Edited by Stephanie Schwerter and Jennifer K. Dick, “Transmissibility and Cultural Transfer: Dimensions of Translation in the Humanities” brings together monumental voices in the social sciences—such as Jean-René Ladmiral from Paris and Peter Caws from Washington DC—to begin to address the Humanities’ specific issues with and debt to translation. Calling for a re-examination of how translations are read, critiqued, and taught in Philosophy, History, Political Science, and Sociology departments, this book provides tools for reflection, bases for reconsideration of given translations, and historical observations on how thought has been shaped across national borders. The volume ends with four case studies—examples from auto-translation in postcolonial literature, cultural issues of translation in Chinese-language cinema, negotiating meaning between linguistically and culturally different audiences in the United States and Lebanon, to verbal-visual questions of translation in marketing to German and French clients.

All in all, this book is a comprehensive, compact survey of the cultural and linguistic translation and transmission issues in the social sciences today. “Transmissibility and Cultural Transfer: Dimensions of Translation in the Humanities” is illuminating and informative. A great tool for study or debate.

Jennifer K. Dick teaches American Literature and Civilization at the Université de Haute Alsace, Mulhouse, France. Her research is in the field of poetry and visual poetics. She is particularly interested in the liminal spaces between language use in the visual arts and typography and visual work implanted on the page in American and European literature. She co-organized the international conference Lex-ICON: treating image as text and text as image in June 2012 from which a collection of critical and creative work on the topic is forthcoming.

Stephanie Schwerter teaches translation studies, intercultural mediation, and comparative literature at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris. She is the author of “Northern Irish Poetry and the Russian Turn” (2013) and “Literarisierung einer gespaltenen Stadt. Belfast in der nordirischen Troubles Fiction” (2007). Her current research interest lies in the field of intercultural communication, exploring in particular intercultural connections in European literature.
TRANSMISSIBILITY AND CULTURAL TRANSFER
Dimensions of Translation in the Humanities
# Table of Contents

**Introduction:**
Jennifer K Dick and Stephanie Schwerter ............................................ 7

**I. Theoretical Reflections on the Uniqueness of Translation in the Humanities**

Jean-René Ladmiral: “Sourcerers and Targeters” ........................................ 19


Elad Lapidot: “Translating Philosophy” ..................................................... 45

Thibaut Rioufreyt: “The Concept of Translation: The Role of Actors in the International Circulation of Ideas” ......................................................... 57

Nicolas Marcucci: “The Quest for Obligation: ‘Translating’ Classical Sociological Languages through Moral and Political Vocabulary” .................. 75

Salah Basalamah: “Social Translations: Challenges in the Conflict of Representations” .......................................................... 91

**II. Case Studies**

Angela Feeney: “Jacques Ferron—Writer and Translator” ............................ 109

Christophe Ippolito: “Literary Translation: From Cultural Capital to Dialogism” 119

Henry Leperlier: “Translation and Distortion of Linguistic Identities in Sinophone Cinema: Diverging Images of the ‘Other’” ........................... 137


**Contributors** ................................................................................................ 183
Introduction

Jennifer K Dick, Stephanie Schwerter

We want to open a discussion here by addressing the limitless (in)fidelity in humanities translations. Did you choose to read fidelity? Or infidelity? What does this choice say about you (the target of our text)? What does our lack or inability to make a choice say about us (the source of the phrase)? How significant is the difference of two letters to the reading of the phrase, or to the journey of imagination it may take you, or me, on? Openness in defining the subject/meaning, where two completely opposite readings of the topic sentence can be made, parallels for us the critical theoretical, technical and literary issues at stake in translation (and mistranslation) for those working in the social sciences today.

When it comes to translation in the social sciences, the issues at stake are not simply precision, prose rhythm, authorial voice, style, and linguistic differences between two or more languages. What is key is how translation affects meaning-making, especially in the areas of philosophy, ethnography and anthropology, sociology, and political theory. For the most part, translations in these areas are not studied and picked apart for their cultural and linguistic accuracies. More often than not, theoretical texts are taught in courses as if the text being read were in the original. Yet even the translation of names of authors such as Plato (in English, derived from the Latin form of his name) and Platon (in French, stemming from the original Greek form) should signal the potentially alarming divide in our overall manner of reading, interpreting and seeing the world through translated social sciences publications.

Frequently, the limits between translation and transformation become blurred. As a result, we might not be able to determine whether we are reading a “faithful” translation, a version or even an imitation of a certain source text. Clive Scott and André Lefevere see translation as an act of communication through which the translator offers his or her own interpretation or reading of the original. Consequently, certain parts or elements of the target text are bound to be alien to the
source. Both critics maintain that texts have to be translated in many different ways. Their view on translation closely corresponds to that of Walter Benjamin as outlined in “The Task of the Translator”. Benjamin argues that a translation should not aim to convey the content of the source text to the audience but to ensure the survival of the original. According to Benjamin, the continued existence of the source text becomes possible if the translator recreates it in a different spatial and temporal context, imbuing it with his or her own voice. In so doing, the translator “produces an echo” of the original and ensures the “survival” and progress of the source text. In the following chapters of the present study, our authors will explore how far a translation contributes to the “survival” of the source text in going beyond simple transmittal of a given text’s base meaning and in attaining its “linguistic complement”, as stated by Benjamin. Another issue addressed is the question of how (or whether) a translator is able to faithfully transfer the different dimensions of the source text into the target language. Don Patterson claims that it is impossible to translate exactly both form and content of the original into a different cultural context as this would be a “precise receipt for translationese”. He maintains that the target language would be forced “to bear the brunt” of the source text and therefore “buckle under the pressure”.

Students and professors alike read the majority of humanities writings for their ideas, and the notions therein or which they may add to. And yet, these notions may well have holes or be completely misconstrued because of the work of a translator. A well-known example is the comparative study of Heidegger translations in English and in French. Both portray radically different views of meaning. There is also the significance of competent translation, which makes a new philosopher or thinker’s work palatable and interesting to the public, or distorts it horribly. Here one thinks of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* translated into English by H.M. Parshley, which Margaret Simons in a 1983 essay revealed had been cut by over 10 per cent from the original text (which was later revealed to be at the publisher’s request).

---


Additionally, Parshley revised Beauvoir’s philosophical vocabulary⁴—so much so, argues Rachel Kwan, that the text “lost much of its argumentative coherence and incisive observations in translation, ultimately obfuscating its purpose.” For Kwan, “This continues to misrepresent and delegitimize Beauvoir’s work, and contributes in turn to the undermining of other women’s philosophical contributions in the public sphere”⁵. For feminist scholars such as Toril Moi and Elizabeth Fallaize, the realization of the extremity of these modifications in Beauvoir’s work led to the examination of how these mistranslations had affected and are potentially still affecting recent feminist theory⁶. Thus to translate is not just to betray language, but also to betray meaning-formation and an entire society’s intellectual growth. Such misunderstandings, or betrayals—intentional or not—have at times led to new methods of thinking about things—as Peter Caws’ chapter in this volume will demonstrate so deftly.

Of course, what comes to play a role in all of this are issues such as those of copyright and the financial costs of retranslating and publishing works which are already widely available in an existing, though perhaps less desirable, translation. Furthermore, the very choice of a certain text for translation determines its “fate” in a different cultural environment. Whereas a “chosen” author is given the chance to “live” outside his or her own language, others remain entirely ignored and literally do not exist in the mind of many readers. These points are touched on lightly here, but they generally remain to be examined in a future study.

Instead, this volume will explore topics specific to translation in the humanities, such as naming, transmitting cultural ideas across borders and languages, the political, economic and social barriers and advantages to accurate translating, and misunderstandings and their historical-philosophical-sociological echoes in

---


contemporary thinking. In the end, we are left with a series of questions to contemplate, such as: How does a culture progress—or how might it be stunted—because of the translations or lack thereof in social sciences? How did the theories of social scientists (such as Tönnies and Durkheim as explored by Nicola Marcucci’s chapter) benefit from travel abroad, a multilingual education, and cross-cultural reflection? How has and do multilingualism, cross-cultural perspectives, and translation help build comparative elements of world views into key writings on sociology, philosophy or political and postcolonial theory? What power issues are inherent in the work of translation in the disciplines of the humanities? What do we hope to get, as theorists, from re-examining and challenging texts and ideas that have been handed down through the generations until their accepted version has practically become a cliché? What are the consequences for social scientists in the transmission and the acceptance across generations of terms held to be true but which originated from potential mistranslations? Why is it important to begin thinking now about specific translation issues for and in the humanities?

In line with so many thorough studies on general translation theory, chapters in this book also pose and respond to questions such as: Should a translation read like a natural text in the foreign language, or should a strangeness signal to the reader that a bridging is still underway? Are there aspects of culture that cannot enter into translation because they are extra-linguistic, and which therefore alter our cross-cultural perspectives in the social sciences? and: Can specific translation and reading tools be provided to help translators and readers of translation in the humanities?

Volumes exist on the general theory and practice of translation, and more are being composed every day, especially in English, such as Translation Zone by Emily Apter, Translation Studies by Susan Bassnett, The Translation Studies Reader by Lawrence Venuti or Translation and Identity by Michael Cronin. These books explore a wide diversity of perspectives on the theme. Hans-Joachim Störing’s Das Problem des Übersetzens, Jörn Albrecht’s Literarische Übersetzung. Geschichte, Theorie, kulturelle Wirkung as well as Katharina Reiss’ and Hans J. Vermeer’s Grundlegung einer allgemeinen Translationstheorie are key publications in the German context. Umberto Ecco’s Dire quasi la stessa cosa. Esperienze di traduzione did not only reach an Italian but also an international readership. In French, reflections such as Traduire : théorèmes pour la traduction by Jean-René Ladmiral
and *Les belles infidèles* by Georges Mounin have imposed themselves upon those who engage with the questions and problems raised by translating. Numerous studies also exist specifically on literary works and their various translations, such as of Dante’s *Divine Comedy* or contemporary debates about how to deal with the unusual German of Paul Celan. Yet there is still very little that has been said about the way translations of classic philosophers have affected our society, or how to rethink the practice and reading of terms and sociology as translation within the humanities. *Dimensions of Translation in the Humanities* therefore attempts to provide an initial theoretical background on this topic as seen through the eyes of advanced scholars such as Peter Caws and Jean-René Ladmiral as well as fresh voices, such as Nicola Marcucci and Elad Lapidot. It includes original observations that raise awareness about our own East/West, Occidental/Oriental cultural blind spots, as in the chapters by Salah Basalamah and Henry Leperlier among others.

This volume opens with two solid foundation discussions on applied and conceptual translation theory. Jean-René Ladmiral’s well-known reflection on the questions of whether translators are source or target oriented, as his title implies: “Sourcerers and Targeters”, paves the way for the other essays in this book. His chapter is followed by Peter Caws’ “How Many Languages, How Many Translations?” in which Caws addresses three basic questions: what linguistic competence is required for scholarship in the humanities, what use can be made of translations, and what can (and cannot) be learned from translations without a full knowledge of the source language? Caws’ chapter closes with a focus on the answers’ implications for scholarship and for postgraduate education.

Elad Lapidot then joins his voice to Ladmiral’s in his chapter, “Translating Philosophy”, where he cogitates about the specific issues at stake in translation of this science of thought, philosophy, starting and ending with the complexity of translating the word itself. This chapter reflects on the way that universities tend to ignore philosophy as a generally all-translated area of study, and the potential ramifications of such ignorance. According to Lapidot, for science, the diversity of languages constitutes a “pathology of communication: different names for the same thing” where “science is not translated, it speaks one language”. As science, philosophy thus fails to justify its own factual translation. Denying it, it sees translating as copying where the translation is required (and presumed) to be correct and identical to the
original. But, as the vast explorations of translation theory remind us, translation itself generates linguistic difference. In this way, translated philosophy understands itself to be lost in transliteration. According to Lapidot, therefore, philosophy requires literal translation as it “looks for the truth in the word”. He explores here literal translation as a method of access to the “love of wisdom”: not for rewriting science but for rediscovering the desire to know.

Lapidot’s chapter opens the way for the cogitations which follow on the circulation of ideas across cultures and societies, many of which take an opposite stance to the ideas of literal translation. First, revisiting Bourdieu and examining his ideas in the context of Bruno Latour’s 2007 book *Changer de société, refaire de la sociologie*, Thibaut Rioufreyt explores, as his title declares, “The Role of Actors in the International Circulation of Ideas”. Rioufreyt shows how the spectrum of writer-translator-reader becomes a single line and role, that of co-translators which he argues are also co-authors. For Rioufreyt, individuals participate in the idea circulation of mediators (meaning actors) and are therefore not simple intermediaries (meaning agents) but actively change the text, its interpretation, its readability, its diffusion, its study, and how it gets carried through a society. Secondly, Nicola Marcucci analyzes the historical context of Tönnies and Durkheim in “The Quest for Obligation: ‘Translating’ Classical Sociological Languages through Moral and Political Vocabulary”. This comparative study argues at once for the impossibility of rectifying the cultural, national and translational divide and also for the absolute certainty that parallels exist and are fructified through translation, travel, cross-cultural and international study and reflection about social systems. This extremely historical look at sociology and the origins of its terms as seen through the examination of these two authors concludes in a space which is an opening for translation, an invitation for its arrival, which will be a “moral” and “political project”.

Everyone plays their part in the process of meaning-making, argue Rioufreyt, Caws and Ladmiral, which leads us to the closing essay in the half of this book dedicated to theoretical reflections on translation, Salah Basalamah’s assessment of the issues of transmission of ideas via translation—where he asks not only “Can one translate?” but “Can one transmit?” Looking at issues specific to the real rift between East and West, Basalamah, in “Social Translations: Challenges in the Conflict of
Introduction

Representations”, calls for new kinds of translation, both philosophical and social, which will be socially active and assume a psychological, or even psychoanalytical, dimension. For him, translation involves coding and decoding in cross-cultural contexts, which may lead to a resolution of the East-West identity crisis. Most significantly, in a time obsessed with theories about how to get past binaries and attain a new paradigm, Basalamah suggests concrete tools towards the flattening of this binary habit, tools applicable both to social science theories and to translation theory.

The second half of Transmissibility and Cultural Transfer: Dimensions of Translation in the Humanities is dedicated to translation in practice. It provides a close look at four specific case examples, starting with two examinations of translation in literature. These case studies are equally social, sociological, philosophical and historical in their particularities. In the first of these, Angela Feeney analyzes issues of autotranslation, the mixing of languages in a single literary text, and the hierarchisation of one language over another to express a colonized sensibility or a postcolonial political stance, as seen in Québec author Jean Ferron’s work. As Feeney notes, Ferron stands as an excellent case study to draw the attention of the reader towards the act of translation itself and towards the role the translator plays in the transmission of culture. Ferron obliges us to consider, when translating, what factors are at play in choosing what to translate and how to translate them. Ferron’s chapter serves as an excellent example of how writers can comment on cultural issues not only through their writing but also through the use of translation.

The second literature case study, provided by Christophe Ippolito in his chapter entitled “Literary Translation: From Cultural Capital to Dialogism”, discusses cultural and linguistic questions regarding his editing a translation of a book on the civil war in Lebanon by Lebanese poet Nadia Tuéni. Ippolito explores his personal experience of editing a scholarly edition of Tuéni’s translated poems for a cross-cultural audience, negotiating meaning between linguistically, culturally and politically different audiences both in Lebanon and the United States, in French and in English.

The remaining two case studies which close this volume are on cultural issues of translation, first in the area of film dubbing, and lastly in marketing. Henry Leperlier’s “Translation and Distortion of Linguistic Identities in Sinophone
Cinema: Diverging Images of the ‘Other’” investigates how dubbing in Hong Kong cinema imposed by regulations from Mainland China can serve to hide or even obliterate an original identity, especially as concerns the use of what he calls “so-called Chinese dialects” or of multilingualism (mixing of languages such as in Hou Hsiao-Hsien’s *A City of Sadness*, which contains dialogues or announcements in five languages: Classical Japanese, Modern Japanese, Mandarin, Taiwanese, Shanghainese). Leperlier’s article reiterates some of the findings named by Feeney in her study of Ferron—that by erasing certain cultures or languages in favour of others, the interpreter or translator is commenting on the cultural context he/she is working and living in, and that context is rife with social and political hierarchy issues.

Echoing Leperlier’s points about carrying cultural identity from one place to another, and in fact just across a shared border, Nadine Rentel’s article “Translating Cultural Values in Marketing Communication. A Cross-cultural Pragmatic Analysis of French and German Magazine Advertising” closes this book with a look at how even the most similar topics and attitudes—for example purchasing the same car in two different countries—may reveal irremediable differences in cultural norms of communication. Here, Rental writes of a space where language and sign have returned to portray a single cultural code, where multimodality of print advertisements are texts as a textual whole, composed of both visual and verbal parts. Rentel shows how diverse even image interpretation and use is from one country’s advertisement for the same product to another. The goals of this chapter are numerous, both befitting a reading by marketers or those studying cross-cultural economic and marketing issues. However, as Rentel herself notes, studying this case of cross-cultural pragmatics in the advertising domain creates a general awareness for the fact that these texts have to respond to the linguistic and cultural expectations of target groups. From a much wider perspective, the analysis of different types of advertising messages (on TV, on the internet, etc.) and of different languages is important in order to describe communication norms in an increasingly globalized context, and can lead readers from many disciplines to see how understanding an appropriate or appealing communicative style for one culture may differ greatly from that of another. In Rentel’s case, she tends to focus on a “targeter” translation objective, to return to Ladmiral’s opening text and terminology, but Rentel is bringing into the dialogue an awareness of how that target group shifts quickly given
time and context, issues at the center of debates about the long-term value of any single translation.

All in all, this volume brings together monumental voices in the social sciences to begin to address the humanities’ specific and problematic debt to translation. Calling for a re-examination of how translations are read, critiqued and taught in Philosophy, History, Political Science and Sociology departments, this book provides tools for reflection, bases for reconsideration of given translations, and historical observations about how thought has been shaped across national borders. The new research contained in this study is designed to encourage supplementary exploration and understanding of the theory and phenomenon of translation—“one of the weightiest and worthiest undertakings in the general concerns of the world.”

---

Theoretical Reflections on the Uniqueness of Translation in the Humanities