

**Transcultural Conference
"India/Europe: Strategies for Reciprocal Knowledge"**

The concept of "transcultural knowledge" was initially articulated in the context of the October 2005 conference "Reciprocal Knowledge - Cultures of Knowledge" held in October 2005 in India (Goa, Pondicherry, Delhi). Despite their general familiarity with the conference agenda and its approaches, international participants experienced multiple difficulties in apprehending the complexities of presentations given by their Indian colleagues. To identify conceptually the apparent gaps in background knowledge as well as the different epistemological assumptions that frame and structure such a process, the idea of "transcultural knowledge" was introduced.

What is "transcultural knowledge"?

Researchers in the Transcultural network engage in a mutual process of knowledge exchange to foster a non-hierarchical cultural dialogue. Following a methodology based on the principle of reciprocity, this dialogue aims at a deeper, transdisciplinary understanding of cultures. My personal experience in the Transcultural network is not only that of an academic discussion about key concepts which have a fundamental meaning in cultures, but of the growing consciousness of being a learner of other cultures and disciplines. This process of reflection about knowledge also leads me to emphasise the significance of such knowledges for my own discipline: translation.

Knowledge and translation

One of the biggest problems faced by translators is in fact the background knowledge. Usually, professional translators have the language skills and master appropriate translation methodologies for different text types. They are usually specialised in certain fields like medicine, law, IT, economy, literature, etc. and have acquired some knowledge in these non-linguistic areas of knowledge as a fundamental complement to their language and translation skills.

Yet every text refers to certain external facts, realities, ideas, concepts, etc which require background knowledge. Therefore one of the translators' main tasks is extensive research on each of those topics. This does not mean that this knowledge is always very complex.

Sometimes it is only the background information of a specific case, such as details of a car accident which are important for interpreting for a legal case in court.

In literary translation, Umberto Eco has already given several examples of translation challenges caused by intertextuality in literary texts, i.e. the reference to other literary works in one text which can only be understood if the reader (or the translator) is in fact familiar with these works (cf. Eco [2006b: 252-266]).

Texts are always involved in a specific cultural and historical context. Some words can have a totally different meaning in other times (cf. Eco [2006b: 191-194] about the original meaning of some words in Dante's sonnet to Beatrice) or in other cultures. "Good weather", in a German context, certainly means "sunny, warm and dry weather", whereas in a semi-desert area in Northeast Brazil it would mean "rain". No need to explain the need for translators to continuously learn about cultures for them to recognise the different meanings and references.

Eco, Umberto (2004), *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation*, Phoenix Press.

Eco, Umberto (2006a), "Intertextuelle Ironie und mehrdimensionale Lektüre", in: *Die Bücher und das Paradies - Über Literatur* (Original Italian Title: Sulla Letteratura), DTV, p. 212-237.

Eco, Umberto (2006b): *Quasi dasselbe mit anderen Worten - Über das Übersetzen* (Original Italian Title: Dire quasi la stessa cosa. Esperienze di traduzione), Hanser.

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Recent publications:

- *Satzspaltung und Informationsstruktur im Portugiesischen und im Deutschen* - ein Beitrag zur kontrastiven Linguistik und Übersetzungswissenschaft. 2005.
- *Zur Übersetzung der Informationsvermittlung und ihrer rhetorischen Strukturierung in den Sermões von António Vieira*. 2005.
- *Transferência Cultural e Tradução na Internet*. 2002.