

The background features abstract, overlapping green geometric shapes in various shades, including light lime green, medium green, and dark forest green. These shapes are primarily located on the left and right sides of the slide, framing the central white area.

# Re-thinking Interdisciplinarity

Brian James Baer  
Kent State University

# Conceptualizing Interdisciplinarity

- ▶ *Translation Studies*, as the academic field
- ▶ *translation studies*, as the study of translation outside the field of TS

# Conceptualizing Interdisciplinarity

- ▶ The developmental model (western historicism) / progressivist narrative
- ▶ Borrowing as a symptom of youth or underdevelopmental
- ▶ Maturity defined by self-sufficiency

# Re-conceptualizing Interdisciplinarity

- ▶ *Literatures, Cultures, Translation* (Bloomsbury)
- ▶ Literature and culture typically viewed by nationalists as singular and unified
- ▶ Translation viewed by nationalists as multiple and ephemeral

# Re-conceptualizing Interdisciplinarity

- ▶ Superficial interdisciplinarity: the borrowing of discrete concepts and methods
- ▶ Deep interdisciplinarity: producing a fundamental reconceptualization of meaning-making

# Managing the *Translational Turn*

Tensions raised by the *translational turn*:

- ▶ Translation versus Transposition?
- ▶ Translation versus *Translation*?
- ▶ Translation Studies versus translation studies?

# Translation versus Transposition

- ▶ Barbara Cassin's *Dictionnaire des intraduisibles* (2010), later published in English under the title *Dictionary of Untranslatables* (2014)
- ▶ Emily Apter's *The Politics of Untranslatability* (2014)

# From Paradox to Untranslatability?

- ▶ The paradox of “translation as betrayal”
- ▶ Jakobson’s “creative transposition”
- ▶ The Manipulation School
- ▶ Susan Jill Levine’s *The Subversive Scribe*



# Lotman's "The Phenomenon of Culture"

- ▶ Translation between two symmetrical or equivalent codes:
  - ▶ Every back-translation of a translation will reproduce the initial utterance
  - ▶ Such translation can only replicate the initial message; it cannot generate new messages
  - ▶ Any distortion is the result of a breakdown in the technology of transmission
- ▶ Translation between two asymmetrical or non-equivalent codes
  - ▶ A back-translation of a translation is unlikely to reproduce the initial utterance
  - ▶ Such translation will generate new messages

# The Impossible Quest for Sameness

“You must be *absolutely faithful* to what the delegate is *trying to say*.

You keep up with him, but you also try to make things clear where they are muddy.

Sometimes you translate exactly what he says and then add a few words to explain what he means.

You lost time that way, but you gain it back by cutting out the padding he puts in to give himself time to think.”

(Interview with UN Interpreter, NYT, 11/6/55, 12)

# Translation or *Translation*?

- ▶ Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*, "How Newness Enters the World. Postmodern Space, Postcolonial Times and the Trials of Cultural Translation"
- ▶ Stuart Hall's essay "Translation and Diaspora"
- ▶ Salman Rushdie's fictional works concerned with what he famously called "translated men"

## Non-translated Men

As CNN reported: “New York Police Department officials say they can't explain why a fearful woman's domestic-abuse report - written in the woman's native language of Spanish - was never translated into English for review, and for possible action.”

## Non-translated Men

“... to be ill in a foreign country was simply to experience in advance the reality of all illness, which is to be homeless. It was to be in a permanent foreign land—one where the language used is barely comprehensible, or at least where words seem to match, only clumsily, what they represent” (qtd. in Binnie 2004:112).

# Mystifying the Fact of Translation

“Translation has [...] become a key metaphor, often unexamined, in such a wide variety of discussions of “globalization” in all the different ways the term is used. Advocates of cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, identity politics and global governance are quick to grasp at “translation” as a metaphor but rarely offer much theoretical underpinning for it. All too often, the concept of translation (not unlike language) is stripped of its political content and used to cast a vaguely positive glow of acceptance, accessibility, and interest in things ‘other.’”  
(Ives and Lacorte 2010, 10-11)

# Mystifying the Fact of Translation

“Examining recent English-language ethnographies of Latin America, we find little evidence of what we call *linguistic reflexivity*: recognition of linguistic boundaries and language-based identities in fieldwork” (de Casanova and Mose 2017, 3).

# Mystifying the Fact of Translation

“French distinguishes in a way that English does not between *traduction* (rendering into another language) and *translation* (carrying from one place to another). We can use French—and the slight difficulty of translating that distinction into English—as a way of refreshing our understanding of the notion. Historians of sexuality quite often seem to find themselves interrogating items in the long list of new psychosexual terms that appeared in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and I shall ask first of all whether the emergence of those terms might not be given a more precise history if we describe them not as invention but as translation, or rather as both translations and inventions, *traductions* and *translations* at the same time, since to translate a term is always to nominate a new frame of reference for it” (Cryle 2015, 21).



# Translation Studies or translation studies

“In transforming translation from a secondary (re)writing practice into a primary scholarly discipline, Translation Studies erased precisely the theoretical advantage of that practice: its deixis with respect to theories of literary theory itself as something other than (or in addition to, or more than) descriptive science. This doubling down on discipline is a mode of bureaucratic leverage with benefits, and costs, that are plain” (Lennon 2010, 6-7).

## From *empire* to *Empire*

“The birth of the United Nations at the end of the Second World War,” they write, “merely reinitiated, consolidated, and extended this developing international juridical order that was first European but progressively became completely global” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 4).

# The Originary Myth of Translation Studies

- ▶ How is the originary myth of Translation Studies implicated in the rise of Empire?
- ▶ Does this myth mystify the workings of that new capitalist world order, specifically, the hegemonic spread of Western values and languages at the expense of “minor” ones and the promotion of transposibility over translatability?

# The Original Myth of Translation Studies

“[The West’s] epistemic privilege of narrating its own local history and projecting it onto universal history” (Mignolo 2012: ix).

# The Originary Myth of Translation Studies

- ▶ “After centuries of incidental and desultory attention from a scattering of authors, philologists, and literary scholar, plus here and there a theologian or an idiosyncratic linguist, the subject of translation has enjoyed a marked and constant increase in interest on the part of scholars in recent years, with the Second World War as a kind of *turning point*.” (Holmes 2000 [1972]: 173; italics added)

# The Originary Myth of Translation Studies

- ▶ In a chapter entitled “The Origins and Development of Translation Studies,” Bassnett writes: “Arguably, the point at which systematic investigation into the processes of translation started was during the Second World War (1939-1945)” (2014: 17).
- ▶ She then concludes the section titled “Beginnings” with a reaffirmation of Holmes’s history: “James Holmes was indeed perceptive to highlight the Second World War as a turning point in the study and practice of translation *around the world*” (2014: 18).

# The Originary Myth of Translation Studies

“Although experienced translators must have been trying to explain or justify what they do long before Cicero and Saint Jerome, I give notice that in my idiosyncratic American amalgamation, I date the beginning of modern translation studies with Eugene A. Nida’s 1947 essay on translation principles, published by coincidence when machine translation was getting started. I note that Wolfram Wilss (1985: 13-14) and Georges Mounin (1976:80) also give Nida’s essay preeminence” (Gaddis Rose 1997: 9-10).

# The Originary Myth of Translation Studies

“That changed everything. If equivalence was suddenly everywhere in translations, or almost, it could no longer be used to support any linguistics that would help people create it. The theorizing of translation was thus moved into a realm that was relatively unprotected by any parent discipline. *It had to found its own discipline*” (Pym 2010, 64).

Elsewhere Pym writes: “Translation Studies started to take shape as an academic discipline. That history is extremely important” (Pym 2010, 64).



# Russian Translation Studies

- ▶ *Principles of Literary Translation* by Kornei Chukovsky and Lev Gumilev (1919)
- ▶ *Principles of Literary Translation*, expanded edition with Fyodor Bogdanovich (1920)
- ▶ *Art of Translation*, co-authored by Kornei Chukovskii and Andrei Fedorov (1930)
- ▶ *Art of Translation*, by Kornei Chukovskii (1936)
- ▶ *Introduction to Literary Translation*, by Andrei Fedorov (1941)
- ▶ *A High Art*, by Kornei Chukovskii (1943),

# Alternative Histories of Translation Studies

“The translator of literary prose does not photograph the original but artistically recreates it. In order to be a translator, it is not sufficient to know this or that foreign language. The translator is an artist, a master of the word, a co-participant in the creative work of that author whom he is translating. He is the same kind of servant of art as an actor, sculptor or painter. The text of the original serves as the material for his complex—and often inspired—creation. The translator is first of all a talent.” (Chukovskii 1919, 7)

# Questions?

