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TRANSLATION ACROSS ACADEMIC CULTURES IN COMMUNICATION STUDIES

The notion of translation is useful to reflect upon the globalization of academic cultures in communication studies. The globalization of academic cultures confronts matters that translation studies have long recognized: the clash between dogmatism and difference, language slips and gaps, and the possibility of misunderstanding. Although globalization invites scholars to broaden perspectives, it does not necessarily promote the rapprochement of epistemic communities in communication studies or the values of universal, de-Westernized and cosmopolitan scholarship.

The aim of this article is to discuss the translatability of communication scholarship in the context of globalized academia and research traditions with different historical trajectories and cultures.

Translation is a “trans-cultural event” [5] that deals with dynamics and challenges that are intrinsic to the crossing of scholarly cultures. The globalization of academic cultures confronts matters that translation studies have long recognized. It is important to clarify a basic point. The issue of translation in the globalization of academic cultures is frequently identified with the domination of English. This linguistic hegemony is viewed as inevitable [1]. Pressure on scholars to publish in English has been growing in Europe and even in Ukraine.

The consequences of this process are mixed. Just as a common language eases scholarly communication across borders, it also presents challenges. English global

dominance gives advantages to scholars who are comfortable in oral and written English and/or trained in English-language universities. Therefore, if language is a site of struggle for meaning and power, the predominance of English favors specific scholars and academic communities in the permanent battle for understanding, persuasion, and visibility. It elevates English-language journals, particularly those with higher usage and citation index, to a prominent global position. It narrows participation by marginalizing scholars who do not master English. This is not just a matter affecting the access of individual scholars; it also minimizes the global presence of thematic subjects and areas of the world with small numbers of English-speaking academics.

The domination of English raises concerns about the epistemological consequences for the production of knowledge. Such concerns are premised on classic argument about the particularities of languages grounding interpretations and conceptualizations of the world. One does not need to embrace Heidegger's petulant conviction that true philosophical thinking is only possible in German (and ancient Greek) to recognize that intellectual work is inseparable from specific linguistic biases. Concerns about an English-dominated global academia are rooted in the notion that the biases of any language shape academic discourse. K. Bennett observes that the domination of English erodes traditional academic scholarship and discourses translated for an English readership. Original writing embedded in particular epistemologies and languages are adapted to the rhetorical patterns of English [2].

All languages present specific semantic boundaries that underpin forms of knowledge. The hope of perfect, univocal translations inevitably confronts the knowledge biases of languages. Therefore, publishing in English is not simply partaking in a globalized community of scholars; it also entails joining a linguistic community with specific biases grounded in linguistic and socio-geographical issues. No doubt, the consolidation of English as the lingua franca of the globalized academia determines unequal conditions of access and lays the ground for certain, language-embedded forms of thinking about the world.

Translation, however, entails issues beyond strictly linguistic matters. To use Paul Ricoeur's distinction [4], translation involves linguistic translations (between languages) and ontological translations (between humans). In this article we are interested in translation in the second interpretation, specifically applied to translation across academic cultures in communication studies. Our concern is not semantics and the biases of languages, although this is an important issue. Instead, our interest is the translatability of differences across intellectual traditions and the institutional logics of academe. The globalization of communication studies implies not only the accommodation and adaptation of linguistic communities to the expressions and rhetoric of English-speaking academics. It also foregrounds the possibility of resonance and harmonization of intellectual work across geographic and academic cultures.

Translation involves contact between languages and cultures. Because any form of knowledge is socially situated, it is necessary to understand how translation works across academic communities that hold varying understandings of scholarly excellence. What is interesting is whether and how translation happens in ways that facilitate or impede understanding and agreement. Translation implies a process by which differences are not resolved or harmonized but, rather, are overcome around common agreement about meaning. As Ricoeur writes, translation entails "the search for optimum commensurability between the distinctive resources of the receiving language and those of the original language" [4, p. 4]. From this perspective, we should not only approach globalization in terms of connecting scholars across geographical settings but consider questions about the translatability of differences, expectations, and standards across academic cultures.

We propose to discuss the globalization of communication studies by examining questions about translation. How does translation work across academic cultures? On whose cultural terms does globalization happen? Are we moving from polyphonic discourse to streamlined speech in the field of communication? Does globalization foster the dominance of specific epistemologies defined by geo-cultural

origin (the West) and academic cultures? Can we legitimately talk about academic Western culture in the singular considering the long-standing presence of academic tribes characterized by different epistemologies, theories, and methodologies? Does globalization propel the hybridization or juxtaposition of academic traditions? Or does academic imperialism ride roughshod over scholarly diversity?

Our argument is the following. Although globalization invites scholars to broaden perspectives, it does not necessarily promote the rapprochement of epistemic communities in communication studies or the values of universal, de-Westernized, and cosmopolitan scholarship. Scholars may be more attentive to research and findings produced in other countries and regions. This opening, however, does not necessarily entail a fundamental shift in the ontology of their work – the understanding of communication, the conception of the research subject, the definition of research problems, and theoretical and methodological sympathies. Globalization prompts dialogue and collaboration among specific cultures of communication scholarship, yet it might have negligible impact on interaction among different epistemic communities. Globalization does not necessarily push scholars to engage in the politics of translation across academic languages.

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