The International Journal for Translation & Interpreting Research
trans-int.org

Approaching law in superdiverse, global societies: The challenges of and for legal translation in plural legal orders

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DOI: 10.12807/ti.115202.2023.a04

Abstract: 'Translation', understood in a broad sense, has been defined as a basic ingredient of globalisation and, more specifically, of the current globalising processes of law. This article reviews contributions that have explored the interconnection of translation and law in various disciplines. Inspired by the call for interdisciplinarity in Legal Translation Studies and for an "outward turn" in Translation Studies, this article will draw on theories of legal pluralism which have used various conceptualisations of translation to offer critical insights into the challenges of and for legal translation as a discipline and a professional practice in the superdiverse societies of the global era. The ultimate aim of this interdisciplinary round trip is to contribute towards increased self-reflexivity in Legal Translation Studies and towards a re-imagining of dominant legal translation practices in line with the growing commitment to diversity in institutional settings.

Keywords: Legal translation; legal pluralism; globalisation; superdiversity; power

1. Introduction

In an oft-cited paper, Esperança Bielsa (2005) provocatively equated globalisation with translation in an attempt to counter the systematic neglect of language and translation issues in studies on globalisation. For Bielsa, worldwide interconnectedness, the interdependence of peoples and actors at planetary level and the flow of capital, products and discourses across frontiers necessitates different types of translational processes as a precondition. In any event, this approach to translation as a "key infrastructure" of the global era (Bielsa, 2005, p. 143) problematises the conception of both languages and translation as mere vehicles or amplifiers of universally communicable concepts, products, theories and cultural practices. Framed within a critical theorisation of globalisation which is aware of its imbalances, hierarchies, tensions and contradictions, translation emerges as a ubiquitous factor underlying the diffusion of commodities and ideas across borders, and as one that is never innocent. Translation is always faced with the task of negotiating differences and asymmetries, which may be preserved, perpetuated, accommodated, acclimatised, redefined and even distorted, explained, overlooked or erased in the process, to name just a few of the potential responses and effects. Translation inevitably takes a stance vis-à-vis alterity, starting from the fact that the very definition of something as Other, as different, as in need of translation, already implies a particular position and, in turn, a positioning. Analysing the attitude(s) and role(s) of translation in globalisation may imply

enquiring, not just what is globalised, but also from which standpoint and how: in which particular ways the global and the local, the borders of Us and Them, are articulated in different contexts in an era characterised not only by constant mobility of people and objects but also by increasing "abstracted or disembodied connectivity" (Bielsa, 2020, p. 3).

In recent decades, legal scholarship has paid increasing attention to globalisation, a phenomenon which is perceived as shaking many of the tenets of its conceptual architectures. Globalisation is considered to be a force currently shattering entrenched ideas of law. Under a critical lens, law discloses itself as a construct that is predominantly "(i) territorial, (ii) emanating from the state, (iii) composed of a public and private sphere, (iv) constitutive and regulatory in function, and (v) cohesive and regimented" (Heyvaert, 2017, p. 205). The transformation of societies and relations in our era is perceived as calling for "a rethinking of some of the basic assumptions of what constitutes law in a global world" and, more precisely, for "mov[ing] beyond a state-centrist or state-framed interpretation of law" (Darian-Smith, 2013, pp. 6, 4). Following in Bielsa's footsteps, this article will support the claim that focusing on translation as an essential ingredient in globalisation can provide revealing insights into the workings and implications of the increasing transnationalisation of law. Ultimately, it may also help to undertake participation in these translational processes with a greater awareness of the complex and multisided responsibilities they entail.

2. Law and/in translation in the global world – current approaches and an additional way forward

The productivity of translation for a better understanding of law in our current era has been asserted and explored in different ways. Despite the scant attention paid to language and translation issues in Legal Studies in general (Glanert, 2014a, p. 268; 2014b, p. 2), a growing number of legal scholars have emphasised the central significance of translation for discerning the functioning of law and justice in the increasingly diverse societies of our global village. In a seminal work, White (1990) paralleled justice and translation on the grounds that legal professionals engage in interpretive acts which always involve transformative conversations with a particular legal tradition. At a context in which "we face the diversity of our world", White even argued for justice to be put into effect as translation —i.e., as a practice committed to creating "a frame that includes self and other, neither dominant, in an image of fundamental equality" (1990, p. 264). More recently, Ost (2009; 2014) has proposed translation "as a paradigm for thinking about the grammar of our plural world" (2014, p. 69). For Ost, translation is not just an operation between national laws or at the level of international law, but a pervasive feature of "law in its entirety", as, even at intralinguistic level, translational phenomena occur constantly across and within linguistic communities. Glanert (2014a, p. 255-256) has also approached law as "law-in-translation" or "an assemblage in motion", inasmuch as legal concepts constantly circulate and travel across borders, changing into local forms, and are continually reformulated into the specific languages of particular fields. Additionally, as comparative lawyers "cannot refrain from translation" (Glanert, 2014b, p. 3), it is suggested that translation and comparative law could well be considered interchangeable categories (p. 12).

Translation Studies and the specific field of Legal Translation Studies (LTS) have also emphasised the critical importance of translation in the interaction of systems in the era of globalisation. In a thought-provoking essay,

Lambert (2009) argued in favour of superseding the reductive view of translation as a textual operation aiming towards establishing equivalence, but often failing to do so, with an understanding in which translation emerges as a constant in processes of law formation which transcend borders as part of larger sociocultural and cross-cultural dynamics. In particular, Lambert encouraged a type of interdisciplinary research committed to revealing the varied and multiple roles that translation has played and continues to play in the shaping of legal systems and in the "planning and construction of societies" (Lambert, 2009, p. 95).

In recent years, the burgeoning field of Legal Translation Studies has also emphasised that law is essentially linked to translation in the global era. Indeed, in an article which highlights the multilingual dimension of international and supranational law with a view to enhancing the quality of translation at international institutions, Prieto Ramos (2017) has defined "global law" as "a network of translated texts". Within LTS research, particular emphasis has been placed on the challenges for institutional legal translation in the correct functioning of supranational legal orders. Many studies, including DGT/EU (2012), emphasise its significance for achieving legal certainty in agreements concluded by sovereign states or in building an autonomous legal order. Perceived as a potential "Achilles heel" (Čavoški, 2017, p. 69) of the process of globalisation, much thought has been given to the expert competences required from specialised, competent practitioners who face the challenge of enabling mutual understanding and reaching conceptual equivalence between the systems involved (Pym et al., 2012; Hargitt, 2013; Bajčić & Basaneže, 2016; Scarpa & Orlando, 2017). In any event, many of these valuable studies within LTS are concerned with the challenges and requirements for the institutional practice of legal translation to ensure uniform interpretation in contexts which adhere to the principle of equal authenticity of multilingual instruments—a goal in line with "the translation priorities of accuracy and consistency", "institutional normativity, authoritativeness, predictability and legal certainty" (Prieto Ramos, 2018, p. 1), and "standardisation" (Svoboda, Biel & Łoboda, 2017, p. 3) that currently prevail in institutional legal translation, as well as with the general expectation that legal translation is to convey the meaning of the original or to honour the pursued legal intent. In this article, I will put forward complementary perspectives that also approach law in the era of globalisation and highlight its translated and translating character. However, rather than focusing on translation as a mechanism through which to secure and guarantee uniformity and sameness, the focus will be on the challenges *and* affordances emanating from its relation with diversity and plurality.

Indeed, it is worth reminding that, in parallel with a shift towards a paradigm of inclusion (UNDP, 2011; UN DESA, 2016; Anheier et al., 2017), for several decades now, institutions across the globe have gradually subscribed to an increased commitment to diversity, not as a problem to be solved but as a value to be acknowledged and promoted as a transformative force in the building of increasingly equitable and participatory societies. Many disciplines, including Legal Studies, have increasingly engaged in critical reflection not only *on* diversity but also *through* diversity, as this constitutive feature offers systems the opportunity to ascertain, and to overcome, their own unnoticed biases and prejudices, and to discover the specificity of what they consider to be natural, normal and normative. For instance, since the late 1970s, different trends in legal scholarship (including Critical Legal Studies, Feminist Jurisprudence and Critical Race Theory) have shed light on the overt or covert link of norms and judicial decisions to dominant ideologies in particular contexts (Douzinas, Goodrich & Hachamovitch, 1994/2005; Mangabeira Unger, 1986/2015). Perspectives linked to multiculturalism have alerted legal

scholars to the cultural bias of purportedly "neutral" or "universal" norms (Parekh, 2000; Kymlicka, 2007; Sagiv, 2015). New concepts such as so-called "culturally-motivated crimes" or "cultural defense" (Van Broeck, 2001; Renteln, 2005) have also highlighted the importance of both factoring in cross-cultural differences in legal reasoning and of nurturing cross-cultural awareness in culturally-sensitive rulings committed to social justice. In my opinion, legal translation, both as a discipline and as a professional practice, may also benefit from an approach to diversity and plurality not only as features that are to be controlled, or as effects that need to be avoided, but also as an asset that may be productively utilised for the fruitful rethinking and re-envisioning of our social orders and our social practices, among them legal translation practices. As a complement to abundant scholarly reflection on how to ensure that (legal) translation acts as an ally of legal certainty in specific contexts, translation may also be approached as a fruitful instrument for the healthy questioning of various taken-for-granted certainties which may not hold up in the transformed landscapes of globalisation and, thus, may ultimately be blinding in the pursuit of solutions that are in keeping with the features and needs of contemporary societies.

In recent times, one concept that has proven to enshrine a significant explanatory and transformative potential for identifying and addressing these features and needs is that of "superdiversity" (Vertovec, 2007). This term has been explored in a vast array of disciplines—including Political Science (Phillimore, Sigona & Tonkiss, 2020), Legal Studies (Ballard, 2007; Shah, 2008), Linguistics (Creese & Blackledge, 2018), Translation Studies (Kredens & Drugan, 2018) and Legal Translation Studies (McAuliffe & Trklja, 2018)—in which, in any event, claims for interdisciplinary efforts are frequent. Superdiversity does not merely describe the "diversification of diversity", i.e., the heterogeneity and complexity of experiences brought about by migration, displacement, mobility and interconnectedness which coexist in our increasingly multicultural, multilingual, and ethnodiverse social formations and institutional and digital landscapes. In addition to providing an insightful lens through which to better perceive the intricate, multilayered and multi-dimensional nature of intersectional diversity(ies), and the knotty and stratified interrelations they weave, superdiversity has also been defined as an approach in itself—as "an ideological orientation to difference" (Blackledge, Creese et al., 2018, p. xxvi). Approaches drawing on superdiversity adhere to combatting inequality-perpetuating dynamics, patterns of exclusion and forces of discrimination which are reinforced and bolstered, often inadvertently, in our daily practices.

Inspired by this orientation, and with a view to exploring interdisciplinary connections, this article aims to contribute towards a more nuanced, (super)diversified perception of the grid of crisscrossing differences that are (to be) negotiated in transnational and translational processes and practices in the legal field in our global era. Specifically, I will examine particular theorisations of "legal pluralism" in sociolegal studies which have emphasised and shed light on the constitutive heterogeneity of legal orders, which are understood as being in a state of constant dynamism and interplay. Literature on "legal pluralism" promises to be doubly revealing for legal translation as a discipline and as a professional practice, inasmuch as it has frequently used the notion of translation to address and explain the complex and various forms of interaction at work between purportedly overlapping and inherently plural normative spheres.

Such a productive reading of interdisciplinarity is in line with recent calls in Legal Translation Studies for greater openness. The consolidation of this specific field as an "interdiscipline" in its own right has been accompanied by

a claim for increasingly complex, varied and integrative research methods (Biel & Engberg, 2013; Biel, Engberg, Martín Ruano & Sosoni, 2019; Kristiansen & Simmonaes, 2019). Within a larger framework, a call for the so-called "outward turn" of Translation Studies (Nergaard & Arduini, 2011; Bassnett & Johnston, 2019) has urged for research on translation to enlarge its own assumed definitions and find a way to be meaningful outside the field of Translation Studies, consolidating the position of TS as a "hub interdiscipline". The *acquis* and potentialities of thought in translation scholarship are seen as disclosing a special significance with which to face many challenges of our present: "in the context, for example, of current debates concerning issues of social organisation in times increasingly characterised by multi-ethnicity, the concerns of TS with the causes and effects of inclusivity and exclusion retain singular resonance" (Bassnett & Johnston, 2019, p. 186). According to Zwischenberger (2019), for this "outward turn" to occur, translation research needs to draw on transdisciplinary thoughts on translation and "travel back to TS and enrich the discipline with new insights" (p. 266), and then reach out to the professional world—for instance by "counteract[ing] misconceived notions about translation and interpreting generated and disseminated by translation practice" (p. 256). Following this methodological path, this article will explore theories of legal pluralism and their particular definitions of translation in order to enable refined approaches to legal translation research, training and professional practice informed by an increased awareness of the nature of diversity. From a view of translation as a pervasive constituent of communication and social life in the superdiverse topographies and transidiomatic environments of our day and age, and from the recognition that the various forms it may take actively contribute to the forging of our (perfectible) social orders, translation emerges as a magnifying glass with which to detect asymmetries, subordination, and inequalities. It can also be a lever for change, as translation can also "aim towards re-imagining" (Bassnett & Johnston, 2019, p. 185). In particular, (legal) translation can contribute to further articulating our world(s) and world order(s) in the plural—an aspiration that legal pluralism also strives towards.

3. Looking outwards: legal pluralism

One of the concepts that have proven to be very useful in Legal Studies for encouraging a rethinking of the legal filed in the plural is that of "legal pluralism". Though this label resists single definitions (Melissaris & Croce, 2017), many of the attempts which have been made in this direction share, with varying nuances, the idea that "in any one geographical space defined by the conventional boundaries of a nation state, there is more than one law or legal system" (Davies, 2010). Posited by some as a feature of law that can be spotted as early as in pre-modern empires, Ancient Rome or medieval times (von Benda-Beckmann & Turner, 2018, p. 256; Rojas Tudela, 2012, p. 20), the term is perceived to have been increasingly invoked since the late 19th and early 20th centuries by authors in legal sociology as a reaction to so-called "legal monism", i.e. an ingrained understanding of legal orders as unitary and separate entities. In the work of pioneering figures including Eugen Ehrlich and Georges Gurvitch, the emphasis on the plural character of law reacts to the Westphalian state-centric model of law (see Michaels, 2009; Rojas Tudela, 2012) in order to highlight the embeddedness of law in social life. A broader notion of law, termed as "living law", encompassed both the social background to laws and codes, and the forces regulating society outside them (Cotterrell, 2015). In other accounts, the rise of legal pluralism as a "scholarly field" is linked predominantly to work produced by legal anthropologists from the 1950s and 1960s

(Griffiths, 2011; Gil & Rivas, 2014; Greenhouse, 2020). From the observation of colonial and post-colonial contexts, legal anthropology also questioned textual and doctrinal approaches to law, and highlighted that various forms of official and non-official normativity, including tradition and customs, frequently coexist in the regulation of social relations. Research on these contexts was eye-opening for a wider array of critical approaches, especially from North America and Europe, which posit legal pluralism as a feature of all legal systems. In this view, state law can be seen to be routinely complemented with mechanisms of informal and non-codified justice and law is assumed to exceed the outcomes of legislative processes (Merry, 1988; ICHRP, 2009). This type of research focuses on how law is constructed through a vast array of instances in social interaction—in everyday practices which impact and shape law and legal processes (Nadler, 2017) —, and is especially interested in revealing how the perspectives of certain social actors are marginalised in the institutionalisation processes of law. At the turn of the 21st century, legal pluralism has received renewed interest in mainstream Legal Studies and other disciplines such as International Relations, as globalisation was and is seen to pose or accentuate challenges resembling those identified by earlier accounts of legal pluralism (Michaels, 2009; von Benda-Beckmann & Turner, 2018; Berman, 2007). In an epoch of growing transnational legal, economic and social relations, and the increasing transnationalisation of law, legal cultures are being influenced by multilateral bodies *and* non-state actors such as global corporations, lobbies and NGOs. Global legal pluralism attempts to explain the complex interplay between multiple and inherently plural (legal and quasi-legal) regulatory regimes shaped by state and non-state actors and trans-governmental networks which, today, occur in the deterritorialised spaces of cross-border activities and digital interaction and within the linguistically and culturally diverse societies shaped by conflicts, (post)colonialism, migration and cross-border movements of people. These phenomena make the coexistence of different understandings of law an everyday occurrence (Tamanaha, 2008; Berman, 2020).

Theories of legal pluralism have not only helped to create a better understanding of realities where legal pluralistic configurations are a fact, but they have also helped legal scholarship to revise their starting assumptions and methodologies. In this regard, they are an invitation to go beyond the dominant state-centred legal paradigm and to revise the division between state and non-state justice sectors (Davies, 2010). By emphasising the indissolubility of the legal and the social (Nobles & Schiff 2012, 1), they have shifted attention from the analysis of "formal" law to the interplay between official institutions and society in the construction of legal issues. In particular, this has spawned interest in the communicative practices creating and recreating law and the distinction between the legal and the illegal (Teubner, 1991-2). Far from a view of law as a set of stable, uncontested meanings, law emerges as "whatever social actors discuss and construe as law" (Solanki, 2011, p. 46), as the result of multidirectional—though rarely reciprocal—discursive practices. In this regard, it is perceived that, despite the intrinsically heterogeneous character of the legal configurations that are in constant contact, the result of lawmaking processes across and within them does not always reflect a parallel plurality of voices. 'Positive law' can thus be seen as a "series of negative moments or exclusions" (Davies, 2005), as the construction of a narrative and an identity in which certain views are privileged and others are prevented from being heard. By approaching law as a sphere constituted through a multitude of multidirectional and intersecting discourses, certain communities are perceived to be under-represented and silenced in the conversations generating standards that, nevertheless, claim to be universal. As many cultural systems are seen as

interacting in these plural and diverse legal constellations, producing "a polyglot discourse" (Dupret, 2007, p. 15), it is no coincidence that "translation" has also been a recurrent topic and polysemous word in scholarly work on legal pluralism.

Translation has been sometimes described and studied as a standard, (ideally) professional practice that is actively used by institutions in plural legal constellations for the construction of or for the smooth functioning of the system. This is the case in post-conflict states or post-colonial settings in which the (new) rule of law is implemented (or in which it fails to do so efficiently) by translating laws and proceedings into the vernaculars understood by social actors (Simões, 2015; Io Cheng, 2020). On a higher level, translation also appears as a useful category with which to explain how law travels from one layer to another within plural legal configurations, for instance when transnational regulation is downscaled to the level of national states, when state authorities implement official law at odds with the logic of customs or when certain legal ideas are globalised through translation processes within transnational networks and production chains (von Benda-Beckmann & Turner, 2018). Interestingly, what these approaches emphasise is that translation is never mere transfer or unproblematic transmission, but always brings about a transmutation—in Pommer's (2008, p. 20) terms, a "dynamic transformation" with the potential of "creating new cultural manifestations". As emphasised by Berger (2017) in his study of the "translation" of transnational norms brought by international (donor) actors into rural areas of Bangladesh, "as norms are translated, their meaning changes". Norms do not merely migrate from one order to the next, but are interpreted and reshaped in each context, metamorphosing both the norm and the host societies in the process: "cultural innovation is inherent in the translation process. In other words, a translation always changes the travelling object" (Draude, 2017, p. 589).

In this regard, translation has been seen as opening up possibilities for empowerment. For example, the translation or vernacularisation of international human rights law in local contexts has been perceived to be a useful strategy with which to alter social hierarchies (Merry, 2006). However, as is also noted, translation does not always produce beneficial results, located as it is in "struggles for meaning" (Capan, dos Reis & Grasten, 2021, p. 1). For instance, human rights are seen as being continually translated in multiple and contested ways, including some that are disenfranchising (Unnithan & Heitmeyer, 2014).

Indeed, scholarship on legal pluralism has decried the systematic cultural neglect of minority voices and the skew towards Eurocentrism in the ceaseless translational processes of law across states and within states, which reveal themselves as being far from innocent and symmetrical. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (1995, 2014) is one prominent scholar who has warned about the imbalances in the flows of influences between interacting legal cultures within the field of global justice. In his view, within the West's "non-relations" with non-Western cultures, many rationalities and forms of legality have not been considered relevant, and have been ignored or denied in assimilationist and excluding translational processes marked by violence and resulting in a formidable "waste of experience" (Santos, 2019, p. 267). Incorporating translation into the analysis of legal knowledge circulation within and across plural legal configurations enables the identification of those elements which are circulated into the legal sphere (and of those which are discarded altogether), the way in which this is done, and from which point of view. Within asymmetrical relations, translation thus emerges as a "framework" enabling the examination of "how the law is translated, who does the translating, and who benefits from it", and, more precisely, of "how practices of translation within the law produce, secure, and reconfigure hierarchies of knowledge production

that have material effects on peoples' lives in unequal ways" (Foster, 2014, p. 79). Translation, "a symptom and a diagnosis of the transnational" (Foster, 2014, p. 79), is also an index of a particular legal culture's perceived self-identity, as every legal translation builds an image for an Other in processes in which, conversely, the Self projects a particular self-image—one that is always a metonymy of its plural reality.

In this regard, research on legal pluralism focusing on translation invites a rethinking of translation that also enables to discover and understand it in the plural form. There is no one single way of translating, of relating to alterity or of encompassing diversity. Translation may be a constant in every relation with an Other or with various Others, but it invariably adopts different forms, patterns, strategies and purposes depending on the type of relation within which it is embedded. Swenson's (2018) classification of four archetypal relationships between state and non-state sectors is revealing of the multiple ways in which normative orders can interact, ranging from combative and competitive relations to cooperative and complementary ones. His explanations about the types of strategies or engagement techniques that are often adopted in order to engage with diversity in these processes (bridging, harmonisation, incorporation, subsidisation and repression) lend themselves to be read in terms of translation, and may indeed act as guides for engaging with a particular orientation in translation practice.

In any event, if translation can act under the influence or in the service of appropriationist or acculturationist, imperialist or ethnocentric agendas, it can also serve, and at the same time be (re)discovered and practiced, as a rebalancing and dialogic instrument. In a widely cited work, Santos proposes "intercultural translation" as a tool for engaging in productive cross-epistemic dialogue on a transcultural footing (Santos, 2014). He argues for 'intercultural translation' as an exercise of 'diatopic hermeneutics', an interpretive approach suspicious of 'universal' truths through which the limitations of different worldviews can be identified and overcome. Speaking against prevalent homogenising law-making practices that contribute to an epistemicide of minority legal traditions, Santos argues for a global legal order committed to social justice, an ideal which, in his opinion, requires global cognitive justice. Following in his footsteps, Aragón Andrade (2018) calls for a counterhegemonic law practice also conceived of as "intercultural translation" and which seeks to include marginalised perspectives with a view to fostering an emancipatory "ecology of knowledges". In a similar vein, Foster advocates "critical cultural translation", not only as a tool for denouncing bias in processes of legal knowledge production, but also "as an approach that addresses conditions of power and inequality" and one which, by assuming "an openness to disorientation", may lead to a reconfiguration of legal meanings and language that allows for more plural understandings and "more meaningful social change" (Foster, 2014, p. 82). Indeed, for Lamalle (2014), when approached through a multilevel translation analysis, the words of law, "rather than a box or a label", emerge as "gates", as a "gateway for the plurality of legal systems and traditions". For instance, bringing translation into the picture of international law is seen to contribute towards re-imagining it "as a plural space" (Bak McKenna, 2021). Defined as "a multi-directional and multi-level process of norm transformation between the global and the local" (Draude, 2017, p. 590), translation appears as an opportunity for fostering an enhanced dialogue of cultures and a pluralisation of current perspectives about what constitutes the "global". Certainly, for Perrin (2017), this pluralist endeavour requires translation to work in both directions—not merely through the vernacularisation of the international, but also by translating local, indigenous concepts and visions into the Western language of international law. In the field

of comparative law, Glanert also points at the limitations of entrenched models of legal comparison favouring cultural assimilation and appropriation and recommends adopting an "alienating approach to translation" (2014b, p. 10) in line with an ethics of translation committed to accounting for cultural differences.

4. Looking inwards: towards increased self-reflexivity in Legal Translation Studies and professional legal translation

In the methodological path suggested by Zwischenberger (2019) that we have adopted in this article, views on translation from outside Translation Studies can be useful for translation both as a discipline and as a profession. There is no doubt that the views on the role(s), potentialities and pending challenges of translation developed in sociolegal scholarship concerned with legal pluralism discussed above are inspiring for legal translation theory and for the professional practice of legal translation in the Language Service Provision (LSP) industry and in institutional settings. They offer food for thought, pose destabilising questions, and invite a self-critical legal translation practice.

In recent times, the discipline of Legal Translation Studies has emphasised the significance of the role of theory in enriching and improving practice (Svoboda, Biel & Łoboda, 2017, p. 11). Recent research strands in the field of LTS have increasingly paid attention to issues related to power, ideology, agency (see Biel et al. 2019; Martín Ruano 2019, 2020), and have highlighted the important role of legal translators as intercultural agents who, either voluntarily or involuntarily, actively participate in meaning-making, in the construction of languages and (legal) cultures, and in the negotiation of identities (Vidal Claramonte & Martín Ruano, 2003; Vidal Claramonte, 2005; Martín Ruano, 2014, 2015, 2016; Engberg, 2016, 2017, 2021; Monzó Nebot, 2020, 2021). Theories of legal pluralism offer legal translation research and practice further grounds for a problematisation of the raw materials with which the translator works, for a broader perspective as to what translation implies and may require, and for a wider perception of what is at stake in the activity of translation.

Legal translation is often described as the rendering of a text from one language to another in a particular situation or institutional context and for a particular purpose—which, all too often, is defined as conveying the text's meaning as precisely as possible or securing the uniformity of the legal intent of the instrument. However, the perspectives offered by legal scholarship make this "textualist" definition blatantly restrictive. While the study of legal translated texts is important, an excessively text-centred approach might overshadow other important dimensions and implications. As suggested by Glanert (2014b, p. 12), the dominant view which confines legal translation to a textual operation concerned with achieving equivalence "does not account for the institutional goals of legal translation practices". Bielsa and Aguilera's warning (2017, p. 3) that thinking about translation as a derivative act, as "a reproduction of something whose value lies beyond", "trivialises and depoliticises it" is revealing. Theories of legal pluralism help us see that even the translation of a particular legal text is much more than that. It emerges as an instance of a chain of translational moves between assemblages in motion which tend to be conceived of as (national, supranational, institutional) "cultures" but which, if looked at critically, disclose their rich and conflictive internal plurality. As such, it is an event that is subject to expectations and is driven by particular inertia. It is also an opportunity for those assemblages in motion to redefine their relationships, to adjust their position vis-à-vis other participants,

and to rediscover their own self-understanding. In such a translational and transactional pact sealed for a certain present, participants also lay the foundations for a certain future, in which they imagine themselves as a particular type of society within a complex, global order also yet to be designed.

Theories on legal pluralism challenge the conceptualisation of legal translation as an exchange between two self-contained and unitary entities that lingers in many of our definitions and explanations of this phenomenon—a view that, for instance, underlies the seemingly unquestionable assertion that legal translators must be familiar with the cultures and languages of the legal systems involved. In addition to ignoring the daily reality of many professional legal translators who, from the deterritorialised spaces of the internet, today work in national, transnational and global markets simultaneously, this well-intentioned desideratum fails to recognise the inherent complexity, plurality, and multilayeredness of every so-called "system" and the overlaps, conflicts and tensions that occur within its presumed borders. Taking each legal system as a prototypical whole in itself or automatically linking each of the orders involved in translation to a unitary culture or language may imply giving *carte blanche* to the unwitting assumption of homogenising and/or ethnocentric ideologies—and perhaps renouncing internal richness, flattening out polyphony, silencing equally valid, yet peripheral options, or alternative forms of enunciation that might prove to be more desirable in the future. As a decision-making process, translation needs to take a position vis-à-vis the original but also vis-à-vis the multiple possibilities available or yet to be discovered for rewording it in institutional and social contexts in which the notion of acceptability is variable and disputed. In this sense, in addition to certain verbal or textual strategies, and whether they want to or not, translations adopt a particular positioning in the discussions that occur at many levels in our complex social sphere(s), which often end up contesting the overall validity or the specific terms of what was once considered immutable law. Just as an example, law and lawmaking are not impervious to current debates of enormous social significance over plain and clear language, inclusive language, and accessibility. Neither is legal translation, which has to negotiate meaning as well as the limits and possibilities of language in different national, local and institutional contexts impacted to different degrees and in different ways by these global debates.

In this sense, theories on legal pluralism convey the idea that legal texts do not have an undeniable meaning that is to be conveyed, but rather take on different meanings within an extremely disparate range of cross-cultural dynamics and types of social relations (including idealisation, cooperation, hegemony, subordination, competition, and open rivalry). Communicating "meaning" within these dynamics is a possible priority or potential goal in the "translation regime" at work (Sakai, 2006), but not the only one. As shown clearly by cases of "existential equivalence" (Koskinen, 2000, p. 51)—translations which do not (exclusively) fulfil an informative mission but mainly pursue the affirmation of a certain language or culture—, legal translations can take on many functions and roles in very different contexts and institutional architectures. They can act as an innovative force enabling systems to move forward by incorporating ideas from other legal traditions; as a conservative or repressive force upholding the stability of a particular (sub)system; as a tool of (neo)colonisation, and/or as an instrument for the integration of citizens in particular (imagined) communities—either global, transnational, national or local, or all of these at once.

Indeed, another lesson shown by theories of legal pluralism is that, in superdiverse social settings, the borders that translation crosses and reconfigures are not just clear-cut separations between two or more demarcated linguistic and cultural territories or spaces, but a whole multi-level and dynamic

grid of complex, intersecting routes linking simultaneously various (trans)national, (multi)cultural, and (pluri)linguistic formations. This invites us to overcome the pernicious effects of the "methodological nationalism" identified in deep-seated vocabularies and tropes surrounding translation (Bachmann-Medick, 2019; Cussel, 2021) which can also be found in the field of legal translation. For example, while the frequent recommendation to determine whether a given legal translation is intra- or inter-systemic may be useful in the initial stages of translator training, its unproblematic internalisation may make translation complicit in totalising ideologies. Far from being a given, legal systems, cultures and languages are always under construction—in dynamics of contact and contagion or distancing and opposition within which translation plays an active role. Translation crosses borders, but also reshapes them, and often has effects outside most apparent boundaries. Seemingly inter-systemic translations (of a divorce decree, of a court summons) can live on beyond the particular national cultures initially involved or reveal how blurred the edges of the "national" becomes in the transidiomatic everyday life of transcultural individuals. In the digital universe of open data, like Derrida's (1987) postcards, the terms used in so-called intra-systemic translations (e.g., those produced by EU institutions) are often read, interpreted and conferred authority beyond their intended circle of recipients. Indeed, although supranational legal orders are often described as autonomous systems (and their official languages as "hybrid" codes with their own rules), the influential effect of supranational institutions on national languages (inside and outside the institution) and on the global translation community cannot be minimised. This fact offers additional reasons to replace the binary models inherited as a mental habit with more complex conceptualisations of legal translation as an activity embedded in polycentric, multilateral or *circular* interrelationships (see Pozzo, 2020, p. 114).

Furthermore, the idiosyncrasy of any particular language or even that extolled "hybridity" of the supranational can also be analysed and measured in terms of greater or lesser dependencies, accepted impositions, renunciations, and omissions with respect to other varieties of that language or its national counterpart, as well as to English as today's hypercentral language and to other influential languages in a particular context. Contemplating the negative of the translation photograph can, thus, offer insights into "the legal and linguistic hierarchies of multilingualism" (Prieto Ramos, 2020) and reasons to be cautious about the benefits of unreservedly adhering *ad futurum*, through institutional self-perpetuating processes, to the revered principle of "consistency" with the prevailing translation norm. By way of reflection, dominant monolingual translation ideologies might prove to be excluding in hybrid, translingual contexts (Vidal Claramonte, 2013). Given that supranational varieties end up influencing the evolution of national ones (Biel, 2014), adhering to a still stammering or alienating *translationese* may mean perpetuating (neo)colonial dynamics of linguistic dependency. In a world of differences, extreme adherence to linear models of equivalence (which are gaining momentum due to the prevalence of increasingly automated translation practices) can exacerbate the asymmetries and inequalities within our superdiverse social spaces, as well as be at odds with many institutions' commitment to the recognition of diversity.

5. A (provisional) conclusion

Theories of legal pluralism broaden our gaze, problematise our translation models and encourage us to correct their flaws. They do not necessarily imply

renouncing the possibility of making legal translations that may claim to be valid and practical contributions to so-called legal certainty, but they do help to discover that all certainty is but contingently built upon the multiple intersecting and conflicting layers of those assemblages in motion that are plural legal-orders-in-translation. For Cronin (2012, p. 182), "plurality involves accepting that there is no final, definitive reconciliation of opposites but that any arrangement is a provisional, unstable equilibrium which does not rule out further conflict in the future". Within plural realities, no single translation can ever claim to have the last (and only) word forever. Any present and any possible future will always have to be rewritten through translation.

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