

At the Selvedges of Discourse: Negotiating the “In-Between” in Translation Studies

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Abstract

The notion of the “in-between” has become a common trope in the work of many translation studies scholars in recent decades. However, in 2003, Maria Tymoczko famously took issue with the term, claiming not only that the concept is incompatible with a systems view of languages and cultures, but also that it subscribes to a Romantic notion of the translator as a “déclassé and alienated intellectual” and to a Platonic conception of meaning.

This article suggests that Tymoczko has construed the term somewhat differently from the authors she quotes, and that this miscomprehension has arisen from her own embedment in a philosophical culture grounded in empiricism and linguistic realism. Returning to the term’s sources in poststructuralist thought, I argue that the “in-between” should instead be understood on the symbolic level of *discourse*, which enables it to become a vehicle for a profoundly un-Platonic form of political engagement.

Keywords: *in-between, translation, discourse, text*

The notion of the “in-between” has attracted a great deal of attention in translation studies over the last few decades, and indeed has become a common trope in the work of many scholars operating in the field. It can be found in the writings of Spivak (1993), Simon (1996, 1999, 2001, 2011), Cronin (2000), Wolf (2000, 2008), Snell-Hornby (2001) and Mehrez (1992), to name but a few, and there have been entire volumes devoted to it, such as Dingwaney and Maier’s *Between Languages and Cultures*.¹ There is even a multilingual novel entitled *Between*², which deals with “the perpetual in-between life of the conference translator” and uses “the idiom of modernist collage to exploit every facet of in-betweenness”.³

However, at first sight, it is not entirely clear just what this between-space is. The trope has become so familiar that few of the above authors have bothered to define it. Hence we are left wondering just how they conceive it: as a kind of no man’s land between warring nations, littered with unexploded shells and burnt-out tanks? as a vibrant trading post, where different cultures come together freely to barter in a spirit of exuberant bonhomie? or even (given the references to liminality that frequently accompany the term) as a kind of threshold leading to some magical other world (like the wardrobe in Narnia, say, or the rabbit hole in *Alice*)? The difficulty is compounded

¹ Anuradha Dingwaney and Carol Maier, eds., *Between Languages and Cultures: Translation and Cross-Cultural Texts* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995).

² Christine Brooke-Rose, *Between* (London: Michael Joseph, 1968).

³ Sherry Simon, *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 155.

by the fact that the notion of “in-betweenness” is often associated in these texts with other spatial concepts that remain equally ill-defined in the translation studies context, such as the “Third Space” and the “contact zone”.

This conceptual fuzziness was addressed in a 2003 essay by Maria Tymoczko entitled “Ideology and the position of the translator: in what sense is a translator “in between?”” which has proved to be very influential. In this Tymoczko takes issue with “the recent development within translation studies of a tendency to speak of translation itself as a place or space somehow disjoined from (or mappable over) the actual physical and cultural space that the translator occupies, and somehow distinct from the ideological position of the translator as well.”⁴

She begins her argument by relating the concept of the “in-between” to the issue of ideology, the theme of the volume in which her article first appeared.

Particularly employed by progressive and engaged writers on translation theory and practice, translation has been characterized as a place or a space *in between* other spaces. The locution *between* has become one of the most popular means of figuring an *elsewhere* that a translator may speak from – an elsewhere that is somehow different from either the source culture or the receptor culture that the translator mediates between – as well as the culture the translator lives in – an elsewhere that is often seemingly not simply a metaphorical way of speaking about ideological positioning, but that ipso facto affords a translator a valorized ideological stance.

After having spent several pages wondering why scholars should be attracted to the spatial metaphor of the “in-between,”⁵ Tymoczko launches into a compelling critique that is anchored in a systems view of languages and cultures.⁶ There is, she argues, no gap or space to bridge when translation is conceptualized in terms of transfer between languages as systems.

In the event that one transcends the limits of a given system, one does not escape systems altogether or fall between systems, but instead one enters another system, generally a larger system that encompasses or includes the system transcended.⁷

Systems are like “a series of Chinese boxes”, she argues, with given systems “nested inside more inclusive ones”.⁸ Hence, “there can be no *in between*, no free space that exists outside systems altogether, separate from a more encompassing system” for “any inquiry or statement or position will fall within the framework of such a larger system.”⁹

⁴ Maria Tymoczko, “Ideology and the position of the translator: in what sense is a translator “in between?”” in *Apropos of Ideology: Translation Studies on Ideology - Ideologies in Translation Studies*, ed. María Calzada Pérez (Manchester, UK and Northampton, MA: St Jerome, 2003), 185.

⁵ She suggests six main reasons for its popularity: i. it is trendy (p.188); ii. it evokes the position that the translator physically adopts in “the archetypal translation encounter”, namely as interpreter (*idem*); iii. it is suggested by the etymology of the word for “translation” (i.e. “carrying across”) in many European languages (189-192); iv. in poststructuralist thought, it is useful for challenging binary conceptualizations and polarities (193); v. it also serves the poststructuralist drive to oppose absolute origins and essential realities (194); vi. it enables the user to escape polarized political alternatives (*idem*).

⁶ Tymoczko, “Ideology and the Position of the Translator,” 195-198.

⁷ Tymoczko, “Ideology and the Position of the Translator,” 195.

⁸ Tymoczko, “Ideology and the Position of the Translator,” 197.

⁹ Tymoczko, “Ideology and the Position of the Translator,” 197.

Tymoczko’s main aim seems to be to reassert, along with Schleiermacher and Toury,¹⁰ the translator’s embedment in a cultural and ideological context. For her, then, the concept of the “in-between” is philosophically suspect, not only because it succumbs to the Romantic idea of the translator as “a declassé [sic] and alienated intellectual cut loose from specific, limiting cultural moorings and national affiliations,”¹¹ but, more importantly, because, “from the perspective of translation as a movement from one system of language and culture to another”, it “returns us to retrograde Platonic notions of meaning...in which meanings and ideas were thought to exist apart from and above any linguistic formulations”.¹²

Although this argument has found favour with some very senior and influential translation studies scholars,¹³ I would argue that it rests on a misreading of the philosophical context in which the notion of the “in-between” arose. As I shall try to show during the course of this article, the term does not refer to any tangible geographic space, or even to its metaphorical projection in the form of national languages or cultures; instead, it is operating on the symbolic level of *discourse*, through which institutions actively construct subjects and limit what it is possible to say about them. Ironically, Tymoczko’s failure to take account of this would seem to be due to her own embedment in an epistemological culture that has long been shackled to the philosophically unsustainable¹⁴ notion of linguistic realism. I shall return to this point later.

Weaving with words

A convenient starting point for our exploration of the “in-between” might be the writings of Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha, who are not only pivotal figures of postcolonialism (which was where the term, in its English manifestation, first emerged), but were also influential in alerting the translation studies community to its heuristic potential for translation. Each of these writers makes clear their legacy to the French poststructuralist tradition, thereby signalling the term’s embedment in a universe of discourse that is a world away from the systems approach that Tymoczko invokes.

¹⁰ She quotes Schleiermacher’s famous phrase from 1813 “just as a man must decide to belong to one country, just so [a translator] must adhere to one language” and Toury’s statement that translated texts are “facts” of one language and one textual tradition only, namely the target culture’s [Gideon Toury, *In Search of a Theory of Translation* (Tel Aviv: Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics, 1980), 82-83] and that translators are “persons-in-the-culture” of the target system (Gideon Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1995), 40).

¹¹ Tymoczko, “Ideology and the Position of the Translator,” 199.

¹² The same claim (“Platonic theories also are implicit in ideas that translators are located ‘in between’”) is repeated in one of Tymoczko’s later works: Maria Tymoczko, *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators* (Manchester: St Jerome, 2007), 290.

¹³ For example, Mona Baker also argues against the notion of the “in-between” on the grounds that it creates “a neutral space for translators to act as honest brokers who are not embedded in either culture, who can transcend any cultural or political affiliation, at least while they’re engaged in the highly romanticized task of translating”. Mona Baker, “Narratives in and out of translation,” *SKASE Journal of Translation and Interpretation* 1/1 (2005): 15. See also Mona Baker, *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2006):41.

¹⁴ Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth (Philosophical Papers, Vol. 1)* (Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 12.

Let us begin with the quotation from Spivak that Tymoczko¹⁵ specifically contests, the claim that in translation “meaning hops into the spacy emptiness between two named historical languages”.¹⁶ Having removed this phrase from its original context, Tymoczko effectively erases Spivak's all-important allusion to Derrida's notion of “dissemination”, which to some extent holds the key to what the “in-between” might indeed “mean” in the postcolonial, and translational, context. Let us restore that context. Spivak is describing her experience of translating some late eighteenth-century Bengali poetry. Here is the remainder of the sentence from which the quotation was taken, plus the ones immediately before it:

Language is not everything. It is only a vital clue to where the self loses its boundaries. The ways in which rhetoric or figuration disrupt logic themselves point at the possibility of random contingency, beside language, around language. Such a *dissemination* cannot be under our control. Yet in translation, where meaning hops into the spacy emptiness between two named historical languages, we get perilously close to it.¹⁷

This is difficult stuff for a reader that has been brought up on a diet of empiricism and linguistic realism, as Anglophone readers usually are. In order to process it, we need to understand that, firstly, in the French discourse analysis tradition which Spivak is drawing upon here, meaning is generated entirely within the sign system with no correspondence whatsoever to any extralinguistic reality¹⁸ (this contrasts markedly with the Anglophone penchant for linguistic realism, according to which words are believed to offer a transparent window onto some independently-existing outside world¹⁹). Secondly, meaning is understood to be generated through the interplay of differences; hence, it is an “effect” of language, spontaneously produced rather than purposefully imposed.²⁰ This means that all manner of unintended significations will be lurking in the most banal text, usually unbeknown to the author and uncritical reader. What is more, there will also be an inevitable loss of meaning, which is what Derrida calls “dissemination”.²¹

¹⁵ Tymoczko, “Ideology and the Position of the Translator,” 186.

¹⁶ In a footnote to “Ideology and the position of the translator,” 197, Tymoczko says of Spivak that “although she is at the cutting edge of bringing French poststructuralist theory into an English-language context, her views of translation as a movement between formal systems are paradoxically fairly regressive philosophically and at the same time somewhat naive, ironically implying a Platonic view of language” This reveals ignorance of the decidedly anti-Platonic thrust of the Derridean text that Spivak was alluding to in her quotation, as I explain below.

¹⁷ Gayatri C. Spivak, “The Politics of Translation,” in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 398.

¹⁸ Cf. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959).

¹⁹ Linguistic realism is defined by Michael Dummett in *Truth and Other Enigmas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 146 as “the belief that statements...possess an objective truth-value independent of our means of knowing it”.

²⁰ Cf. Jacques Derrida, “Différance,” in *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, trans. Alan Bass, ed. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 61: “In a language, in the *system* of language, there are only differences. /.../ these differences *play*... On the other hand, these differences are themselves *effects*. They have not fallen from the sky fully formed, and are no more inscribed in a *topos noētos*, than they are prescribed in the gray matter of the brain /.../ What is written as *différance*, then, will be the playing movement that “produces” – by means of something that is not simply an activity – these differences, these effects of difference.”

²¹ For further elucidations of this concept, see Ian Maclean, “Un dialogue de sourds? Some Implications of the Austin-Searle-Derrida Debate,” in *Jacques Derrida: Critical Thought*, edited by Ian Machlachlan.

In the collection of Derrida’s essays that bears *Dissemination* as its title (2004/1972), we find a particularly interesting example of the “in-between”, which Spivak will certainly have been alluding to in the passage quoted above.²² The essay called “The Double Session”, which dates from early 1969, was first presented to the Theoretical Study Group set up by the journal *Tel Quel* as an elaborately staged event involving a chair, a blackboard, and an old-fashioned chandelier that cast interesting shadows.²³ All the participants were presented with a folded piece of paper bearing an extract from Plato’s *Philebus* running along the top and left-hand side, and a short prose text by Mallarmé (*Mimique*) inserted in the bottom right-hand corner in another typeface. There were further quotations by Mallarmé chalked on the blackboard.

According to Hill,²⁴ the point of all this was not only to challenge dominant conceptions of “philosophy” and “literature” as the discrete domains of truth and fiction, but also to question the nature of all “frames, borders, limits and margins” that divide and hierarchize texts, and indeed mark off the textual from the “real”. This was achieved not only visually (the asymmetrical layout of the two extracts on the page was significant, with “Mallarmé making inroads on at least some of the space Plato might otherwise have assumed to be his own”) but also through a series of near-homophonic subtitles in which the *L’Antre de Mallarmé* (“antre” is usually translated as “cavity”, but here is also a reference to Plato’s famous “cave”) is transmuted first into *L’“Entre” de Mallarmé* (where “entre” means “between”) and then into *L’Entre-Deux “Mallarmé”* (i.e. “Mallarmé”, the “in-between”). Hill interprets this as a “play on the doubleness and uncertainty of what fell between – between sounds, places, or meanings,”²⁵ while for Johnson “the passage from Plato’s “antre” to Mallarmé’s “entre” is thus a passage from ontological semantics to undecidable syntax, from the play of light and shadow to the play of articulation”.²⁶

This, then, seems to be an early manifestation of Derrida’s famous technique of deconstruction with which he sought to disrupt totalizing discourses by bringing to light connections and significations that might otherwise have remained unperceived. By creating a textual hybrid out of two apparently irreconcilable extracts, he disperses or “disseminates” the authoritative unity of the originals, undermining the truth value of the Platonic discourse by infecting it with Mallarmé’s literariness.

Returning to Spivak, it becomes clear that she too is engaged in a game of dissemination in the act of translation. The “between” in her text, therefore, refers not to some concrete geographical or even cultural location, as Tymoczko supposes, but to the spaces that are revealed when an authoritative discourse (a colonial one, in this case) is

Aldershot and Burlington, (VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 54; Marian Hobson, *Jacques Derrida: Opening Lines* (London and New York: Routledge), 1998, 84; Leslie Hill, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jacques Derrida* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 55; and Barbara Johnson, “Translator’s Introduction” to Jacques Derrida, *Disseminations*, (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), xix; xxv-xxxv for further elucidations of this concept.

²² Indeed, she specifically refers to Derrida’s “antre” in her earlier seminal text “Can the subaltern speak?” (Gayatri C. Spivak, “Can the subaltern speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, Illinois: University of Illinois, 1988, 283.)

²³ Hill, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jacques Derrida*, 33-38; Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 187.

²⁴ Hill, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jacques Derrida*, 35-35.

²⁵ Hill, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jacques Derrida*, 35-35.

²⁶ Johnson, “Translator’s Introduction,” xxix.

deliberately disrupted by the interposition of another. This is confirmed by the lines that follow.

By juggling the disruptive rhetoricity that breaks the surface in not necessarily connected ways, we feel the selvages of the language textile give way, fray into *frayages* or facilitations....²⁷

That is to say, a translation strategy that does not pander to the predetermined patterns of the target language²⁸ but instead seeks to violate its surface with the introduction of strange material imported from that other foreign world will have the effect of shattering its smooth certainties, producing an estranging or de-naturalizing effect. And this, Spivak suggests, may generate new perceptions, new ways of seeing the world (the “frayages” and “facilitations” mentioned in the last line are, we are told in a footnote, the French and English translations of the Freudian term for the neurological pathways in the brain that open up when neurone resistance is finally overcome).

In the following extract from *The Location of Culture*, we find Homi Bhabha making exactly the same point with respect to the generative potential of the “in-between”.

I am more engaged with the “foreign” element that reveals the interstitial; insists in the textile superfluity of folds and wrinkles; and becomes the “unstable element of linkage”, the indeterminate temporality of the in-between, that has to be engaged in creating the conditions through which “newness comes into the world”.²⁹

What is interesting about these extracts is that both of them conceive the text as a tightly-woven fabric that needs to be deliberately ripped and torn in order to allow the foreign meanings to show through. But this is not mere coincidence. The equation of “text” with “textile”, and of textual creation with the act of “weaving”, has a long pedigree in poststructuralist thought, involving key figures such as Barthes,³⁰ Derrida³¹ and Kristeva³² amongst others.³³ Indeed, the trope underpins the whole poststructuralist notion that the reality we inhabit is effectively spun by language, that we ourselves are woven into a vast semiotic web that conditions what it is possible for us to see and think.³⁴ For Derrida there is nothing at all outside the text (“Il n’y a pas de hors-texte”);

²⁷ Spivak, “The Politics of Translation,” 398.

²⁸ “I must resist both the solemnity of chaste Victorian poetic prose and the forced simplicity of ‘plain English’ that have imposed themselves as the norm” (idem).

²⁹ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 325-326.

³⁰ In *S/Z* (1974/1970), Barthes understands Balzac’s *Sarrazine* (1830) as a fabric consisting of five threads (codes) that are woven together.

³¹ In *Of Grammatology* (1997/1974 [1967]), which of course was translated into English by Gayatri Spivak, Derrida argues that textual interweaving not only blurs the distinctions between speech and writing, and between thought and signs, but also between experience and representation.

³² The etymological connection between the French words for text (“texte”) and for weaving (“tisser”) clearly contributed to Kristeva’s notion of the text’s “productivity”, generating “intertextuality” (Kristeva, *Desire in Language*).

³³ In fact it dates back to Quintilian (*Institutio oratoria* 9.4.3-23), who used the word *textus* (“texture”, “tissue”, “web”) to refer to the composition (“weaving”) of different elements into a pleasing and comprehensible speech.

³⁴ Spivak develops this, drawing on the work of psychoanalyst Melanie Klein to describe the development of the sign system in the young child. “The human infant grabs onto some one thing and then things. This grabbing of an outside indistinguishable from an inside constitutes an inside, going back and forth and

hence, the only escape from the totalitarianizing effects of authoritative discourses is to disrupt them, either through wordplay and neographisms, or as we have seen, by inserting some other kind of discourse into the cracks.

Yet this trope is not easy to accommodate within the intellectual and discursive environment that has prevailed in the Anglophone world. In part, this is due to etymology (the word “text” in English does not immediately evoke the act of weaving, despite being related to words like “textile” and “texture”, and there is no verb that could usefully be deployed to represent the work of textual composition as a fruit of the loom). However, a more compelling reason is likely to be the deep-rooted cultural orientation towards empiricism and linguistic realism in the Anglo-Saxon world, mentioned above. This not only severely impedes an understanding of how discourse can precede perception, it also generates a certain prejudice about how academic writing should proceed. That is to say, if you believe that words in your language correspond unproblematically to things in the outside world, then it becomes a kind of moral duty to use a plain style where all meanings are tightly controlled. From this perspective, the kind of proliferation of signification that we see in the writings of Spivak, Bhabha and Derrida seems at best irresponsible, at worst downright nonsense. It is this prejudice that leads Batchelor³⁵ to suggest that Bhabhian discourse perhaps needs to be “simplified – or perhaps de-poeticized” before being applied to translation theory – and it is also this that causes Maria Tymoczko³⁶ to interpret the notion of the “in-between” in such a literal way.

There are, however, a few fields of inquiry in the Anglophone world where constructivist arguments have had considerable impact. Two of the most significant are feminism and postcolonialism, where notions of the “in-between” first emerged in English, and where the first attempts were made to create “hybrid” forms of writing that sought to unsettle the smug certainties of colonialist and patriarchal discourses. Before going on to explore the use of the “in-between” in translation studies, let us look briefly at how the term has been deployed in these two related fields.

The “In-Between” in Postcolonialist and Feminist Discourse

Today, it seems self-evident that the subaltern experience must inevitably entail a dual perception that will be inherently sceptical, if not downright irreverent, towards dominant discourses and the nefarious worlds that are erected by them. However, back in the early 1970s, this was far from the case. For Anglo-Saxons, language merely reflected a pre-existing social reality, and if there were injustices in the system, it was the social activists, not the literati, that were best equipped to deal with them.³⁷

coding everything into a sign system by the thing(s) grasped. One can call this crude coding a “translation”. In this never-ending weaving, violence translates into conscience and vice versa. From birth to death this “natural” machine, programming the mind perhaps as genetic instructions program the body...is partly metapsychological and therefore outside the grasp of the mind. Thus 'nature' passes and repasses into “culture” in a work or shuttling site of violence...” Gayatri C. Spivak, “Translation as Culture,” in *In Translation – Reflections, Refractions, Transformations*, ed. Paul St. Pierre and Prafulla Kar (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2007), 263-264.

³⁵ Kathryn Batchelor, “Third Spaces, Mimicry and Attention to Ambivalence: Applying Bhabhian Discourse to Translation Theory,” *The Translator* 14/1(2008): 60.

³⁶ Tymoczko, “Ideology and the Position of the Translator.”

³⁷ On the epistemological disjunction between Anglo-American and French feminists in the 1970s and ‘80s, see Simon, *Gender in Translation*, 88-91 and Robyn Wiegman, “Feminism’s Broken English,” in

Once more, the awareness of how the subaltern self is moulded by language seems to have appeared first in Francophone culture before filtering through to the Anglo-Saxon world. In 1949, Simone de Beauvoir wrote “on ne naît pas femme, on le devient” (“one is not born a woman, one becomes one”), thereby marking the all-important distinction between biological sex and socially-constructed gender; while in 1952, Frantz Fanon identified the role played by language in creating ethnic stereotypes.

Yes, the black man is supposed to be a good nigger; once this has been laid down, the rest follows of itself. To make him talk pidgin is to fasten him to the effigy of him, to snare him, to imprison him, the eternal victim of an essence, of an *appearance* for which he is not responsible. And naturally, just as a Jew who spends money without thinking about it is suspect, a black man who quotes Montesquieu had better be watched. Please understand me: watched in the sense that he is starting something.³⁸

Unsurprisingly, then, attempts at systematically disrupting colonialist and patriarchal discourses by inserting into them fragments of other languages and discourses also seem to have taken place first in French. Sherry Simon³⁹ describes some of the polyphonic texts produced by the French feminists Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray in the 1970s and '80s; while in the postcolonial context, Samia Mehrez (1992) recounts similar experiments in Francophone North Africa by authors such as Abdelkebir Khatibi and Abdelwahab Meddeb.

It was crucial for the postcolonial text to challenge both its own indigenous, conventional models as well as the dominant structures and institutions of the colonizer in a newly forged language that would accomplish this double movement. Indeed, the ultimate goal of such literature was to subvert hierarchies by bringing together the “dominant” and the “underdeveloped”, by exploding and confounding different symbolic worlds and separate systems of signification in order to create a mutual interdependence and intersignification.⁴⁰

The notion of the “in-between” (“l’entre-deux”), which arises frequently in the works of Khatibi and Meddeb, as well as in Mehrez’s own discussion, thus came to refer to a hybrid style of writing that mixed elements from two languages, creating a text that reads as if it were a translation, although it is not. This has since come to be known as *writing-as-translation*.⁴¹

Just Being Difficult? Academic Writing in the Public Arena, edited by Jonathan Culler and Kevin Lamb (California: Stanford University Press, 2003) on the epistemological disjunction between Anglo-American and French feminists in the 1970s and '80s.

³⁸ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 22.

³⁹ Simon, *Gender in Translation*, 86-110.

⁴⁰ Samia Mehrez, “Translation and the postcolonial experience: the Francophone North African text,” in *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London: Routledge, 1992), 122.

⁴¹ Such practices have also been found in other postcolonial contexts but are generally conceptualized in other terms. Mary Snell-Hornby in “The space in-between: what is a hybrid text?” (*Across Languages and Cultures* 2/2 (2001):209) points out that, in the Anglophone scene, such hybrid texts were for a long time rather misleadingly classified as “Commonwealth literature”. Pérez-Firmàt (Gustavo Pérez-Firmàt, *The Cuban Condition: Translation and Identity in Modern Cuban Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) borrows Fernando Ortiz’s notion of *transculturation* to describe the strange coinages of literary criollism that mark the “collision of cultures” in Latin American literature; Sherry Simon uses the term *border writing* to describe cases of “‘incomplete’ translation as an ongoing element of cultural creation” (Sherry Simon, *Gender in Translation*, 162); in Brazil, the same procedure has been

As regards the theorization of such practices, Homi Bhabha, like Gayatri Spivak, has been particularly instrumental in bringing constructivist ideas into English. Like her, he stresses the role of discourse as the matrix of social identity, as well as its potential for social transformation.

“What is to be done?” must acknowledge the force of writing, its metaphoricity and its rhetorical discourse, as a productive matrix which defines the “social” and makes it available as an objective of and for, action. Textuality is not simply a second-order ideological expression or a verbal symptom of a pre-given political subject.⁴²

Thus, his own writing is deliberately opaque, using new coinages (eg. “a presencing”, “a worlding”, “unhomed”) and devices such as brackets and hyphens that draw attention to etymology (eg. “ex-centric”, “en-closure”).

Hybrid hyphenations emphasize the incommensurable elements – the stubborn chunks – as the basis of cultural identifications. What is at issue is the performative nature of differential identities: the regulation and negotiation of those spaces that are continually, *contingently*, “opening out”, remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference - be it class, gender or race. Such assignments of social differences - where difference is neither One nor the Other but *something else besides, in-between* - find their agency in a form of the “future” where the past is not originary, where the present is not simply transitory. It is, if I may stretch a point, an interstitial future, that emerges *in-between* the claims of the past and the needs of the present.⁴³

As we can see from this passage, these interventions are *performative* in nature, so that meaning, and therefore identity, is constantly being negotiated in each and every communicative act. To this extent, the “in-between”, like its correlate, the “third space”, should perhaps be understood not as a “space between two poles or binaries,”⁴⁴ but rather as a pause⁴⁵ that exists in “the split-space of enunciation”⁴⁶ during which the

theorized as a form of *cannibalism*, or “the critical devouring of the universal cultural heritage” (Haroldo de Campos, “Translation as creation and criticism,” *Metalinguagem e Outras Metas: Ensaios de Teoria e Crítica Literária*, 4th edition (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1992), 44; Elsa Vieira, “Liberating Calibans: Readings of *Antropofagia* and Haroldo de Campos’ poetics of transcreation,” in *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, ed. Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (London and New York: Routledge, 1999); while for Mary Louise Pratt (“Arts of the contact zone,” in *Profession*, (New York: Modern Language Association, 1991), 34-5), the appropriation of the colonizers’ language by the colonized for their own purposes is conceived as one of the *arts of the contact zone*. Even Maria Tymoczko herself has acknowledged these practices, describing how “postcolonial authors...remake the languages and literatures of their former colonizers through the important and adaptation of native mythos, mythopoeic imagery, an alternate lexis, vibrant textures of idiomatic speech and new formalisms” [Maria Tymoczko, “Post-colonial Writing and Literary Translation,” in *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, ed. Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 35].

⁴² Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 22-23.

⁴³ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 219.

⁴⁴ Michaela Wolf, “The Third Space in Postcolonial Representation,” in *Changing the Terms: Translating in the Postcolonial Era*, ed. Sherry Simon and Paul St-Pierre (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2000), 138.

⁴⁵ Batchelor (“Third Spaces,” 54) calls this a “time-lag”, which is probably an attempt at expressing in English the aspect of deferral inherent in Derrida's term “difference”.

⁴⁶ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 38.

symbols used in the utterance are interpreted in the light of the new context in which they find themselves.

It is this fundamental instability of meaning which allows for the phenomenon that Bhabha calls “cultural translation”⁴⁷, a process through which key signifiers are re-inscribed into new discursive environments in order to endow them with a new charge and new signifying potential. Spivak refers to something similar in her article “Translation as culture” (2007/2000), when she writes of “translation as reparation” (translation as “the constitution of a subject in responsibility”⁴⁸). This is also the sense of translation that is now commonly used by literary and cultural studies scholars, interested in exploring questions of alterity (see, for example, Budick and Iser’s *The Translatability of Cultures: Figurations of the Space Between*⁴⁹).

However, it has little to do with what translators and translation studies theorists usually mean by the term, as Trivedi⁵⁰ rather indignantly points out. Let us now return to the concept of the “in-between” and see how that has been used in works that are specifically about translation in the more conventional sense of the word.

The “In-between” in Modern Translation Studies

If Maria Tymoczko has not engaged with the poststructuralist thought that underpins most of the examples of the “in-between” that she quotes in her provocative article “Ideology and the position of the translator: in what sense is a translator “in between?””, the same cannot be said of Harish Trivedi, who grapples at length with Bhabha’s term “cultural translation” in an attempt to assess its implications for the discipline of translation studies. However, Trivedi’s tone, unlike Tymoczko’s, is somewhat facetious – so much so, in fact, that it is not entirely clear to what extent he is self-satirizing. For example, in discussing Salman Rushdie’s famous line “we are translated men” (quoted by Bhabha in the last chapter of *The Location of Culture*), Trivedi confidently announces:

Rushdie was here exploiting the etymology of the word “translation”, which means to carry or bear across, and what he meant, therefore, was that because he had been borne across, presumably by an aeroplane, from India and Pakistan to the United Kingdom, he was therefore a translated man. He neglected to tell us as to whether, before he became a translated man, he was at any stage also an original man.⁵¹

From this he deduces that what Bhabha meant by “translation” is “the process and condition of human migrancy”⁵², and wonders why “translation” should be the word of choice in a collocation such as “cultural translation” in this new sense when perfectly

⁴⁷ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 212-235.

⁴⁸ Spivak, “Translation as Culture,” 265.

⁴⁹ Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser, *The Translatability of Cultures: Figurations of the Space Between* (California: Stanford University Press, 1996).

⁵⁰ Harish Trivedi, “Translation Culture vs. Cultural Translation,” in *In Translation – Reflections, Refractions, Transformations*, ed. Paul St. Pierre and Prafulla Kar (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2007), 282-288.

⁵¹ Trivedi, “Translation Culture vs. Cultural Translation,” 283.

⁵² Trivedi, “Translation Culture vs. Cultural Translation,” 283.

good and theoretically sanctioned words for this new phenomenon, such as migrancy, exile or diaspora are already available and current".⁵³

This parodic literalness serves to highlight the apparent incommensurability of the paradigms with which we have been dealing in this article. Tymoczko, Baker and Trivedi clearly subscribe to the "commonsense" Anglo-Saxon notion that words are signs for things in the real world, that "translation" is an act that inevitably involves "two texts from two different languages and cultures"⁵⁴ and that the notion that there may be a gap between cultures into which an unsuspecting translator may topple is about as convincing as the fairies at the bottom of the garden. Spivak and Bhabha, on the other hand, influenced by Derrida and the other French poststructuralists, are operating in the symbolic domain. For them, what counts is the subjective experience of the world, and the way that this is moulded and conditioned by discursive formations. In this virtual mental world, there is clearly room for an experience or perception that is ill-aligned with dominant configurations, or which shares aspects of more than one at the same time. In this paradigm, therefore, notions of the "in-between" or "third space" make every sense.

In this final section, I would like to gauge the extent to which translation theorists working in English have been influenced by the discourse of the "in-between" and examine the coherence of their arguments in the light of what has already been said about the subject. There are, in the end, few authors to discuss, for most of those that were lampooned by Tymoczko have already been dealt with in previous sections.⁵⁵ But two that warrant particular attention are Dingwaney (whose volume *Between Languages and Cultures*, co-edited in 1995 with Carol Meier, focuses particularly upon the issue of the "in-between" in translation studies) and Michael Cronin (2000), who wanders onto the subject almost by accident during his reflections on the connections between travel, language and translation.

Dingwaney's introductory essay, "Translating "Third World" cultures", clearly gestures back to the postcolonialist debates that we considered in the previous section. We can also see her poststructuralist credentials, the understanding of culture as a rich tapestry of many threads that does not necessarily map onto anything in the material

⁵³ Trivedi, "Translation Culture vs. Cultural Translation," 285. This apparent obtuseness is belied by Trivedi's witty conclusion, which positions him as a rather implacable critic of postmodernism: "In conclusion, one may suggest that there is an urgent need perhaps to protect and preserve some little space in this postcolonial-postmodernist world, where newness constantly enters through cultural translation, for some old and old-fashioned literary translation. For, if such bilingual bicultural ground is eroded away, we shall sooner than later end up with a wholly translated, monolingual, monocultural, monolithic, world. And then those of us who are still bilingual, and who are still untranslated from our own native ground to an alien shore, will nevertheless have been translated against our will and against our grain. Further, translation itself would have been untranslated or detranslated, for it would have come under erasure in a sense rather less deconstructive than Derrida's but plainly more destructive. The postcolonial would have thoroughly colonized translation, for translation in the sense that we have known and cherished it, and the value it possessed as an instrument of discovery and exchange, would have ceased to exist. Rather than help us encounter and experience other cultures, translation would have been assimilated in just one monolingual global culture." (Trivedi, "Translation Culture vs. Cultural Translation," 286).

⁵⁴ Trivedi, "Translation Culture vs. Cultural Translation," 283.

⁵⁵ As for Snell-Hornby's article on "the space "in-between"", this is concerned primarily with the practical difficulties of translating postcolonial "hybrid" texts into other languages, and as such, is not directly relevant to our discussion. Mary Snell-Hornby, "The Space In-Between: What Is a Hybrid Text?" *Across Languages and Cultures* 2/2 (2001): 207-216.

world, or indeed onto anything in anyone else's culture, but which exists in itself, for itself:

...in seeking to transport words (and sentences and texts) from one language to another, the translator cannot merely search for equivalent words in the "target" language to render the meaning of the "source". Rather, the translator must attend to the contexts ("a world, a culture") from which these words arise and which they, necessarily, evoke and express.⁵⁶

Unusually, this author actually offers a definition (two definitions, in fact!) of the "between" as it appears in the title of the volume, and these too reveal evidence of the work's poststructuralist orientation. The second definition of "between" – "as that space from within which the (colonized) native deliberately (mis)translates the colonial script, alienating and undermining its authority"⁵⁷ – clearly refers to the postcolonial interventionist programme discussed above. But the first one offers a less familiar inflection, which impinges not so much upon discourse or culture but upon the person of the translator:

...that space translators can occupy in response to the "intentions" of the text and/or culture they translate which, then, calls their habitual ways of living and thinking into question and allows them to be "powerfully affected" by another mode of living and thinking.⁵⁸

This is reminiscent of Spivak's⁵⁹ description of how she has to "surrender" to the text when she translates, of how the translator's own personal worldview is also altered by the encounter with the foreign work. But it also harks back to Bhabha's "Third Space" as a place of interpretation:

The act of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the I and the You designated in the statement. The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot "in itself" be conscious.⁶⁰

However, Dingwaney is not entirely consistent with regard to her epistemological orientation. A little further down she invokes arguments similar to those used by Maria Tymoczko in her 2003 article:

In the translation of non-Western cultures (and languages), it is imperative that translators/ethnographers make their power and privileged vantage point evident. This task entails not only that they remain aware of their own locations with respect to the cultures they study, but also that they be constantly aware of 'the institutional conditions and disciplinary demands' that impinge on their translation, that they understand fully whom they write for, within what contexts, and, more than anything else, the mediated status of their accounts.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Anuradha Dingwaney, "Translating "Third World" Cultures," in *Between Languages and Cultures: Translation and Cross-Cultural Texts*, ed. Anuradha Dingwaney and Carol Maier, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 3.

⁵⁷ Dingwaney, "Translating "Third World" Cultures," 9.

⁵⁸ Dingwaney, "Translating "Third World" Cultures," 9.

⁵⁹ Spivak, "The Politics of Translation," 400.

⁶⁰ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 53.

⁶¹ Dingwaney, "Translating "Third World" Cultures," 9-10.

This suddenly literalist interpretation of space and location does not seem entirely compatible with the poststructuralist perceptions of her definitions to the extent that the one may even cancel the other out. In short, we are left wondering just which paradigm this book subscribes to, and thus how to process the material that we encounter in it.

A similar ambivalence is found in Michael Cronin’s book *Across the Lines: Travel, Language, Translation* (2000), though in this case it is resolved somewhat more successfully. Of all the authors we have considered, Cronin is perhaps the only one that could really be considered eligible for Tymoczko’s⁶² and Baker’s⁶³ charge that the “in-between” motif romanticizes the translator as an isolated poetic figure without allegiances to any culture. He unashamedly develops the motif of the translator as nomad, mentioning “the long tradition of associating mobility with mediation in the figure of the translator-nomad”⁶⁴ and wondering why “the figure of the translator-nomad” has so often been absent “from the critical literature on travel”⁶⁵. Indeed, he even extends the motif to include interdisciplinarity: “the translator is not only a nomad between ethnic/national cultures but s/he is also a traveller between disciplinary cultures”⁶⁶; “in an era of disciplinary parochialism, the third wo/man as translator or travel writer is valuable as a nomad bringing us news from elsewhere”⁶⁷. However, he goes on to qualify the attribute:

The movable diversity of translation does not in our conception of the translator-nomad empty out the subject as appears implicit in the post-Derridean expression of “an inventory of traces”. The translator is a situated subject, positioned by contexts of race, gender, class and history, *but not reducible to these contexts, just as no text is merely the sum of its contexts.*⁶⁸ (my emphasis)

Precisely because of this irreducibility (and it is here that Cronin manages to bridge the gap between the two apparently incommensurable paradigms), “a purely historicist analysis of the phenomenon of translation is never fully adequate”⁶⁹.

The other will always transcend your understanding of his/her contexts. It is precisely this transcendent incommensurability that drives translation and travel. Both are situated in the gap, the ‘écart’, that motivates the perpetual effort to know a country better, to render a text more fully, but the effort only succeeds because it fails. In other words, total knowledge of a country and its people (a manifest absurdity!) and a perfect translation signal not the triumph but the undoing of translation and travel.⁷⁰

Here, then, we have another conception of the “in-between”, one which evokes the motif of weaving with which we launched our discussion.

⁶² Tymoczko, “Ideology and the Position of The translator,” 199.

⁶³ Mona Baker, “Narratives in and out of Translation,” *SKASE Journal of Translation and Interpretation* 1/1 (2005): 15.

⁶⁴ Michael Cronin, *Across the Lines: Travel, Language, Translation* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000), 98.

⁶⁵ Cronin, *Across the Lines: Travel, Language, Translation*, 102.

⁶⁶ Cronin, *Across the Lines: Travel, Language, Translation*, 149.

⁶⁷ Cronin, *Across the Lines: Travel, Language, Translation*, 150.

⁶⁸ Cronin, *Across the Lines: Travel, Language, Translation*, 106.

⁶⁹ Cronin, *Across the Lines: Travel, Language, Translation*, 106.

⁷⁰ Cronin, *Across the Lines: Travel, Language, Translation*, 106.

The gap of the “entre-deux” here should be conceived of less as a space, a reified entity tending towards stasis than as a constant movement backwards and forwards in which there is no fixated identification with either of the poles. The continuous oscillation between source text and target text, between home culture and foreign culture, native language and foreign language, define both translator and traveller as figures in motion. The translator/traveller embraces the analog mode of both/and rather than the digital mode of either/or.⁷¹

Hence, the translator, shuttling back and forth, is engaged in a semiotic weaving operation not unlike the child described by Spivak (2007) in her article about Melanie Klein (cf. footnote 34). Translation is presented as a performative act, which spins a new symbolic fabric, a textile knit of yarns (this English word is felicitously polysemous!) drawn from pre-existing tapestries. Hence, it cannot help but be an “in-between”, not in the static sense understood by Tymoczko, but as an ongoing dynamic process which, like the hybrid postcolonial writing described by Bhabha⁷², brings “newness” into the world.

Conclusion

One of Maria Tymoczko’s main arguments against the use of the “in-between” in translation studies is that it derives from a particular Western conceptualization of translation involving the notion of “carrying across”. “Not only do old concepts sometimes cease to be relevant as time passes,” she says, “but they do not always offer theoretically useful perspectives”. She goes on: “We should also be especially careful about claiming as universal a theoretical assertion that is based on the particularities and histories of a few Western European languages”⁷³.

It is curious, then, that she has taken so little account of the redefinition of translation that has taken place in the context of poststructuralist theory in which it is conceived not as an act of “bearing across” but as an act of semiotic creation. Homi Bhabha’s notion of “cultural translation”, which Harish Trivedi (2007) so comically lampoons, is not considered by her, not even in a chapter bearing that name in her 2007 book, *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators*; while Gayatri Spivak’s extension of the term to mean “the constitution of the subject in responsibility, a kind of genealogical scripting”⁷⁴ is given even shorter shrift. This is a pity, because these redefinitions open the door onto a whole different conceptualization in which the notion of the “in-between” is far from redundant.

If she had investigated the theoretical apparatus underpinning these alternative perspectives, she would also have found that they were anything but “Platonic”, as she asserts more than once⁷⁵. On the contrary, they derive from an intellectual culture that was decidedly anti-Platonic (witness Derrida’s systematic dismantling of Platonism in “The Double Session”), and imply a view of language in which meaning is inherently unstable, generated anew in each individual communicative act, and inevitably subject to misreadings, overreadings and “disseminations”.

⁷¹ Cronin, *Across the Lines: Travel, Language, Translation*, 106.

⁷² Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 326.

⁷³ Tymoczko, “Ideology and the Position of the Translator,” 192.

⁷⁴ Spivak, “Translation as Culture,” 265.

⁷⁵ Tymoczko, “Ideology and the Position of the Translator,” 197 and *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators*, 290.

What is more, it is precisely this intrinsic instability of signification that allows authors and translators to intervene in dominant discourses in order to disturb authoritative readings and generate estrangement in relation to taken-for-granted assumptions. Thus, rather than preventing ideological engagement, as Tymoczko⁷⁶ suggests, the trope of the “in-between” actively encourages it, as we have seen in the numerous hybrid discourses thrown up under the rubric of postcolonialism and feminism.

Finally, we might ask just why Anglophone translation studies have, with a few exceptions, been so resistant to poststructuralist approaches, generating misunderstandings of the kind that we have been tracing here.

One reason might be the strongly empirical orientation imposed by the founding fathers of the discipline. Indeed, the main goal of descriptive translation studies seems to have been to create a method that is above all “scientific”, in the sense that it seeks to chart observable “facts” and from them “formulate a series of coherent laws which would state the inherent relations between all the variables found to be relevant to translation”⁷⁷. This has resulted not only in the development of research methods and models that are becoming increasingly quantitative, particularly since the advent of computational linguistics, but also in the use of a discourse that is scarcely distinguishable from that employed in the sciences.⁷⁸ A subset of the heavily reified entity known as “English academic discourse”,⁷⁹ the discourse of translation depends on what Niranjana⁸⁰ describes as “Western philosophical notions of reality, representation and knowledge” in which “reality is seen as something unproblematic, “out there”; knowledge involves a representation of this reality; and representation provides direct, unmediated access to a transparent reality”.

Hence, it is natural that an author working within the dominant paradigm should interpret a term like the “in-between” in the light of the conceptual grid laid down by its discourse. And this, as Sherry Simon has pointed out, “has been tied to certain conceptions of **boundedness**” (author’s emphasis):

... the text, the national language, and the national culture all come to occupy similarly autonomous and well-circumscribed spaces. Translation is generally considered successful when a text crosses clearly defined linguistic and cultural border to be ‘re-composed’ within another homologous milieu.⁸¹

However, such conceptions now appear increasingly inadequate to deal with the complexity of the translational phenomena occurring in the contemporary world. All too

⁷⁶ Tymoczko, “Ideology and the position of the translator,” 185.

⁷⁷ Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*, 16.

⁷⁸ Indeed, Halliday and Martin claim that, as a result of the colonisation of all areas of knowledge by the discourse of science, there is now, in English, an “essential continuity between humanities and science as far as interpreting the world is concerned”. Michael A. K. Halliday and Jim R. Martin, eds., *Writing Science: Literacy and Discursive Power* (Pittsburgh & London: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993), 220.

⁷⁹ Defined rather broadly as “the language used in academic settings”, this has been intensively described by linguists (eg. Hyland 2009; Flowerdew 2002; Swales 1990), codified in numerous style manuals (cf. Bennett 2009) and taught in universities all over the world with almost no consideration of the possibility that there may exist other ways of encoding knowledge.

⁸⁰ Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism and the Colonial Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 2.

⁸¹ Sherry Simon, “Cultural and textual hybridity,” *Across Languages and Cultures* 2/2(2001): 225-226.

often “the border becomes porous and the text itself plural”⁸² and the binaries that form the mainstay of the discipline (author/translator, original/translation, source language/target language, etc) break down. In short, descriptive translation studies is inherently ill-prepared to deal with any form of hybridity for this involves “the mixing of codes: linguistic codes...and cultural codes”.⁸³

It might be time, then, for efforts to be made to bridge the oft-invoked rift separating the empirical (scientific) and humanistic approaches to translation. For, as we have seen, the former’s excessive dependence upon the (outdated) philosophy of linguistic realism and its consequent failure to acknowledge that language plays a fundamental role in constructing, as well as reflecting, social realities often means that concepts with considerable explanatory potential, such as the one we have been discussing here, are seriously misunderstood. That is to say, when such terms are removed from the discursive fabric in which they are enmeshed, and interpreted as if they were signs standing for entities in the world “out there”, they will inevitably begin to fray, losing their signifying power. This is what has happened with the “in-between” in translation studies. At the selvages of two almost-incommensurable discourses, it has itself slipped into the gap. What is particularly worrying is that this is perhaps indicative of a serious rip opening up in the conceptual fabric that constitutes the discipline of translation studies. Considerable skill is now required to darn the hole and prevent further unravelling.

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⁸² Simon, “Cultural and textual hybridity,” 225-226.

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La marginea sinelui discursului: negocierea spațiului „dintre” în studiile de traductologie

Noțiunea de „spațiu dintre” a devenit un trop comun în lucrările multor cercetători în studii de traducere din ultimele decenii. Oricum, în 2003, Maria Tymoczko s-a ocupat de acest termen, nu doar afirmând că acesta nu este compatibil cu o abordare sistematică asupra limbilor și culturilor, dar și că el se subscrie noțiunii romantice a traducătorului ca *déclassé* și ca „intelectual alienat” și concepției platoniciene asupra înțeleșului.

Acest articol sugerează că Tymoczko a construit termenul cumva diferit de autorii pe care îi citează, și că această lipsă de înțelegere a izvorât din chiar propria ei angajare în cultura filosofică bazată pe empirism și pe realism lingvistic. Întorcându-ne la sursele termenului în gândirea poststructuralistă, consideră că termenul de „spațiu dintre” ar trebui înțeles ca un nivel simbolic al *discursului*, care îi permite să devină un vehicul al unui angajament politic profund neplatonician.