas. (2005). Translation and its metaphors: The (N+1) wise men and the elephant. *Skase, Journal of Translation and Interpretation*, 1(1), 47-69.
- Santaemilia, José. (Ed.) (2005). *Gender, sex and translation: The manipulation of identities*. Manchester: St. Jerome.
- Serres, Michel. (1997). *La traduction*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit.
- Tymoczko, Maria. (2008). *Enlarging translation, empowering translators*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing.
- Tymoczko, Maria. (Ed.). (2007). *Translation and power*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Venuti, Lawrence. (Ed.). (2004). *The translation studies reader*. London: Routledge.
-

About the Author

Rainer Guldin is Lecturer for German Language and Culture at the Faculties of Communication and Economic Sciences at the Università della Svizzera Italiana in Lugano, Switzerland. He studied English and German Literature in Zurich and Birmingham (England). His Ph.D. thesis focused on the work of the German writer Hubert Fichte. Recent publications include *Vilém Flusser: An Introduction* (2011), *Pensar entre linguas: A teoria da tradução de Vilém Flusser* (2010). He is Editor-in-Chief of the peer-reviewed multilingual open access e-journal *Flusser Studies*.

Citing this paper:

Guldin, Rainer. (2012). From transportation to transformation: On the use of the metaphor of translation within media and communication theory. *Global Media Journal -- Canadian Edition*, 5(1), 39-52.