Ecologies of translation : Walking in the steps of Barbara Czarniawska

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Abstract

Barbara Czarniawska's work on translation has nurtured several lines of organization research, inspired generations of researchers and continues to provoke us to do fieldwork and to carefully reflect upon conceptual frameworks to make sense of what we see. In this paper we first depict various ways in which translation studies have evolved. We then pick up the very idea of bundles of ideas, that we find to be repeatedly emphasized by Czarniawska in describing processes of idea circulation and also being such an important feature of the translation framework as such. We suggest an ecological approach to translations to put to the fore the interplay among ideas as well as between ideas, actors and spaces. With the conceptualization of ecologies of translation, we thus bring forward three important aspects of the translation framework as developed and used by Barbara Czarniawska - the focus on bundles of ideas, the understanding that circulation of ideas is characterized by uncertainty and ambiguity, and a notion of actors as embedded and changing – and we open venues for continued research to develop the understanding of these aspects of translation.

1. Translating organizational change: The birth of a pathbreaking framework

Barbara Czarniawska's work on translation has nurtured several lines of organization research, inspired generations of researchers, and continues to provoke us to conduct fieldwork and to carefully reflect upon conceptual frameworks to make sense of what we observe. When we read the translation literature in the field of organization studies, it becomes apparent that since translation was introduced into organization studies by Czarniawska and Joerges (1995), to understand the broad circulation of management ideas, research has taken several diverging routes (for overviews see, e.g., Wæraas and Nielsen, 2016; Wedlin and Sahlin, 2017; Røvik, 2023). With the growing popularity of the concept (see, for instance, the special issue of International Journal of Management Review 2016), there is now "considerable variation in the meaning of the term, approaches to its study, and concepts used to account for the process" (Hultin, Introna, and Mähring, 2021: 588).

In the introduction to the book *Translating Organizational Change* (1996), Barbara Czarniawska and Guje Sevón proposed to understand transfer and circulation of ideas as translation instead

Submitted 27/02/2025 – Accepted 11/12/2025

of as diffusion, the until-then much-used concept for such studies. The quote below nicely summarizes the main argument for this choice of concept, and is also illustrative of one of many lessons from Barbara Czarniawska's work – that we should reflect upon the assumptions and associations we bring into organization studies when importing concepts from other fields (Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996b: 6):

> In the present context two such carelessly used concepts are of crucial importance: 'diffusion' of ideas – until now the central concept in descriptions of transfer of innovations – and 'power,' another physicalist concept used to grasp internal aspects of organizational change processes. Both tow with them whole chains of assumptions, which usually remain unexamined in organization theory. 'Diffusion' suggest a physical process, subject to the laws of physics, and thus the explanation of phenomena denoted to this term provokes a further train of physical metaphors, like 'saturation' or 'resistance.'.

Barbara Czarnawska was always very careful to reference her sources of knowledge and inspiration. The concept of translation, she and Guje Sevón wrote in the co-authored introduction to the volume *Global Ideas*, "as used currently in social sciences, is a loan from Michel Serres, who introduced it in his series of Hermes books (Serres, 1982; Brown, 2002)" (Czarniawska and Sevón, 2005b: 7-8) and continued with a clarifying definition:

> For Serres, translation is a generalized operation, not merely linguistic; and it takes many forms. It may involve displacing something, or the act of substitution; it always involves transformation. Consequently, that which is involved in translation – be it knowledge, people or things – has an uncertain identity. Each act of translation changes the translator and what is translated.

They go on to follow the travel of this concept via sociology of science and actor-network theory, to their own adoption in order to "understand a continuous circulation of management ideas and practices" (Czarniawska and Sevón, 2005b: 8). In this spirit, we here trace different lines of translation research and distinguish them in terms of their conceptual understanding and types of fieldwork.

Czarniawska's and Sevón's (1996; 2005) introduction of the concept of translation came together with a bundle of theoretical and methodological conceptualizations on change, actors, ideas, spaces, and fieldwork, several of which have been significant for, and been developed through, Czarniawska's own work. We suggest that while Barbara Czarniawska repeatedly has told that many circulating ideas come in groups and have allies, they relate to and influence each other and they shape and reshape identities and actions, much subsequent research has focused on one idea and one space at a time. In this paper, we first depict various ways in which translation studies have evolved as they have focused on parts of the bundle of concepts presented by Czarniawska and Sevón in their 1996 and 2005 introductions. We then pick up the very idea of bundles of ideas, which we find to be repeatedly emphasized by Czarniawska in describing processes of idea circulation and also being such an important feature of the translation framework as such. We suggest an ecological approach to translations to understand bundles of ideas, and to put to the fore the interplay among ideas as well as between ideas, actors, and spaces of translations. With the conceptualization of ecologies of translation, we thus bring forward three important aspects of the translation framework as developed and used by Barbara Czarniawska: the focus on bundles of ideas, the

Submitted 27/02/2025 – Accepted 11/12/2025

understanding that circulation of ideas is characterized by uncertainty and ambiguity, and a notion of actors as embedded and changing. Thus, we wish to open venues for continued research to develop the understanding of these aspects of translation.

2. Ideas and change

Translation analysis in organization studies developed from the observation that much policy formation and organizational change is spurred by and evolves as local adoption and adaptation of globally circulated ideas (Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996b; 2005; Sahlin and Wedlin, 2008; Drori, Höllerer, and Walgenbach, 2014; Wedlin and Sahlin, 2017). A common message of studies of globally circulated ideas of organizing and management is that ideas (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1995), models (Drori, Höllerer and Walgenbach, 2014), prototypes, and templates (Wedlin and Sahlin, 2017) do not remain unchanged as they flow but are subject to translation. Translation is thus used to denote the combined process of movement and change (Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996b): individual ideas, experiences, or models are actively transferred from one setting to another, and such movement invariably involves more or less change, intentional and unintentional, as the ideas are adapted in new contexts and settings.

Primary candidates for investigation in this tradition have been popular management ideas: widely circulated ideas and models such as TQM (Özen and Berkman, 2007; Erçek and Say, 2008), Lean Management (Andersen and Røvik, 2015; Morris and Lancaster, 2006), New Public Management (Sahlin-Andersson, 2001), and Business Process Reengineering (Heusinkveld, Benders, and Hillebrand, 2013; Huising, 2016). Also, a set of slightly broader principles and ideas such as international accounting standards (Mennicken, 2008), management accounting (Czarniawska, 2010), diversity management (Boxenbaum, 2006; Klarsfeld, 2009), reputation management (Waeraas and Sataøen, 2014), and shareholder value principles (Meyer and Höllerer, 2010) have been shown to travel and become translated. Such ideas, models, and principles could be included in what is often considered to be management fashions (Abrahamson, 1996; Czarniawska and Sevón, 2005b). Even if new technologies are often integrated into or accompanied by circulated management ideas, the translation of circulated new technologies was less visible in these early studies. Barbara Czarniawska has repeatedly pointed out the limitations of many studies in institutional theory as they have neglected technology (Joerges and Czarniawska, 1998; Czarniawska, 2008).

Not only circulating ideas change. A fundamental idea of translation studies is that change abounds. While much organization theory, according to Czarniawska and Sevón (1996b: 4), primarily treated change as an exception (to stability) and largely spurred by the initiatives of specific actors, they argued for a view of organizational life as a combination of stability and change. This implies change of circulated ideas as well as of those settings into which ideas are adopted and transferred. Following Tarde (1890/1962), translation scholars propose that imitation is a mechanism driving such change; actors who want to reform look at others to find role models to imitate. Sevón (1996) showed how organizations are fundamentally transformed in processes of imitation, involving changed identities, identifications and desires. Following this line, studies have shown how circulated ideas and their translation lead to changes in work procedures, practices, or structures in the organizations where ideas are picked up and translated (see for instance Ansari, Fiss, and Zajac, 2010; Kirkpatrick et al., 2013; Waeraas and Sataøen, 2014).

Submitted 27/02/2025 – Accepted 11/12/2025

A third form of change, also pointed out by Czarniawska and Sevón in 1996, although somewhat less prominent in the translation literature to date, is the change of those translating ideas - the translator (Huising, 2016; van Grinsven, Sturdy, and Heusinkveld, 2020). Described as one of the central tenets of the translation perspective, and following from Latour (1986), Czarniawska and Sevón (1996) pointed out changes in both the translator and what is translated. This was also noted by Frenkel (2005) and conceptualized by van Grinsven, Sturdy, and Heusinkveld (2020) as a form of "identity-work." With this concept they aimed to "reveal translation to be a dual mechanism in which agents narratively construct both themselves and the concept in relation to their organization" (van Grinsven, Sturdy, and Heusinkveld, 2020: 890).

Detailed field studies have been the dominant method to capture translations and to study the combination of stability and change in all these forms of translations. Three spaces for field studies dominate translation research: studies of the adoption and translation of ideas in an organization; studies that trace translation trajectories, and studies of various translators and translation sites. In the next section, we explore these diverse kinds of translation studies further and pay particular attention to the role of actors in these respective spaces.

3. Actors and spaces

The distinct emphasis on both movement and change puts particular focus on the active social processes involved in translations. The empirical trail of early translation studies testifies to this, with a large set of detailed empirical accounts, often in the form of single case studies (Boxenbaum and Strandgaard Pedersen, 2009), of the adoption and adaptation of popular management concepts into various organizational settings (for an overview, see Røvik, 2023). This perspective has focused on the role of actors in translation, most significantly those actors that are either producing and promoting ideas, or those adopting, translating, and implementing ideas in local organizational contexts. Most attention has been paid to the latter, analyzing processes whereby abstract ideas 'travel into' and materialize in certain fields and in specific organizations (for an overview, see Spyridonidis et al., 2016). Actors include, for instance, managers and other local actors inside the adopting organizations (Morris and Lancaster, 2006; Özen and Berkman, 2007). In this sense, many translation studies relate to versions of implementation studies (see Gondo and Amis, 2013), focusing on the implementation of an idea or model and its associated practices, procedures, and/or techniques.

The translation framework clearly holds assumptions of active agents – also called translators – and posits that the translation process itself drives the flow. Thus, ideas are not assumed to travel because of any inherent "properties" or of the initial power of those promoting the spread, but rather ideas travel and gain power through the process whereby actors in translation push the idea forward and onward, into new settings (Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996b). The focus on the active work involved in translation has led to criticism of an overly actor-centric perspective on such processes (Hultin, Introna, and Mähring, 2021), although the perspective on the role of those actors and their agency varies (Boxenbaum and Strandgaard Pedersen, 2009; Kirkpatrick et al., 2013; van Grinsven, Sturdy, and Heusinkveld, 2020); ranging from a "strategic" to an "embedded" perspective on translating agents. For the former, strategies for translation are formed in relation to actors' own interpretations and as means to solve local problems or concerns (see for instance Boxenbaum and Battilana, 2005; Ritvala and

Submitted 27/02/2025 – Accepted 11/12/2025

Granqvist, 2009), or translation is used as a strategy by which actors can shape interests to reinforce the implementation of an idea into an organization (Morris and Lancaster, 2006). The embeddedness view, on the other hand, theorizes actors as embedded in their local and institutional context and emphasizes that their interests and preferences are shaped in the process of translation. This follows on what John Meyer has termed "soft actorhood" (Meyer, 1996: 243), stressing how actors and their ideals, interests, and preferences are shaped and changed in the process of translation.

A recent effort to bring actors and embeddedness to the fore in translation analysis is taken by van Grinsven, Sturdy, and Heusinkveld (2020), framing translation processes as involving identity work. In their study of the narratives of those involved in translating Lean in a hospital setting, they show how both the actors and the translated concept are constructed in the process of translation, through the active identity work of actors as they argue for and reason about the meaning, significance, and practices of Lean. In this identity work actors both draw on, and shape, the understanding and meaning of Lean in the organization. In an effort to combine the agentic perspective with the embeddedness view of agency, the authors note that: "it is not simply the organizational context or individual interests that shape translation, but their interaction and combined effects" (van Grinsven, Sturdy, and Heusinkveld, 2020: 889). This perspective also invigorates an emphasis on meaning and meaning-making in translation processes (Zilber, 2006), and recognizes one of the fundamental recognitions in translation work, namely that actors are shaped by the process of translation as much as translation is shaped by actors (Czarniawska and Sevón, 2005b; Sevón, 1996).

An earlier attempt to theorize the embeddedness of actors in translations has been through the notion of editing rules (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996). While not prescriptive, such editing rules should be understood as implicit 'rules which have been followed' (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996: 85), which guide and shape translation processes. These rules include those of context, formulation, and logic; depicting the process of dis-embedding the idea from a specific context, formulating and presenting the idea in an attractive and dramatized way, and presenting it according to a rational logic of cause and effect, respectively. The three kinds of rules can further be specified in relation to the broader set of translation studies.

Empirical accounts taking an embeddedness approach have shown various contextual framings and shapings of translation: aspects of national and organizational cultures or frames (see for instance Morris and Lancaster, 2006; Boxenbaum, 2006, Helin and Sandström, 2010; Kirkpatrick et al., 2013), field-level understandings, institutional norms and logics (Zilber, 2006), business vocabularies and management knowledge frameworks (Höllerer et al., 2020), translation rules and habits (Røvik, 2023), professional contexts (Pallas, Fredriksson, and Wedlin, 2016: 1663), community contexts providing links to both community and field level actors and organizations (Heinze, Soderstrom, and Heinze, 2016), and political contexts and processes (Radaelli, 2005; Elvbakken and Foss Hanssen, 2019).

The second type of editing rules, on formulation, closely relates to the process of dis-embeddedness that Czarniawska and Joerges (1995) showed to be so central for driving the travels. Local aspects of a development are stripped away and ideas are generalized or theorized (Strang and Meyer, 1993), so that they are formed into being less specific and possible to apply in new settings. Another aspect of formulation has been developed with Barbara Czarniawska's work on narratives (1998; 2004). Translation involves narration; ideas that travel are often told as stories with a plot. Interestingly, much after Barbara Czarniawska called our attention to narratives as aspects of both organizing and translation, the concept of

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narrative has itself formed a kind of management idea that has traveled widely during the past decade.

The third type of editing rule is again more related to the embeddedness of ideas and actors. Studies of translation have shown how ideas are translated into policy recipes, and in this way appear possible and suitable for implementation in new settings (Sahlin-Andersson, 2001; Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall, 2002). In this policy recipe form, management ideas are formulated as the logical solution to all kinds of problems, with clear anticipation of specific forms of change that lead to improved organizational performance (Wedlin et al., 2024). This form of translation puts new perspectives on issues of implementation, and thus on how ideas are embedded in new settings (Røvik, 2023).

While the active work of translators has been a central feature of much translation studies, there has been continued criticism that the translation perspective lacks a proper conceptualization of actors (Huising, 2016; van Grinsven, Sturdy, and Heusinkveld, 2020; see also Zilber, 2006). We would, however, argue that there are plenty of actors in translation studies, but studies have largely tended to focus too narrowly on a limited set of actors, mainly inside the adopting organization. Studies have featured the active work of, for instance, middle managers (Radaelli and Sitton-Kent, 2016), project leaders or corporate executives (Morris and Lancaster, 2006; Özen and Berkman, 2007), professional communication officers (Wæraas and Sataøen, 2014; Pallas, Fredriksson, and Wedlin, 2016), nurses (Spyridonidis and Currie, 2016), and scientists (Ritvala and Granqvist, 2009; Elvbakken and Foss Hansen, 2019). This puts focus not only on a specific set of actors, as noted above, but has also implied a particular interest in practices, and in how a specific idea has changed, or not, during translation, partly at the expense of attention to the interplay between actors, ideas, and the context of translation.

The recognition of a broader set of actors engaged in translation as well as the multiple contexts that these actors are embedded in, has taken the actor perspective further. Huising (2016) follows the work of Hallett and others to argue for an "inhabited institutions view" on actors involved in translation, focusing on "how interaction in specific contexts alters what is made manifest and 'suffuses institutions with local force and significance' (Hallett and Ventresca, 2006: 213)" (Huising, 2016: 385). From her interviews with managers engaged in work to translate Business Process Reengineering (BPR) practices into various organizations, Huising (2016) notes how engagement with an extra-local BPR community influenced the local translation work of these actors, shaping both what is brought in and how the concepts are perceived. She particularly notes how the idea of BPR shifts over time and is understood in relation to other ideas and organizational members' previous experience with related but distinct concepts such as TQM, Six Sigma, and Lean. This highlights the recognition that the translation of one idea is related to other ideas, and that ideas often come in bundles, with both allies and competitors (see also Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson, 2000).

This perspective puts important focus on what happens in various translation spaces (Teulier and Rouleau, 2013). It emphasizes understanding the embeddedness of actors and translations both within and across local settings, and that the interplay between those – and movement between them – also shapes local translations. In the words of Huising, this suggests that "studies of diffusion might benefit from paying more attention to the health and vibrancy of spaces and communities committed to particular institutions or fads than they pay to the adopting organization" (Huising, 2016: 387). The recognition of organizations involved in the promotion and spread of ideas resonates with, and reinvigorates, earlier translation studies of

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the role of various actors as carriers of circulated ideas (Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall, 2002) and of transnational networks and communities of actors as vehicles for idea circulation (Djelic and Quack, 2010; Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson, 2006). It also serves to answer calls to put increasing attention to not only the embedding of ideas in new contexts, but also the dis-embedding of ideas (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996), and the actors involved in theorization (see Strang and Meyer, 1993; Nielsen, Mathiassen, and Newell, 2014; Höllerer et al., 2020).

4. Implications for fieldwork

Our review of translation studies above illustrates the importance, but also limitations, of various kinds of fieldwork for understanding translations and transformations of ideas as well as organizations and translators. Studies of individual spaces may sometimes overemphasize the importance of certain local spaces – with limited possibilities to understand travel dynamics. We thus argued in the above section that translation studies have begun, and should continue, to move attention to new and different translation spaces, particularly moving beyond individual organizational contexts. This means paying attention to a multitude of contexts and settings in which actors and translation processes are embedded, be it local, community, or transnational contexts, professional settings, political processes, or power relations that form contexts for translation, as well as shifting interest to a greater set of actors involved.

The review above also illustrated how a focus on specific translating actors sometimes assume a strategic view of actors and actions. However, as Barbara Czarniawska taught us, we should not conflate studies of actors with holding these actors as necessarily strategic. This can be summarized in the often-cited quote about anthills (Czarniawska, 2009: 438):

> An anthill is not a building erected according to a plan; it is a practice of long standing, taken for granted by the ants; and if the ants may not know what justifies the existence of the anthill, the biologists certainly do. The anthill is a part of an ecosystem, and can be built only in specific places where specific materials are available, and at specific times. It takes many ants to build it, and as individuals, they are indispensable but not irreplaceable. The institutional entrepreneurs are the ants who start the building, the idea being the queen.

This quote puts focus on the importance of actions and interactions, and of their embeddedness. As noted above, translation studies need to recognize that actors are not pre-defined, but shaped – along with the translated ideas – in the process of translation. This further suggests a move to understand translation processes in more detail, particularly focusing on relations and interactions among actors and ideas, rather than on existing and specific practices or procedures. It also means recognizing meaning-making in this process, shaping how relations are created and shaped, and change over time, as translation proceeds.

Barbara Czarniawska's own work is exemplary in how fieldwork can broaden studies of translation to new spaces and new forms of travels and translations. Her studies of news agencies showed a specific form of translation and a specific kind of translation space; news production and the actions and actors involved (Czarniawska, 2012). Through her well-known studies of action nets she could transcend the limitations of space-specific fieldwork. In her own words (Czarniawska, 2017: 782):

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> In my studies of city management (Czarniawska, 2002b) I have tried to follow and describe such action nets, that is, the ways (some institutionalized, some innovative) in which certain actions were connected to one another. Such action nets usually transcended any given organization.

5. Ecologies of translations – Extending the conceptual framework

To carry the tradition of Barbara Czarniawska's broader view of translation processes further, we not only need to follow her advice for fieldwork beyond specific organizational settings, we also need to develop the conceptual framework for an enhanced understanding of the interplay between actors, ideas, and the context of translation. We suggest doing this by drawing on an ecology perspective, and seeing multiple translations "as sets of dynamic and mutually influencing processes" (Wedlin and Sahlin, 2017: 103) that we term ecologies of translation. Such ecologies, we propose, provide a way to explain "the many complex interactions and relations, actions and actors involved in continuous translation processes both within and outside the organizational context" (Wedlin and Sahlin, 2017: 103). Let us briefly outline this perspective.

The introduction of ecology concepts in various subfields of organization studies opened up new venues for analysis and new explanations to organizational change and its impacts (Abbott, 1988; Hannan and Freeman, 1977; Hannan, 2005; Westney and Piekkari, 2020). There are many variants of such ecological analysis and the concept reveals inspiration from different disciplines (Abbott, 2005; Liu and Emirbayer, 2016). However, common to most ecological analyses is that they show ways of exploring embeddedness, adaptation, and interplay across actors and locations, and the relations evolving between them (Abbott, 2005; Liu and Emirbayer, 2016; Mennicken, 2010; Star and Griesemer, 1989). Building on this rich ecology concept, we argue for the need to more explicitly bring the interplay of ideas, actors and spaces into translation analyses.

Just like the concept of translation in organization studies largely builds on concepts developed within science and technology studies, so have notions of ecologies. In their studies of museums, and of boundary objects, Star and Griesemer (1989) used an ecological analysis to understand "this situation [is] that entrepreneurs from more than one social world are trying to conduct such translations simultaneously" (Star and Griesemer, 1989: 389). Building their analysis on the ecology of institutions as developed by Hughes (1970), they argued that "[a]n advantage of the ecological analysis is that it does not presuppose an epistemological primacy for any one viewpoint" (Star and Griesemer, 1989: 389). A related notion of ecology is used by Wise (1988). In his framing of the study of Mediating Machines, Wise reviewed previous ecological approaches and notes that "Many adopt some form of local ecological model" (Wise, 1988: 109) but went on to argue:

> From an ecological viewpoint, however, research specialties, wherever they interact with other specialties, institutions, or political and economic realities, must answer to contextual demands. Such interaction enlarges the network of adaptation and with it the stability of local practices. Maladaptation in the larger domain, similarly to that in the local one, implies incoherence, instability, and a need for readjustment. The problem of contextual

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> adaptation thus extends local knowledge into the societal sphere, showing in a rather natural manner how societal context comes to bear on the doing of good science.

The quote points to a fundamental relation between what is termed local ecologies and the broader social space. This relation is what we see lacking in much translation research focusing exclusively on the local context, as we argued in the previous section. Or stated differently: many translation studies appear to take individual organizations and their boundaries as given. As shown by Czarniawska in her work on action nets, to understand processes of translation and change, we need to transcend organizational boundaries and follow the actions and, in doing so, also understand how spaces are linked.

In her study of the societal transformation into market-oriented auditing in post-Soviet Russia, Andrea Mennicken (2010) built on Abbott's (2005) notion of linked ecologies to understand the interlinking of organizational and societal change and understand how different translation spaces are interlinked. Mennicken (2010: 335) described that:

> A linked ecologies approach emphasises change, internal dynamics and the overlapping and interpenetrating of previously distinct worlds. Rather than focusing on the ways in which different arenas, networks or fields give rise to the emergence of a particular accounting technology – such as value-added accounting or discounted cash flow analysis (Burchell, Clubb, & Hopwood, 1985; Miller, 1991) – attention is focused on the ways in which arenas and fields themselves come to be interlinked and reworked.

With the use of a linked ecologies analysis, Mennicken (2010) showed how multiple relations formed between practices, ideas, and instruments resulted in a change from state-led inspection to market-oriented auditing in post-Soviet Russia. This analysis thus includes a broad set of (heterogeneous) actors, while stressing the relational features of the ecology approach.

The "linked ecologies" approach was developed by Abbott (2005). According to him, the concept of ecology involves three components: actors, locations, and a relation associating the one with the other. He characterized the ecological view as an intermediary view where (Abbott, 2005: 245):

> individuals make their own histories, but – to modify the Marxian dictum – in that making they produce larger structures that in turn render them unable to make those histories under conditions of their own choosing.

Abbott "reconceptualize[s] the social world in terms of linked ecologies, each of which acts as a (flexible) surround for others" (Abbott, 2005: 245), and he developed two concepts for analyzing the links between ecologies: hinges and avatars. Hinges are inter-ecology contacts, or phrased more precisely "Synchronic and diachronic patterns within and between ecologies [that] create possibilities for alliances between actors and locations across the borders of ecologies" (Abbott, 2005: 255). Avatars "are attempts to institutionalize in one ecology a copy or colony of an actor in another" (Abbott, 2005: 245).

Most studies of ecologies put actors and their interactions in focus. This is also how Westney and Piekkari (2020) use the concept for an analysis of the translation of management ideas inside a multinational corporation. They examined the interactions of two sets of translators:

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"those involved in constructing general models that are materialized in texts aimed at a wide audience, and those involved in translating practices into specific organizations" (Westney and Piekkari, 2020: 58). Furthermore, they studied the interaction of various sub-disciplinary communities and the interaction of translators and potential users – what they conceptualize as the audience in their model. Such interaction among actors across locations has implications for how translations evolve (also see Krücken, 2024). These studies provide further avenues to pursue insights in ecologies of translations.

The frame of linked ecologies provides additional venues for analyzing a multitude of actors and locations in relation to one another, and to those in related social spaces. Hinges constitute spaces in between different ecologies where actors and ideas become interlinked. Hinges open venues between social spaces and, in this way, also open up new interplays across actors and ideas. While it can be a physical place or a particular organization or network, it can also be issues or agendas that operate across ecologies (for an example, see Wade, Bush, and Webb, 2020). As Mennicken (2010) noted, these interlinked elements may not necessarily move in unison, but they can constrain, contest as well as compete with one another. Avatars, on the other hand, describe the way that actors themselves can provide a link between ecologies by building a copy or a colony of an actor in another ecology. In translations, we conclude, such a colony may be drawn upon or influence the adoption flow and translations of ideas and transform settings.

These concepts thus capture attempts to further theorize what happens at the intersection of spaces and through the interlinking of various actors, also over time. Both hinges and avatars denote relations that connect translating actors to each other and to particular locations and spaces. For translation researchers, this provides means to continue to explore and develop knowledge on translation processes that move between settings or happen in various places simultaneously, and that involve a multitude of actors not commonly included in translation studies. These may comprise (but are not restricted to) professional groups and actors, policymakers, and specific networks or communities that are built around particular ideas, models or practices. This conceptual framework also opens up for analysis of translations in new types of spaces and linked spaces, such as digital spaces. Furthermore, it opens ways to recognize that actors may take part in translation for various reasons and may be mobilized to do so through their movements and through the process of translation.

Studies of such ecologies of translation actors can also show the impact and influence of individual actors or groups of actors. While the notion of ecologies indicates that individual actors or groups of actors tend not to be able to fully control entire processes of translation – it is always a matter of interplay and embeddedness – we can expect more or less strategic moves from those actors involved. Thus, following the suggested pathways of the inhabited institutions scholars (Hallett and Ventresca, 2006), we can better position translation processes, actors, and ideas, in the space between the macro-level institutional sphere and the micro-level practices and work of local actors. Such studies can contribute to – and nuance – the lively scholarly debates on what role actors and actorhood play (Hwang and Colyvas, 2020) in organizational and institutional change.

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6. Paving the way for future translation studies

Barbara Czarniawska's work on action nets and the reviewed ecological approaches open venues to enrich the examination of interplays of actors and actions beyond given local spaces. Still, those diverse ecological approaches largely put actors – be they strategic or embedded, local or trans-local, bound to limited spaces or linking ecologies – at the center of the analysis. However, returning to the observations from translation studies in the introduction to this paper that ideas often come in bundles or strings, and thus travels and translations of individual ideas may impact on other ideas, we would argue that the concept of ecologies of translations should put more explicit focus also on interplaying ideas and interplaying translations. A number of recent studies have also explicitly shown that circulating ideas are often accompanied by and interplay with related ideas, and analyzed these as ecologies of ideas (Wedlin et al., 2024; Mazza and Strandgaard, 2024; Christensen and Laegreid, 2024; Byrkjeflot and Svejenova, 2024).

Many studies of processes of translation have focused on one idea and followed its circulation. Even if studies have shown that translations of individual ideas do not proceed in a vacuum; rather, translations form in the context and interplay of multiple ideas, actors, and event, this specific interplay is shown primarily in empirical presentations. With ecologies of translation, this interaction of translations and translators can be further theorized. We will conclude by returning to the bundle of theoretical and methodological conceptualizations that we referred to in the opening of this essay: change, actors, ideas, spaces, and fieldwork, and reflect on this bundle from an ecologies of translation perspective.

In terms of fieldwork, an ecology of translations perspective invites us to look around individual ideas, between ideas. An ecology approach with a focus on interlinked and interplaying ideas encourages us to examine the interplay of ideas and their translations in terms of how they struggle, combine, influence, support, or crowd out each other. This can be done in translation spaces where we can expect to find several interplaying translations. Westney and Piekkari (2020) have shown one such important translation space – multinational corporations. Other translation spaces, where the interplay of several translations evolves, are pointed out in studies of circulated management ideas such as consultancy firms (Gill et al. 2020), think tanks (Garsten, 2024), business schools (Engwall and Wedlin, 2019), and international organizations and transnational networks (Djelic and Quack, 2010; Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson, 2006).

Important spaces for such interplaying translations have been shown to be settings in rapid and extensive reformation. Westney's (1987) influential study of the transfer of western organizational patterns to Meiji Japan clearly demonstrated how several ideas were translated in relation both to the new context in which they were adopted and in relation to each other. Höllerer et al. (2020) studied the reforming Austrian public sector and analyzed the "interlinking theorizations" of management concepts and ideas, and argued for the need to explore the "architecture of management knowledge" (Höllerer et al., 2020: 1286). Piekkari, Tietze, and Koskinen (2020: 1314) refer to the "multiplicity of semiotic systems" available to actors engaged in translations and the way these variously shape the ensuing translations. Also, Røvik (2000) focuses on the interrelation between various ideas in translation, as he describes how Norwegian public sector organizations during times of extensive reform took the shape of "multi-standard organizations", where several practices – linked to several adopted ideas – develop simultaneously.

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The approaches of interlinked ecologies and action nets encourage us not to stay in one place with our fieldwork, but to look for encounters of ideas, along their circulation. In this way, studies can provide understandings also of how ideas link translation spaces together as well as ideas and their translation. When designing the fieldwork around idea circulations and their interlinkages, translation ecologies also clearly point to actors as embedded and translated both in relation to spaces and to ideas. In such a way, an ecologies of translation approach can develop our understanding of the role of actors without assuming their roles, interests, and intentions beforehand. Rather, we can take as a starting point that translation processes, as Barbara Czarniawska reminds us, are characterized by embeddedness and ambiguity.

An ecology of translation perspective that focuses on the ecology of ideas also invites us to put more focus on the ideas and their architecture. What does change, and how do combinations of various ideas impact their architecture? This promises to contribute to some very topical questions: How do various kinds of ideas interact and impact on each other and on their travels? For example, how do knowledge-based ideas interact with ideas that lack scientific knowledge? How do the ecologies of ideas of management and organization that come with new technological innovations, digitalization, and autonomous systems translate?

Keywords

Barbara Czarniawska, Ecologies of translation, embedded actors, translation spaces, bundles of ideas

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