

Propositions on Cross-Cultural Communication and Translation *

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Abstract: Cross-cultural communication can be characterized by a relatively high degree of effort required to reduce complexity, by relatively high transaction costs, by relatively low trust between communication partners, and by relatively narrow success conditions that create points of high-risk discourse. To communicate successfully between cultures would thus require a special kind of risk management. Translation, as a mode of cross-cultural communication, is held to share those same features, as well as at least two specific representational maxims concerning discursive persons and textual quantity. It is argued that the related concepts of complexity, success conditions and risk can describe not only the act of translating as a mode of cross-cultural communication, but also certain features of the professional intercultures to which translators belong. Step-by-step propositions thus synthesize an approach that runs from an analysis of cross-cultural communication to a description of professional intercultures, their sources of power, and the reasons for their apparent lack of power in a globalizing age.

Résumé: La communication transculturelle se caractérise par un haut degré d'effort requis pour la réduction de la complexité, par des coûts de transaction relativement élevés, par un relatif manque de confiance, ainsi que par des conditions relativement étroites de succès communicatif. Tous ces facteurs créent des points où le discours serait à haut risque, de sorte que la réussite communicative requiert une spéciale gestion des risques. La traduction, comme mode de communication transculturelle, partage ces mêmes traits, auxquels viennent s'ajouter deux maximes représentatives qui lui sont propres. Par extension, les concepts de complexité, de conditions de succès, et de gestion des risques seraient capables de décrire non seulement l'acte de traduire, mais aussi certains traits des intercultures professionnelles dont font partie les traducteurs. Une même suite de propositions mène donc de l'analyse de la communication transculturelle à une approche des intercultures, de leurs sources de pouvoir, et finalement des raisons de leur apparent manque de pouvoir à une époque de globalisation.

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The following are propositions designed to connect a few ideas about cross-cultural communication. They are presented in fairly common language and as concisely as possible. The ideas are drawn from a multiplicity of existing theories; the aim is not particularly to be original. The propositions are instead intended to link up three endeavors: an abstract conception of cross-cultural communication, a description of the specificities of translation, and an attempt to envisage the future of cross-cultural communication in a globalizing age. The various points at which the propositions draw on previous theories are indicated in a series of endnotes. Examples and illustrations can be found in the works referred to.

1. On cross-cultural communication in general

- 1.1. Cross-cultural communication involves the perceived crossing of a point of contact between cultures.
- 1.2. Cultures here are minimally seen as large-scale systems of assumed shared references, linguistic or otherwise¹, used for the purposes of reducing complexity (on which, more below).²
- 1.3. Cultures themselves may idealize one or several internal centers, where the shared references are felt to be so dense that communication would be without any need for reductions of complexities. Away from such ideals, cultures may have peripheries, where references are sparse, or sparsely shared, or mixed

¹ There are many definitions that list the many things in a culture. But if we ask theorists if there is anything beyond culture, and they reply in the negative, then the lists of things might as well be summarized as “everything”. The term “large scale” here is obviously a rule of thumb. We might think of things like Western culture, French culture, Catalan culture, rural culture, youth culture, MTV culture, Siemens company culture, and so on. The smaller the scale, the more we would want to use the marketing term “locale”.

² The notion of “reduction of complexity” is drawn from systems theory (used in information technology, psychology, negotiation theory), where it is traditionally distinguished from “complication”: an airplane is a complicated system but is predictable (we hope), whereas ecological systems are complex because many links are fragile and thus relatively unpredictable. The process of interpretation, as an under-determined deciding between alternatives, is thus a reduction of complexity, with or without the complications of linguistic analysis. The model is used here to avoid assumptions of stable meaning or the truth value of propositions. It places communication in a world of probabilistic calculations, be they symbolic or intuitive. None of my writings on cross-cultural communication have ever assumed any kind of “meaning transfer”.

with references shared by other cultures. The terms “center” and “periphery” are not to be understood geopolitically. (cf. Even-Zohar 1990, Toury 1995)

- 1.4. The differences between centers and peripheries are operative fictions rather than primary empirical facts. The very belief that one is in a central position may be enough to curtail perceived complexity, just as the false impression that one is lacking in context may increase perceived complexity. (Pym 1998)
- 1.5. The difference between center and periphery may also be characterized in terms of effort. When shared references are believed to be dense (all else being equal), the reduction of complexity requires less effort than when the references are believed to be sparse. Effort here is understood as being on both the sending and receiving sides of communication, as well as in any mediating position or investment in the channel. A text sent and received near a perceived center will thus require less investment of effort than the same text sent from a center to a periphery (assuming that the reduction of complexity is to be to a similar degree in both cases). And further supplementary effort will be needed if the text is to be received in another culture. (Pym 1995)
- 1.6. The lines between cultures are marked as crossover points where the communication act receives supplementary efforts of a mediating and discontinuous nature. Such points are usually where translations are carried out, although many other modes of communication may operate at those points. (Even-Zohar 1981, 1990; Pym 2001a)
- 1.7. Cross-cultural communication thus marks the points of contact between cultures, although it alone will not join up the points to form any kind of line. (Pym 1998, 2001a, cf. Chatwin 1987)

2. On complexity and its reduction

- 2.1. Texts are inscribed objects that can be interpreted in different ways and for different functions, quite independently of any original intentions.³
- 2.2. The plurality of possible interpretations is what we are calling complexity.
- 2.3. The reduction of complexity does not imply any discerning of a true or primal meaning. For example, a reader at this point might interpret the term “reduction of complexity” as “understanding”, but such a reading will hopefully be deviated by the following paragraphs.
- 2.4. In this sense, the reduction of complexity does not entail an act of understanding in any idealist sense.
- 2.5. Nor must effort be expended only to reduce complexity. Effort can also be used to make texts more complex, preparing them for a greater plurality of

³ It seems important to do away with reliance on the notion of intention, which remains, for example, in Sperber and Wilson (1988) and consequently in Gutt (1991).

interpretations. Such might be a certain conception of aesthetic pleasure, diplomatic ambiguity, or communicative *méchanceté*.

- 2.6. The degree of appropriate complexity is in each case dependent on the success conditions of the communicative act concerned.

3. On success conditions

- 3.1. Success conditions are criteria that make the communicative act beneficial for all or some of the participants concerned.⁴ Our ethics hold that there should be benefits for all; our realism realizes that this is not always the case.
- 3.2. Such criteria may be simple, as in the case of a business negotiation to reach mutual agreement on a sales price: the success condition might be that all participants agree on a price. However, success conditions may also be subtle and multiplex, as in the conversations by which friends exchange solidarity and mutual amusement, deploying the values of play and reminiscence. I would like to talk with my brother, not in order to gain any particular information, but simply to recall all those years when I talked with my brother. Hopefully he would share that aim. (cf. Pym 2000a)
- 3.3. Success conditions may be considered ethically invalid when they do not ensure benefits for all participants in an act of communication; that is, when inclusive cooperation is impeded.⁵ This is so even when local success conditions are met. For example, what precise benefit might young children gain from being told about the criminal past of their parents? And what of terminally ill patients? To answer those questions, it is not enough to define local success conditions in terms of “understanding the truth” or *somesuch*.
- 3.4. Success conditions should be formulated as failure-avoidance conditions, rather than as ideals.⁶ For example, the commercial success condition for publication of a book in translation theory in English is that about 200 copies be sold (depending on the price). Anything above that figure is likely to be

⁴ Cf. the extensive discussion of “appropriateness” conditions in pragmatics, applied to translation in, for example, Mayoral (2003).

⁵ Cf. Pym (1997); I would now accept this as a minimalist ethics of effort. It requires completion by a redistributive concept of social justice, if and when such a theory can find grounding in a cross-cultural model. The ethics of cooperation assumes that more than one culture is involved in the communication act, although there are almost always asymmetric power balances to be accounted for. We do not accept that cross-cultural communication is well characterized as “interference” (which seems to suggest a pristine prior state, and an unwanted action), nor that it is “mostly unilateral” (Even-Zohar 2001), although we would certainly agree that cross-cultural communication is “always imminent” and that “there is no symmetry in cultural contacts” (ibid.). One should always try to find the multiple interests in play.

⁶ Cf. the use of Popper’s negative ethics in Chesterman (1994b, 1997).

profit; anything below it is probably a commercial loss. Success in this case clearly requires a more complex notion of a best-seller.

- 3.5. Success conditions are in each case relative to certain material constraints on the communication act. A business negotiation cannot normally take two years (unless the stakes are very high); it is far better completed in two hours (unless the matter is very complex). A conversation between friends, on the other hand, would tend to have success conditions that give a positive value to extension over time.⁷
- 3.6. It would be naïve to suppose that success conditions are defined first and that participants consequently determine how much effort they should invest in a communication act. Success conditions themselves may be defined or redefined in relation to the effort expended, such that communication is terminated when the success achieved is deemed “good enough” for the effort expended. Alternatively, a communication act may be extended and further effort invested simply because high entertainment value is found in mutual joking (or so it seems as we keep drinking). Far from absolute, success is a point of pragmatic termination, defined through constantly revised expectation.⁸
- 3.7. A fundamental success condition of all communication acts is that the mutual benefits from the communication must be greater in value than the transaction cost incurred. (Keohane 1984, Pym 1995, 1997)

4. On transaction costs

- 4.1. Transaction costs are the efforts put into a given communication act. These costs include production, reception, mediation, fees paid for the channel, or any distribution costs. (Keohane 1984, Pym 1995, 1997)
- 4.2. Transaction costs may be estimated for just one participant (when deciding whether to participate in one communication act or another) or for all participants (when assessing the ethical viability of the communication act itself).
- 4.3. If a given success condition can be satisfied through two alternative communication acts, the more viable communication act will be the one with the lower transaction costs for the participant confronted with the choice. If a Russian company can purchase oil at the same price in English or in Russian,

⁷ Cf. Katz (1978) on performance conditions.

⁸ Cf. Pym (1993), where semiosis is seen as terminating either because it becomes trivial (the transaction costs cannot be met) or because the alternatives are too important (one acquiesces to the decisions of the other, as a sign of respect, or despair).

it might do so in Russian because it thus saves the effort of learning or translating English.⁹

- 4.4. To reduce complexity is to reduce transaction costs. To build trust is also to reduce transaction costs. To learn a culture is to reduce transaction costs within that culture.
- 4.5. The higher the transaction costs, the more restrictive the success conditions. If books can be produced and distributed very cheaply, the break-even number of copies will be lower than the 200 mentioned above, and the commercial success conditions will be easier to meet.
- 4.6. The selection of cheaper means of communication does not in itself ensure the minimal ethical requirement that benefits ensue for all participants. However, the lowering of transaction costs may allow for looser success conditions, greater general benefits, and thus a greater probability of mutual benefits. Cheap communication may be ethically laudable. (Pym 1995)

5. On the specificity of cross-cultural communication

- 5.1. Cross-cultural communication might be characterized by a relatively high degree of effort required to reduce complexity, by relatively high transaction costs, by relatively low trust, and by relatively narrow or restrictive success conditions. In short, it is harder to meet success conditions between cultures than within just one culture.
- 5.2. In some cases, cross-cultural communication is so restricted by narrow success conditions that the efforts involved have to be redistributed on a mid-term or long-term basis. The sender might thus adopt or learn the referents of the receiver; the receiver might do the same for the referents of the sender; or there may be intervention from a mediator able to carry out a number of operations between and including these extremes.

6. On the size of communication acts

- 6.1. Each participant projects the desired extension of the communication act in terms of the benefits to be obtained. For example, if an immigrant family decides to adopt a new language in its home domain, the transaction costs will be enormous for the parents' generation, and the desired benefits will probably not appear until the children's generation gains social advantages through cultural integration. In this case, the communication act, from the perspective of the parents, should be seen as spanning two or more generations. (From the perspective of the children and other social actors, the disadvantageous loss of the former language should also be gauged in terms of generations.)

⁹ Cf. Levý (1967) on the "minimax" principle. Levý, however, used game theory supposing complete information. Here we assume no such completion.

- 6.2. Communication acts may also be foreclosed, either because the benefits have been achieved (many marriages dissolve after the children leave) or because the sought benefits seem unlikely to eventuate (courting does not always lead to long-term relationships). In the latter, the communication act should be regarded as truncated in its very nature.
- 6.3. The estimation of success conditions and the provision for appropriate transaction costs is itself a source of complexity, even for small-scale communication acts. This complexity may be reduced through the explicit calculation of the values involved (as tends to be the case for large-scale acts in the professional domain) or through internalized cultural predispositions (as tends to be the case for small-scale acts in all domains). The degree of calculation may nevertheless also depend on factors such as the nature of the communication act itself, since the calculation must be recognized as incurring transaction costs.
- 6.4. Internalized cultural predispositions, having evolved from countless individual decisions over many generations, may give a more efficient distribution of communicative effort than will explicit professional calculation.¹⁰
- 6.5. Internalized cultural predispositions may, however, develop only in order to restrict the number of participants that can enter into a communication act. The size of such acts might thus be restricted to monocultural dimensions, with benefits for members of a shared culture. (cf. Chesterman 1994)
- 6.6. Cross-cultural communication thus tends to deploy overt calculation and explicit values more than internalized cultural predispositions, for reasons that are in addition to the greater need to reduce complexity.¹¹

7. Translation versus language learning

- 7.1. Mediated cross-cultural communication can enhance the sharing of referents, adapt texts to new referents, or do many things in between those possibilities.
- 7.2. In the first case we would usually talk about language learning, although the learning involves cultural preferences just as much as it concerns grammar and lexemes.
- 7.3. In the second case we would usually talk about text adaptation or translation of some kind.
- 7.4. The adoption of language-learning strategies (which include the use of passive language competence) is usually beneficial when the communication act is of medium or large dimensions, particularly over time.

¹⁰ On internalized predispositions, see Bourdieu (1979 & later) on *habitus*.

¹¹ Cf. the explicitation hypothesis in translation theory, and the proposed laws in Toury (1995).

- 7.5. The adoption of translation or adaptation strategies is usually beneficial when the communication act is of reduced dimensions or relatively short-term.
- 7.6. Since most cultures are engaged in both short-term and long-term communication with other cultures, they commonly combine both kinds of strategies. There is little evidence that a predominance of language learning (for example, of English) prohibits alternative modes of mediation (the numbers of translations in general have risen alongside the development of international English).
- 7.7. The most viable mode of mediation is nevertheless ideally selected in accordance with the success conditions of the communication act, since those conditions can override the quantitative logics involved. For example, the European Union defines its success conditions in terms of attaining stable multilingual governance. This means that translation is adopted as a major long-term strategy despite the exorbitant transaction costs involved.¹²

8. On the nature of translation

- 8.1. Translation is thus a relatively high-effort high-cost mode of mediated cross-cultural communication, normally suited to short-term communication acts.
- 8.2. Ideas commonly held about translation have historically clustered in what might be called “translation forms”. These forms embrace ideas held by producers, receivers and theorizers on all levels, no matter how paradoxical or unscientific those ideas may be. A translation form reduces complexity so that different social agents may believe they are discussing a shared object called “translation” or some similar term.
- 8.3. In terms of its contemporary Western form, translation may be considered a mode of cross-cultural mediation defined by at least two maxims of representation: one concerns translational quantity, the other concerns first-person displacement. There may be many other maxims operative in a translation form (those concerning semantic similarity, for example), but the maxims of quantity and first-person displacement should be considered specific to translation only. (cf. Pym 1992a)¹³
- 8.4. The maxim of translational quantity holds that a translation represents an anterior text quantitatively. If a translation is longer, a corresponding anterior text is presumed to be longer as well.
- 8.5. The maxim of first-person displacement holds that the first person of the text is the same first person as the anterior text, even when the two texts are held to

¹² Stecconi (2002) cites costs of 175.5 euros per page in 2001.

¹³ The notion of maxims here clearly draws on Grice (1975). As in Grice, the maxims are of interest not because they are immutable laws but because they are historical social conventions able to produce implicatures when not adhered to.

have been produced by different subjects. (The person who says “I am translating”, as an instantaneous present, cannot be the translating translator.)

- 8.6. These two maxims are primarily operative in the space of text reception, such that any text received as a translation is, for the purposes of this description, a translation. (cf. Toury 1995)
- 8.7. The maxim of translational quantity means the receiver believes that if the text is shorter or longer than the previous text that it represents, those differences are insignificant, such that they do not alter the translational status of the text. Any challenge to this maxim will produce implicatures operating on the boundaries of translationality. For example, when a ten-minute speech is rendered consecutively in two minutes, the difference in length is very likely to be significant and the text will probably be received as a critical commentary rather than as a translation.
- 8.8. The maxim of first-person displacement distinguishes translation from other forms of reported speech and code-switching. It can also be challenged. For example, when a Broadway production of *La Bohème* mentions Marlon Brando in the lyrics, the first person authoring that name cannot be conflated with the first person of Puccini. The implicature once again points to commentary rather than translation.
- 8.9. This way of defining a translation coincides with certain culture-bound conceptions but should not exclude other culture-bound criteria, of whatever nature. If a term other than “translation” is required, that can be arranged.
- 8.10. This translation form can be considered a prototype concept on the level of the maxim of quantity. A prototype concept would be, for example, a view where quantitative differences between a translation and its anterior text were ideally held to be non-significant (in accordance with our maxim), and less-than-ideal translations tapered off in both directions, along continua where texts became significantly longer or shorter than the anterior text, perhaps becoming expansive commentaries at one end, and summaries at the other (cf. Holmes 1988). In certain gray areas, receiving subjects would hesitate to give the attribute “translation”, or would disagree on the issue. Such would be the model of a prototypical quantitative relationship, operating in terms of clines. (Halverston 1999)¹⁴
- 8.11. The maxim of first-person displacement, however, works on a fuzzy logic of “yes-no” switching, not in terms of continua. This is clear in the case of the displaced first person, where the producer of the translation is at once the implied first person (a translation is produced by a translator) and is not the manifest first person (the “I” is not that of the translator). Both reductions are maintained at the same time; there is no prototype concept; there is no cline. (Monacelli and Punzo 2001)

¹⁴ Halverston (1999) sees prototypicality as a general feature of translation, overlooking the complementary logic of switching.

- 8.12. The maxim of first-person displacement appears unhappy in cases where a text is simply reproduced in its original form (i.e. as a loan word or transliteration), since the non-markedness of the cultural distance in such cases leaves no space for the implied first-person translator. This is why transliterations are rarely felt to be translations in any complete sense.
- 8.13. The representationality of our translation form presupposes sets of bilateral relationships between the cultures involved (source vs. target, etc.). This in turn underlies remarkably binary translation options within theorization processes (source-oriented, target-oriented, etc.). Such binary logics tend to be less persistent in the theorization of non-translational cross-cultural strategies. The binarism rarely finds exact sociological correlates among the multiplicity of cultural positions involved in cross-cultural communication.
- 8.14. The strong binary nature of our translation form also underlies the way in which translational discourse positions its receivers as either observational (if they are oriented toward the source culture and text) or participative (if they are oriented toward future action). (Pym 1992b)
- 8.15. This translation form does however also position excluded receiving positions, most simply through the choice of a particular target language or variety that reduces complexity for some social groups while creating relative opacity for others.
- 8.16. The observational and participative reception positions tend to be related in terms of a fuzzy logic of perceptive switching (receivers are aware of both positions even while adopting just one). The logic of exclusion, however, is more graded and tends to operate in terms of clines.

9. On trust

- 9.1. Trust is a key mechanism for reducing social complexity. (Luhmann 1989)
- 9.2. Mediated cross-cultural communication is usually carried out for a participant who is peripheral or external to at least one of the cultures involved. For example, clients ideally employ translators to work into Spanish because they, the clients, do not know Spanish well enough to do so themselves. In such situations, the mediation is characterized by a high degree of potential mistrust, since the translator might always identify with the other side. It is in those situations that trust is allocated and has a value.
- 9.3. In such situations, the extent of potential mistrust is particularly extreme in the case of translation because of the representational nature of the two maxims involved. Translators may be mistrusted not just because their work is to some degree opaque to the person allocating trust (this is a condition of all trust) but also because the work is often purported to be in the name of another person (who may or may not be the person allocating trust).

- 9.4. This situation of particularly high potential mistrust explains why theorizations of translation have traditionally claimed the contrary, ensuring fidelity, faithfulness, impersonal transparency or, in various technocratic versions, equivalence or functionality. Such theorizations are socially necessary reductions and are in some cases encoded as default norms for translation, as part of a translation form.
- 9.5. In societies where this kind of theorization is commonplace, the translation form signals a high degree of idealism. Social trust may thus be invested through ideas like the complete understanding and reproduction of meaning, even though those ideas contradict the variation inherent in linguistic expression and the necessarily underdetermined nature of translators' decisions. (Quine 1960)
- 9.6. Such idealizations of representation may in turn be accepted within a theory of the translation form. We might, for example, hypothesize that all propositions can be re-expressed in all languages if and when translators are allowed to expend unlimited effort and use communicative acts of unrestricted dimensions. If phrase A cannot be translated to meet certain success conditions now, it might be so translated in 100 years' time, when a strong translation tradition has been established in the field and directionality concerned. The limitations on effort and textual space (since communicative partners will not pay mediators unlimited sums) must then explain why the translational ideals are not obtained.
- 9.7. In other forms of mediated cross-cultural communication, the allocation of trust can be based more on alternative factors such as the mediators' area expertise, their ability to reduce complexity, or the results of prior communication acts. The particularity of translation is that, in addition to these factors, its representationality implies an empirically unjustifiable idealism.
- 9.8. Trust may thus appear to be the highest virtue to be sought in translators. However, its value lies in its role as the prime mechanism for reducing complexity. As such, the social function of trust is subordinate to the higher ethical aim of facilitating cooperation, in the sense of making benefits possible for all participants in the communication act. (cf. Chesterman 2001)

10. On risk

- 10.1. Texts are composed of many messages on many levels, delimited and activated in accordance with the particular conditions involved. These messages are of unequal importance for the attainment of success conditions. For example, in the translation of a birth certificate, a mistake in the name of the midwife is not as high-risk as a mistake in the names of the parents or the date of birth. (Pym 1996, Mayoral 2003)
- 10.2. Risk here is understood as the probability that a particular option will lead to success conditions not being obtained.

- 10.3. Degrees of risk are in principle not marked textually. To assess them, one requires extra-textual information on the nature of the success conditions and the communication participants in each particular act. The distribution of risk can thus be different for the same text in different communicative acts.
- 10.4. High-risk messages are not to be confused with messages for which there are numerous possible variants (i.e. cross-cultural complexity) and thus a risk of possible misunderstanding. Such “rich points” may be of intellectual or aesthetic interest to the external observer, but they are not always of key importance to the communicative participants. (cf. Agar 1994)
- 10.5. Most communicative effort should be invested in high-risk messages, in terms of production, reception and mediation.
- 10.6. Senders, receivers and clients tend to be intuitively aware of risk distributions, since they have the most direct interests in the attainment of success conditions. Mediators, however, tend to be less aware, since they work more directly on texts (cf. Holz-Mänttari 1984). Mediators of all kinds should thus be trained to identify high-risk messages and to devote particular attention to them.
- 10.7. Mediators of all kinds should also be trained not to expend excessive effort on low-risk or background messages. Indeed, participants of all kinds would benefit from accepting low-cost mediation in such cases. This is because any reduction in transaction costs increases the range of mutually beneficial outcomes.
- 10.8. The reduction of effort expended on low-risk messages is also beneficial because it allows greater effort to be expended on high-risk messages. This is the logic behind, for example, using automatic translation for large quantities of text in order to locate the pages for which high-quality human translation is justified. The distribution of effort is also an important key for successful simultaneous interpreting. (Gile 1995)
- 10.9. The rationale of effort distribution may nevertheless be thwarted by the nature of trust as it affects mediated cross-cultural communication. If there is always some degree of mistrust, especially in the case of translation, low-effort mediation may be seized upon as a marker of incompetence. Nothing is easier than to find a mistake in a translation and declare the whole enterprise unsuccessful. Nothing is more fatal than to hear a good accent and believe the interpreter is an expert in field knowledge as well. This ruse of trust is less acute in non-representational modes yet remains a paradox of all mediated cross-cultural communication.

11. On the nature of translation problems

- 11.1. Translating may be described a problem-solving activity bringing together generative and reductive skills: 1) for a pertinent source-text message, a series of more than one viable target options are conceptually generated, and 2) from that series only one target option is selected. In other words, translating

minimally involves the generation and reduction of complexity, with the two becoming floridly intertwined in the actual process of translating. (Popper *passim*; Pym 2003a, 2003b; cf. Toury 2002, in terms of which the type of “problem” we refer to here is clearly process-oriented)

- 11.2. A successful translation is one that meets its corresponding success conditions. Successful *translating*, on the other hand, may be distinguished from unsuccessful translating in terms of the way effort is distributed in order to meet those conditions. Successful translating might thus be associated with skills and strategies such as general speed in generation and reduction, holistic decision-making (greater translation units), avoidance of low-risk problems, investment of effort in solving high-risk problems, and the capacity to justify decisions in meta-translational discourse.
- 11.3. In some cases more than one target option may be selected (i.e. several different translations may be offered). This, however, challenges the maxims of representation and may be felt to question the translation form.
- 11.4. For each source-text message, two basic options are always available: 1) the message may be omitted, and 2) it may be reproduced in its source-text form. Use of these options is sometimes deemed not to be translational, since they challenge the maxims of representation.
- 11.5. Where, in addition to the basic options, there is only one target option available, the result may be a translation but there is, strictly speaking, no translation problem to be solved. Such situations mostly belong to highly technical domains with controlled discourses; they usually concern terminology or phraseology.
- 11.6. The solving of translation problems requires effort more on the reductive than the generative side, especially in an age of electronic information. The main practical difficulties once concerned access to information; they now have more to do with the selection of trustworthy information from the range of options available.
- 11.7. For low-risk translation problems, there is more than one viable target option and there are no rules dictating the selection of just one of them. One translator will choose option A, another will choose option B, and each can find reasons to disagree with the other. This principle of under-determination ensues from the variability of linguistic expression. It is not specific to translation; it only becomes especially noticeable when comparing translations.
- 11.8. If a translation problem concerns a high-risk message, there may be greater determinism of successful and unsuccessful target options, if only because the success conditions are expected to be affected by the choices involved. This determinism is, however, never absolute, minimally because the investment of effort in the problem-solving itself increases transaction costs and thus restricts success conditions.

- 11.9. Error in the solving of translation problems does not concern right options versus wrong options. Error allows a further intermediary or trainer to respond “Yes, it’s right, but...” or “No, it’s wrong, but...”. This is true of both low-risk and high-risk messages, but the discussion of error is only cost-effective when the risks are high. (Pym 1992c)
- 11.10. Theorizations of translation may provide parameters for either the generative or the reductive side of translating. Historical-descriptive comparison and deconstruction, for instance, are particularly appropriate for raising awareness of alternatives. They thus assist on the generative side. One of the great failings of contemporary theories, however, is that they provide few guidelines for decisions on the reductive side, especially with respect to the concept of risk. The analytical tradition, which once sought the logics of translation forms, could offer some help here.
- 11.11. In many situations translators must decide between A and B as an exercise of their own subjectivity and responsibility. In low-risk situations, the exercise of this responsibility is of limited social or historical consequence. In high-risk situations, options are more highly determined by success conditions and the scope for individual responsibility is thus more limited. Translators therefore have only restricted responsibility with respect to their problem-solving activity (unless one can demonstrate that the nature of their language is in some way high-risk). The power games are played in the decision to translate a text or not, in the selection of target varieties, and in the determining of success conditions.
- 11.12. The one clear mistake in solving translational problems is to expend excessive effort deciding between options that are not high-risk. The preponderance of low-risk or medium-risk options is why translation traditions are inherently conservative (the extension of existing norms requires less effort than the instigation of new ways of solving problems).
- 11.13. A less obvious mistake is to expend so much effort on high-risk messages that no party can compensate the expenditure. (The benefits will become so narrow that mediators will not be paid for all their work, or the timeframe of the communication act will be extended beyond the appropriate success conditions.)
- 11.14. In situations where the benefits are infinite, expenditure on problem-solving may also be infinite. The promise of divine salvation thus justifies the millennia of translations of the Bible.¹⁵

12. Why and how complexity is reduced

- 12.1. The reduction of complexity is necessary for the taking of any action. Since the entire consequences of an action cannot be foreseen or calculated with exactitude, the participants in the action must proceed in a situation of

¹⁵ Cf. Pascal’s wager.

incomplete or imperfect information, with an abundance of alternatives. The reduction of complexity limits the options, curtails further calculations, and allows actions to take place.

- 12.2. In reducing a complex range of variants, mediated cross-cultural communication reveals its close relation with action. It is at once an action in itself and discursively predisposed to action (since the reduction is often to just one variant, notably in the case of translation), as well as providing a basis for further action, since such communications often take place in situations where things are to be done.
- 12.3. The selection of modes and strategies of communication is itself a form of reducing complexity. When that complexity is socially reduced by illusions of perfect representation and the like, it is because of the imperatives of action. There is often no time, or little reason, to grasp the complexities of the mediated other.
- 12.4. A forgetting of the mediator's position and subjectivity is itself a reduction of complexity. Many situations require this, and translators often have an interest in maintaining their relative anonymity (because it reduces effort and maintains the endemic translation form).
- 12.5. The reduction of complexity is socially facilitated by relations of trust, by the internalizing of norms and ideals, and by the learning of cultures themselves. Mediators, however, have fewer established norms and cultural dispositions, if only because their tasks concern peripheral situations and they tend to work within mixed-culture groups. They might thus be more given to holistic estimation on the basis of explicit information; they might attempt to calculate the success conditions, the appropriate distribution of effort, and the long-term effects of high-risk decisions.
- 12.6. In situations where this distinction holds, mediators might thus deploy specific expertise allowing them to provide advice on cross-cultural communication to those with more subjective or short-term modes of reducing complexity.

13. On the nature of communication participants

- 13.1. The participants involved in cross-cultural communication are traditionally seen as a sender in a source culture, a receiver in a target culture, and an optional mediator somewhere between, usually more on the target side.
- 13.2. In many situations, especially those involving complex technical communication via electronic means, that bilateral model must give way to one in which texts are generated by a group of specialists and are then communicated to a wide range of receivers situated in many cultures. (cf. Lambert 1989, Pym 2004)
- 13.3. In this second model, the mediator may more normally be seen as an active member of the text-generating group, usually a member who uses specialized knowledge of communication norms in one or several receiving cultures.

- 13.4. In this second model, the dimensions of the target culture are usually seen as being smaller than those of national cultures. The receiving cultures may thus be termed “locales”, understood as social places where sets of cultural, linguistic and economic parameters coincide for the purposes of attaining specific mutual benefits. Success conditions can be defined for specific locales.
- 13.5. This second model may consequently be termed one of “localization”, understood as the set of processes by which texts are generated to meet success conditions in specific locales. (cf. Sprung ed. 2000)
- 13.6. The localization model will tend not to be suited to highly authored texts anchored in the center of a traditional culture. This is not because such texts somehow aim at reception by whole cultures, but because localization situations are generally devoid of the strong authorship that sets up bilateral logics.
- 13.7. Localization thus does not operate in a binary representational way and has little need to be constrained by the maxims of the translation form. Localizations may break with length constraints (adding and deleting textual material), and the weakly authored nature of their texts hides the paradoxes of first-person displacement.
- 13.8. If the purpose of a translation is to represent an other, the purpose of localization is to enable the user to carry out the appropriate action (usually to push the right buttons or to purchase the product presented).
- 13.9. The localization model is characterized by communication moving from specialized text generation to multiple peripheral points. The place of the traditional source text is thus occupied by processes of constant re-elaboration of messages. Target texts consequently become end points where success conditions are tested.
- 13.10. The localization model is profoundly asymmetric in terms of directionality. The little communication deriving from end-use locales tends to be information on the degree to which success criteria have been met.

14. On the nature of professional intercultural

- 14.1. In the localization model, the text-generating groups form a special kind of locale that might be defined as one for which no localized target texts need be produced. Such groups may be seen as forming professional intercultures.¹⁶
- 14.2. Professional intercultures result from processes of secondary enculturation, further to the primary enculturation by which cultures are learned and interiorized. Secondary enculturation concerns the internalizing of the technical and organizational skills at the base of what is sometimes called “professional” or “company” culture.
- 14.3. In the case of professional intercultures, enculturation may be described as producing a general quality of secondariness. This in turn allows us to describe intercultures as having relations with “primary” cultures, which are the sets of locales identified through secondary enculturation.¹⁷
- 14.4. Secondariness here defines professional intercultures in that the main business of such groups is to work on communication between cultures perceived as primary.
- 14.5. Secondary enculturation is not to be understood as the learning of a second primary culture (as when someone might become French then English), but as a process of gaining membership of professional communities, with their associated techniques, competencies and discourses of expertise.

15. Professional intercultures and the boundaries between cultures

- 15.1 Secondariness allows professional intercultures to define the boundaries between cultures, most notably by producing the changeover points marked by discontinuity in communication.
- 15.2 The most significant discontinuities in this regard are translations, which most clearly mark the boundary points between cultures. This is because of the representational illusions by which, in translation, the only significant differences between source and target would be language and cultural preferences.

¹⁶ Here we use the adjective “professional” to distinguish this kind of intercultural from the more general overlaps characterized by hybridity on many levels. Cultural overlaps open a space necessary for the development of professional intercultures, but their study will not necessarily advance our understanding of power in cross-cultural communication. My thanks to Helen Baumer for pointing out the need for such a distinction.

¹⁷ “Secondariness” here means the same as our earlier term “secondness”, destined to be confused with the Peircean sense of the latter. The twin criteria of professionalism and secondariness (Pym 2000b) should distinguish professional intercultures from the more general networks of international organizations, both intergovernmental and otherwise, that may constitute an international civil society. Such networks have definite roles to play, in addition to the professional intercultures and nation states that we are focusing on here.

- 15.3 Translations may thus be seen as one of the ways in which the limits of primary cultural identity are marked.
- 15.4 This marking of limits is only operative for as long as there is no prolonged awareness of the intercultural itself as a mediating place. The marking depends on a partial forgetting of the fact of mediation.
- 15.5 The boundaries of primary cultures, if marked by the times and places of discontinuities in cross-cultural communication, are not continuous lines but rather collections of points, with greater or lesser density, clustered around multicultural cities and their electronic extensions.

16. Membership and identity of professional interculturalities

- 16.1. Membership of interculturalities presupposes some knowledge of at least two primary cultures. Translators would thus by definition be members of interculturalities, without betraying or annulling membership of their primary cultures. "Membership" should be considered in relative terms (some people are more "members" than others), since there are many degrees of the knowledge and skills by which membership is recognized.
- 16.2. Membership of professional interculturalities extends to all the professionals involved in cross-cultural communication, not all of whom operate as mediators in any direct sense.
- 16.3. Professional interculturalities are generally constituted by members of diverse provenance, each bringing particular cultural knowledge in addition to their complementary technical skills.
- 16.4. Diversity of provenance may thus constitute a trait of a professional intercultural's identity, whereas it is usually hidden in the constitution of primary cultural identities.
- 16.5. Interpersonal relations within such interculturalities are professional in that communicative work is explicitly exchanged for embodied value (financial or symbolic reward, which can later be exchanged for other forms of value). Communicative work based on use value (assumed direct functionality) is here not considered professional.
- 16.6. Subjects engaged in code-switching may be members of a professional intercultural (even with a membership of one) if their cross-cultural work has secondariness with respect to a more primary communicative act and is professional, carried out in exchange for embodied value.
- 16.7. Professional interculturalities circulate the specific techniques and expertise able to address the complexity of cross-cultural communication. This tends to be done in terms of holistic calculation rather than the unreflective application of norms to isolated low-level decisions. Professionalism may also involve the ability to present explicit justifications of the decisions made.

- 16.8. The ability to use such justifications enables intercultural professionals to produce theorizing discourses on cross-cultural communication, in addition to mediating in that communication. They may thus act as consultants and managers within this field, as well as theorists of the field itself.
- 16.9. Increasing professionalization usually involves an increase in specialization within the intercultural. Translators, project managers, consultants and theorists might assume separate professional identities, often supported by separate social institutions.

17. The power of professional interculturalities

- 17.1. All primary cultures are defined from positions of secondariness. In this lies the possible power of professional interculturalities.
- 17.2. The relative autonomy of professional interculturalities may be understood as the degree to which they can make decisions concerning cross-cultural communication without explicit authorization from other parties or institutions.
- 17.3. This relative autonomy is mostly seen as being with respect to primary cultures, particularly when such cultures are identified with nation states. The most effective autonomy is nevertheless with respect to the owners of the communication media, be they private clients or government agencies, which may or may not be identified with primary cultures.
- 17.4. Professional interculturalities can accrue the power not only to mark the limits of cultures over the long term but also, through the selection of communication modes and directionalities, to influence the ways in which primary cultures perceive each other. This latter power is particularly available to analysis in the case of translation because of the representational nature of the activity. However, that power need not be concomitant with greater awareness of mediating positions, nor with the specificities of translational language. (Translators may wield greatest power when they are most invisible, as hidden persuaders.)
- 17.5. The relative autonomy of professional interculturalities with respect to primary cultures ensues partly from the principle of diverse provenance, since the interculturalities bring together expertise that cannot be controlled in a detailed way by the clients or owners of the means of communication.
- 17.6. The relative autonomy also derives from the degree to which the professional interculturality can reduce complexity through holistic calculation and justification.
- 17.7. The greater the complexity of cross-cultural communication, the greater the power of professional interculturalities.

- 17.8. In terms of negotiation theory, professional intercultural agents may begin as groups of agents representing principals located in primary cultures (as, for example, in the case of ambassadors at the United Nations). As their power accrues, however, the agents may assume the position of principals (as when the European Court of Justice finds against the claims of Member States).
- 17.9. Alternatively, professional intercultural agents may progressively lose secondariness, extend themselves socially, and become primary cultures (as happened with the missionary intercultural agents established in Mexico from the sixteenth century, which evolved into a major component of contemporary Mexican culture). (Pym 2000b)

18. Globalization and cross-cultural communication

- 18.1. The economic and cultural processes known as globalization ensue from a general lowering of transaction costs (cheaper means of transport and communication).
- 18.2. The lowering of transaction costs produces a potential increase in complexity, since any number of partners are available for an action and it is difficult to ascertain which will produce the most beneficial relationship. Communication thus increases both because it becomes cheaper and because it is used in order to reduce the greater complexity that results from the range of possible partners. (cf. Keohane 1984)
- 18.3. The increase in communication particularly concerns cross-cultural situations, since this is where the transaction costs have become considerably lower and the complexity of choosing between potential partners has become greatest (since less is known about them).
- 18.4. The growth of cross-cultural communication is manifest in all modes, from the learning of languages to mediation via translation. The rise of English as the world lingua franca thus runs parallel to the rise in translations from English.
- 18.5. The growth of cross-cultural communication is asymmetric. The lingua franca is increasingly used within intercultural agents, whereas end-use and cultural identity processes continue to require the locales of primary cultures.

19. The powerlessness of intercultural agents

- 19.1. Globalization might thus be expected to increase the decision-making power of professional intercultural agents as knowledge-based communities, since it increases both the quantity and complexity of cross-cultural communication. (cf. Frow 1995)
- 19.2. Professional intercultural agents nevertheless appear unsuited to the recognition or use of power. This is because of their disinterest in their own identity and frequent professional reluctance to reduce complexity, which is after all one of the sources of professional autonomy in the first place. (cf. Frow 1995)

- 19.3. The disinterest in its own identity may be attributed to the intercultural's constitutive diversity of provenance, which allows primary cultural identities to have weight on the personal level.
- 19.4. Disinterest in intercultural identity may also be attributed to the nature of complementary specialized professions, which remain mutually exclusive and thus tend to fragment the intercultural. Each profession has an interest in maintaining its exclusive domain of expertise, within which their power depends on their apparent objectivity and thus lack of identity. (Pym 2001b)
- 19.5. Since professional interculturalities are often unsuited to the reduction of complexity beyond their spheres of specific concern, intercultural professionals may have difficulty formulating clear action or conveying the justifications by which they do reduce complexity.
- 19.6. Thanks to the relative weakness of their identities, professional interculturalities work on the symbolic rather than iconic levels for their self-reflection; they reason, rather than wave flags or praise heroes.
- 19.7. Relatively weak at iconic means for reducing complexity, professional interculturalities remain subject to mistrust, just as the perpetuation of that mistrust builds the iconic identities of primary cultures.

20. The future of cross-cultural communication

- 20.1. Effective power over communication policies will tend to remain in the hands of institutions suited to the iconic reduction of complexity, notably nation states. This should also apply to policies for cross-cultural communication, albeit with occasional concessions to specialized interculturalities.
- 20.2. The increase in cross-cultural communication should enhance the mobility of labor, albeit at levels well below the enhanced mobility of capital. At the same time, policies that maintain high transaction costs, as in the use of translation for long-term cross-cultural relations, will restrict the mobility of labor.
- 20.3. International capitalism has an interest in keeping the mobility of labor at levels lower than the mobility of capital. This ensures the continued asymmetries of the localization model.
- 20.4. International capitalism thus has an interest in the maintenance of cultural diversity at end-use locales, and will continue to support the role of translation in defining those locales.
- 20.5. A nation state may have similarly little interest in promoting large-scale mobility of labor across its borders, since that mobility alters the territorial principles necessary for both tyrannical control and democracy. One might expect such states to favor translation as a prime mode of cross-cultural communication for international exchanges, even when this transgresses all logics of transaction costs and success conditions. (cf. Colas 1992)

- 20.6. The use of translation in cross-cultural communication is thus over-determined by both international capitalism and the nation state.
- 20.7. The training of translators and other intermediaries in numbers well beyond strict market requirements may nevertheless enhance mobility in that it builds up the social stock of skills necessary for the alternative modes of cross-cultural communication. The people we train will do more than translate. (Pym 2000b)
- 20.8. A further consequence of globalization is the increasing mix of cultures within nation states. In cases where this is fully recognized, the bureaucracies of nation-states could themselves become professional intercultural. This, however, remains a question to be refined through case studies, as are most of these hypotheses (hopefully giving empirical research something interesting to test).

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