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Translation, internationalisation and the university

Suzy Harris*

School of Education, Froebel College, Roehampton University, London, UK

The demands and challenges posed by the global economy help explain the growing importance of the internationalisation of higher education in European, national and institutional policy arenas. The discourse of internationalisation is driven primarily by economic factors, and an emphasis on competition, standards and skills has shifted attention away from considering internationalisation in relation to the aims, values and the purpose of higher education. This paper considers the notion of translation as a way of thinking about internationalisation. Translation is normally understood in relatively simple terms – as the transfer of meaning from one language to another – and it is seen primarily as a technical matter, albeit one that sometimes raises considerable difficulties. It is argued that that there is something limited and mistaken about this way of thinking about translation. It is not only between languages that translation occurs but also within a language. The question of translation has to do with the nature of meaning, and meaning has been and must remain a central concern of higher education and the university.

Keywords: translation; language; internationalisation; higher education

Internationalisation and the problem of language

Since the 1990s the internationalisation of higher education has become an increasingly important aspect of European and national policy, driven by economic considerations and the need to compete in the global knowledge economy. For example, a central concern of the European Union is to improve the quality of European higher education in order to successfully compete with the economies of the US, China and India. To this end the EU has concentrated its energies on increasing transparency and comparability, and on improving quality assurance mechanisms (IRDAC Report to the European Commission 1994). The Bologna Declaration (1999) can also be seen in this light with its goal of a single European Area of Higher Education as a means of increasing the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education. And, at a national level, the UK government has vigorously promoted international education under the Prime Minister's Initiative (PMI). This initiative was launched in 1999 in a bid to establish a UK 'brand' of international education and to increase the recruitment of international students to HE institutions. In 2006 a second phase of PMI was introduced, this time a five-year strategy to improve the national brand abroad, to secure the position of the UK as a leader in international education, and to improve the student experience (Toyoshima 2007).

The term 'internationalisation' is used in a variety of ways – for some it refers to external processes such as globalisation and the emergence of a competitive marketplace whilst others use the term in relation to curricular issues and the need for an intercultural and/or global dimension to the curriculum (see Knight 2004). Despite the various uses and understanding of the term there does seem to be a consensus that internationalisation, however defined, is both good and necessary for higher education. The benefits of internationalisation tend to be viewed

*Email: s.harris@roehampton.ac.uk

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in economic terms; the economic is privileged whilst educational and cultural dimensions are not addressed (Harris 2007a, 2008a, b). This paper attempts to redress the imbalance and does so through a consideration of the notion of translation as a way of thinking about internationalisation and higher education. Translation is considered first in relatively simple terms – as the transfer of meaning from one language to another – and it is seen primarily as a technical matter. This way of understanding translation is limited and does not acknowledge that translation occurs within a language as well as across languages. To say this is not merely to exploit the idea of translation in a metaphorical way. It is rather to contest the terms of the opposition within which translation is understood: of the security and stability of meaning in the supposedly pure 'home' language, on the one hand; and, on the other, of the vagaries and uncertainties of meaning where this home language is translated into one that is alien. If our instinctive adherence to the terms of this binary opposition can be weakened, the ways in which it is not a mere metaphor to say that translation occurs within as well as between languages will become apparent. The question of translation is then not just about how to accommodate people who speak different languages in a system of higher education but rather about the nature of meaning itself. The paper explores this more profound question of meaning which is at the heart of what higher education is about.

Let us begin be examining the way that translation becomes an issue in higher education. First, developments like Bologna are responses to difference. In some ways this is just part of globalisation but in other respects it is a characteristically European response. Bologna is designed to manage difference, and it does this through endorsing standardised procedures, a form of performativity. This is not to deny difference but to imply that difference can be successfully encompassed within homogenised systems. Second, the internationalised universities of Europe, and elsewhere, face a practical problem in that many students do not speak the lingua franca of the host institution. Hence, there is a need for special entrance tests and special preparatory courses designed to compensate for this linguistic deficit. The lack of command of the needed language is understood as a technical problem and these are means of addressing it.

The diversity of national education systems which historically has been seen as important becomes problematic when the imperative is commensurability. I do not want to suggest that uniformity is necessarily bad or that education does not, nor should not, have any economic benefit. The argument set out here is the need to be attentive to what is absent and the restrictive and narrow ways in which education is conceived. For example, it is striking that some 10 years ago the European Commission could state quite boldly that the aims of education need no longer be debated: the purpose of higher education is to serve the needs of the economy. This, it was implied, was self-evident; moreover, the distinction between education and training is considered redundant (European Commission White Paper 1996). In his analysis of European documents Pádraig Hogan notes the absence of moral purpose behind education policy; the main concern is about performance in a market culture and the promotion of excellence and the language used is one of competitive individualism (1998). And it is not only in education where this instrumentalist language is found. Kevin Williams (2000) considers this in relation to what he refers to as the new European project – a united and unitary 'New Europe' underpinned by a particular, and narrowly conceived notion of European citizenship. Underlying the European project is a conception of human beings as self-interested consumers. The role of education is to create 'economic agents' who will contribute to the development of an entrepreneurial society.

It is useful in the following paragraphs to look at issues to do with language in the university. The first thing to say is that language is especially complex in the university, for example, disciplines have their own specialised forms of language and these are quite different from the

language of business or other institutions. Despite this the university is now expected to engage, collaborate and enter into partnership with business and commerce. The growing closeness of the university and its business neighbours, steered as it has been by successive governments is, not surprisingly, transforming traditional academic discourse within the university, particularly in terms of governance and management but also in relation to the curriculum. The language of performativity and marketing is pervasive, the most recent example of which is the emergence of enterprise as a core part of the business of the university. Enterprise is now an equally important income stream but it is also spreading across the university into the curriculum with modules designed to improve students' entrepreneurial skills. For the new university this may be an attractive way to identity itself because of the very different research profiles of the old and new universities.

The relationship between the university and business is of course important; there is a practical and technical need for employees to possess good language skills in order to carry out their job. Employers, naturally, expect university graduates to have acquired these skills before they leave university. The danger is in privileging an acquisition of a portfolio of skills and competencies over an engagement with ideas and ways of thinking connected with a disciplinary tradition. The latter, historically, has been a central purpose of the university.

One of the features of a mass higher education is that the student population is much broader and more international in composition, particularly so in the UK which has one of the most diverse university student populations in the world (Watson 2007). Students will come to university for various reasons and hold a range of expectations and assumptions about university life. Student and parent satisfaction is increasingly important and an area that, in a highly competitive market, universities cannot ignore. There is more demand on academics to make their courses more student-centred, through, for example, using online technology and more transparent assessment systems. One result of this is that less attention seems to be given to matters of curriculum content; it is reduced to the most effective 'delivery'. And the use of delivery here is far removed from its Latin origins – *liberare* – to set free. The need for institutions to be responsive and be seen to be responsive to student needs is an aspect of proceduralism that pervades university life; there is an obsession with method where emphasis is on procedure rather than the substantive and questions of value.

This proceduralism obscures aspects of language and difference that can be seen particularly clearly in relation to students for whom English is neither their first language nor the language of their previous education. There are immediate concerns around language comprehension and familiarity, for example, with academic and cultural customs when studying in a British university. Consider, for example, Chinese students who come to study in departments of social sciences or humanities. This will be the first occasion when they will be expected to read texts written in English and to write essays conforming to western academic traditions. This will require them to discuss the ideas and arguments in the texts and relate them to the context of their native country. The experience of a Chinese student in this respect is so unlike that of their Spanish or Italian counterpart because there is a lack of shared European etymology to help decipher words and phrases. Both the student and their tutor have difficulty in finding any common ground from which to begin to discuss problems of translation, interpretation and meaning. Chinese students, like their peers, must be able to use the language appropriate to their subject of study; some find academic writing easier than others irrespective of what their first language is.

There are then, unquestionably, practical problems that face students whose first language is not English; universities take this seriously and spend a great deal of time and resources to supporting its students, through for example, English language centres and student support services. There is, however, a danger that discussion rests on these kinds of issues and does not

move beyond these to consider other questions that are not technical and cannot be resolved easily through devising practical solutions. This is something that is not confined to internationalisation specifically but to education more generally. In the UK, for example, much of the political debate about HE in recent years has revolved around financial concerns. Very little time has been spent discussing the point of higher education. As Richard Smith and Paul Standish point out, 'what kind of world we need a competitive economy *for*' is not talked about (2001, italics in original).

As numbers of international students continue to rise, there is a danger that problems will continue to be constructed as technical that require technical solutions; this will perpetuate the tendency to think in dichotomous ways. Language tends to be seen in terms of binaries – 'native language' and the 'non-native language'; 'first language' and 'second language'; 'native tongue' and 'foreign tongue'. The distinction between native and non-native speaker is, however, more complex than this dichotomy suggests. In the UK, for example, nearly 15% of primary school students speak a different language at home, and in several British universities a large proportion of students are effectively bi-lingual (Watson 2007).

Matters to do with language are not confined to students whose native language is not English. In UK universities and those where English is the medium of study, a vast number of texts that are used on courses are translations. For example, in sociology Marx, Weber and Durkheim will most likely have been read in translation rather than the original – by teachers as well as students. Teacher educators discussing the relevance of Rousseau or Freire for schooling in contemporary society are probably unlikely to have read these in the original, unless they studied languages as undergraduates. In philosophy, students will not be expected to read texts in the original when they discuss the ideas of, for example, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes or Wittgenstein.

There are two points that I wish to draw attention to from what has gone above – the first is to do with the danger that arises from globalisation, namely, the homogenisation of the theory and practice of higher education, and one critical factor in this homogenisation is language. The use of English globally implies that everyone can understand each other and that language is primarily about communication understood in a technical sense rather than about meaning. A language is generated that is full of abstract nouns – 'internationalisation', 'harmonisation', 'quality', 'excellence'. The second area of concern, and related to the first, is the monolingualism of liberal political discourse. In their paper Naoko Saito and Paul Standish (2008) refer to the monolingualism of political liberal discourse in which there is, they argue, a blindness to difference, to what is other and to what is incommensurable.

Both the homogenisation of language and the monolingualism of policy discourse are informed by performativity, a regime that demands standardisation, uniformity and commensurability; diversity as expressed through different and diverse educational traditions, is not acknowledged. There seems to be an assumption that any problems or difficulties that emerge can be ironed out and resolved; this is based on the view that language problems are purely technical and arise from linguistic difference – not having a good enough grasp of the language or not being able to make oneself understood; if someone does not have a good grasp of language it is presumed that they need technical help to improve their language skills (Harris 2007b).

One of the characteristics of performativity is that it is informed by an impoverished concept of meaning. The problem of translation is understood only as a technical one; the central question is one of better communication and delivery. This, however, has little to offer in the way of understanding and engaging with difficulty and difference and meaning. In the following section, therefore, I suggest a different way of thinking about translation that challenges this understanding of meaning as operating in a technical way.

Translation and transformation

As noted in the previous section the language of international policy is English so there is an assumption that we can all understand each other. This international language is, however, read and understood by people who encounter it from a wide range of linguistic, cultural, and institutional contexts. There are different connotations associated with terms when they are used in the international language of English; strange things can happen. Some examples may be of use here. Take for example a term I have used in this paper, *performativity,* which is an English translation of a term first used by Jean-François Lyotard. Among native English speakers this term has been taken up by many in education sometimes without acknowledging the origins of the term or clearly stating how their use captures the subtleties of Lyotard's original understanding. When this term is used, for example in Spanish contexts, the term is usually left untranslated but sometimes it appears as *rendimiento.* Whichever version is used, the meaning is not quite the same. There are negative connotations to the word in French and English usage that is not always as strong in Spanish. Another would be the German word *Bildung,* a word which has been said by some to be untranslatable. According to Maarten Simons (2006), a feature of *Bildung* is an attitude or duty to truth. This is not captured in the English term 'formation' which is often used. And a third example would be that of 'science'. The word comes from the Latin *scio* – I know. In English the word has come to have a strong association with natural science and for many people would conjure an image of a scientist in a laboratory carrying out an experiment; the term scientist would not be associated with an historian or philosopher. The equivalent of the word 'science' in German implies something different. In German *Wissenschaft* means science and *Geisteswissenschaft* means human science; these terms imply an on-going process, 'to capture reality as a totality in concepts' (ibid., 37). When a German academic is using the term science in English – for example at an international conference – they mean something broader than a native English speaking person. They mean knowledge in the round and reference to a scientist would include not just a physicist but an historian or philosopher as well.

As George Steiner (1975) notes, each human language maps the world differently and different societies have different ways of cutting up the world and describing the world. This means that words cannot be simply translated. Every reading of a text is an act of translation where the reader is trying to interpret the words and meaning for herself – whether one is reading the text in its original or translated version. In the case of the latter, to translate a novel by Gabriel García Márquez, for example, word by word would not capture the imagery and rhythms of his phrasing; nor is it a straightforward task to transpose the original Latin-American Spanish to German or Chinese. There are good and bad translations; a good translation requires an understanding of the context and view of world that informs the original text. The translated text is in some ways an interpretation of the original.

There is transformation in translation; meaning is always in movement. Translation goes to the heart of meaning and in the following paragraphs we shall see how this is so. The strangeness of language can be seen in a particularly striking way in the work of translation from one language to another. Wilhelm von Humboldt makes a distinction between *Fremdheit* and *das Fremde* in relation to the translation of texts (Eco 2003). *Fremdheit (*which can be translated as foreignness or strangeness) on the one hand is the term he used to describe the sense a reader has when the translator seems to have chosen words that sound strange or odd, as though a mistake has been made in the translation. *Das Fremde* (translated as the strange or the unfamiliar), on the other hand is the term used to describe a reader's sense of reading something that is recognisable, that has been translated appropriately, but that they are reading the words as if for the first time – the familiar has been rendered strange or foreign. Humboldt shows that a

proper understanding of language in its original form is not transparent or unproblematic. It is always strange, always open to disturb the reader.

The strangeness of language is thematised in Walter Benjamin's writing. For him the essential quality of a translation is not communication or imparting knowledge; a translation that intends to perform a transmitting function is in his eyes a bad translation. It is rather the mysterious and unfathomable (that is there in the original) that is essential to a good translation. The importance of the mysterious also suggests that translatability implies untranslatability, an idea that is central in Benjamin's 'The task of the translator'. The notion suggests both the impossible and the necessary; we could not live or make sense of our lives without translation of all sorts but at the same time it is impossible because it can never be absolute. There is no perfect translation. Whilst the goal of translation is 'undeniably a final, conclusive, decisive stage of all linguistic creation' at the same time 'an instant and final… solution to this foreignness remains out of the reach of mankind' (1996a, 257). This acknowledgment is central because it also suggests that it is the role of the translator rather than the translation that is central.

> It is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language which is exiled among alien tongues, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work. For the sake of the pure language, he breaks through decayed barriers of his own language. (Ibid., 261)

A translation is not an ending but a beginning, a transformation and a 'renewal of something living – the original undergoes a change' (256). The translator must allow her own language to be affected by the foreign language. There is always an element in the translation that refuses further translation, which is to acknowledge what is foreign, what is different, and to acknowledge that which is incommensurable. For Benjamin the idea of untranslatability is not something negative; there is a richness that is important to recognise and acknowledge.

The impossibility of translation suggests a loss; there is no perfect translation, no complete, ultimate understanding or perfect communication. For Lovisa Bergdahl (2008) this loss 'condemns us to never give up trying' but this is not said in despair, it is to recognise that we are always moving towards something rather than reaching an end point; it is an orientation rather than a route. I would add that the loss is also a find in the sense that it is also a release that invites or allows a response, to acknowledge the remainder – of what cannot be pinned down or reduced to something that is familiar and rendered safe. The richness in the idea of the untranslatable is that, as Bergdahl points out, it makes absolute understanding impossible: there are limits to what we can understand of the other and of ourselves, but it is the impossibility that means that we must not give up trying.

Bergdahl's reading of Benjamin is powerful and draws attention to the ethical response that translation summons. She considers Benjamin's position in relation to that of Habermas for whom translation is understood in terms of cooperation and negotiation and is ultimately possible. One weakness of his argument that she identifies is that there are too many assumptions that underpin it which effectively mean that there is already some kind of consensus operating. This denies the very thing that is present and contested – difference and incommensurability. For Benjamin there is a mysteriousness in the untranslatability – what is beyond the translation is the mysterious – in between the lines of the text, particularly so in the reading of the scriptures. It is not about communication[1] – it is about a response – a response that starts with the self then reaching out; it is an ethical responsibility first and foremost that I am called to. I am singularised; *I* have to respond, nobody else can make a response *for me*.

Jacques Derrida's way of putting this is that translation is both possible and impossible. The assumption that the literal translation of language involves a translation from a 'pure' meaning of the native language into another language is mistaken.

> Translation can… get everything across except this: the fact that there are, in one linguistic system, perhaps several languages or tongues. Sometimes – I would even say always – several tongues. There is impurity in every language. (Derrida 1982, 100)

Derrida makes this point deftly in 'What is a "relevant" translation'. The inverted commas around the word 'relevant' are used to draw attention to the untranslatability of the word. In any text there is a question about the source language to which the words used are to be understood. Words are always in the process of translation; the word, 'carries in its body an on-going process of translation' (2005, 425). There is also a broader point that he is making and that is the connection between the word relevant and the French verb *relever* which invokes a bringing to life – and this meaning of *relever* is heard in the French usage of *relevant*, whereas it is completely hidden in the English word. It is this idea of bringing to life again that is key. Following Benjamin, translation should ensure the survival of the original – survival in the sense of living on, and also of life after death.

Translation and the nature of meaning

The foregoing account draws heavily on poststructuralist accounts of meaning and translation. It is then intriguing to find that similar ideas were also advanced, about a century earlier, in the work of Henry David Thoreau. Consider, for example, his extraordinary and complex statement, in *Walden*:

> The volatile truth of our words should continually betray the inadequacy of the residual statement. Their truth is instantly *translated*; its literal monument alone remains. The words which express our faith and piety are not definite; yet they are significant and fragrant like frankincense to superior natures. (1986, 289, italics in the original)

What does Thoreau mean by these words, and what leads him to make such a claim? Anything we say is partial, he helps us to realise, never the final word or the complete story. Words cannot be pinned down; like birds they flutter and fly away – they are translated and transformed. The best words like faith and piety do not try to say it all; they are more subtle, not mundane or ordinary. Some things cannot be said directly and need to be subtle like fragrances that linger and provoke images. He is saying also that we have a responsibility not to keep words as monuments, that what is needed is to have a sensitivity to language and this he expresses powerfully in terms of the mother tongue and father tongue:

> Books must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written. It is not enough even to be able to speak the language of that nation by which they are written, for there is memorable interval between the spoken and the written language, the language heard and the language read. The one is commonly transitory, a sound, a tongue, a dialect merely, almost brutish, and we learn it unconsciously, like the brutes, of our mothers. The other is the maturity and experience of that; if that is our mother tongue, this is our father tongue, a reserved and select expression, too significant to be heard by the ear, which we must be born again in order to speak. (1986, 92–3)

The mother tongue is the language we are born into and cannot step outside of. It is seen as natural; it is already part of language full-blown. The father tongue is a different kind of language, not as natural as the mother tongue; it sensitises us to language and how we are not in control of it fully. In calling it the father tongue Thoreau is also hinting at the spiritual and its association with God the Father and His words spoken through the prophets. The father tongue and mother tongue do not complement each other but we do need both. The responsibility not to keep words as monuments is exemplified in the father tongue whereas the mother tongue has no such responsibility. The language and culture of performativity perhaps can be seen in terms of the mother tongue - the thinking underpinning it has come to be seen as natural,

common sense, taken for granted, unproblematic; words such as 'quality', 'standards' and 'effectiveness' have become mere monuments.

The father tongue is what is required in an education for grownups because it offers a mature relationship to language that can challenge the common and the taken for granted – it is about *uncommon* schooling. Thoreau is not proposing an institutional form of schooling but rather a schooling that goes on through life, a kind of continuous learning into adulthood. We can see how the father tongue also resonates strongly with 'higher' education; students need to be sensitised to language and this is possible through the father tongue which is needed to disturb the unproblematic view of language. It is perhaps not without significance that in the past a person went to university to *read* philosophy or *read* chemistry. Nowadays the verb most often used, outside Oxbridge, is to 'do' a subject ('I'm doing music').

We can see then that Thoreau's concern is with the question of meaning and understanding the world. *Walden* is about the possibility of living and can be seen as a kind of perfectionist writing. Thoreau was disappointed in America – it had not lived up to the Pilgrim Fathers' ideas of the Promised Land. His book is not an easy read; there is ambiguity and it is difficult to read him and to work out what he means or how to interpret a particular word or phrase, but it is also difficult in that he challenges his readers. He is writing in the father tongue; we have to learn to read, but not just literally, we also have to read the world. In a chapter entitled 'Reading' he draws the reader's attention to an important feature of the written word: 'it is the work of art nearest to life itself. It may be translated into every language, and not only be read but actually breathed from all human lips' (94). Writing and reading are quite different from the spoken word. It is easier to be shocked or wrong-footed by the written word. Whilst this is possible when you listen to a good orator, the difference is that the orator wants to win you over rather than to shock.

Thoreau and Benjamin are fascinated with the creation of the world by the word. They take us back to the scriptures and the opening words of St John's Gospel (Jn. 1:1). 'In the beginning was the Word; the Word was with God and the Word was God.' This is such a profound statement that shows that language and meaning and the human are connected, and we cannot unravel this; we are mutually dependent on one another. It is, however, precisely because of this interconnectedness that there is volatility – we give words to the world and we receive them. In 'On language as such and on the language of man', Benjamin considers the way in which this is expressed in the Bible; 'God breathes his breath into man; this is at once life and mind and language' (1996b, 67). Benjamin uses the creation story to construct in effect a philosophy of language, in the light of which the content of a thing is not expressed *through* language but *in* language. Benjamin's 'through' and 'in' subtly distinguish what is at stake here: the distinction serves to resist the idea of language just as a means to something, or as technical. It is, rather, constitutive of what we are as human beings. God calls into being Adam, and this creating word is also a naming word, Adam (*adamah*, meaning earth). The human being-in-the-world is then an expression of God's inner substance, an expression in which the human being, world, things, are generated through language. Yet God remains incommunicable and inscrutable, and, that is, untranslatable. In ancient Hebrew, the language of the Torah, God's name appears as *YHWH*; it is literally unpronounceable. For Benjamin every language, apart from divine 'language', which would be pure, can be thought of as a translation of all others. Language depends upon differentiation, and differentiation is the stuff of translation. But a divine 'language' would be a language without differentiation, a language seeing all at once without differentiation, and hence without identification, and hence no language at all. This impossible language nevertheless remains as a kind of ideal of perspicuity to which all too human thought aspires.

Human languages can only ever be partial and different societies and cultures have different ways of making sense of the world and hence the multiplicity of languages. There will always be

difference but the problem is that we tend to accept the differences that our language gives to us as though these were fixed. The father tongue challenges this. Our own words are new objects that we bring into the world; what you give back is not what you received. Whereas the father tongue acknowledges and understands this, performativity and technicism understand only the mother tongue and everything is reduced to 'a translatability without remainder' (Standish 1999, 11).

The idea of untranslatability in Benjamin and Derrida's work suggests that there are limits to what we can understand of the foreign but also of ourselves. The relationship between the foreign and the native is also addressed by Stanley Cavell who has been extremely interested in Thoreau's writing. One of the themes that run through his book, *The senses of Walden,* is understanding other cultures. He wrote this at the time of the Vietnam War and was thinking not just about relations between America and Europe but about America and Asia. He is interested in the idea of the native and the foreign but not simply in terms of native speakers and foreign speakers, but in terms of how we see things as foreign in our own lives because they are different. Cavell is concerned with the more profound notion of the native and the foreign, and with the ways in which we can be anxiously preoccupied with the foreign and not question the native; this raises questions about our native culture and language and our relation to others. He offers a rich and more complex way of thinking about intercultural understanding, recognising the role of education in helping us to observe the strangeness of our lives.

> For a child to grow he requires family and familiarity, but for a grownup to grow he requires strangeness and transformation, i.e., birth. (Cavell 1972, 60)

Cavell's philosophy as translation is about encountering the strange in the familiar. His is a call to discover and rediscover, continually, the strange and the familiar in our selves. It is not, he says, 'the other that poses the first barrier to knowledge of him or her, but myself'. Language is important in rebuilding the self's relationship to culture and to others, to our neighbour. Our relation to language is important because it is about 'placing ourselves in the world' (ibid.). To do this we need, as Saito and Standish (2008) have noted, a more subtle language that moves beyond the monolingualism of policy discourse and performativity; the university should be a place where this can begin.

Higher education in translation

As we saw earlier language is especially complex in the university and the language of performativity pervades university life. Such a language is inappropriate for the work of the university because it denies the need for translation – everything is transparent and commensurable and translation is reduced to a technical problem. The discourse is persuasive but impoverished. Take for example accountability – it is conceived in terms of quality assurance systems with the result that a richer sense of accountability, of being accountable for our words and actions, of being held to account for our words and how we behave towards each other, is suppressed. This is particularly important in the university and all institutions of higher education; the father tongue is needed here otherwise it is not truly 'higher' education. Difficult and uncomfortable questions must always be asked and be allowed to be asked. Students, especially those in higher education, should be disturbed by what they read in the sense that taken-for-granted assumptions are challenged, that they see the strange in the familiar. This requires a sensitivity and humility, and a way of thinking that is not found in the language of transparency and total quality systems that pervade policy documents and education more generally.

If the previous argument holds, then the following is perhaps a key point. Often the cultural richness of the university is viewed primarily in terms of the diversity of the student population.

It is important also to consider the diversity of ways of thinking about the world and our place in that world that comes to us through, for example, our engagement with the written word – the texts or canon of a subject. Texts need to be read and re-read, argued over and re-interpreted, for every generation. In so doing new ways are opened up to explore the question of how we are internationalised by an education that is *higher,* rather than how higher education is internationalised; this is a question to be engaged with not only in a teaching context but throughout the cultural life of the university. It is also a question that draws attention to ourselves not so much as independent, fully autonomous beings, but as always in relation.

In this paper the language of the internationalisation of higher education has been taken as a point of departure – an occasion for thought – from which to consider the concept of translation. The internationalised university is a place where it is possible to acknowledge the richness that comes from different languages and cultures coming together – it allows moments of conversion which our cultural life needs and depends on. We have seen, however, that an understanding of translation as a merely technical matter of moving from one language to another is both limited and mistaken. The question of translation is not simply about how to accommodate linguistic diversity within a system of higher education but rather it is about the nature of meaning and this is and must remain a central concern of higher education, the university, and the wider public.

Notes

1. 'Communication' is the term Bergdahl uses; in my translation of Benjamin the term used is 'information'.

Notes on contributor

Suzy Harris is Professor of Education at Roehampton University. She is Director of the Centre for Research in Beliefs, Rights and Values in Education (BRaVE) and the Secretary of the Roehampton Branch of the Philosophy of Education Society Great Britain. She is also Editor of *International Studies in Sociology of Education.* Her current research is on the internationalisation of higher education in the UK and Europe, especially Spain where she has strong collaborative links. This work adopts a more philosophical approach to theorising higher education policy.

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