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Hermeneutics, Specialized Communication, and Translation

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The central questions at issue in this fourth installment of the *Yearbook of Translational Hermeneutics* are these: What is understanding? How do we understand? How does a human being understand, and can that human understanding be differentiated from how a machine understands? Moreover, a further set of questions concern what characterizes understanding in everyday life, and what characterizes understanding in professional contexts. If these questions are as fundamental as they are general, however, the specific (but not less fundamental) questions are these: What is special about—specialized—translational understanding? How much hermeneutics is there in translation at all? And what role does interpretation play in translatorial action? Are understanding and interpretation one and the same? And what role do they play in describing and explaining translational processes on different levels (cognitive, interactive, social, etc.)?

The next set of questions concerns methods and methodology in translational hermeneutics: Can there be methods of understanding? And if so, which ones? What information does hermeneutics, if we understand it as a methodology, provide about interpretation? Is it useful to speak of different, specialized hermeneutics depending on the subject context? Is there a general hermeneutics that goes beyond interpretation contingent on a specific subject? What explanatory potential does a hermeneutics of *Dasein* and of thrownness (cf. Heidegger¹⁶1986) into the world hold for the hermeneutics of translation and interpreting? Does an ontological approach to hermeneutics shed light on the translator as a human being as opposed to a machine? What is a machine at all? How much human is there in a machine and in artificial intelligence? And how much affinity to algorithms is there in humans? What is the relationship between human action on the one hand and neural machine translation and artificial intelligence on the other in translatorial action? Can machines and large language models act in a way that is comparable to or replaces human professional translatorial expertise? Such are the questions at the heart of this installment of the *Yearbook of Translational Hermeneutics*.

The now quite broad field of translational hermeneutics draws on a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches in view of these questions. These approaches have included the presentation of understanding as an art and craft of interpretation on the part of the translating individual or subject (cf. Paepcke 1986, Stolze 1982, 1992, 2003, Cercel 2009, 2013, Cercel et al. 2022), enquiries into literary studies (cf. Heilmann-Sennhenn 2002, Hermans 2004, Cercel 2013) and cognition-oriented research (Bălăcescu/Stefanink 2009; Leibbrand 2009/2011, 2015, Stanley et al. 2021, Robinson 2022). In addition, there has been scholarship into translation and interpreting oriented towards the social sciences and their

hermeneutics (Leibbrand 2009/2011, Alavi 2018) and, last but not least, studies of the philosophical contexts of hermeneutics itself, including its relationship to phenomenology (Stanley 2009, 2012a, 2012b, 2017, Mählmann/Stanley 2018).

This edition of the *Yearbook of Translational Hermeneutics* aims to develop a further topic in translational hermeneutics, namely the nexus configured by “Hermeneutics, Specialized Communication, and Translation”. At issue is how to integrate specialized communication into the broader relationship between translation and interpreting, and hermeneutics. It was Stolze (1982, 1992, 2003) who offered a number of pointers in respect of the attempt to lay the foundations for a translational hermeneutics approach to specialized texts (see also Wiesmann in this volume). Building on relevant publications on specialized translation of a basic (cf. Pommer 2012, Simonnaes 2012, Wienen 2022) and didactic nature (Stolze 1999, 2009, Stanley 2018), the three guest editors of the present *Yearbook* decided to seek both conceptual and empirical contributions on the following topics:

- The (textual) horizons and historicity of transcultural specialized communication in the past and present.
- Hermeneutics and rhetoric in transcultural specialized communication.
- Professional action as hermeneutic action (e.g. legal hermeneutics, comparative law, legal translation; professional ethics).
- Specialized interpreting and hermeneutics (e.g. court interpreting, interpreting for the police, interpreting in asylum proceedings, etc.; interpreting at specialized conferences; comprehension processes, orality in specialized communication, rhetoric in interpreting, etc.).

- Methodological approaches to transcultural specialized communication as translational hermeneutics.
- The anthropological dimension of transcultural specialized communication in translation practice, translation studies and translation didactics, including a) humanism and hermeneutic thinking and acting versus posthumanism and transhumanism in translation and specialized communication, b) the interpretive approaches of hermeneutics and philosophy as regards human-machine interaction in translation and specialized communication, c) hermeneutics and translation technologies in translation and specialized communication.
- The translating (i.e. socio-cognitive) subject and its interactions in specialized contexts (e.g. translation processes, actors, agency, collaborative translation in transcultural specialized communication).
- Transcultural specialized communication, hermeneutics, and cognition.
- Transcultural specialized communication, hermeneutics, and creativity.
- Transcultural specialized communication, hermeneutics, and performativity.

In the remainder of this introduction, it may be helpful to provide a brief overview of the essays collected in the volume. The first essay (BRIAN O'KEEFFE), entitled "Translation Before the Law: The Hermeneutics of Translation in the American Legal Context," examines how American scholars, lawyers, and judges interpret the U.S. Constitution. It discusses how concerns arise in the face of legal interpretations that are seen as too free to serve the interests of law, and how the solution to this supposed hermeneutic freedom is the imposition of certain rules to govern and indeed restrict interpretation. How-

ever, these rules are justified by an appeal to “fidelity”, and this appeal is problematically associated with the practice of translation. O’Keeffe shows that certain legal scholars adopt an equivalence model of translation. Despite the criticism that has been leveled at this model, it nonetheless serves a purpose in the context of legal interpretation according to legal scholars Paul Brest and Lawrence Lessig – the two scholars chiefly at issue in O’Keeffe’s essay. If, they argue, one is willing to admit the parallel between legal interpreters and translators, as if both were interpreting their texts in the same way, then the ethical principle that translators are supposed to obey, namely the principle of fidelity, can be effortlessly transferred to legal interpretation whereby that fidelity limits the freedom jurists have to interpret legal texts and especially the U.S. Constitution.

The essay “Bridging the Knowledge Asymmetry between Experts and Laypeople: Translators as Bridge-Builders” (ELENA CHIOCCETTI) focuses on expert-layperson communication as a hermeneutic process and deals with occupational health and safety, an area in which effective communication between experts and laypeople can help to save lives. However, as Chiocchetti demonstrates, this communication is hampered by the asymmetrical distribution of knowledge between experts and laypeople. Normally, bridging this gap is the task of technical communication. Nevertheless, the essay argues that translators have the necessary technical skills and are therefore able to support communication between experts and laypeople. Their key skills are linguistic, translational and technical knowledge. Translators are able to understand the source text and the intentions of the experts, on the one hand, and anticipate the prior knowledge and expectations of the target audience, on the other. In this way, they can revise the texts produced by the experts and adapt them both interlingually and

intralingually to the target audience's level of knowledge. In such wise, the workflow for optimizing (multilingual) communication between experts and laypersons is extended compared to the workflow in ISO 17100:2015. In the age of neural machine translation, moreover, knowing how to optimize expert-layperson communication is an inherently human skill, Chiocchetti argues, and indeed a potentially value-adding service offered by translators.

The third essay (RALPH KRÜGER), entitled “Human Agency and Machine Agency in Digitalised and Datafied Translation Production Networks”, draws on concepts and findings from translation sociology, translation technology and translation process research. It examines the agency of translators in modern digitalized, data-driven and distributed work environments (translation production networks) as they interact with non-human “agents”, such as neural machine translation systems (NMT) or newer large language models (LLMs). Initially, a macro-perspective is adopted: Networks are conceptualized as socio-technical systems with asymmetric power relations between individual network actors whereby the issues are how translators can exercise their agency over these actors, and how the agency of translators can be constrained by the agency of other actors. The essay then narrows its perspective to the interplay of human and machine agency, focusing specifically on the interaction between translators and NMTs in production networks. Here, translators and NMT systems form a hybrid system in which both system elements contribute to the successful accomplishment of a task and can either converge or diverge.

Human-machine interaction is also the focus of the fourth essay (EVA WIESMANN) entitled “Der smarte Übersetzer – Mensch vs. Maschine [The Smart Translator. Man vs. Machine].” The aim of the article is to show how important it

is that translational hermeneutics, which focuses on the anthropological dimension of translation, and when it addresses specialized translation, does not leave the discussion of (neural) machine translation to computational linguistics or computer science. This is indeed an important perspective, Wiesmann argues, because the goals of machine translation seem to be getting increasingly achievable, especially in the field of specialized translation. Moreover, the profound changes that have affected the profession of specialized translation in recent decades have been accompanied by trans- and post-human tendencies that have numerous ethical implications. In this respect, the essay is also a plea for the human being's place in the translation process.

The fifth essay (TATSIANA HAIDEN) is entitled “Sociocultural Aspects of Translation Quality Evaluations” and is devoted to the concept of translation quality from the emic perspective, namely that of various actors, in particular translators, authors and the publishing house *Paul Zsolnay Verlag* in Vienna during the interwar period. The focus is on the communications between the actors involved in translation. Based on correspondence between the actors, Haiden examines the concept of translation quality, i.e. the question of how that concept was used, by whom and under what circumstances, and how it can be interpreted on the basis of the different interests, networks, status and qualifications of the actors. Haiden shows that the concept of quality was already being used a century ago as a social construct, as means of manipulation, and as demonstration of power. The methodological approach is that of *histoire croisée*: it deals with historical overlaps involving different time periods, and also with the perspectives of different actors on one and the same object or process. The essay demonstrates that when dealing with historical translations, professional communication and the evaluation of translation

quality, several levels of interpretation must be taken into account, and that when discussing different interpretations of quality, their socio-cultural character must be considered.

The next essay (RADEGUNDIS STOLZE), “Spannung zwischen Inhalt und Form. Hermeneutische Aspekte in der technischen Fachübersetzung [Tension between Content and Form. Hermeneutic aspects in Specialised Technical Translation],” offers an account of the hermeneutic approach to texts in technical translation. While technical authors concentrate on generating knowledge and technical readers on using knowledge when producing texts, technical translators focus on the linguistic presentation of this knowledge – that, of course, requires a certain degree of prior understanding since translation, it is assumed, means the responsible presentation of an understood source text. Examples are used to show how the translator uses a holistic approach to examine the background of the text, the position in the specific subject area, the terminology, and the mode of expression. When undertaking the translation, Stolze argues, it is important to compare terminology and consider the possibilities of word formation as well as the functional style, and the text type.

The last essay (MIRIAM P. LEIBBRAND), “Hermeneutik und transkulturelle Fachkommunikation: textuelle Horizonte, translatorisches Handeln und Translationskultur [Hermeneutics and Transcultural Specialized Communication: Textual Horizons, Translatorial Action, and Translation Culture],” addresses the interface between hermeneutics, translation, culture, and specialized communication. The aim of the essay is to further outline and specify a translational hermeneutics approach to the theory and empirical study of transcultural specialized communication (i.e. specialized translation and specialized interpreting) from both a translation and an interpreting studies perspective. This is achieved by means of a transdisci-

plinary synthesis of concepts and methods drawn from philosophical hermeneutics, translation and interpreting studies, social and cultural sciences, and research on language for special purposes, in particular the linguistics of specialized texts. The ability of those concepts and methods to describe and explain the interplay of translatorial understanding and the action of the individual socio-cognitive subject – a subject acting as a professional agent in the translational process of human translation and interpreting – is described and illustrated with reference to certain practices of transcultural specialized communication. Particular attention is paid to the role of textual horizons (Stanley 2018) in transcultural specialized communication. These, Leibbrand argues, enable translation culture(s) and thus professional translatorial understanding and action in transcultural specialized communication.

It is the hope of the guest editors of this volume that, in view of the variety of essays we have just summarized, the *Yearbook* has fruitfully expanded the range of topics translational hermeneutics can address, and has shown ways of including new perspectives at the interface of hermeneutics, specialized communication, and translation. The guest editors wish the readers of the *Yearbook* a stimulating and productive engagement with these essays.

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