TRANSLATING EXPERIENCE, EXPERIENCING TRANSLATIONALITY

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ABSTRACT: Starting from reflections on information as knowledge involving the formation of ideas and minds, this article invokes Tim Ingold’s concept of *wayfaring* that highlights the processual, emergent, and social aspects of becoming knowledgeable. ‘How do we know?’ is posed as a fundamental epistemological question focusing both on the sources of knowledge (investigation, study, and instruction) and the complex processes of knowledge formation and transfer. Given that the epistemic processes of making sense and assessing evidence rely on experience, the latter element is analysed in detail as an English-language concept, including its history, development, and current status, leading to the notion of experiential knowledge. The final part of the article, by drawing on translation as corporeal movement, suggests translationality as an epistemology experientially grounded in material translation. The experience of translationality is subsequently related to music and musical instruments. The article closes with a call to explore other forms of translationality.

KEYWORDS: Information; Knowledge; Experience; Translationality

1. Knowledge and information

In her article setting the stage for the EPISTRAN project, Karen Bennett repeatedly writes about knowledge translation in terms of “information transfer” or “information transit” (2024). The ‘transfer/transit’ parts of these phrases – and their nominal derivates *translation* and *translationality* – have received a lot of attention in recent years (Robinson, 2017; Marais, 2019; Blumczynski, 2023; Vidal Claramonte, 2022, 2023, 2024) and will be further explored later in this article, but the *information* part often appears to be glossed over or taken for granted. Yet this is precisely where I think we should start. What is information? The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines the noun *information* as “knowledge obtained from investigation, study or instruction”[1] and the (intransitive) verb *to inform* as “to impart information or knowledge”[2]. Before we examine these definitions at some depth, it is important to note that they do not equate information with knowledge in a bi-directional relationship. In other words, we can accept the proposition that ‘information is knowledge’ (derived from various sources) without conceding that the reverse is also true. Asserting that ‘knowledge is information’ might provoke objections: surely knowledge is *not only* about obtaining or possessing information, *but also* – if not *mostly* – about the ability to process it, evaluate it, apply it, and so on. A database contains lots of information but no knowledge; information needs to be translated into knowledge. That is why knowledge is always constructed and situated contextually, linguistically,

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[1] Available at: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/information (Accessed: 18 June 2024)

[2] Available at: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/inform (Accessed: 18 June 2024)

culturally, ideologically, and so on (which may imply that information is not – a false dichotomy, as I will argue below).

1.1. Drawing lines, forming ideas and minds

Reasonable and valid as these objections appear, they also demonstrate a superficial grasp of what information is, what it does, and how it works. Where did we get the idea that information is decontextualized bits of data that only become meaningful in context? Not from the word itself, for sure. Its sense could not have been plainer: information is about *in-formation*, about stuff that is contingent, emergent, and continuously taking shape. The Latin verb *īnfōrmō* may carry a familiar pedagogical sense "to inform, instruct, educate"[3] – but the underlying conceptualization draws on experience that is as profoundly manual as it is mental: "to delineate, sketch, form an idea"[4]. What we have here is an image of drawing lines and outlines: boundaries as well as pathways. This connection between lines, information, and knowledge has been drawn compellingly throughout Tim Ingold's work (1993, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2015), recently applied to translation studies by Sue-Ann Harding (2021). For Ingold, epistemological systems are too often "parcelled up into discrete cultures" (1993, p. 229); indeed, the very concept of culture "fragments the experiential continuity of being-in-the-world, isolating people both from the non-human environment (now conceived as 'nature') and from one another" (p. 230). Translation is usually presented as a remedy for this fragmentation and isolation (its ability to make connections, build bridges, and so on, is often highlighted) – but the real problem is the underlying conceptualization and its "alienating discourse". Yet, as Ingold argues, lives are lived – and, we could add, knowledges emerge – "not inside places … but through, around, to and from them, from and to places elsewhere" (2011, p. 148), along pathways and among wanderings. Invoking well-known tropes, we could say that "the journey is the destination" and "the medium is the message" (McLuhan, 1964) – a move that points us away from a substance-based ontology (knowledge as discrete units of stable information; information as bits of data; data as something objectively "given" [to draw on an etymological argument once more]) towards a more processual conception in which knowledge, information, and being itself are fluid and emergent. For Ingold, "our most fundamental mode of being in the world" (2011, p. 152) is through *wayfaring* – his term to describe "the embodied experience of this perambulatory movement" (p. 148). Therefore, "learning is processual, and rather than knowledge being transmitted from one blob (teacher) to another (learner), we *become knowledgeable*" (Harding, 2021, p. 355). What is worth highlighting here is the essential role of experience: wayfaring is not simply a metaphor to describe changes to a mental state (a common misconception of knowledge). Instead, "knowledge is grown along the myriad paths we take as we make our ways through the world in the course of everyday activities, rather than assembled from information obtained from numerous fixed locations" (Ingold, 2010, p. 121) – in a word, it is rhizomatic. We will soon consider how exactly information is obtained from various sources, but it should be stressed that "we do none of this alone … Becoming knowledgeable is social" (Harding, 2021, p. 356).

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[3] Available at: https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/informo (Accessed: 18 June 2024)

[4] Available at: https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/informo (Accessed: 18 June 2024)

I find it fascinating that much of this rich, inspiring theorization may also be advanced through semiotic reasoning based on etymological data: as we said, *īnfōrmō* is to "delineate, sketch, form an idea". Delineating is drawing and tracing lines; sketching is producing an approximate and prototypically visual representation: an impression, an image, a model, a scheme. This signals its semiotic – or, to be more precise, iconic – nature: a sketch, image or model is not only itself but functions as a sign of something else it resembles. A map is not the territory, a photograph is not the object depicted by it, a bust is not the person it commemorates – but they all represent other entities through similarity or imitation (which is what iconic signification consists of). This similarity, again, is not objectively "given" but must be recognized: an idea must be *formed*.

It is here, closest to the etymological core of *īnfōrmō*, that we find the sense "to form, mould, fashion".[5] To inform is thus to give form or shape to something – but also "to form the mind of, teach". This is a crucial point, and one worth restating. **The concept of information presupposes formation – not just of observations, ideas, judgements, and conclusions, but also of minds**. Minds are not only the sites of formation but also its objects. This etymology points us towards "embedded, embodied and subjective forms of knowledge"[6] – another key part of the EPISTRAN motto on which I will reflect later on.

1.2. How do we know?

Meanwhile, let us return to the simple definition quoted earlier and focus on the image of information as "knowledge obtained from investigation, study or instruction".[7] One of the greatest, all-encompassing epistemological questions is of course 'How do we know'? In this preliminary conceptual interrogation, it is worth focusing first on the interrogative (pronouns in particular). To be sure, the question '*what* do we know?' is almost nearly as important; and '*who* do we know?' may indeed be vital in some critical situations (other contextual questions about *where* and *when* are important in situating our knowledge in geographical and temporal terms, and their various complex entanglements: geopolitical, historical, economic, etc.).[8] But the adverbial *how* in 'How do we know?' at least to my ear, stretches farther than the other interrogative pronouns. As I argued elsewhere, HOW

… not only overlaps with all the other contextual elements but is presupposed by them, especially by the WHAT. If we have something to say, we have to say it somehow. The manner – the HOW – [often] overrides the matter. The approach can dictate the findings, and this is where our hermeneutic, epistemological and phenomenological assumptions come to the fore. Eventually, what we conclude about a given phenomenon is largely dictated by how we approach it (Blumczynski, 2016).

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[5] Available at: https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/informo (Accessed: 18 June 2024).

[6] Available at: https://www.epistran.org/ (Accessed: 18 June 2024).

[7] Available at: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/information (Accessed: 18 June 2024).

[8] It is worth stressing that even in what we consider as perception of information, "[t]he constructed nature of images forces the viewer to reflect on the diversity and inequality of those who are looked at. In this venue, John Berger (1972) asked many years ago if the way in which we look affects what we know. And Roland Barthes emphasized that every image, like words, brings with it that secondary level of meaning, which is really what must be translated" (Vidal Claramonte, 2022, p. 31). See also Mirzoeff, 2015.

‘How do we know?’ is thus a fundamental epistemological question that cuts to the core of epistemic translation, too. The connection with the epistemic is clear; but how exactly does it relate to translation? To start with, the question itself cannot be separated from the language in which it is asked – therefore, there is enormous value is rephrasing “the same” question in different languages and otherwise inflecting it. If I were to consider it in my first language, Polish, this question would usually be phrased as ‘*Skąd [to] wiesz*’ [where do you know it from]? The German phrasing is very similar: ‘*Woher weisst du das?*’ Again, let us focus on the interrogative pronouns. *Skąd* and *woher* ask about sources. Where are you drawing your knowledge from? Who told you this? This is a very specific emphasis, highlighting the origin of knowledge, rather than the process of its formation. It brings to mind the meaning of information as “knowledge obtained from investigation, study or instruction”.[9] Formulating this profound epistemological question in Polish or German, we reflect on issues of reliability, credibility, and perhaps also authority. In particular, *instruction* as a source of knowledge invokes a formal and often hierarchical structure (reverberating in the word *in-struct*) wherein knowledge flows mostly in one direction. Someone tells me how things are, or how to do (or not to do) things. Instruction finds its most extreme form in religious contexts which are often strongly hierarchical and employ revelation: the kind of knowledge to be accepted and followed but usually not open to questioning or verification. África Vidal Claramonte (2022, p. 30) reminds us “how institutions, who cling to certain ways of seeing and ordering the world, cause them to prevail so that other views do not seem to be possible”.

Knowledge obtained in a course of study is a little different. It is not *revealed* but rather *discovered* or even *created* in a process of searching, and re-searching, analyzing, and reflecting. Studying places the onus on the student, the knowledge seeker: there is intention, effort, focus, purpose, direction, selection, and so on. Studying is making sense.

Knowledge obtained through investigation is different still. It is not confined to searching for something and finding things out but also consists of putting whatever has been found to a test. Investigation involves speculating, hypothesizing, verifying, validating or disproving; it works with questions of probability, explanatory power, and strength or weight of evidence. This kind of knowledge is most prominently *constructed*, built out of various pieces that are carefully examined and fitted together into something that makes sense.

Summing up, our key epistemological question phrased in English, ‘How do you know?’ invites us to reflect not just on the sources of knowledge but also on the complex process of *in-formation* and its *transfer*: giving form and shape to something, while also recognizing that it forms, moulds, and shapes our minds. Contrary to a mechanistic, simplistic, strawman conceptions attributed to *information transfer* (think of the often ridiculed conduit model, and the staple arguments against invariance; cf. Blumczynski, 2023, pp. 2, 24), this phrase may be also wonderfully insightful, complex and emergent, when you think of *in-formation* along the lines I sketched above, while also bearing in mind that *transfero* and *translatum* are merely two grammatical inflections of a single lexeme in Latin. Information transfer, epistemic translation, and ecology of knowledges are all parts of an extended 'meshwork' – another favourite term in Ingold's vocabulary (set against Bruno Latour's [1987; 2007] 'network'). However, the epistemic processes of making sense and assessing evidence are not complete without the third element that they both presuppose: experience.

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[9] Available at: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/information (Accessed: 18 June 2024).

2. Translating experience

Working our way back, then: experience, evidence, and sense. A conceptual triad that also happens to be a title of an intriguing book by the Polish-Australian ethnolinguist Anna Wierzbicka (2010) that will guide a large part of the subsequent discussion. It is here that I am coming to the first part of my title: translating experience. How can we translate experience? Why should we? Once again, insights from interlingual translation are pertinent. In Polish, there is not one but at least three words referring to this concept (often used in the plural). *Doznania* comes from *znać*, to know, to be familiar with someone or something. *Doświadczenia* has an element of *świadczenie* (testimony, provision) but can also mean scientific experiments. *Przeżycia* literally means 'something [one has] lived through' (similar to the German *Erlebnis*).

This is a very rich, varied, and complex picture of 'what experience is in Polish'. It is also a very Anglocentric way to put it, of course. A Polish-language knowledge seeker would not try to subsume these three (and possibly other) concepts under a single, all-encompassing one. To live through something, to experiment, to testify, to provide, and to know are of course loosely related to each other, but they are not subcategories of some super-ordinate concept that Polish happens to have no single word for. This is another crucial point. Polish – or any other language – is not anomalous by separating these various ways of knowing, or acquiring knowledge, any more than the epistemic system of English is anomalous by compressing them into one. In other words, there is no need to assume that there exists some meta-lingual, pan-lingual, universal concept of EXPERIENCE that is lexicalized (or not) differently in various languages. Rather, we need to listen to these languages respectfully and learn from them as we construct our translational epistemology, not shoehorn their epistemic perspectives into that of English, or some other master language. So let us be wary of an epistemic leap of faith that has become all too common. *Experience* is an English word and concept, not something shared between all humans. Before we ask how we can, might or should translate experience (and, therefore, knowledge[s]), we need to admit that experience needs translation.

2.1. **EXPERIENCE** *as an English-language concept: its history, development, and current status*

This is, roughly speaking, a starting point for Wierzbicka (2010) who in her book *Experience, Evidence, & Sense* makes a claim that all three titular keywords denote uniquely English cultural themes. Wierzbicka takes a strongly relativist perspective and argues that there exist certain “verbal cues” and especially certain keywords, that “define the conceptual world inhabited by speakers of particular languages. She goes all the way back to Wilhelm von Humboldt (1988, p. 60) and his words from over two centuries ago that “there resides in every language a characteristic world-view” (Wierzbicka, 2010, p. 4). She posits that even though there are many ‘Englishes’ around the world, there is also an Anglo English, neither homogenous or unchanging, and yet separable as a useful abstraction founded on a shared verbal and conceptual history. In her earlier book *English: Meaning and Culture* (2006), she demonstrated that everyday English words, such as ‘right’, ‘wrong’, ‘reasonable’, and ‘fair’ “contain a wealth of history and pass on a great deal of cultural heritage” (2010, p. 5). Words of this kind – she argues – “may be ‘invisible’ to native speakers, who simply take them for granted and assume that their equivalents exist in other languages” (p. 5). In *Experience, Evidence, & Sense*, Wierzbicka “extends the exploration of the hidden cultural legacy of English and focuses in particular on some of the most basic ‘Anglo’ assumptions about ways of knowing – assumptions that English carries with it, imperceptibly, in its spectacular expansion in the modern world” (p. 6). Her chapter devoted to experience spans nearly seventy pages, so I can only offer a synopsis of but one strand of her argument.

Drawing on a wealth of examples from literature, lexicography, philosophy, religion, art and history, Wierzbicka reconstructs the semantic history of the word *experience* in English, which includes “past experience, accumulated knowledge” and “current experience, sensory, or sensory-like” (2010, p. 31), to demonstrate how *experience* casts its long shadow over English-language knowledges, both popular and specialist. Against detailed comparisons with lexical counterparts in French, German, and Russian, she concludes that “the word *experience* is often untranslatable (without distortion) into other languages, even European languages” (p. 31). This is a strong claim, with potentially serious repercussions for the discussions of ecology of knowledges. It compels us to examine not only how knowledges are (or might be) translated but also to what extent our epistemic foundations may be inflected by semiotic, linguistic, and cultural patterns of which we are only vaguely aware. So, let us be epistemically cautious when talking about experience as a basis, foundation, or catalyst of our knowledges – and let us not forget that by switching to a different language, we are also inevitably shifting our focus, or emphasis, or some other important aspect.

For example, Wierzbicka points out that *experience* is a word frequently used in advertising: people are urged to visit this or that place to have a “unique experience” in zoos, aquariums, museums, national parks, and so on. Enjoyable experience, thrilling experience, exciting experience. In academia, we are pushed to enhance ‘student experience’ – a concept that includes some residue of study and learning but highlights the contextual elements around it: the quality of facilities, range of attractions, level of engagement; in short – if you excuse this trivialisation – how much fun you are having as a student as you participate in various aspects of the so-called ‘student life’. Experience becomes reified here: it is something measurable by surveys, something that may have a direct influence on universities' league tables, and therefore funding levels, international recruitment, and so on. Universities, possibly more than ever before, stand or fall in direct relationship to the levels of 'student experience'. This expression is rather difficult to translate into other languages, and I often see it used untranslated, as a borrowing, invoking the images of campus life typical of universities in the English-speaking world. I mentioned trivialization; indeed, it seems very easy to reduce this rich concept of experience to figures and commodify it. This is why I often find myself resisting this emphasis, feeling that it inflates certain elements of the context of study while diminishing others. Who is teaching you, and how, is probably a bit more important than how the distance to the nearest disco, or how much beer twenty quid will buy you. So, let's be careful about what we call experience. In particular, let's not buy too quickly or uncritically into the readily measurable, commodified, commercialised, monetised experience, and its questionable foundations.

Against this reductionist view, Wierzbicka (2010) demonstrates the complexity of the polysemous word *experience* by offering detailed semantic analyses of its various strands as they developed over the centuries. For example, in Shakespeare's sapiential perspective, it is the mother of wisdom: "Experience is by industry achieved / And perfected by the swift course of time" (*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, act 1, scene 3; cf. Wierzbicka, 2010, p. 34). In this case, *experience* is something accumulated over time by doing things and presumably by reflecting on them: knowledge is seen as a gain, and is associated with advanced age – in short, it is "a doer's accumulated knowledge" (Wierzbicka, 2010, p. 35). There is an element of sustained exposure, overriding ad hoc impressions. Think of John Donne's *Songs is Innocence and Experience*, and John Milton's ideas of consciousness typical of Paradise and Fall, on which Donne draws.

With time, a more recent meaning has emerged, most visible in the adjective *experienced:* an experienced teacher, or an experienced driver, capturing "a doer's specialized skill" (Wierzbicka, 2010, pp. 36–37). This is close to the concept of procedural knowledge: how-knowledge, or indeed the KNOW-HOW. This kind of knowledge is often highly transferrable: that is why a successful CEO of a pharmaceutical company may be headhunted to take a similar role in IT industry. While KNOW-WHAT or KNOW-THAT are usually industry-specific and must be acquired anew, we can bring our know KNOW-HOW with us, quite literally *translating* it to a new context.

There is also another nuance to experience, captured in the phrase "it was a/an [adjective] experience" (as a count noun). Wierzbicka (2010, pp. 39–40) reports no such occurrences before 1850, but notes that numerous examples appear in the second half of the 19th century), often with the adjective *new*: "it was a new and pleasant experience"; "it was a new and amazing experience", "a new and disagreeable experience" (p. 40) This is a very common usage these days, as in "We had a water birth … It was a great experience and no problem" or "Domestic/food prep in a five-star hotel … It was a fantastic experience. (Wierzbicka, 2010, p. 40), All these examples highlight something unusual happening, affecting how the experiencer is feeling. The event linked with the feeling is arresting; it is a subjective, contemporaneous perspective and “awareness that gives the undergoer a special, subjective knowledge of a particular event that is not accessible to other people” (p. 42). Based on a large corpus of data, Wierzbicka concludes that “in the semantic history of *experience*, there occurred (between the sixteenth and nineteenth century) an important shift from a long-term and retrospective view, which was also objective, external one, to one that was subjective and internal, as well as short term and introspective” (2010, p. 43).

2.2. Experiential knowledge

This is precisely the angle taken in a recent Forum published in the journal *Translation Studies*, whose contributors explore some of the epistemic, ethical, political, and linguistic considerations in representing experiential knowledge (Susam-Saraeva, 2021, and subsequent responses). I cannot reflect on this more fully here, but recommend this Forum as pursuing some threads that are highly relevant to the aims of the EPISTRAN project. Translating experiential knowledge is entangled with burning questions of ethics, politics, entitlement, enforcement, and a myriad of other highly complex and sensitive perspectives. This kind of translation proceeds “not through the intellect, but through the emotions”; it is “an experiential category, whose core is a sensory experience” (Vidal Claramonte, 2024, p. 94).

At the same time, it is noteworthy how often and how strongly philosophical prose in English depends on the various inflections of the word *experience*. Here is John Searle, as one example, critiquing Hume: “When I turn my attention inward, he [Hume] tells us, what I find are specific experiences. I find this or that desire for a drink of water, or a slight headache, or feeling of pressure of the shoes against my feet, but there is no experience of the self in addition to these particular experiences” (Searle, 2004, p. 278, quoted in Wierzbicka, 2010, p. 60). As Wierzbicka (2010, p. 61) points out, “the idea of deliberately ‘turning my attention inward’ to observe what is currently happening to me (in me) became lexicalised in English in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (as a new meaning of the word *experience*).

> So, [w]hen Searle speaks of “experiences”, he appears to take such acts of self-observation for granted, but in fact, thinking in those terms is a modern Anglo habit of the mind that derives from the empirical tradition and its reflection in the English language. For example, when I as a native speaker of Polish, turn my attention inward, I do not find any “specific experiences”. I do find certain feelings – for example, a headache, or a feeling of pressure of the armchair against my body. I also catch myself having (or having just had) certain thoughts. But I do not think of any of these in terms of “experiences”. I can talk about such exercises in introspection in both Polish and English in terms of “feelings”, “thoughts” and “what is happening to me”, because both Polish and English have lexicalised the universal semantic primes FEEL, THINK, HAPPEN and ME (I). However, I could not talk about them in Polish in terms of “experiences” because there is no such word in Polish and no such habitual interpretive scheme (Wierzbicka, 2010, p. 61).

Experiencing something may often be used to complement or counter mental, theoretical, more 'objective' perspectives and positions. The shift in the sense of experience identified by Wierzbicka seems to correspond to the tension between technical 'scientific' knowledge (i.e. the kind of knowledge which purports to be objective, rational and universal) and "the various embedded, embodied and subjective forms of knowledge that have served as its Others in different times and places".[10] This tension holds across time, but also within and between languages. Perhaps experience is something that integrates thinking with feeling? What seems undeniable is that, from a diachronic perspective, experience and experiencing in English have undergone significant intralingual translation over several centuries. From a synchronic perspective, experience and experiencing, when discussed interlingually, need careful, epistemically nuanced, multi-dimensional translation, often into more specific concepts (with all the challenges usually associated with it).

2.3. Limitations of Natural Semantic Metalanguage

Unfortunately, Wierzbicka's own proposal to employ what she calls explications using Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) as a universal, pan-lingual vehicle for abstracting meanings from the languages in which they are expressed, seems to me seriously deficient in both its theoretical basis and explanatory power. NSM's claim that "the full meaning of any semantically complex expression can be stated in terms of a reductive paraphrase in ordinary language" (Goddard, 1998, p. 131) sounds not only naive and idealistic but also indefensible if we consider its epistemological foundations (for a fuller critique, see Blumczynski, 2013). Discovering or formalizing an alphabet of human thought seems as utopian to me today as it must have sounded back in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when it was proposed by Descartes and attempted by Leibniz. Translation always leaves behind a 'remainder' of omitted potential significations or added potential significations; this results in a plurality of valid interpretations and indeterminacy of translation (Quine, 1960).

As much as I remain critical of Wierzbicka's method and suspicious of its theoretical underpinnings, many of her semantic analyses and discussions, especially those relating to culture-specific concepts and values, are genuinely insightful and illuminating. Wierzbicka – herself translated from the Polish to the Australian ethnolinguistic setting – is a keen observer of cultural patterns expressed linguistically; her work on conceptual ethnocentrism of English (2006, 2010) is particularly relevant to the issues of cultural exchange and asymmetries of power, including the power of knowledge(s). Clearly, it is possible to obtain valid findings whilst using not entirely adequate or poorly calibrated instruments. Ironically, Wierzbicka tends to downplay what is to me her most valuable contribution to the study of cross-cultural interaction – her personal translated experience – in an attempt to objectify it through the theory of semantic universals. In the second part of this article, I intend to follow exactly the direction that she neglects and explore the largely personal experience of translationality as I understand it.

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[10] Available at: https://www.epistran.org/ (Accessed: 18 June 2024).

3. Experiencing translationality

When you experience something (in English), you are affected by it. This points to a holistic, psychosomatic process rather than just mental awareness or intellectual acknowledgement. It is here that I would like to posit a link to Douglas Robinson's work who in his *Translationality* (2017) makes a number of partially overlapping approximations of this concept, tracing it, on the hand, to translational medicine (and other disciplines that eagerly picked up this adjective), and on the other hand, to "Anton Popovič's … own English translation of his Slovak term *překladovost*" (Robinson, 2017, p. ix). Paraphrasing Popovič, Robinson defines translationality as "a relation holding between the proto-[source] and meta-[target] text and having a transformative semiotic or modeling character" (ix). "Performed translationality" is his shorthand for "*felt-becoming-mobilized-becoming-performed translationality*" (p. ix; original italics). Translationality means "change, force, impact, motion, energy" (p. ix). It can also be approached as "transformationality: the constant emergingness of everything, through embodied, situated, performative interactions" (p. x). It is performed as well as "periperformed": "If literary translationality is 'performed' by writers, translators, and adapters, it is 'periperformed' by audiences, including editors and critics" (p. x). Periperformed translationality is extremely elusive but also, for the same reason, often irresistible: "it is about cultural change as an almost imperceptible 'groundswell,' as a 'watershed' without inciting events, indeed as 'reality,' as 'human nature,' as 'the way things are'" (p. x). Robinson's use of translationality is undeniably rich but also inflected towards his focus on translational-medical humanities. In the following pages, I will draw on my recent book (Blumczynski, 2023a) to sketch my own take on translationality and how it relates to experience, angling it towards several epistemic questions central for EPISTRAN.

3.1. Translation as corporeal movement

My initial premise is that for decades textual translation has been viewed as the conceptual centre of gravity for the entire discipline of translation studies. Roman Jakobson (1959) has told us that interlingual translation is 'translation proper', which implies that any other uses of this concept (for example, translating lives, people, experiences, places, and so on) must be mere metaphorical extensions of this prototype. This view is typical of what Kobus Marais calls 'lingual bias', which he exposes and challenges, most fully in his *A (Bio)semiotic Theory of Translation* (2019), arguing that translation is a complex systemic process underlying all semiosis. It is the basic meaning-making process all living organisms depend on for their survival and wellbeing, not unlike metabolism. My argument follows a different trajectory but leads to similar conclusions. The roots of the word *translation* (*trans* and *fero*), indicate a material, and often also commercial, practice of moving things as well as words. This order is meaningful. Moving things is a more fundamental and basic practice than 'moving' words (which often seems to call for inverted commas).

This primary sense of corporeal movement is not only derived from etymology, but is also reflected in two related senses of the word *to translate*, nearly forgotten but still attested in dictionaries of English: (a) "To transfer or move (a bishop, minister, etc.) from one ecclesiastical post to another", and (b) "To transfer or move (the dead body or relics of a saint, ruler, or other significant person) from one place to another".[11] Now, I hope we can agree that if anything is a metaphor, it is the imaginary 'movement' of meanings, texts, and messages from one page and language to another. The translational 'movement' of texts is modelled on the physical, material, spatial – as well as symbolic and ceremonial – movement of objects, and especially bodies. As Vidal Claramonte argues, "[t]ranslating is transporting and displacing … Translating is a constant, physical movement that causes us to go backward and forward with each new step" (2024, p. 125). To put it differently, in a diachronic perspective: as *homo sapiens*, we had been translating various people (too young, too old, too sick, or too important to move on their own; as well as their remains) long before we started translating texts.

Now, there is no doubt that textual 'transfers' also have a material dimension: at the very least, our reading experience is inscribed in and mediated by pages, screens, surfaces, and textures traversed (metaphorically) by our gaze and perceived (physically) by our tactile receptors. Yet we should remember that not all looking is reading, and not all objects are texts. Vidal Claramonte has explored a range of relevant aspects of material translation in three of her recent books, *Translation and Contemporary Art* (2022), *Translation and Repetition: Rewriting (Un)Original Literature* (2023), and *Translation and Objects* (2024).

3.2. Translationality as an epistemology experientially grounded in material translation

Translationality – as I understand and experience it – is part of an ecology of knowledges that challenges many of the entrenched Western distinctions drawing on classical categories, traditionally proceeding by bifurcation, excluding the middle, and rejecting partial or multiple class membership (see Blumczynski and Hassani, 2019; Blumczynski and Sadler, 2023). It is a concept that captures the various embedded, embodied and subjective forms of knowledge which are not normally viewed as scientific or scholarly, because they are messy and rhizomatic (Blumczynski, 2016, pp. 28–31; Baer, 2020, p. 234) – but are nevertheless powerful and irresistible. In short, translationality is my conceptualization of an epistemology that is experientially grounded in translation. Ancient and medieval corporeal translations of people and objects could be seen, heard, smelled and felt as genuine (or not). Even though "we communicate through each of our five senses", since "[m]eaning is conveyed in our voice tone, accent, speech rhythm, intonation, body, movements, and many other channels (Vidal Claramonte, 2023, p. 74), in some parts of translation studies, we have departed quite significantly from such an embodied, holistic, experiential, and sensory perspective. Yet, as I recently suggested elsewhere, one could argue that had this sense of translation not been marginalised by the overpowering textual focus in the history of our discipline, no 'social turn' … would have been needed to remind us that translation is, above all, a social practice – it would simply be inconceivable as anything less. Likewise, a 'material turn' … would have been rather unlikely and indeed unnecessary had corporeal translations been viewed as prototypical rather than peripheral, studied mostly by analogy to and in the shadow of linguistic and textual "transfers" (Blumczynski, 2023b, p. 10).

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[11] Available at: https://www.oed.com/dictionary/translate_v (Accessed: 18 June 2024).

Translationality – as I understand and experience it – has a strong material component, and combines a personal and private perspective with a public and social one. Translations of influential people and sacred objects were historical processes or acts occurring in concrete spatiotemporal reality, not just in the mind or imagination. They were conducted to be witnessed, celebrated and experienced:

> Using Robinson's (2017) terminology, solemn translations of bishops and relics were not just performed but periperformed: as public events, they were partially constituted by popular attention and mass participation, effectively creating an effect of a self-fulfilling prophecy ("something extraordinary must be happening since so many people have gathered to witness it"). In the case of relic translations, that shared, material experience was mediated by the senses: by the sumptuousness of reliquaries; by powerful choral chants (special hymns were composed for the occasion of relic translations); by the smell of incense (relics were often authenticated by their reportedly "sweet scent"); by the haptic contact with the sacred objects themselves – or at least, vicariously, with people who handled them. Translationality has its roots in an individual and collective sensory experience wrapped in thick layers of symbolic significance (Blumczynski, 2023a, pp. 178-179).

This material, corporeal transfer created a perceptible sense of connection between places and communities, as church officials left one post to assume another in a different city, and sacred relics were sent by one group to another as special "gifts of friendship" (or, at other times, taken by force). Translationality is precisely the power of that experiential link; a potential to experience metaphorical travel across time and space in the presence of an object that first completed a material journey in the opposite direction.

Even though those historical uses of the word *translation* as material transfer invoke religious contexts, translationality is something much larger, and may be more mundane as well as more profound. I argue that, "[i]f translation is indeed ubiquitous, and translationality involves an experience of connecting – metaphorically, but through material, sensory mediation – with another reality across temporal and spatial distance, then we should be able to encounter it … in various aspects of everyday life" (Blumczynski, 2023a, 180). The examples I give below are drawn from the final chapter of *Experiencing Translationality* (Blumczynski, 2023a, pp. 174–194).

3.3. Experiencing translationality in music

For several reasons, a particularly promising site for experiencing translationality is offered by music. Like other sensory experiences (such as smells or flavours), listening to familiar pieces of music often brings powerful memories of other times and places, people and relationships, moods and circumstances. These memories may sometimes be very specific: many of us have songs or compositions which carry us back in time to a single moment, particular location, special person. *Lacrimosa* from Mozart's *Requiem* carries for me a memory of a high-school sweetheart and a first major heartbreak. Pat Metheny's album *Bright Size Life* takes me back to the hot summer of 1995, an orthopaedic ward at a hospital in Wrocław, and a prolonged wait for yet another surgery. The song *Bloom* by The Paper Kites had an unexplainable, instant soothing effect on our younger son when he was a baby; we must have played it hundreds of times, often in a loop, while driving around or when putting him to bed; years later, the opening chord progression immediately takes me back to this special time in my life as a father when constant sleep deprivation was mixed with the simple joy of taking care of a new baby. I am sure that many of us who enjoy listening to music have associations similar to those, evoking other times, places, memories, and emotions. In fact, this translational power is probably one of the main reasons why we enjoy re-listening to familiar compositions. In experiential terms, this is the general principle behind any re-enactment which is effectively a translational time machine.

3.3.1. Johnny Cash's haunting Hurt

Some translationality effects have a truly massive scale. The video accompanying Johnny Cash's 2002 performance of the song *Hurt* on YouTube, in four and a half years, was viewed more than 245 million times (that's about 150,000 views a day!), and attracted over 90,000 comments, many of them expressing a profound sense of personal connection to the song's powerful message. What is worth stressing is that *Hurt*, contrary to popular belief, is not Cash's own song but a cover of an original composition by Trent Reznor of Nine Inch Nails, who wrote it when he was in his late twenties. The track was included in the album *The Downward Spiral*, described as "something magnificent that took you all the way to the heart of darkness" (Udo, 2019) – but it only became a global hit when it was performed by an artist of another generation, representing a radically different musical style, and nearing the end of his life, who gave the song an entirely new meaning and infused it with profound poignancy. The minimalist arrangement "revealed all the creaks and crags in Cash's voice"; the producer Rick Rubin later said "there were times that Johnny 'sounded broken,' but they tried to turn that into a positive" (DeMain, 2022). It sounds like they succeeded. Reznor, when he first heard the record, said that "it was very strange (…) this other person inhabiting my most personal song. I'd known where I was when I wrote it. I know what I was thinking about. I know how I felt. Hearing it was like someone kissing your girlfriend. It felt invasive" (Vinnicombe, 2008). "However, it was only when the aural experience was complemented by a visual narrative that the translational link to Cash became irresistible" (Blumczynski, 2023a, p. 185): the video featuring images from Cash's life (voted as greatest video of all time by *New Musical Express* in 2011) finally sealed that translational flow of creative material from the artist who originally wrote the song to one who almost a decade later became its 'more original' performer. Reznor, recalled his experience thus:

> Anyway, a few weeks later, a videotape shows up (…) I pop the video in, and… wow. Tears welling, silence, goose-bumps… Wow. I just lost my girlfriend, because that song isn't mine any more. Then it all made sense to me. It really made me think about how powerful music is as a medium and art form. I wrote some words and music in my bedroom as a way of staying sane, about a bleak and desperate place I was in, totally isolated and alone. Some-fucking-how that winds up reinterpreted by a music legend from a radically different era/genre and still retains sincerity and meaning – different, but every bit as pure (Reznor and Rickly, 2004).

What was initially a cover, a translation, has morphed into an iconic, primary, somehow 'more authentic' performance (certainly so when judged by the popularity of Cash's version dwarfing Reznor's). Such authenticity is "an experiential, pragmatically constructed notion (…) [that] may easily bypass considerations of origins, authorship, and chronology" (Blumczynski, 2023a, p. 186). *Hurt* is Johnny Cash's poignant, extremely moving swan song – both him and his wife June died within a few months of filming – who carries hundreds of millions of online viewers back to their own pasts, both remembered and imagined, unlocking a potent dimension of self-knowledge.[12] How does this kind of knowledge fit into the broader ecology of knowledges?

3.3.2. Translationality of the guitar

In addressing this question, I will again draw on my own personal experience. Even though I do not consider myself a musician and certainly not a performer, experimenting with sounds and playing music bring me the most immediate sense of translationality. If translationality manifests itself in an experiential connection with another reality, time, place or person, often facilitated by material objects, the guitar is one such translational artefact for me. The fascination goes back to my childhood, one of the earliest memories of being together as a family, and the sound of my dad's beat-up, nylon string guitar he played for me and my sister at bedtime. Forty-some years on, I can still remember some of the tunes and improvised songs in which we tried to capture the adventures of the day – even though that old guitar is no longer around. Instead, over the years, I have gathered a small collection of other guitars; none of them are very rare or expensive, but each of them connects me to a particular person, or time, or a set of circumstances. One was a gift from my sister for my 19th birthday. Another was a totally irresponsible gift to myself (money was very tight) that rekindled my love for music again, and carried me through one of the darkest times of my life. Still another was a tribute to B.B. King. Another to Carlos Santana, my guitar hero from high school – a remote time and some version of myself I never became. There is some degree of rotation; every now and then a buy a guitar (usually second-hand), and the decision whether to keep it or not is based on this hardly describable, psycho-sensory sense of connection.

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[12] In fact, we could argue that "describing an experience as 'moving' is nothing else than recognizing its translationality, a power to carry you over" (Blumczynski, 2023a, p. 186).

The experiential translationality of the guitar is in large part derived from its extremely corporeal makeup: it is an instrument with "a body, neck, head(stock), and a (tremolo) arm – that can be played in various positions: sitting down, standing up, and even walking around, carried by the player as an extension of his or her body" (Blumczynski, 2023a, p. 189). Given their material transferability, no wonder that guitars can be so thoroughly translational. Some evoke a symbolic link with an artist and his iconic instrument – you can have a rough sensory approximation of how it must feel to be Joe Bonamassa or Eric Clapton as you feel the shape, weight distribution, body contour, neck profile, and so on, of a Gibson Les Paul or a Fender Stratocaster, respectively. This is the familiar, marketable kind of translationality, underpinning advertising campaigns and celebrity product endorsement: many people will gladly pay money to be able to drink the same coffee as George Clooney or wear the same fragrance as Keira Knightley. Despite the dominant commercial impulse driving these sensory experiences, they also have an undeniable epistemic dimension. They offer us some direct knowledge of what it is like to taste, smell, feel, wear, hear, or watch a particular product or partake in a specific activity.

Beyond this kind of "translationality for sale" (Blumczynski 2023a, pp. 144–173) whose epistemic potential is perhaps overshadowed by its economic focus, playing musical instruments both draws on and helps build a certain kind of knowledge. Whether conceptualised as a skill, ability, or command, playing an instrument involves the body as well as the mind – and in fact challenges this dichotomy. Like any other form of knowledge, it needs to be acquired, internalized, and rehearsed. But because this experience is so thoroughly psychosomatic, with time and practice, some elements of technique may become instinctive and nearly automatic. It is not uncommon for players or music teachers to speak about their fingers "remembering" certain scales, chord shapes, or progressions. "[A] large part of learning how to play an instrument is developing this sensory, haptic prowess and gradually detaching it from a conscious mental effort; in fact, "[y]ou have only mastered a scale when you can play it perfectly amidst distractions, without actively paying attention to the progression of notes" (Blumczynski, 2023a, p. 187). In much of contemporary education theory and practice, at least in the Western world, such ways of acquiring and cultivating knowledge as memorization or rote learning have largely been abandoned, but it seems that in playing music – and possibly in some other areas of artistic and creative expression – there is no other route to fluency except by of focused repetition or persistent practice. "[S]ome people with severe dementia and Alzheimer's disease are able to play musical compositions they had mastered in the past, even though they claim they do not know or remember them" – which demonstrates that "instrumental skills are internalized and encoded as holistic bodily operations" (Blumczynski, 2023a, p. 187). In this sense, developing what we could call "instrumental knowledge" (the ability to play a musical instrument), is not far removed from meditation exercises: a repetitious physical or manual activity providing a reassuring sense of routine, and thus encouraging mindfulness. Based on personal experience, I can attest that even though practicing scales, passages, and phrases can at times be tedious, it can also be meditative, as "it integrates the physical and the mental, the near-automatic and the aesthetic, the repetitive and the creative" as well as "fosters a sense of ontological continuity, a processual identity, a connection with myself from another time" (Blumczynski 2023a, p. 187). I have no doubt that this kind of self-knowledge, so closely connected with sensory experience, deserves its place in a comprehensive ecology of knowledges. Translationality of this sort cannot be fully described, explained, or reduced to a linguistic account – it needs to be experienced.

4. Towards other translationalities

When I was thinking about the concluding chapter for *Experiencing Translationality*, I was not sure how much this personal, perhaps even intimate account will work in an academic monograph, but in the end I decided to take the risk and be true to myself, accepting that this is really the closest I can get to capturing my experience of translationality. Since the book was published, it has been enormously encouraging to hear that this approach had struck a chord with others. Recently, I had the pleasure of hosting a senior scholar from a highly respectable university, who on the following day sent me this personal message:

> After the delicious meal and lively conversations last night, I found it hard to fall asleep … so I read the book you gave me. Your chapter on the experience of translationality spoke to me to the core. We were earlier talking about the materiality of hobbies, and your guitars are my wood working tools: some from Italy, some purchased over time here, they connect me with the present and the past, they move me emotionally and physiologically, the biomechanics of my brain are engaged by the sensorial dimensions. Yes, you did unlock a stream of recognizable allegories, metaphors, and universal values of translationality that I can recognize at a personal level.

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that capturing this psychosomatic experience, (self)knowledge, and (self)awareness in a scholarly structure of the kind theorised by EPISTRAN – especially its strand focused on translationality – is nothing short of epistemic translation. It is my hope that this special issue of *Translation Matters* collectively and all the contributions within it will serve as a credible testimony of, and strong impulse for, epistemic and translational engagements across the EPISTRAN project and beyond.

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