Politics of Translation: Circulations, Commensurations, Comparisons
Anthro: 57718, Winter 2015, Thursdays 1:30-4:20
Instructor: S. Gal Haskell 237, email for appointment: (s-gal at uchicago.edu).

Goals: Ethnography has long been considered the “translation” of cultures, but the process of translation has not often been closely examined in anthropology. Since the middle of the 20th century it has been problematized by philosophy of science, in which incommensurability between Kuhnian “paradigms” was thought to block translation across them, undermining the possibility of progress. Similarly, the politics of multiculturalism in many parts of the globe revived neo-Herderian notions of cultures with differing “ontologies” between which there is little communication, apparently undermining the founding assumptions of liberalism. Cultural, ethical, epistemic and linguistic “relativity” were the labels for discussing such matters in earlier decades. Today, the apparent circulations (or space-time “travel”) of discourses and objects – also: of theories, financial instruments, media, methods, political activism, institutional arrangements – appear to contradict the assumptions of cultural incommensurability, even as they are re-emphasized.

This course asks: How are these effects (of circulation vs. ontological difference vs. (in)commensurability) achieved? How do cultural “objects” come to be recognized, reanimated, imitated, analogized in diverse locations, seeming to travel and circulate. What are the roles of measurement in this (commensuration), and/or parallel meaning (i.e. translation)? What are the semiotic processes/practices of translation, -duction, -mutation, -formation, etc.? What do they achieve, how are they effected, manipulated, fought over, and/or refused. How are the social practices, linguistic practices, objects, personae and sites of commensuration/translation themselves transformed in the process?

The course starts with practices of linguistic translation. How do semiotic practices of linguistic translation illuminate other forms of commensuration, circulation and boundary work? How does translation in STS, international activism and in NGOs clarify linguistic analyses? What are the implications for anthropology?

Books: Required Books that are not online are ordered at Seminar Coop. You are invited to read them in their entirety, but I also give required page numbers.

Makihara, M. and Schieffelin, B. 2007 Consequences of Contact. (full text online)
Articles are available on Chalk, or at the e-journal portal of Regenstein. Listed works are required. A hashtag signals a well-known piece that is highly recommended: read it again and/or recall/rethink). More provides further directions for those interested in exploring, or in constructing bibliographies. I have listed the readings in alphabetical order, but you should read in chronological order (via original dates of publication), to sense historical unfolding and argument.

**Requirements:** (a) Reading the materials in time for discussion is crucial. You will be asked to form smaller groups to analyze and present some of the material for a designated week. The goal is to identify the major issues in the readings of the week and raise questions about them that the rest of the class can discuss. This is itself a skill to develop further in the course of the quarter. (b) Participants will post, before class, one page (250-450 words max.) of “response” to the week’s readings. This should serve two functions: It will encourage each of us to think analytically and comparatively about the readings prior to class; it will prepare everyone to speak up about issues of interest to them. More details on this later. (c) Everyone will submit a longer piece by the end of the quarter: an outline or section of an MA paper or qualifying exam; a draft of a dissertation chapter (if relevant); ideas for a dissertation proposal, or any other work that furthers your intellectual goals. No page limit, and to be discussed with me before end of quarter.

**Topics and Readings:**

1. Jan. 8  **Perennial Issues**  
   Class (unavoidably) cancelled; to be made up at end of quarter

These readings are “warm up” and to be discussed together with those for next week. They are classic essays in literary mode, with philosophical inspirations and implications. Read to locate the obsessions, ironies, contradictions; this list tracks a western tradition. Be sure to read those with hashtags.

- #Barnstone, W. 1993. Fidelity and translateability, and: Why Jesus... both IN *The Poetics of Translation*, (Chalk).
- Borges, Jorge Luis 1962. “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” and “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote” IN his *Labyrinths* (Chalk)
- #Steiner, G. 1975. The hermeneutic motion. IN his *After Babel*, (TSR-Chalk)
- Venuti, L. 2000. Introduction. IN his *Translation Studies Reader* (Chalk)
2. Jan. 15  Diagnoses: Why translation now?

In addition to these readings, you have an assignment: Find a brief text of some kind (written, aural, mass mediated or not, in any "language" or linguistic form with which you are familiar) and translate it into the classroom prose of our seminar. Something on the order of a paragraph will do. The assignment is to bring “original” and translation to class and to think about (and present) what you have done, as a basis for discussion: What did you presume; what needs explication? Why?

Appadurai, A. 1996. Here and now. In his Modernity at Large. (Chalk)
#Asad, T. 1986. The concept of cultural translation in British anthropology. In Clifford, J. and Marcus, G. (eds.) Writing Culture. (Chalk)
Clifford, J. 1997. Traveling cultures. In his Routes. (Chalk)

More: Leventhal, RS The disciplines of interpretation is a useful historical view of 18 c. theories; J. Turner’s Philology for 19th c. We will not discuss business translation, but its political economy deserves attention. Some reports: M. Cronin, Translation and Globalization; P. Casanova The World Republic of Letters.

3. Jan. 22  Impossible yet ubiquitous: Translation as linguistic project

The emergence of anthropology and linguistics in/by “trans-processes” – inter/intralinguistic – gloss, paraphrase, reported speech, exegesis, genre and more...


More: The Rosman/Rubel on translation in anthropology; Boas’s views on the NW coast, in the Handbook. Accounts of “first encounters” e.g. Todorov, T. The conquest of America, or Greenblatt, Pagden, Mignolo, for other regions (see Errington further bibliography). Biographies of first translators in colonial encounters: F. Kartunnen Between Worlds. For review of literary developments, see, Lloyd in HAU 2014.
4. Jan. 29  **Powers of translation: Events and historical practices**

Ethnographies hinge on translation practices in events; the form and effect of power differentials; productivity of trans-mutations, genre conventions.


Schieffelin, B. 2007. Found in translating. IN Makihara/Schieffelin *Consequences of Contact* (CC)

**More:** Highly recommended, for “language contact” in ethnographic mode: Stasch and Errington in *CC*. For those who have read the Richland: Chap 1,2, 3 of Hanks *Converting Words*. For other ways of incorporating the foreign: Rutherford, D. 2000. The white edge of the margin. *AE* 27:2:312-339.

5. Feb. 5 **“Language” produced, policed, perforated**

“Language” as concept problematized, via enregisterment (‘intra-linguistic’ difference) and the politics of boundaries. Standardization and varieties of polyglossia in relation to translation vs. juxtaposition, functional differentiation.


Mitchell, L. 2009. From the art of memory to the practice of translation. IN her *Lg Emotion and the Politics of South India*. Chap 5. (Chalk).


6. Feb. 12  **Circulations and voicings – in advocacy, for instance**
Do concepts of interdiscursivity, ventriloquation, voicing, mediatization – i.e. relations among registers in participation frames – help in understanding advocacy?

Merry, Sally Engel 2006. Human rights and gender violence. (esp. ch. 1,5,6,7)

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Liu. L. 1999. Legislating the Universal: The circulation of international law in the 19th century, IN L. Liu, Tokens of Exchange, 127-164 (Chalk)


7. Feb. 19 Practices of commensuration/comparison/analogy/transduction

Two sets of practices of commensuration and comparison, two scholarly traditions. Attend to the practices the dilemmas posed by each.

Chakrabarty, D 2000 Translating life-worlds into labor and history. IN his Provincializing Europe. Pp. 72-96. (Chalk)

Galison, P. 1999 Trading zone. IN Science Studies Reader 137-58. (Chalk)

Kuhn, T. 1982. Commensurability, comparability, communicability. PSA: Proceed. of Biennial Meeting of Philosophy of Science Association 2

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Gal, S. in press. Processes of translation and demarcation in legal worlds. IN E. Mertz (eds.) Law and the Translation of Legal Worlds (Chalk)


8. Feb. 26  **Translation as recruitment of objects and people**

(Those already familiar with this, read chaps 3-4 in *Science in Action.*)

9. Mar. 5  **Struggles over “referentiality” and “the real”**

Review/recall “causal theory of reference” as adapted to linguistic anthropology. What can we learn by comparing it to referentiality and denotation as grasped in other anthropologies and philosophies?

Hacking, I. 1999. Kind making. IN *The social construction of what?* (Chalk)
Langwick, S. 2011. *Bodies, politics and African healing*. Chps 7, 8. (full text available online via library catalogue)
Mol, A. 2002. *The body multiple*. Chaps 1,2,3. (Chalk)


10. Mar. 12  **Conversions of/to Christianity: Translation, Ethics, Materiality**

A key site for problematizing the kinds of contact and engagement discussed last week is missionization, especially Christianity seen as cultural project. What are the terms of engagement?

Keane, W. 2007 *Christian Moderns*. (esp. parts 1 and 2)
Robbins, J. You can’t talk behind the holy spirit’s back IN *CC*. (Chalk)
Handman, C. Speaking the soul. IN *Mikihara/Schieffelin CC*. (Chalk)

11. Mar 13 or 17  **Presentations of projects in class (voluntary)**