

## Dislocation in Translation La dislocation en traduction

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Volume 22, Number 1, 1er semestre 2009

La traduction au Japon  
Translation in Japan

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/044786ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/044786ar>

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Publisher(s)

Association canadienne de traductologie

ISSN

0835-8443 (print)

1708-2188 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Sakai, N. (2009). Dislocation in Translation. *TTR*, 22(1), 167–187.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/044786ar>

### Article abstract

My inquiry into translation is, first of all, concerned with a regime that postulates translation as something representable, and then, with the task of historicizing that regime. The definition of translation as the “transfer of the message from one language into another” leads to the supposition that languages are separate and discrete unities. But what might translation be if we suppose that this is not the case and that one language cannot be easily distinguished from another? The Jakobsonian concept of interlingual translation or “translation proper” fails to take into account the ambiguity inherent in the translator’s position: who and where is the translator in relation to the source and target texts? Being neither addresser nor addressee the translator becomes a “subject in transit.” If translation is understood as simply the transfer of an invariant message from one language to another, the ambiguity of the translator’s positionality is suppressed and with it the idea of translation as a *poietic* social practice that institutes a relation at the site of incommensurability. When this occurs, translation is replaced by the “representation of translation” and comes to be seen as a form of communication between two fully circumscribed language communities. It was this particular representation of translation which gave rise to the possibility of identifying the unity of ethnic or national language with another language unity. By this “schema of co-figuration” an ethnic-linguistic community becomes a “geo-body” on which national sovereignty is built. Two nations represented as equivalent and alike can be viewed as *conceptually different*, a difference construed as a *specific difference*. The co-figuration of “the West and the Rest” is an example of the resultant typical binary oppositions: “the West” constitutes itself by positing everything else as “the Rest” allowing one term to be evaluated as superior to the other. The identification of “modern” with “the West” changed how people organized historical experience; movement in time came to be associated with movement from periphery to centre. Historically, how we represent translation prescribes how we imagine national communities and ethnic identities.

# Dislocation in Translation

Naoki Sakai

My task is to trace, with a dotted line so to say, a passage from the project I call “the dislocation of the West” to the general topic of translation. In stating “dislocation,” I am drawing attention to the two possible connotations of this word: the exiting or disconnecting of something from a fixed location, on the one hand, and the undoing of the act of geographic mapping by which something is located, that is, identified in terms of spatial coordinates on a cartographic plane, on the other. Although what we normally understand by translation may at first appear to have little to do with geography, the act of translation is often represented as a spatial bridging between locations, territories and places as if the initial discontinuity or difference that translation is to overcome had preliminarily been determined to be a geographic distance. There is no necessary relationship between the conception of translation and the cartographic determination of translation in its representation. Or to put it simply, how we conceive of translation is entirely independent of the invocation of the figures of geographic territory. Nonetheless, it is very difficult to evade this regime according to which translation is represented as a bridging of two separate entities, territories or what Thongchai Winichakul calls “geo-bodies” (1994). In the modern world, it is extremely difficult to think of translation outside this *schema of co-figuration*.

The conceptual complexity of the term “translation” and the difficulty in any attempt to define it make it necessary to historicize the particular ways in which translation has been understood and practiced in modern nation-states. To the extent that the politico-ethical significance of translation is always complicit with the construction, transformation or disruption

of power relations, translation participates in the *dislocation* of communication.<sup>1</sup> Translation involves moral imperatives on the part of both the addresser and the addressee and can always be viewed, to a greater or lesser degree, as a political maneuver of social antagonism. In addition, the representation of translation produces socio-political effects and serves as a technology by which individuals imagine their relation to the national or ethnic community. In this respect, let us keep in mind, one is already committed to a certain metaphysics when one assumes, wittingly or not, that translation is representable and serves subjects or—this will come to connote the same thing—serves to manufacture subjects. Therefore, my inquiry into translation is, first of all,

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1 Jean-Luc Nancy discusses “the ruin of theories of ‘communication.’” “It is a community in that Bataille immediately communicates to me the pain and the pleasure that result from the impossibility of communicating anything at all without touching the limit where all meaning [*sens*] spills out of itself, like a simple ink stain on a word, on the word ‘meaning’” (1993, p. 319). “This spilling and this ink are the ruin of theories of ‘communication,’ of the conventional chatter that attempts to promote reasonable exchange and serves only to obscure violence, betrayal and lies, leaving no possibility of measuring oneself against powerful follies. But the reality of community, where nothing is shared without also being removed from this kind of ‘communication,’ has already, always, revealed the vanity of such discourses. They communicate only the postulation of the communication of a ‘meaning,’ and of the meaning of ‘communication’” (*ibid.*, p. 320). What Nancy alludes to by “excription in communication” is how the community is communicated in exposition. The prefix “ex-” in “excription” and “exposition” points to the thematics of dislocation and “ex-tatic outside of itself.” It is precisely in relation to the problematics of the excriptic/expository materiality of being-in-common that I have tried to understand translation. “Les corps toujours sur le départ, dans l’imminence d’un mouvement, d’une chute, d’un écart, d’une dislocation.” “L’*exposition* ne signifie pas que l’intimité est extraite de son retranchement, et portée au-dehors, mise en vue. [...] L’*exposition* signifie au contraire que l’expression est elle-même l’intimité et le retranchement. L’à part soi ne s’y traduit pas, ne s’y incarne pas, il y est ce qu’il est : ce vertigineux retranchement de soi qu’il faut pour ouvrir l’infini de retranchement jusqu’à soi. Le corps est ce départ de soi, à soi” (2000, pp. 31-32). The whole discussion of community and communication will take us back to Nancy’s earlier text on Georges Bataille (1983, pp. 11-49).

concerned with a regime that postulates translation as something representable, and then, with the task of historicizing that regime.

The particular way translation was represented is conditioned by the essentially “modern” *schema of co-figuration* (most typically, the communication model according to which translation is represented as a transfer of signification between two clearly demarcated unities of ethnic or national languages) by means of which we comprehend natural language as an ethno-linguistic unity. In other words, the commonsensical notion of translation is delimited by the schematism of the world (by the act of representing the world according to the schema of co-figuration). Conversely, the modern image of the world as “inter-national” (that is, as consisting of basic units called *nations*) is prescribed by a representation of translation as a communicative and international transfer of a message between a pair of ethno-linguistic unities.

### The Concept of Translation and Its Complexity

The network of lexicographical connotations associated with the term translation leads to notions of transferring, conveying or moving from one place to another, or of linking one word, phrase or text to another. The words for translation in many modern languages share these connotations: *fanyi* in Chinese, *translation* in English, *traduction* in French, *honyaku* in Japanese, *Übersetzung* in German, and so forth. It may therefore appear justified to postulate the following definition: “Translation is a transfer of the message from one language to another.” Even before one specifies what sort of transfer this may be, it is hard to refrain from asking about the message. Is not the message in this definition a product or consequence of the transfer called translation, rather than an entity that precedes the action of transfer, something that remains invariant in the process of translation? Is the message, which is supposedly transferred in this process, determinable in and of itself before it has been operated on? And what is the status of the language from which or into which the message is transferred? Is it justifiable to assume that the source language in which the original text makes sense is different and distinct from the target language into which the translator renders the

text as faithfully as possible? Are these languages countable? In other words, is it possible to isolate and juxtapose them as individual units, like apples, for example, and unlike water? By what measure is it possible to distinguish one from the other and endow it with a unity or body? But for the sake of facilitating the representation of translation, is it not necessary to posit the organic unity of language rather than seeing it as a random assemblage of words, phrases and utterances if one is to speak of translation in accordance with the definition?

Accordingly, the presumed invariance of the message transmitted through translation is confirmed only retroactively, after it has been translated. What kind of definition is it, then, that includes the term in need of explanation in the definition itself? Is it not a circular definition? Similarly, the unity both of the source and the target language is also a supposition in whose absence the definition would make little sense. What might translation be if we suppose that a language is not countable or that one language cannot be easily distinguished from another?

It is difficult to evade this problem when we attempt to comprehend the terms “meaning” and “language.” At the very least, we can say that, in our transcendental investigation, translation is not derivative or secondary to meaning or language; it is just as fundamental or foundational in any attempt to elucidate these concepts. Translation indicates the trace of contact with the incomprehensible, the unknowable, or the unfamiliar, that is, with the foreign, and there is no awareness of language or meaning until we come across the foreign. First and foremost, the problematic of translation is concerned with the allocation of the foreign.

If the foreign is unambiguously inconceivable, unknowable and unfamiliar beyond comprehension, then translation simply cannot be done. If, conversely, the foreign is understandable, knowable and familiar, translation is unnecessary. Thus, the status of the foreign is ambiguous and devious in translation. The foreign is incomprehensible and comprehensible, unknowable and knowable, unfamiliar and familiar alternatively and at the same time. This foundational ambiguity of translation

is derived from the positionality occupied by the translator. The translator is summoned only when two kinds of audiences are postulated with regard to the source text, one for whom the text is comprehensible at least to some degree, and the other for whom it is incomprehensible. The translator's work consists in dealing with difference between the two audiences. The translator encroaches on both and stands in the midst of this difference. In other words, for the first audience the source "language" is comprehensible while for the second it is incomprehensible. It is important to note that the language in this instance is *figurative*: it need not refer to the "natural" language of an ethnic or national community, German or Tagalog, for example. It is equally possible to have two kinds of audiences when the source text is a technical document or an avant-garde work of art. In such cases "language" may well refer to a vocabulary or set of expressions associated with a professional field or discipline, for example, jurisprudence; it may imply a style of graphic inscription or an unusual perceptual setting in which an artwork is displayed. This loose use of the term "language" invariably renders the task of determining the meaning of the term *translation* difficult, for all the acts of projecting, exchanging, linking, matching and mapping could then be talked about as sorts of translation, even if not a single word or verbal act is involved. Here the discernibility of the linguistic and the non-linguistic is at stake.

Roman Jakobson's famous taxonomy of translation attempts to restrict the instability inherent in the figurative use of the word "language." Jakobson divides translation into three classes: "(1) Intralingual translation or *rewording* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of 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 nonverbal sign systems" (Jakobson, 1971, p. 266). According to the Jakobsonian taxonomy, one who translates "legal language" into common parlance would be performing an intralingual translation, while one who offers a commentary on an obscure artwork would be engaged in an intersemiotic translation. In neither case can one be said to be a translator strictly speaking. Only someone who translates a text from one language to another would be doing translation proper.

Jakobson's taxonomy neither elucidates nor responds to our query about the supposition concerning the countability and organic unity of the source and target languages. It does not empirically validate the supposition concerning the ethno-linguistic unity of natural language; it merely repeats and reconfirms it. Nevertheless, it discloses that "translation proper" depends on a supposed discernibility between the interlingual and the intralingual, between a translation from one language to another and a rewording within the same language. It thereby prescribes and demarcates the locus of difference between two presumably ethnic or national language communities by virtue of the fact that Jakobson presupposes that translation proper can take place only between two unequivocally circumscribed languages. It therefore eradicates the various differences and potential dislocation within such a linguistic community and configures the foreign exclusively outside the unity of a language.

No doubt this conception of translation is a schematization of the globally shared and abstractly idealized commonsensical vision of the *international* world, consisting of basic units—i.e., nations—segmented by national borders into territories. It is not simply Jakobson's idiosyncratic view. In this schematization, "translation proper" not only claims to be a description or representation of what happens in the process of translation; this description also prescribes and directs how to represent and apprehend what one accomplishes "perlocutionarily" when one translates. In this respect, "translation proper" is a *discursive* construct: it is part of what may be called the regime of translation, an institutionalized assemblage of protocols, rules of conduct, canons of accuracy and ways of viewing. The *discursive* regime of translation is *poietic*, or productive, in that it foregrounds what speech acts theorists called the "perlocutionary" effect (Austin, 1967). Just as a perlocutionary act of persuading might well happen in a speech act of arguing but persuasion does not always result from argument, "translation proper" need not be postulated whenever one acts to translate. Yet, in the regime of translation, it is as if there were a causal relationship between the co-figurative schematization of translation and the process of translation. Collapsing the process of translation onto its co-figurative schematization, the representation of translation

repeatedly discerns the domestic language co-figuratively—one unity is figured out, represented and comprehended as a spatial figure in contrast to another—as if the two unities were already present in actuality. It is in this sense that Jakobson is committed to that metaphysics thanks to which the regime of translation appears to found the propriety of “translation proper” and to validate the ethno-linguistic unity of “natural” language.

As long as one remains captive to the conventional regime of translation, one construes the ambiguity inherent in the translator’s positionality only as the dual position a translator occupies between a native language and a foreign tongue. Hence the presumption persists that one either speaks one’s mother tongue or a foreigner’s. The translator’s task would be to discern the differences between the two languages. And this difference is always determined as that between two linguistic communities. Despite countless potential differences within one linguistic community, the regime of translation obliges one to speak from within a binary opposition, either to the same or to the other. Thus, in the regime of translation the translator becomes invisible (Venuti, 1995, pp. 1-42) because the translator is the one who eludes identification within the binary. This attitude, in which one is constantly solicited to identify oneself within the binary, may be called “monolingual address” (Sakai, 1997, pp. 1-17) whereby the addresser adopts the position representative of a putatively homogeneous language community, and enunciates to addressees who are also representative of a homogeneous language community. The term *monolingual address*, however, does not imply a social situation in which both the addresser and the addressee in a conversation share the same language or are native to the same ethno-linguistic unity; they believe they belong to different languages yet can still address each other monolingually.

### **Translator: The Subject in Transit**

Is it possible to understand the act of translation outside the monolingual address? To respond to this question, it may be helpful to consider the translator’s position of address. When engaged in the task of translation, can she perform a speech act such as making a promise? Is the translator responsible for what



she says while translating? Due to the translator's unavoidably ambiguous position, the answer too is ambiguous. Yes, she can make a promise, but only on behalf of someone else. She "herself" cannot make a promise. The translator is responsible for her translation but she cannot be held responsible for the pledges expressed in it because she is not allowed to say what she means; she is required to say what she says without meaning it. In essence, the translator is someone who cannot say "I." Here the problem of the invariant message returns as the question of meaning, of what the translator "means" to say.

In relation to the source text, the translator seems to occupy the position of the addressee. She listens or reads what the original addresser enunciates. At the same time, however, there is no supposition that the addresser is speaking or writing to her. The addressee of the enunciation is not located where the translator is; in translation, the addressee is always located elsewhere. Here again the translator's positionality is inherently ambiguous: she is both an addressee and not an addressee. She cannot be the "you" to whom the addresser refers.

A similar disjunction can be observed in the enunciation of the target text, that is, in the translation. In relation to the audience of the target text, the translator seems to occupy the position of the addresser. The translator speaks or writes to the audience. But it is seemingly not the translator herself who speaks or writes to the addressee. The *I* uttered by the translator does not designate the translator herself but rather the subject of the original enunciation. And if the translator does indicate the subject of the translated enunciation by saying *I*, in a "translator's note," for example, she will then have to designate the original addresser as *he* or *she*.

In other words, in translation, the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the enunciated—the speaking *I* and the *I* that is signified—are not expected to coincide. The translator's desire is at least displaced, if not entirely dissipated, in the translated enunciation, if by *desire* we understand that what is signified by *I* in "my" utterance ought to be sutured with the supposedly concrete and unique—but imagined—existence of

“me” (the desire expressed as “I want to be myself”). This is why the translator cannot be designated straightforwardly either as *I* or *you*: she disrupts the attempt to appropriate the relation of the addresser and addressee as a *personal* relation between the first person and the second person. According to Émile Benveniste, only those directly addressing and those directly addressed can be called persons, whereas *he*, *she*, and *they* cannot be so designated (Benveniste, 1971, p. 224). Hence, the addresser, the translator and the addressee cannot be persons simultaneously. The dislocation of the paradigmatic relations of personal positions constantly occurs in translation. The translator cannot be the first or second person, or even the third “person” undisruptively. Ineluctably, translation introduces an instability into the putatively *personal* relations among the agents of speech, writing, listening and reading. The translator is internally split and multiple, devoid of a stable position. At best, she is *a subject in transit*.

In the first place, this is because the translator cannot be an “individual” in the sense of *individuum*, the indivisible unit. In the second, it is because she is a *singularity* that marks an elusive point of discontinuity in the social even though translation is the practice of creating continuity from discontinuity. She is assigned to the place of the foreign, in the smooth space of *partage* where the foreign is an opening on the articulation of the conceivable and the incomprehensible. Translation is a *poietic* social practice that institutes a relation at the site of incommensurability. This is why the discontinuity inherent in translation would be completely repressed if we were to determine translation as the communication of information; the *ambiguity inherent in the translator’s positionality* would have to be entirely overlooked as long as translation is grasped as the transfer of an invariant message from one language to another.

The internal split within the translator demonstrates how the subject constitutes itself. In a sense, this internal split is homologous to what is known as the “fractured I.” The temporality of “I speak” necessarily introduces an irreparable distance between the speaking *I* and the *I* signified, between the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the enunciated. The subject in the sense that I am here and now speaking designates

the subject of the enunciation, but it does not signify it because every signifier of the subject of the enunciation may be lacking in the enunciated or the statement (Lacan, 1977, p. 298). In the case of translation, however, an ambiguity in the translator's positionality marks the instability of the *we* as subject rather than that of the *I*, since the translator cannot be a unified and coherent personality in translation. This suggests the possibility of a different attitude of address, namely, "heterolingual address" (Sakai, 1997, pp. i-xii), a situation in which one addresses oneself as a foreigner to another foreigner. Held captive in the regime of translation, however, the translator is supposed to assume the role of the transcendent arbitrator, not only between the addresser and the addressee but also between their linguistic communities. As monolingual address, translation, as a process of creating continuity in discontinuity, is often replaced by the representation of translation in which translation is schematized according to the co-figurative communication model.

### **Modernity and the Schema of Co-Figuration: A Genealogy of the Modern**

Let us consider how translation is displaced by its representation and how collective subjectivity, such as national and ethnic subjectivity, is constituted in the representation of translation. Through the translator's labor, the incommensurable differences that call for the translator's service in the first place are negotiated. In other words, the work of translation is a practice by which the initial discontinuity between the addresser and the addressee is made continuous. In this respect translation is like other social practices: translation makes something comprehensible out of an unrepresentable difference. Therefore, translation cannot be construed in terms of representable difference. Only retrospectively can we recognize the initial incommensurability as a gap, crevice or border between fully constituted entities, spheres or domains. Cultural difference, which prompts translation, is unrepresentable in this sense and can by no means be reduced to either specific difference or spatial distance. But when represented as a conceptual difference or gap, it is no longer an incommensurability. It is mapped onto a striated space, which

may be segmented by national borders and other markers of collective (national, ethnic, racial or “cultural”) identification.

Incommensurable difference is more like a feeling<sup>2</sup> prior to the explanation of how incommensurability has occurred, and cannot be represented as a specific difference (in the economy of *genera* and *species*, for example) between two terms or entities. What makes it possible to represent the initial difference as an already determined one between one language unity and another is the work of translation itself. Hence the untranslatable, or what appears to resist translation, cannot exist prior to the enunciation of translation. It is translation that gives birth to the untranslatable. The untranslatable is not anterior to translation. Neither is it immanent in the invariant message that is supposedly transferred in translation. But the untranslatable pertains to the *dislocation* of communication; it is as much a testimony to the sociality of the translator, whose elusive positionality reveals the presence of an aggregate community of foreigners between the addresser and the addressee, as the translatable itself is. We fail to communicate because we are in common with one another. Community does not mean we share common ground. On the contrary, we are in community precisely because we are exposed to a forum where our differences and failure in communication are manifest. Nevertheless, the translator's essential sociality with respect to the untranslatable is disregarded in monolingual address, and with the repression of this insight, monolingual address equates translation with the representation of translation.

When the temporality of translation by which the translator's disjunctive positionality manifests itself is erased, translation is displaced by the representation of translation. Because the disruptive and dynamic processes of translation are ironed out, the representation of translation allows for the representation of ethnic or national subjects as two contrasting spots in the co-figurative representation and, despite the presence of the translator, who is always ambiguous and disjunctive,

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2 For a more detailed discussion about the “feeling” and difference, see: Gilles Deleuze, Chapter 4, 1994. And for the poetic aspect of “feeling,” p. 291 ff.

translation as representation thus posits one language unity against another, and one “cultural” unity against another. In this regard, the representation of translation transforms *difference in repetition* (Deleuze, 1994, pp. 70-128) into a *specific difference* between two particularities and serves to constitute the putative unities of national languages, thereby reinscribing the initial difference and incommensurability as a specific, or commensurate and conceptual difference between two particular languages within the continuity of languages. As a result of this displacement, translation is represented as a form of communication between two fully circumscribed, different but comparable language communities in which social antagonism and the various loci of difference are expunged.

The particular representation of translation as communication between two particular languages is no doubt a historical construct. Given the politico-social significance of translation, it is no accident that, historically, the regime of translation became widely accepted in many regions of the world after the feudal order and its passive vassal subject gave way to the disciplinary order of the active citizen-subject in the modern nation-state, to an order consisting of disciplinary regiments which Michel Foucault describes brilliantly. The regime of translation serves to reify national sovereignty. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have argued, it makes “the *relation* of sovereignty into a *thing* (often by naturalizing it) and thus weeds out every residue of social antagonism. The nation is a kind of ideological shortcut that attempts to free the concepts of sovereignty and modernity from the antagonism and crisis that define them” (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. 95).

Following the Kantian schematism,<sup>3</sup> the *poietic* technology embedded in the regime of translation which renders it representable may be called “the schema of co-

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3 Kant thought of the schema as a “third thing” heterogeneous to either sensibility or understanding, thanks to which an intuition—in sensibility—is subsumed under a concept—in understanding—and attributed it to the general faculty of imagination, a faculty whereby to give a concept its figure or *Bild*. He called the operation of schema “schematism” (1933, pp.180–89).

figuration.” Since the practice of translation remains radically heterogeneous to the representation of translation, translation cannot be represented as a communication between two clearly delineated ethno-linguistic unities. Rather, it was this particular representation of translation that gave rise to the possibility of figuring out the unity of ethnic or national language together with another language unity. Thanks to this co-figurative schematism, there emerges an ethno-linguistic unity as if it were a sensuous and unified thing hidden and dormant behind the surface of extensive variety. In other words, the schema of co-figuration is a technology by means of which an ethno-linguistic community is rendered representable as a “geo-body,” thereby constituting itself as a substratum upon which national sovereignty can be built. “People” is nothing but an idealization of this substratum.

This self-constitution of the nation does not proceed unitarily; on the contrary, its figure constitutes itself only by making visible the figure of an other with which it engages in a relationship of translation. Precisely because the two nations are represented as equivalent and alike, however, it is possible to determine them as *conceptually different*, and their difference is construed as a *specific difference* (*daiphora*) between separate identities. Nevertheless, cultural difference, which calls for the work of a translator, is not a conceptual difference but an incommensurability, that is, the very absence of a common denominator for conceptual comparison. The relationship of the two terms as equivalent and alike in *specific difference* gives rise to the possibility of extracting an infinite number of distinctions between the two. Just as in the co-figuration of “the West and the Rest” by which “the West” represents itself, constituting itself by positing everything else as “the Rest,” conceptual difference allows one term to be evaluated as superior to the other. This co-figurative comparison allows for typical binary oppositions to characterize the West and the Rest, such as: the presence of scientific rationality versus its absence, the future-oriented spirit of progress versus the tradition-bound sense of social obligation, the internalization of religious faith and its accompanying secularism versus the inseparableness of the private and the public.

The “modern” is marked by the introduction of the schema of co-figuration, without which it is difficult to imagine a nation or ethnicity as a homogeneous sphere. As Antoine Berman taught us on the intellectual history of translation and Romanticism in Germany, the economy of the foreign, that is, how the foreign must be allocated in the production of the domestic language, has played a decisive role in the *poietic*—and poetic—identification of national language.<sup>4</sup> Most conspicuously in eighteenth-century movements such as Romanticism in Western Europe and *Kokugaku* (National Studies) in Japan, intellectual and literary maneuvers to invent, mythically and poetically, a national language were closely associated with a spiritual construction of a new identity which later naturalized national sovereignty. This substratum for the legitimization of national and popular sovereignty was put forward as a “natural” language specific to the “people,” supposedly spoken by them in their everyday lives. Literary historians generally call this historical development “the emergence of the vernacular.” With the irruption of the sphere of nearness-extensive obsessions with things of everydayness and experiential immediacy—in which the ordinary and the colloquial were celebrated (Sakai, 1991, pp. 113–240), the status of “universal” languages such as Latin, literary Chinese, and Sanskrit was drastically and decisively altered. In their place, languages emerged whose markers were ethnic and national—English, German, Japanese, Thai and so forth—and the ancient canons were translated into these languages. For this reason, Martin Luther’s German translation of the Bible and Motoori’s Japanese phonetic translation of the *Kojiki* (*Records of Ancient Matters*) can be said to mark crucial steps in modernity. This emphasis on ordinary and colloquial languages paralleled the reconception of translation and the schema of co-figuration.

In talking about “modern” as it is apprehended in many parts of the world today, first it is historically necessary to anchor it in the original uses of this notion in the history of Western Europe. This is neither because the most authentic forms of modernity are found in Western Europe, nor because modernity

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4 For an extensive analysis of the role of the foreign in German Romanticism, see: Antoine Berman, 1992.

emanated from the center somewhat associated with Western Europe to the periphery of the Rest. Rather this is because the notion of “modern” has been accepted and used primarily as a translation from its European originals for more than a century in many places, including those outside the geographic terrain of Europe and North America. One can talk about “modern” as if there were a globally common apprehension of it precisely because, all over the world, people assume it is impossible to apprehend it without referring it back to its European equivalents, from which their local translations are believed to have derived. In the globally accepted conception of modernity the schema of co-figuration between the West and the Rest is already powerfully at work. Therefore, despite linguistic and social diversities among the different sites of the world, the notion of “modern” is supposedly retraceable to the singular history of Western Europe thanks to the Eurocentric structure incorporated in the very notion itself. In this respect, the schema of co-figuration is the form which is most appropriate to the representation of the Eurocentric world, and it is also a form in which the legacy of European colonialisms is preserved. As far as the local terms used for modernity are concerned, however, the situation was drastically different in “pre-modern” times preceding the translation of “modern” into local equivalents.

It is often presumed that genealogically the word “modern” of modern English derives from the Latin adverb *modo* meaning “lately” or “just now.” It meant the array of recent events close to the present moment, or the recent times in contrast to the distant past, along a chronological axis. In the pre-modern periods, many of the terms and expressions which are used to connote “modern” today in places and communities outside Western Europe meant something like the Latin *modo*, and did not imply any necessary reference to Western Europe. In the cosmological universes of those peoples inhabiting many regions of the globe, Western Europe did not carry such universal prestige, and “the West” simply did not exist, for “the West” is nothing but this prestige in global relationality.

The introduction of “modern” qualitatively changed the manner in which people customarily organized their historical



experience. With the arrival of “modern,” people in many places in the world began to map geopolitical directives, centered around colonial powers in Western Europe, onto their pasts and futures, and to order their destinies and desires in terms of cartographic relativity. “Modern” now implied much more than a chronological closeness to the present moment in which periods are classified. Consequently, they sought coherence in the transition from the experience of their past to the anxiety or hope for their future by projecting a trajectory from a topos outside the modern onto a topos within. The progression of time from the past to the future was thus associated with a movement on the cartographically imagined surface of the globe, from a geographic location outside the “modern” civilization to another within it. The dynamic ecstatic or ex-static process from the past to the future was deprived of its temporality, and represented spatially as a vector from a geopolitical location in the periphery to another in the center. Thus, the temporal movement could be appropriated by the schema of co-figuration, and consequently the two pairing figures of the West and the Rest were imagined as if each were somewhat homogeneous within, despite the fact that neither the West nor the Rest could be an entity or a unity of language. Indeed, this explains how the mythic construct called “the West” was constituted, and why the West had been perceived as structurally indissociable from the modern until recently. Hence, it is important to differentiate two dimensions in which the schema of co-figuration operates. In the case of the West and the Rest binary, it is always the one-and-many opposition, and the West remains the point of reference in all comparisons whereas the Rest is variable. Therefore, the West is often imagined to be an enduring identity such as the continuing tradition of Christianity, the foundational structure of medieval legal and theocratic order, and the archaic Greek rationality while the Rest is simply an accidental assemblage of diverse life forms and does not constitute a single substance. This means that the centrality of the West consists of the polarity of the distribution of ethnic, civilizational and racial comparisons. (Let me note in passing here that whiteness in racial hierarchy clearly has a structural affinity with this centrality of the West. Perhaps this explains why the white and the Westerner are so frequently confused with each other although whiteness and the West are clearly of different

registers.) On the other hand, in the case of the co-figurative identification of the ethno-linguistic unity, it is the postulate of specific difference between two languages in translation. To the extent that the ethno-linguistic unity could be thought of without reference to the polarity in the distribution of comparisons, the international world does not and should not have a dominant center, and this idealized international world consisting of equal national sovereignties is expressed in the design of the United Nations. But, of course, these two dimensions in the operation of the schema of co-figuration are intimately related to one another in the allocation of civilizational differences, and their correlation is one of the fundamental features of the modern international world.

The very split between the two distinct dimensions of co-figurative modernity—the modernity of the ethno-linguistic unity and the colonial modernity of the West and the Rest—is itself the very definition of something like Modernity in general in the constitution of the hierarchical, non-democratic world of Capital. Even in their very opposition, both ethno-linguistic modernity and Eurocentric modernity are bound to a common index: the normative value of the West, the putative naturalness of which obfuscates a state of domination. This is accomplished by the form of an exception. Indeed, the dialectical subject of history excepts itself from history (without taking exception to history), thereby eliding the continual presence of third-term “exteriorities” (supplements, exclusions and displacements).<sup>5</sup>

Historically, how we represent translation prescribes not only how we collectively imagine national communities and ethnic identities but also how we relate individually to national sovereignty. Translation is also complicit in the discourse of the West and the Rest through which colonial power relationships are continually fantasized and reproduced, and the hierarchical order of the modern world is rejuvenated.

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5 Carl Schmitt advances this argument in *The Nomos of the Earth* (2003). See Part III: The *Jus Publicum Europæum*. Of course, he viewed it from the Eurocentric perspective.

This has been a rather hasty examination of the problems of translation as they relate to my project “the dislocation of the West.” I hope that you can see that “the dislocation of the West” has nothing to do with the typical rhetoric of “the decline of the West;” neither has it much in common with “provincializing Europe,” for I would never regard the West as an enclosed territory or as the enduring consistency of a tradition. Since it is no more than an allocation of civilizational differences, it is not an entity that can decline or grow. By rigorously examining the schematism of co-figuration, I believe that we should be able to comprehend how the West is cartographically mapped and rendered localizable despite its inherent inconsistency, and what violence is required to prevent it from being dislocated. In other words, the project of “the dislocation of the West” aspires to show that the West is being dislocated all the time. In this sense, translation is a process of global politics.

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**ABSTRACT: Dislocation in Translation** — My inquiry into translation is, first of all, concerned with a regime that postulates translation as something representable, and then, with the task of historicizing that regime. The definition of translation as the "transfer of the message from one language into another" leads to the supposition that languages are separate and discrete unities. But what might translation be if we suppose that this is not the case and that one language cannot be easily distinguished from

another? The Jakobsonian concept of interlingual translation or “translation proper” fails to take into account the ambiguity inherent in the translator’s position: who and where is the translator in relation to the source and target texts? Being neither addresser nor addressee the translator becomes a “subject in transit.” If translation is understood as simply the transfer of an invariant message from one language to another, the ambiguity of the translator’s positionality is suppressed and with it the idea of translation as a *poietic* social practice that institutes a relation at the site of incommensurability. When this occurs, translation is replaced by the “representation of translation” and comes to be seen as a form of communication between two fully circumscribed language communities. It was this particular representation of translation which gave rise to the possibility of identifying the unity of ethnic or national language with another language unity. By this “schema of co-figuration” an ethnic-linguistic community becomes a “geo-body” on which national sovereignty is built. Two nations represented as equivalent and alike can be viewed as *conceptually different*, a difference construed as a *specific difference*. The co-figuration of “the West and the Rest” is an example of the resultant typical binary oppositions: “the West” constitutes itself by positing everything else as “the Rest” allowing one term to be evaluated as superior to the other. The identification of “modern” with “the West” changed how people organized historical experience; movement in time came to be associated with movement from periphery to centre. Historically, how we represent translation prescribes how we imagine national communities and ethnic identities.

**RÉSUMÉ : La dislocation en traduction** — Cet article explore le postulat qui définit la traduction comme représentable, puis se penche sur l’évolution de cette pensée. Définir la traduction comme « le transfert d’un message d’une langue dans une autre » présuppose que les langues sont des unités individuelles et indépendantes. Mais que serait la traduction si on supposait le contraire, c’est-à-dire que les langues ne se distinguent pas si facilement les unes des autres? Le concept forgé par Jakobson de traduction interlinguistique ou « traduction propre » ne tient pas compte de l’ambiguïté inhérente à la place du traducteur : qui est le traducteur et quelle est sa position par rapport au texte source et au texte cible? Ni destinataire ni destinataire, il devient

un « sujet en transit ». Si par l'acte de traduire on ne fait que transférer un message invariant d'une langue à une autre, on élimine à la fois l'ambiguïté de la position du traducteur ainsi que l'idée de la traduction comme pratique sociale poétique qui établit une relation de l'ordre de l'incommensurabilité. La traduction est dès lors remplacée par une « représentation de la traduction » et est ainsi perçue comme une forme de communication entre les deux cercles fermés que forment chacune des communautés linguistiques. C'est précisément cette manière de représenter la traduction qui a permis d'identifier l'unicité d'une langue ethnique ou nationale à l'unicité d'une autre langue. Grâce à ce « schéma de co-figuration », une communauté ethnolinguistique devient un espace géographique sur lequel se construit la souveraineté nationale. Deux nations représentées comme des équivalents qui se ressemblent peuvent ainsi être considérées comme *conceptuellement différentes*, et leur différence est une *différence spécifique*. La co-figuration de l'expression « the West and the Rest » est un bon exemple d'une telle opposition binaire : « l'Ouest », ou l'Occident, se définit en se différenciant de ce qu'il n'est pas par « le reste », ce qui met l'emphasis sur la supériorité du premier terme par rapport au second. L'association du terme « moderne » avec « l'Ouest » a modifié le rapport des individus à l'histoire. Ainsi, le mouvement dans le temps est devenu synonyme de tout mouvement de la périphérie vers le centre. L'histoire démontre que notre manière de représenter la traduction dicte la manière dont on imagine les communautés nationales ainsi que les identités ethniques.

**Keywords:** dislocation, heterolingual address, modernity, monolingual address, nationalism

**Mots-clés :** dislocation, discours hétérolingue, modernité, discours monolingue, nationalisme

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