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Review of:
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Wittgenstein in/on Translation.
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**Engaging with Translation.
New Readings of
George Steiner's *After Babel***

Marco Agnetta
Larisa Cercel
Brian O'Keeffe
[eds.]

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**Yearbook of Translational Hermeneutics
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über die – womöglich ‚fanatisch‘ – gelebte Praxis einer, redundant ausgedrückt, genauso text- wie subjektbezogenen Hermeneutik.

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Wittgenstein in/on translation is a collection of papers based on talks given at the workshop of the same name that took place at the Department of Philosophy of the University of Bergen (Norway) in 2017. It opens with an emotive foreword by Antonia Soulez *in memoriam* of Arley Ramos Moreno, emeritus professor of philosophy at the Universidade de Campinas (Brazil) and one of the editors of the volume, and who passed away in August 2018 as the book was being prepared. In the introduction, the other two editors, Paulo Oliveira and Alois Pichler, explain that the purpose of the workshop was to “discuss existing and new approaches to the theory

and practice of translating Wittgenstein and [of] philosophy” (p. 17). Why Wittgenstein? Because he “is one of the most profound thinkers about language” (p. 17) who also devoted himself to translation—both in theory and in practice, though especially the latter. In the title, *on translation* refers to the Austrian philosopher’s translations and revisions of translations of his own works, whereas *in translation* has to do with the transposition of his works into other languages and moreover into other research areas in which translation plays a pivotal role (such as “Education” and “Aesthetics”, see p. 18). Oliveira and Pichler add that Wittgenstein’s *philosophies* of language—given the “significant changes from one phase to the other(s)” (p. 18)—can shed light on the phenomenon of translation from a theoretical and epistemological perspective as well. They further remark that all contributors to the volume are first and foremost avid Wittgenstein readers, with some also having experience translating, reviewing and editing his work.

The first contribution, “An Epistemology of Usage [*Gebrauch*] of Language”, is by Moreno, “one of the most distinguished readers of Wittgenstein in Brazil” (p. 20). Moreno carefully and thoroughly traces some of Wittgenstein’s core concepts (such as ‘forms of life’ and ‘language games’) and embeds them in an “epistemology of usage of post-therapeutic character” (p. 33), referring to Wittgenstein’s proposition in his *Philosophical Investigations* (*PI*) that philosophical methods are “therapies” (*PI* 133d). Unlike Wittgenstein, who engages with actual language usage and well-established linguistic signs, Moreno’s epistemology of usage focusses on the *construction* of linguistic signs at a level that Wittgenstein largely disregarded. Yet this level is of utmost importance to translators, as it illuminates the possibility of equivalence between languages—though Moreno does not go into that in his short chapter. In the next chapter, “‘You Should Like to Say...’: Wittgenstein and Translating Temptations”, Marco Brusotti addresses precisely this question: if one can compare the two forms of life involved in translation, is this enough to justify a given translation in terms of “correctness” (p. 51)? Although Wittgenstein never proposed a translation theory *per se*, he emphasised the importance of ‘depth gram-

mar' over 'surface grammar' in translation, warning that the latter might be misleading, at least on Brusotti's account. When it comes to translating, say, a play on words, what matters are "more general analogies between the role the two plays on words could have: could they be used in similar speech situations? How profoundly would the two language games differ?" (p. 56) Based on the intriguing notion of "composite portraiture", namely "superimpos[ed] negative images" (p. 66), Brusotti ponders whether Wittgenstein's stance on 'depth grammar' was more relativistic or universalistic, concluding that his well-known reference to our "[s]hared human way of acting" (*PI*, p. 206) amounts to nothing more than imprecise 'overlaps'—a conclusion that is at odds with, for instance, Katalin Neumer's thesis that "'depth-grammar' is universal" in Wittgenstein (p. 73).

The third and by far the longest paper in the book, "How to Wrestle with the Translation of Wittgenstein's Writings", by Dinda L. Gorlée, takes the reader through a somewhat tortuous, albeit thought-provoking journey through translations of Wittgenstein's works into several languages—though only English translations are thoroughly discussed. Her contribution is one of the few chapters that promises a more explicit link with translation studies. Yet her uncritical reliance on long outdated literature (such as Eugene Nida's works from the 1960s), along with the disconcerting association between the word 'deconstruction' and expressions such as "the will of author Wittgenstein" (p. 82), "closer to Wittgenstein's meaning" (p. 98), "the translator needs to [...] discover the [...] meaning..." (p. 105), "obvious equivalences" (p. 113), among many others, might perplex a lot of translation scholars. She takes Wittgenstein's original words and even punctuation marks and compares them with their respective translations into English: these are often taken out of context and then deemed "good" or "bad" (to be fair, these are terms she places within scare quotes). Wittgenstein translators are lambasted for reflecting their own "taste and value" in their translations instead of "the intellectual and spiritual senses of Wittgenstein's source text" (p. 82). At the end of the paper, one gets the feeling that Wittgenstein translators misun-

derstood him profoundly, including those who worked directly with him and whose translations he himself revised, and only Gorlée's interpretations are legitimate—an old and worn-out pet peeve in translation studies (cf. e. g. Venuti 2016).

In “Can we Translate the Character of a Text?”, João José R. L. de Almeida critiques recent works by the “Wittgensteinian translation theorists” (p. 126) Dinda Gorlée, Helena Martins, Paulo Oliveira and Philip Wilson. From the latter he takes the notion of “physiognomy”, namely “language as it is found in a source text, not as an ideal language” (p. 130) to look into his own Portuguese translations of Wittgenstein. His contention that the same text may have more than one physiognomy, his acknowledgement of the readers' decisive role in providing the “key to a text” (p. 145), along with his suggestion that translators make ethical, informed choices based on their own interests, bring his work closer to contemporary translation studies. In chapter 6, “Wittgenstein Nachlass Ts-226: A Case of Wittgensteinian (Self-)Translation”, Alois Pichler zooms in on that excerpt from the Austrian philosopher's *Nachlass* [some 20,000 unpublished pages], and which was translated into English by one of his trustees, Rush Rhees, a translation painstakingly annotated and commented on by Wittgenstein. Crucially for translators and translation scholars alike, Pichler suspects that Wittgenstein's revisions to Rhees' translations were just as much about improving the translation as they were about developing his own writings further *in light of translation*. Pichler calls for more research into “Wittgenstein's changes to Rhees' translation” (p. 160)—a promising research topic both for translation and philosophy specialists.

Nuno Venturinha breathes new life into an old translation dichotomy, word-for-word versus sense-for-sense, in “Wittgenstein on Translation: Sense-for-sense and Epistemological Issues”—a question that arose in a letter by Wittgenstein to C. K. Ogden, from April 1922, concerning the impending publication of the English version of the *Tractatus*. By scrutinising translation examples along with comments and revisions by Wittgenstein, as well as the Austrian philosopher's explicit opinions on the matter, Venturinha demonstrates that Wittgenstein favoured a sense-for-sense strategy.

The second part of the paper, though somewhat disconnected from the first, proposes a list of five epistemological aspects about translation that can be inferred from Wittgenstein's earlier and later works. In "Philosophy of Language and Translation", Paulo Oliveira approaches some urgent issues in translation studies, the most pressing of which is probably the need for translation theories to be firmly grounded in a theory of language. In a fascinating overview of key developments in translation studies, Oliveira builds bridges with philosophy of language, revealing just how mutually relevant the two disciplines are. By trying to reconcile some of the conflicting views expressed in the book as a whole, Oliveira arrives at the conclusion that those of us working in the intersection between translation and philosophy have our work cut out for us. His appraisal of deconstruction as a "kind of relativism" (p. 203) that "has problems in offering concrete solutions for practical [translation] questions" (p. 214) may well seem hasty, considering that two of its most pivotal points are precisely to go beyond the universalism versus relativism dichotomy and to propose a notion of language that can, in my view, undergird a translation theory free from a practice-oriented agenda (cf. Leal 2014, 2019). Still, the translation scholar will probably find Oliveira's paper the most gripping in the book.

The impact of Wittgenstein's background as a primary school teacher on his later philosophy of language takes centre stage in Cristiane M. C. Gottschalk's "A Broader Sense of the Concept of Translation Inspired by Wittgenstein—from the Classroom to Cultural Issues". The compilation of a dictionary for his pupils (*Wörterbuch für Volksschulen*) is of particular interest to Gottschalk, since in it we witness Wittgenstein's concern for ordinary language and for actual language use. Although admittedly the chapter deals chiefly with translation *sensu lato* (mostly intralingual and intersemiotic), Gottschalk sheds light on the crucial question, namely "how far culture and habits from different communities are limits for understanding a foreign language?" (p. 259) by delving into Wittgenstein's later philosophy and acknowledging the ubiquity of translation—even 'within' the 'same' language.

The three last papers were not presented at the workshop in Bergen. Natascha Gruver's "Lesemaschinen – Reading-Machines" is based on the performance piece of the same name by the oboist Molly McDolan in which "an artistic interpretation and translation of Wittgenstein's thoughts on reading and understanding [...] in the §§156 to 169 of the *Philosophical Investigations*" (p. 265–266) are offered. The piece derives its name from Wittgenstein's thought experiment of the reading machine, which in turn illuminates the role that "reading, understanding [and] internal mental states" (p. 270) play in his later philosophy. Rafael Lopes Azize's chapter, entitled "Speaking and Translating: Aesthetics, Aspect-seeing, Interpretation", is probably the most abstruse for those readers not well-versed in Wittgenstein—and the loose ties between the sections of his paper exacerbate this feeling. His key argument is that Wittgenstein does not so much dismiss "the idea that there are attributes inviting aesthetic appreciation of objects" as rejects "the philosophical reduction of aesthetic experience to the perception of objective aesthetic qualities" (p. 282). Starting from the *Bemerkungen über Frazer's 'Golden Bough'*, Azize proposes a thought experiment centred on a basic proposition à la Wittgenstein, which leads him to inquire into the aspects behind the "recognition of aesthetic value" (p. 296). Azize closes his paper with a discussion of these issues in the context of translation, establishing an interesting dialogue with some of the previous chapters of the book. Finally, Miguel Angel Quesada Pacheco's "Wittgenstein in Bribri Language" provides a fascinating snapshot of a translation of parts of the *PI* into Bribri, a Chibcha language spoken by some 18,000 people chiefly in Costa Rica and Panama, by Ali García Segura. In addition to an overview of the most relevant aspects of Bribri as regards translation, Pacheco also offers numerous comparative examples between Wittgenstein's German original, the Spanish translation (the source text of the Bribri translation), the Bribri translation, along with English glosses. Pacheco's overreliance on a 1988 work by Peter Newmark to undergird his discussions on translation does somewhat reduce the overall soundness of an otherwise stimulating paper. Nevertheless, his final acknowledgement of dogged transla-

tability even in the most adverse conditions—translation *is* a “despite everything” task, as Paul Ricœur (2006: 18) would say—ends the volume on a positive note. This is indeed good news both for translation, for obvious reasons, and for philosophy, particularly if we accept Jacques Derrida’s suggestion that the possibility of translation is tantamount to the possibility of philosophy (1985: 120).

Overall, the book is accessible to non-experts in Wittgenstein and further strengthens the link between translation and philosophy, a link which is at long last gaining greater strength. Let us hope that works such as this will continue to emerge, both in philosophy and in translation studies. Although the volume seems to adhere to an English-only policy, let it be said that the chapters do not fall prey to anglophone “epistemicide” (Bennet 2013: *passim*). However, they could profit from a thorough revision, as the recurring typos, grammatical errors, editorial glitches and typographic issues do disrupt the reading process and compromise the quality of an otherwise interesting book, for translation and philosophy scholars and students alike.

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