

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION (INTER-)EPISTEMIC TRANSLATION: A NEW PARADIGM?

Translation, in its conventional interlingual form, has been present in the transmission and development of knowledge since the earliest times. From the recovery of the lost Hellenistic science in the libraries of Andalusia in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries to the circulation of academic texts in modernity, manuscripts have transited across time and space, crossing intercultural and interlingual boundaries, thanks to the tireless efforts of teams of translators, working under different kinds of constraints and funded by various kinds of patrons.

This special issue, however, is not so much interested in the interlingual translation of knowledge,¹ as in the transmission of information between different epistemic systems. The idea that there may exist distinct knowledge regimes with their own internal coherence has been with us at least since C.P Snow, who, in 1959, lamented the subaltern status of Science in an academic world still dominated by humanistic learning. However, the notion of the episteme [*épistémè*] as a configuration of unspoken assumptions underpinning what is understood to be knowledge at a particular moment in time can be traced to Foucault, who, in *The Order of Things* claimed:

In any given culture and at any given moment, there is always only one *episteme* that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice. (Foucault, 2002, p. 183)

Today, in most Western societies, it is the episteme of Science that determines what is legitimately considered as knowledge. Science produces 'facts', defined in most English dictionaries as that which actually exists or is proved to be true;² which means that all other forms of knowing are tacitly regarded as subjective and therefore not 'true'.³ As for non-western knowledges, such as the traditional philosophies of the East, or the indigenous knowledges of the Global South, these are stripped of cognitive authority

¹ This has been amply dealt with elsewhere. See, for example, Bennett (2023), Montgomery (2000) and Duris (2008, reviewed here by Jennifer Dobson).

² Sokal & Bricmont (1998, p. 102) add: "For us, as for most people, a 'fact' is a situation in the outside world that exists irrespective of the knowledge we have (or don't have) of it – in particular, irrespective of any consensus or interpretation". However, this appeal to objectivity is belied by the etymology of the word, which is derived from *factum* (the past participle of the Latin verb *facere*, to do or to make) and therefore technically means 'things made or done'.

³ As Richard Rorty puts it: "In our culture, the notions of 'science', 'rationality', 'objectivity' and 'truth' are bound up with one another. Science is thought of as offering 'hard', 'objective', truth: truth as correspondence of reality, the only sort of truth worthy of the name. Humanists – for example, theologians, philosophers, historians and literary critics – have to worry about whether they are being 'scientific', whether they are entitled to think of their conclusions, no matter how carefully argued, as worthy of the term 'true'" (Rorty, 1991, p. 35).

through processes of epistemicide,⁴ and reduced to the status of 'myth', 'tradition' or 'belief'.

Inter-epistemic translation is a way of bridging the gulf between these different epistemes, with a view to putting them into dialogue. The aim is ultimately to combat the epistemological monoculture (Bennett, 2015) that is proving so devastating to our societies and especially to our planet,⁵ and to work towards an 'ecology of knowledges', on the understanding that "different types of knowledge are incomplete in different ways and that raising the consciousness of such reciprocal incompleteness /.../ will be a precondition for achieving cognitive justice" (Santos, 2016, p. 213).⁶

It also goes some way towards fulfilling the prophecy made by Arduini and Nergaard in 2011, and reiterated in various forms by Gentzler (2017), Blumczynski (2017), Robinson (2017), Marais (2018, 2022), and Bassnett and Johnston (2019), that translation is now poised to expand its remit far beyond its traditional domain to become a major interpretive and operative tool at the centre of a whole new transdisciplinary research paradigm.

The term 'interepistemic translation' was coined by Douglas Robinson in his 2017 book *Translativity* as a potential fourth kind of translation to add to Roman Jakobson's tripartite division.⁷ He describes it as a process of narrative reframing "similar to ... *translatio studii*, the translation of learning, also known as the transfer or transmission of knowledge – which is never a 'cloning' of knowledge, of course, but always involves what I'm calling translationality: adaptation, transformation" (2017, p. 200). In the pages that follow, he envisages a whole series of different relations that could be studied under this rubric, ranging from the kinds of operations contemplated in translational medicine and the medical humanities, through the writing of popular science and representation of scientific issues in literary fiction to the study of how knowledges transform over time as epistemological paradigms wax and wane.

The EPISTRAN project,⁸ launched in 2023 at the Centre for English, Translation and Anglo-Portuguese Studies (CETAPS) at Nova University of Lisbon, has sought to develop the notion of (inter-)epistemic translation from Robinson's initial idea by using the tools, concepts and resources from Translation Studies to study the way that knowledge is, has been or could be transferred between different epistemes. At present, the project is divided into three strands: one looks at the relationship between Science and Humanistic learning, with a focus on science communication and popularization, and literary accounts of scientific knowledge (Strand A); a second is concerned with non-western knowledges,

⁴ See Price (2023, reviewed here by Paola Mancosu) on the various kinds of epistemicide at work in indigenous contexts.

⁵ See Cronin (2017) for an overview of the ecological problems deriving from the hegemony of this episteme and suggestions for how translation may be deployed to contribute to their solution.

⁶ See also Santos (2008, 2018).

⁷ 1) intralingual translation or rewording is an interpretation of verbal signs by other signs of the same language; 2) interlingual translation or translation proper is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language; 3) intersemiotic translation or transmutation is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs belonging to non-verbal systems' (Jakobson, 2000, p. 114)

⁸ www.epistran.org. See Bennett (2024) for an overview of the project, its aims and outputs.

both knowledges of the Global South and traditional knowledges of the East (Strand B); while a third is historical, focusing on the repackaging and/or exclusion of premodern knowledges with the advent of modern Science (Strand C). All three of these are represented in this special issue with articles by, respectively, Pedro Navarro and Mohammad Aboomar (Strand A); Africa Vidal, Margherita Zanoletti and Xiaorui Sun (Strand B); and Angelo Cattaneo (Strand C).

Finally, there is another aspect that was not initially contemplated by the project in its first incarnation, but which acquired prominence at the first international conference, held in Lisbon in December 2023. Represented here by the contributions of Piotr Blumczynski and Kobus Marais, this expands the object of study beyond Robinson's concept of interepistemic translation to something much broader, namely the translational processes through which new knowledge is generated from primary experience.

It is this decalage that lies behind the terminological instability that the attentive reader will note across the issue as a whole. The terms *epistemic*, *inter-epistemic* (hyphenated) and *interepistemic* (unhyphenated) are all used to qualify 'translation' at different points, as well as the compromise term (*inter-epistemic*) that we eventually chose for the main title. For now, the difference between them remains intuitive. Perhaps later in the day, when more work has been done on the subject, it will be possible to formally distinguish them one from another.

The special issue opens, appropriately, with a paper by **Douglas Robinson** in which he theorizes the concept of interepistemic translation that served as the inspiration for the EPISTRAN project and this publication. He begins by briefly running through the three types featured in his book *Translationality* (2017) all located at the frontier of medicine and humanities,⁹ before turning his attention to a 1981 article by Itamar Even-Zohar on Transfer Theory. The bulk of his article is given over to a discussion of the eight hypotheses that Even-Zohar presents at the end of his article, which Robinson interrogates as being of great relevance for the interepistemic project. While most of his analysis is very abstract and theoretical, in keeping with the style of the text under discussion, he does illustrate some of the points with concrete examples from food transculturation, suggesting that "creative/adaptive/transformational cooking and plating and serving" and also "traveling

⁹ The first concerns the field that is today known as the *medical humanities* (the interface between specialist knowledge about disease and healing, and human stories of illness and suffering as dealt with in a novel or memoir); the second is the *translational humanities of medicine*, illustrated with a case-study concerning the medical knowledge of Galen and how that got passed down through the ages in various forms until it was eventually transformed into literary history; while the third looks at the *medical humanities of translation*, involving the transformations undergone by medical research on empathy as it feeds into humanistic research, and more specifically the phenomenology of translating.

and entering restaurants and eating” might be viewed as epistemic systems in their own right.

Robinson's initial proposal for interepistemic translation in his conclusion to *Translationality* gives particular attention to the relationship between scientific and humanistic forms of knowledge, as we have seen, and as a result, this aspect is already particularly well developed in the EPISTRAN project. **Pedro Navarro's** article, about the popularization of Darwinism in nineteenth-century Brazil, reflects this. Working at the interface between History of Science, Science Communication and Translation Studies, Navarro begins his article with a theoretical discussion about the concept of science popularization and how this relates to interepistemic translation and translationality more broadly, before moving on to his case study, Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859). He explains how the ideas contained in this work (which was itself a summary of a much longer tome, known informally as Darwin's 'big book') were first translated into German, where they underwent a series of transformations in the hands of three German scientists, who adapted it to suit their language and epistemological agendas, and then into French, before appearing in Brazil in the popularizations of Augusto César de Miranda Azevedo.

The next article, by **Mohammad Aboomar**, is also concerned with evolutionary biology, but this time in relation to religious worldviews, which he conceptualizes as systems producing knowledge of a different kind to Science and using different means. Focusing particularly on publishers' paratexts, which provide crucial information about the assumptions and motives underpinning the various recontextualizations, he traces the process through which evolutionary biology was transformed into anti-evolutionary rhetoric by creation science and intelligent design movements in the United States, before being translated and adapted by Islamic organizations for use in Muslim contexts.

The following three articles are from the second strand of the EPISTRAN project: *Knowledges of the World*. **Africa Vidal's** article begins with a discussion of the concept of 'epistemicide' as applied primarily to the indigenous knowledges of the Global South and examines some of the proposals that have been made by anthropologists and others to combat this situation through sensitive translation practices. She then turns her attention to contemporary art, exploring its potential to translate indigenous worldviews in multi-sensory ways. After lingering briefly on Jackson Pollock, whose haptic drip paintings are in part inspired by the tactility of Navajo sand paintings, she focuses on Joseph Beuys, presenting his live installations as 'shamanic translations' that use the primitive world as a way of attacking the "closed, static, and dogmatic structures" of contemporary society.

Margherita Zanoletti, for her part, examines an illustrated children's book by Australian aboriginal author Oodgeroo Noonuccal as an exercise in (inter-)epistemic translation and part of a strategy of cultural resistance against epistemicide. The work, *Stradbroke Dreamtime* (1972), which includes episodes from the author's childhood on Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island), alongside Creation stories and other tales from the people of the land, is analysed in three different ways: as an exercise in autobiographical writing (i.e. translation from embodied experience into literary form); as a transformation

of aboriginal oral knowledge into written literature (diamesic resemioticization); and as an intersemiotic translation of textual material into visual image in a way that evokes the pictorial and performative aspects inherent in Aboriginal storytelling. The work as a whole, she concludes, thus functions as a performative device that encourages interaction, facilitates comprehension, and expands the audience on a global scale, supporting Oodgeroo in her mission to bring the knowledge of her people to the attention of the West.

Xiaorui Sun's article, which follows, explores the overlaps that exist between Deleuzian Affect Theory and the Qi Theory of traditional Chinese medicine, with a particular focus on the concept of hysteria. Beginning with a discussion of two accepted Chinese translations for the term 'hysteria' which "both fail to construct the periperformative interactions between the Eastern and Western epistemic regimes", she proposes instead an interepistemic approach that involves looking for common ground between the two. Rejecting the dominant Western tradition as too fixated on binarisms ("always honoring one pole and banishing the other"), she finds more sympathetic material in a 'counter-hegemonic epistemic regime' that she identifies as running from pre-Socratic philosopher Anaximenes through Spinoza to contemporary thinkers Deleuze, Guattari and Massumi. In particular, the Deleuzian concept of the 'body without organs', with its upturning of the conventional body/soul dualism, strikes her as having much in common with Daoism and the theory of *qi*, bringing potential not only for the translation of knowledge between East and West, but also for translation theory and practice more broadly.

Eastern and Western knowledges come into contact again in **Angelo Cattaneo's** article, which describes the confrontation between cosmologies that took place during the Jesuit missions to Japan and China in the second half of the sixteenth century. The Jesuits' main aim was of course evangelization, but as the Creation *ex nihilo* (a fundamental dogma of Christianity from which all other articles of faith were derived) was embedded in and explained through the Aristotelian-Scholastic cosmology of the homocentric spheres, it became imperative to convince their interlocutors and potential converts of the science behind the dogma. Their attempts at interepistemic translation, involving astronomical diagrams, globes and armillary spheres, as well as logic and mathematical demonstrations, were met with (amongst other things) neo-Confucian counter-arguments based on the notions of *ri* ("principle" or "pattern") and *qi* ("generative energy") as the primordial forces driving the world. The extent to which the Jesuits were successful in their enterprise can perhaps be measured by the fact that, in Japan at least, the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic concepts of the spherical earth and spherical universe gradually took root, though detached from the Christian matrix in which they had been presented, persisting even after the expulsion of the religious orders in 1614.

The last two articles complicate the concept of interepistemic translation that we have been exploring until now by questioning the stability of the epistemes involved in the process. For **Piotr Blumczynski**, knowledge is never static but instead something dynamic and emergent, a constant process of assessing evidence and making sense of it. Thus,

experience (in the particularly English understanding of the term) becomes the basis for a materially grounded epistemology of translationality, now defined as “an experience of connecting – metaphorically, but through material and sensory mediation – with another reality across temporal and spatial distance”. Arguing that translationality can be encountered in all aspects of everyday life, he ends his article with two personal and moving accounts of translationality in music, which stress the psychosomatic and material nature of lived experience.

The final chapter of this special issue, by **Kobus Marais**, is also more concerned with the translational processes involved in primary knowledge creation than transmission between already existing epistemes (hence his preference for the term ‘epistemic’ rather than ‘interepistemic’ translation). The starting point for this very philosophical reflection is the Vredefort Dome, a massive crater in central South Africa whose origins were still being hotly debated until a few years ago. From here, Marais moves on to a theoretical review that dialogues not only with the neuro-social hermeneutics of Douglas Robinson but also with the new materialist perspective as represented by physicist-cum-philosopher Karen Barad. Activating the broad semiotic framework established by C.S. Peirce (who himself used ‘translation’ to explain the relationship between representamen, object and interpretant), and the semiotic realism of John Deely, Marais argues that knowledge creation needs to be constrained by ‘matter-energy’ (what the Scholastics called *ens reale* or ‘mind-independent reality’), not just for practical reasons (to ensure that aeroplanes do not fall from the sky, for example) but also for ethical ones. He ends his piece with a powerful ethical appeal that has much in common with the arguments used by foreignizing translators and anthropologists attempting to explain worldviews of indigenous peoples: the *thing*, he says, is an Other, which needs to be shown respect rather than ‘constructed’ in a solipsistic way. Only by listening to nature and attempting to translate it *on its own terms* do we stand any chance of stalling the ecological crisis that currently assails our planet.

Before we end this Introduction, mention also needs to be made of the four book reviews, which explore published works of great relevance to the project. Jennifer Dobson’s review concerns the French collection of essays *Traduire la science: Hier et aujourd’hui*, edited by Pascal Duris (2008), which has a strong historical focus, often grappling with the problems of how to translate science from a past episteme accurately into terms that are intelligible today – a theme continued by Pedro Navarro in his careful examination of four papers by Phillippe Selosse. Rodrigo Lacerda, for his part, reviews a work about translation as a social and cultural practice in the field of anthropology (*Translating Worlds: The Epistemological Space of Translation*, Carlo Severi and William F. Hanks, eds.), while Paola Mancosu assesses *Translation and Epistemicide: Racialization of Languages in the Americas* by Joshua Price (2023). None of these works use the term ‘(inter-)epistemic translation’, of course, though many of the case studies they describe would fit the EPISTRAN project perfectly. Let us hope that in the future many more will.

Finally, a word about the Epigraph, which not only sets the tone for this special issue but also opens the door to a whole new area of research. It represents a transcription of birdsong undertaken in an orchard in Worcestershire, England, with mark-making triggered in the split second of hearing birdsong as it filled the landscape. Perceived differences in bird calls (for example, the sharp intonation of wood pigeons, the gruff barking pheasants, and flowing sounds of robins) were recorded using different kinds of marks.

As an exercise in asemic writing, this is not strictly speaking epistemic translation from nature of the kind envisaged by Kobus Marais, since its author, Harriet Carter, is exploring the artistic affordances of the medium, rather than attempting to transmit senses that might be present in the source. However, it does allow us a way into a new dimension of inter-epistemic translation that was not initially contemplated in the EPISTRAN project, but which attracted some attention at the December conference – the concepts of bio-, geo- and terratranslation, or “translation systems that allow us to interact with other sentient and non-sentient beings on our planet” (Cronin 2019: 71). There is already work being done in this domain: a transdisciplinary team made up of biologists and semioticians at the University of Tartu has for some time been engaged in the study of biosemiotics and what Jacob von Uexküll dubbed Umwelt translation;¹⁰ and as for the geo- or terra-translational aspect, in addition to Karen Barad’s (2007) book about the entanglement of matter and meaning, mentioned by Marais in his paper here, some introductory work has already been produced by translation scholars Michael Cronin (2023) and Karin Littau (2023).

But this is for the future. For now, it is enough to launch the concept of (inter-)epistemic translation with the three strands that we already have. We hope that this special issue will inspire others to take it further.

Karen Bennett and Marco Neves

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¹⁰ See Kull and Torop (2012); also Marais and Kull (2016) and Marais (2019).

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