Benjamins Translation Library

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Preface

Living with translation

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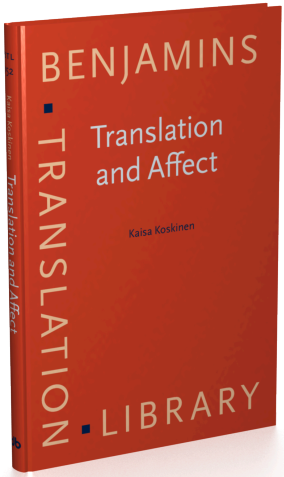

Pages ix–xii of
Translation and Affect: Essays on sticky affects and translational affective labour
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Preface

Living with translation

> It is certain, however, that to gain an exact idea of a science one must practice it, and, so to speak, live with it. That is because it does not entirely consist of some propositions that have been definitely proved. Along side of this actual, realized science, there is another, concrete and living, which is in part ignorant of itself, and yet speaks itself; besides acquired results, there are hopes, habits, instincts, needs, presentiments so obscure that they cannot be expressed in words, yet so powerful that they sometimes dominate the whole life of the scholar.
>
> Émile Durkheim 1893/1933. *The Division of Labour in Society*. Clencoe, Ill.: Free Press.

The above quotation of Durkheim came my way quite accidentally, in an article by Anne Warfield Rawls (2003: 220) where she offers a critical analysis of the limited success of sociology in fully acknowledging the legacy of Erving Goffman and Harold Garfinkel. In the article, she sees the (then) contemporary sociology far too focused on institutional and systemic thinking; on rules, norms and beliefs, and too eager to reach generalizations to appreciate the messy details of lived situations. For her, the focus in the quotation cited above is on propositions and practices; for me, it is on "hopes, habits, instincts, needs, presentiments". Goffman, Garfinkel and other sociologists taking a microanalytical view of social life were acutely aware of the embodied and emotional aspects of situatedness, and their analyses of everyday encounters placed the lived interaction of communication partners under close scrutiny.

According to Rawls, sociology had not, at least not by the year 2003 when the article was published, been able to overcome the false dichotomy of micro- and macroanalysis and to fully appreciate the revolutionary power of Goffman's and Garfinkel's approaches. I am not in a position to judge the validity of Rawls' 2003 argument, or to assess its relevance for today's sociology with its affect turns and practice turns. Instead, what caught my attention in the quotation, and in Rawls' discussion of sociology, were the similarities with a field closer to my heart. Translation studies, as we know the discipline today, has grown its roots in numerous directions. Some of its origins can be traced back to the (applied) linguistics of the 1950s, to the machine translation initiatives and research of the same era, and to its strong ties to the creation of multilingual international and intergovernmental organizations (the UN, the EU) and the building of training facilities for

translators and interpreters for these organizations as well as for the local needs of globalizing nations. This disciplinary history has contributed to giving the study of translation a modernist, functional and pragmatic outlook.

Histories of translation studies tend to emphasize the role of applied linguistics, to give translation studies a longer historical pedigree, but the *independent* field of translation studies was largely brought into being through the systemic and norm-focused paradigm of descriptive translation studies (DTS) from the 1980s onward, with a strong input from scholars with backgrounds in literary theory and comparative literature. Although the rise of the discipline in the 1990s coincided with a postmodernist, poststructuralist and postcolonial phase that eschewed technocratic approaches and favoured emancipatory stances and politically and ethically attuned researcher-positions, the descriptive approach, with its systems-theoretical basis and a tendency to seek generalizations and provable propositions, proved more influential and has had a more sustained effect on the field. This influence was further institutionalized by the foundation of the journal *Target* (in 1989) and in the long-standing series of CETRA summer schools (from 1988 onwards), which served as tools for disseminating the research agenda and for training new generations of TS scholars in the paradigm.

The legacy of DTS was, and still is, of crucial value in terms of providing a sustainable scholarly base for the budding discipline, but it also directed research in ways that overshadowed other potentially relevant viewpoints that have been coming to the fore only recently. Indeed, in addition to understanding the structures of translation (fields, production networks, institutional hierarchies, etc.) and to seeking laws of translation, be they universal or probabilistic, we also need to "live with" translation, attuned to its "concrete and living" nature, and the often obscure "hopes, habits, instincts, needs, presentiments" of the people involved, translation and interpreting scholars included. In short, to fully understand translation, one also needs to understand its *affective* side, the ways in which it forms a part of the lives of those involved with it. This book seeks to explore the many faces of this involvement.

There is also another underlying reason for opening this monograph with a quotation from Durkheim, one of the founding figures of the discipline of sociology in the late 19th century. Affect was one of the key areas of study in early sociology, in such disciplinary milestones as Durkheim's own work on anomie, Georg Simmel's analysis of living in the city, and C. Wright Mills' studies of the workplace. While this book does not follow a strict theoretical model, and the viewpoints and supporting arguments presented in it derive from many disciplines, I see it primarily as a contribution to the subfield that we have since the early 2000s began to label as the sociology of translation. In tracing emotions and affects, my

focus is on social and interactional aspects more than on neuropsychological, cognitive or individual ones. Parallels to sociology are therefore a good place to start.

The affective side of translatoriality is a multifaceted issue with permanent relevance and fascination, but it is also a pressing topic. The technological advances of automated translation have changed the translatorial landscapes dramatically, and machines are taking on routine translation tasks. What remains for the human to deal with, at least for now, is the affective and the ethical decision-making in multilingual communication. We do not yet have a full picture of what that entails. Although a number of scholars have discussed the notions of affect and emotion in translation studies, there is no comprehensive account of translation and affect available as of yet, and this book thus proposes to chart the terrain. In this book I aim to provide a holistic overview of the various ways in which affect can be usefully studied in translation studies. Each semi-autonomous chapter targets an area of interest and opens into different theoretical and methodological directions. At the same time, they each develop the core argument of the book: affect is ubiquitous in life and in translation, some affects are particularly sticky and influential, and translators and interpreters are affecting and being affected in their work in myriad ways. Most chapters also report on empirical findings with the aim of indicating different opportunities for further study.

This book has been a long time in the making, and it builds on my sustained interest in the role of affect in various translation-related issues. In many ways, I am returning to most of my earlier research interests, now looking at issues such as translators' agency, workplace culture, institutional translation practices and retranslation specifically and explicitly from the point of view of affect. Indeed, a reader familiar with my previous work will find recognizable elements from my previously published texts. Here, they reappear in rewritings and new combinations. Some chapters also report on entirely new research as well as findings and results previously published only in Finnish; the section on translator training builds on my own experiences. None of the chapters is a reprinted or translated version of previously published articles. Rather, in this book I develop my earlier ideas further and bring them into new constellations through a sustained focus on the affective.

It has been argued that academic texts on the topic of affect tend to be rather devoid of emotion (Probyn 2010: 74). Indeed, that may be the case here as well, but I have aimed for writing differently. But writing affectively *and* academically is not that easy, and the resulting style not necessarily successful. Regardless of the outcome, this writing process has definitely not been without its affective ups and downs, quite the contrary. It was therefore opportune that when I was deep in the writing-cum-thinking process for this book, already having hopelessly missed my first deadline, I had an appointment with a psychologist to discuss the problems

I had with sleeping. To find the root cause for this bodily reaction to a number of simultaneous challenges in my life at the time, she asked me to keep a diary of how I feel at any given moment of my everyday life and where in my body these emotions are making themselves sensorily felt. I did not reveal the book project to her, but I was grateful for the reminder to be reflective of my own affects and embodiments at a time when I was emphatically focusing my cognitive efforts to understand and explain those of others. These reflections allowed me to be more attuned to the various affects involved in the project: It has made me feel insecure and frustrated, and struggling for clarity and understanding, making my chest feel heavy. I have been giddy with the lightness of writing when things have gone smoothly. I have also felt anxiety in my stomach at the thought of ending up only reporting what everyone else already knew, revealing my imposture. And I have been heart-warmingly grateful to those numerous colleagues who have supported me during this process, and thankful for those many insightful writers whose texts have allowed me to see things more clearly, and even more so for those who have muddled my over-simplified preconceptions. Writing is a corporeal activity and it affects bodies, as Elspeth Probyn (2010: 76) reminds us. The writing of this book has affected and keeps affecting me. The book that you are now reading is, in its incompleteness, very dear to me. In the pages that follow I have tried to capture, in an accessible form and in pragmatic terms, many of the most important takeaways of my research career so far, seen through the lens of affect. I can only hope it will also succeed in affecting your body, one way or another.

The two central premises of the book I can trace back to my PhD project (Koskinen 2000), and even beyond, to the very beginning of my academic endeavours. The first premise is a mind-set: that of avoiding binary, dualistic set-ups and embracing the more complex logic of both/and. Regarding the notion of affect, discussed in the next chapter, I deliberately refuse definitions that would force a choice between body and mind; I work to accommodate both intrinsic and extrinsic elements of emotions, taking both individual and the social aspects into account; I try to cater for both translating and interpreting, avoiding a common strategy of dealing only with one or the other. The second premise is best explained as a research question, and it is the one I keep trying to answer in all of my research activities: what kind of an activity is translating, and what is the task of the translator? Affect, as a flexible and open-ended concept, allows me once more to reflect on the endlessly fascinating practice of translation from a new angle.