

Narrativity: framed as follows

Introduction by David Katan

Narrativity, however we regard it, has long been understood as the way we make sense of the world; and according to many, our ability to not just communicate but to tell stories about and to each other is what makes us human (e.g. Gottschall 2012). Indeed, Fisher (1985) suggests calling us *homo narrans*. However, this storytelling ability, indeed necessity, is not (yet) one which occupies the professional translation market, which is still embedded in a quest for invariance, ‘equivalence’, or at least similarity (Katan 2022). Of course, if we consider old-speak *weltanschauung*, ‘maps/models of the world’, ‘context of situation’ and ‘context of culture’ (in Katan & Taïbi 2021), or in more nuanced – and useful - narrativity terms, such as ‘ontological’, ‘conceptual’, ‘public’ and ‘meta’ narratives, no form of similarity can be taken for granted. Stories, as we shall see, get reframed however we translate. So, this issue focusses on the translator as one charged with the task of duly considering what sort of story to create for the new reader.

Translation Studies is still a young discipline, so theories surrounding narrativity have been imported from other disciplines, such as literature and sociology. We have Mona Baker to thank for introducing us to narrativity as discussed in the social sciences. She then details how translation can be understood as a form of (re)narration that participates in constructing a new model of the world rather than merely being a process of transferring semantic content from one language to another, with her. Yet as Neil Sadler points out in his contribution below, the number of narrative-inspired publications in Translation Studies does not appear to be growing. This issue of *Cultus* is designed to buck this trend. To help in this enterprise we have senior representatives of what Julie Boéri in this issue only half-joking called Mona Baker’s “Narrative School”, Julie Boéri, Sue-Ann Harding and Neil Sadler; narrativity savants such as Theo Hermans and Doug Robinson, and also five articles by researchers whose papers are “narrative-inspired”, and focus on putting narrativity theory into practice. The only person notable for their absence is Mona Baker herself. Given that her name appears as an underlying narrative throughout this issue, perhaps - as we put this issue together - we should change the conceptual narrative and make this a *Festschrift*, marking Mona’s seminal contribution, and anticipate the moment for the proverbial passing of the torch.

To begin, then, at the beginning, we open with a fireside conversation. Three colleagues sit around the fire, remiss and unravel their separate but intertwined journeys in narrativity. **Theo Hermans**, who was already asking 25 years ago, “whose voice comes to us when we read translated discourse?” (1996: 26), has just

published *Translation and History* (2023), which (as the book description tells us) “pay[s] attention to the role of the narrative”¹. Around the fireside, he continues to ask those important questions on translation and narrative. Fielding the answers, filling in many of the gaps and adding their own stories regarding these questions is **Sue Anne Harding** and **Julie Boéri**.

The first question is about ‘renarration’. Hermans’ focus is on reframing, and how classifying and ‘typologies of narrativity’ can help in as Goffman would say “what is *it* that is going on here?” (1974: 9, emphasis in the original). Boéri and Harding then take us back to when they were Baker’s Narrativity School students, and (re)consider the framework, the theory and the narrativity types they engaged with. What emerges is both a continuing stamp of approval for Baker’s approach along with mention of newer extensions, such as Harding’s personal and shared narratives and Boeri’s narratives of location and position as well as those of profession.

Secondly, Hermans questions our understanding of ‘history’. Canonical narratives are discussed, and Hermans singles out the historians themselves for their questionable authority to translate the past for us. Harding picks up on the historians’ “storying the gaps” in history, particularly where this can now give voice to those whose lives have been silenced. This raises questions for translators, and for how, and to what extent they should account for the variety of gaps between texts. Discussion moves on to (the lack of) cross-fertilisation of narrativity with other disciplines. There is a definite underlying feeling of timidity and silo thinking (particularly in universities), but we also have positive examples, such as Boeri’s work with sociologist and interpreter Deborah Giustini, to combine Bourdieusian practice theory with narrativity.

‘Causation’, the next question, takes us to the heart of narrativity, which needs linear actions and reactions, causes and effects to give meaning – or does it? And to what extent does any of this reflect actual reality? Hermans is concerned in particular about the ease with which a story not only simplifies and shapes, but in identifying a cause and an effect, closes any further discussion with a “that’s it, end of story”. Harding suggests vigilancy and a performative challenge, such as “According to who/what criteria” (see Katan & Taibi, 2021), to test the limits of the truth of a particular story. Boéri, on the other hand, proposes her own meta-ethics of causation rather than causality.

The next point is ‘Fictionalisation’ or ‘story telling’, in the sense that any fact narrated will automatically be framed according to the story we are telling – and with translation even more so. But the fireside chat then moves into fictionalisation of translation itself, with stories of and about translators themselves, including an account of Boéri and Harding’s impromptu staged

¹ <https://www.routledge.com/Translation-and-History-A-Textbook/Hermans/p/book/9781138036987>

dramatization of translators narrating stories of translators. Clearly, new career paths are being drawn here.

Hermans' final question is about "Narrative Blind Spots", where any narrative framing necessarily ignores what lies outside the frame. But, as we leave the fireside, we are easily convinced by our three musers that narrativity allows exactly the opposite. Engaging with narrative research, and using the nuanced narratological tools now available, actually means opening up our understanding of translation. As this particular story of the fireside chat comes to a close, we hear Boéri commenting on Neil Sadler's "inspiring critical review", which I will also now do.

Neil Sadler's *Future directions in socio-narrative research in translation* takes us, firstly, back to Mona Baker's conversation with Andrew Chesterman in the very first issue of *Cultus*, which focussed, at least in part, on "translators as active re-narrators". Sadler then shows us how the socio-narrative approach to narration has extended the field. We also learn more about what is and what is not narrativity, as well as 'strong' and 'weak' versions, paralleling the Sapir-Whorf's theories. Both suggest that the language we habitually use either frames the way we narrate the world (strong) or – if used reflectively - can allow us to notice different ways of narrating the world (weak).

Sadler then clarifies how the more nuanced classification of narrativity mentioned around the fireside has sharpened the analysis itself. For example, he mentions Harding's work on public, conceptual and meta-narratives; while Doug Robinson (also in this issue) is mentioned as introducing new concepts, such as "somatic", bodily and affective dimensions of communication that give narrativity its force", as well as others' work on metaphor theory. And certainly, the papers that follow in this issue have benefited from this fine tuning, focussing on conceptual and public narratives, and discussing for example "interactive modes of engagement" and "multimodal metaphors".

As to the future, Sadler points to fledgling new applications such as incorporating Critical Discourse Analysis and corpus-based studies. Lying in the wings is an impressive idea: using narrativity theory to develop translator wisdom. This aspect of narrativity, crucial to any mediation is the ability to accept and hold on to different, often competing narratives. Sadler quotes Marias on this, but the original quote (or at least an earlier version) comes from Scott Fitzgerald, "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function", which I cited (in Katan, 2016: 4) as an argument against Brian Mossop's "invariant" position, which advocates that translators ideally be attuned to similarity rather than to difference across texts, languages or cultures. After reading Sadler, it comes immediately to my mind that this application of narrativity is exactly what community interpreters need to function effectively, as they look, for example, for ethical ways to reconcile the needs of an asylum seeker, and her ontological narrative with those of the state,

which may well be promoting a public narrative of, let's say, "Reduced immigration is a common good".

Sadler then looks to the future development of the theory itself and, as already highlighted, notes the merited deference to Mona Baker. He suggests that now is the time for narrativity to encompass other traditions (as he has himself has done). He outlines three main disciplines, whose narrative input could significantly enhance the present socio-narrative approach: philosophy, historiography and literary theory. He concludes, looking towards the horizon: "It now falls to us as translation scholars, including myself, to go forward and do this work". And it is to a number of these scholars that we now turn.

Douglas Robinson, already mentioned by Sadler for his innovative work on narrativity, turns here to an area favoured by Hermans: the translator's voice. Robinson asks the question: "whose narrative is it?", assuming we accept that the translator is already understood to be a narrator. Using the term 'heteronym' he dives into the multi-faceted hall-of-mirrors world of the translator's narrativity. He begins with an overview of the translator-as-narrator view, taking in 'the implied' translator, reader, author; reader response traditions; Russian formalism and much more. We learn about 'impotence' and how the reader is guided from without to within the narrative. This leads us to the reliability of the narrator/translator. To what extent do they "betray the reader's trust that the translation accurately reproduces the source text"? This clearly becomes a more obvious issue the more the translator 'experiments' or transcreates – as Robinson does.

The heteronyms come to the fore discussing the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa who used dozens of pennames, or rather authorial persona, including those of four translators. Life gets more complicated when we read his "English poems", 70 years after his death, with the paratext telling us that his poems are actually edited and translated by someone else.

Robinson then indulges us with his own transcreation of a Finnish novel by Volter Kilpi which, in keeping with the multi-faceted hall of mirrors, was a) originally (according to the fictional novel) a found eighteenth-century manuscript in English translated by Kilpi himself into Finnish, and b) in reality unfinished on his death. Robinson then considers the types of pretence possible: heteronymizing himself as the English author or editor of the original manuscript, or hiding himself as translator, and so on. To further embed the narrative, Robinson added further pretences, his own 'editor's' introduction and his own Irish scholar's' critical study. And more. What Robinson shows us is how the source narrative may in itself be unreliable, and can and should at all times be questioned by translators.

Matt Holden focusses on personal and public narratives during Italy's "Anni di piombo", in reference to the amount of lead that was shot during the 1970s - in particular by the extreme communist group, the Red Brigades, killing police officers and a key member of the government, Aldo Moro. Holden focusses on the continuing appeal of "post-terrorist narration" and production of books and

films of this dark period in Italy - and the lack of translation into English. Holden's translation, then, of *Compagna luna*, an account of the Moro kidnapping by Barbara Balzerani, a former member of the Red Brigades, is "a small step" to filling this void. In a similar manner to Doug Robinson's heteronomy puzzle, Balzerani writes of herself in both the first and the third person, marking a past and present reflection – also alternating between roman and italic. Just to 'Robinson' matters even more, there were two publications: the first with minimal paratext, while the second edition is prefaced, or reframed, by the author herself including references to positive reviews, and a letter she wrote in response to a particularly cutting critical review.

Holden takes Baker's ontological and collective narratives as his reference for positions regarding the extreme left's armed struggle against the Christian Democrat government of the time. So, the book is a present-day ontological narrative concerning collective narratives of the time, where Balzerani renarrates herself. Holden's task was then to re-re-narrate for a new English-speaking audience. As Holden reveals more of the context or collective narratives of the time and of now, we realise, to reuse the mirror metaphor, that Balzerani is returning to pick up and renarrate "the shards of a broken mirror", meaning in this case, her broken self.

She narrates her adolescence – in the 3rd person - as one of tension and unease, both with her own body and with the body of people around her. Some aspects are universal, some quintessentially Italian. *Il sessantotto* embodies the Italian 1968, in stark contrast to the 1967 *Woodstock* Summer of Love (discussed by Coralina Iliadou also in this issue). This was a time of full-on frenzied bloody political clashes between the extreme left and right, and between students and the police or any other representative of 'the system' – with very little love in between. Holden's point is that Balzerani is writing for a reader, not only acutely aware of the positively-intentioned politicised students' *sessantotto*-framed world that Balzerani found herself in, but for a reader also now willing to hear her cry for help, rather than encompass the public narrative of "Red Brigades are terrorists". In short, the reader is one from the community who shares, or is able to share, her counter narrative.

So where does the translator position him/her self? What are the ethical and practical issues and solutions? One of the cardinal points made by Mona Baker, and repeated in every contribution here, is that the translator is no longer an innocent bystander. As Holden states, any contextualisation "will be marked by my own positionality and interpretation of these events". So, Holden, like Robinson unmask his own pretence, and finds his own beliefs and values coming into play, which impact on the translation decisions – particularly when it came to allusions to one or other of the narratives. This is a perfect example of the translatorial wisdom needed that Sadler mentioned in his critical review: that ability to successfully hold two opposing narratives – and mediate between. Holden shows that he began with an attempt to understand the position from which Balzerani

speaks, framing her narrative as “self-reflection”, fully aware of his own positionality, and how in the ‘weak’ version of narrativity this might affect, and just possibly improve, his reading – and translation.

We now come to two papers devoted to narrativity and videogames. First is **Qipeng Gao**’s contribution, “Louder than words: Videogame Localisation as Narrative (Re)telling”. This contribution focusses on game adaptation and opens up ideas regarding narrativity to well beyond the words to be translated, to the whole game experience in a multimodal context. The first point he makes is that narrativity, however defined is still a fuzzy concept, but is very much (when successful) to do with “a felt feeling”, which depends on the player’s active engagement, and ability to (re)construct the story through a variety of ‘interior’ (the game itself) and ‘exterior’ (the setting) multichannel narrative clues. Unsurprisingly it is ‘coherence’ and ‘clarity’ between these clues that make for good gaming experience. He begins pointing out the “jaw dropping” statistics regarding videogame profits, of which some 50% come from localisation. Yet localisation ‘quality’ (read involvement in the narrativity) has always been an afterthought, even though, as Gao tells us, critical fan blogs have brought about apologies and retranslations from the game manufacturers.

For this contribution Gao has interviewed a group of thirteen, mainly videogame players, developers, narrative designers and videogame localisers to find out the extent that the quality of the narrativity or “game story” rather than plain ludology or “game play” affects enjoyment of the game. Interestingly, for this issue, the title of “narrative designer” is a reality in the game world, but for the moment the job is to integrate the story into the constraints of the game rather than to actually construct the game narrative.

The second videogame contribution, by **Wenqing Peng**, takes us to a specific adaptation or re-narration of the Three Kingdoms period of Chinese history. Once again, following the Robinson heteronomy we have a series of (un)reliable events. The original series of wars over the unification of the kingdoms was around the 2nd century. It was chronicled a century later, then popularised in a novel in the 14th century that has since been adapted a number of times. More recently it become a hugely successful series of Japanese videogame. A further reincarnation is as an English real-time tactics game, where the players become leaders of one of the real historical factions aiming to eliminate the other factions and unite China. The final Robinson twist is that this particular English reincarnation of a medieval Chinese series of wars has now been localised, or rather has been given what Peng calls “a homecoming approach” back into China. This particular homecoming, as Gao discusses in his contribution came with its own issues, given the lack of coherence between the medieval setting and the use of modern Simplified Chinese. Peng, though, takes us through the three modes of engagement in localisation: telling (through the text), showing (through the sounds and the visuals) and interactive (through player engagement). It is this player involvement that is fundamental to the question of narrativity, given the gamer’s freedom to choose

and control the characters they play. First, all the main characters drawn from history had themselves to be repositioned to be made equally attractive to the players. So, there has been a policy of selective appropriation whereby historically chronicled weaknesses and defects have been reduced. Also, given the players' gaming power the players can actually change the chronicled fate of their chosen character – and distort the history as narrated in the novel. Yet, at times, “these deviations ... in fact bring the content of the game closer to the original history”. And changes are also made to the game as a result of player online feedback. Peng echoes Hermans' fireside concerns about the historian's artifice, and, as a result of the videogame potential, questions the historian's authority as the sole arbiters of 'history'. Peng concludes forcefully with: “In most narrated versions of history, we show or tell stories in various ways, but in a video game, we interact with history”.

It is, as Gao pointed out previously through the coherence of the narrative clues that the interactive experience is truly felt. Peng's focus is on the crucial role of 'medium specificity', and gives many examples of how the visual and aural clues, the 'cinematics', work in practice to create that visceral “felt feeling”. What is clear throughout both these contributions is that the narrativity functions through the multimodality – and not (simply) through the telling.

The final two contributions are also multimodal, but focus on film documentaries, and in each case the documentary message aims to counter the prevailing conceptual and public narrative. **Coralia Iliadou** investigates how the *Woodstock* 'Summer of Love' film (far removed from Italy's *Sessantotto* discussed by Holden earlier) was subtitled and received in a Greece that was under a right-wing dictatorship. Iliadou pieces together the various stages of censorship that the film went through, and the general modus operandi of the audiovisual translation industry at the time, using archival material (applications, letters and various other documentation), various copies of the film and interviews with key agents and others. She explains in detail how the regime promoted the public narratives of conservatism, moral education and protection from “harmful influences”. Clearly *Woodstock*, with its own counter narrative of hippy 'free love' was not the obvious film to promote in Greece at that time. The overarching meta narratives too were even more politically untenable and ideologically subversive. The Greek regime was fervently anti-communist, whereas the film, though not pro-communist was equally fervently against US involvement in Vietnam. Iliadou sees censorship, not as a simplistic linear binary (censored / non-censored) system but as a complex productive process that retells a story: “a dynamic form of (re)narration”, which Hermans and fellow musers will be very glad to hear

The film went through a number of Film Examination board evaluations, cuts, screenings and suspensions - and these are carefully chronicled. The suspensions were due to the need to control the immense crowds who wished to see the film as well as the regime's realisation that the degree of censorship was not sufficient to stop the crowd excitement growing.

Coralia Iliadou sees the film documentary as a series of personal ontological narratives, expressed by individual festival goers and by the performers. These run counter not only to mainstream American public narratives but also to the meta or master narratives of anti-communism. She explains how “the translation agents” pre-emptively reframed what they knew would be censored. The first reframing was through addition of an introductory text in Greek, explaining that the entire Woodstock film was a peaceful and non-political festival. Then there was pre-emptive relabelling or rather euphemistic subtitling. For example, references to drug smoking became cigarette smoking, and so on.

Finally, there were many cases of selective appropriation, which meant not subtitling some of the most tendentious anti-Vietnam or other protest songs; and even using dots to show where they had conscientiously deleted inflammatory words. With every screening licence application, the Evaluation board would then demand further cuts. What became clear, however, was that the audience was reinterpreting the self-imposed (and further imposed) censorship in terms of their own censored lives, so that the counter-narrative was clearly visible, also through its ‘told’ absence. This conclusion supports Peng, who earlier had argued that the force of the narrativity does not depend on what we are told, but as a result of our engagement with what we have been shown. In this case, the audience was able to see the festival goers enjoying the free summer of love, sex and drugs, while the soundtrack allowed them to hear the original music and realise that the lyrics had been censored.

The final contribution by **Bushra Kalakh** concerns animated documentaries, or rather ‘animentaries’. Kalakh focusses on, once again, the ‘Robinson pretence’ where events when documented photographically are deemed to be an authentic narration of reality, whereas when animated, the authenticity is deemed as lost. She counters this with her investigation of five political animentaries produced by an Israeli based NGO documenting human rights violations in Palestine. She begins by discussing documentary realism and realism in fiction as well as how reality can be portrayed in animated film, echoing the fireside chat, and Boéri’s comment that “Factual discourse may be fake and fiction may well be true”. As highlighted by Kalakh here, is that factual first-person documentaries like any other narration contribute to the construction of social reality. The camera frames what it sees and excludes the rest. Kalakh, instead sees animentaries as a semiotic translation reframing reality so that it can be seen afresh. This is particularly important when the translator is attempting to create, in this case intralingually transcreate, a story that engages a jaded audience unable to respond to so much reality. She focusses on one of the key underlying threads in this issue, that the language itself (the telling) even when showing the photographed reality misses a semiotic perspective: in this case a visual counter-image (the animation), which shows how the image can be interpreted. She gives a number of examples (both visual and aural). A visual example shows the Israeli soldiers as white-skinned with fixed smiles, whereas the

Palestinians are drawn as dark-skinned and their heads lowered. These are narrativity cues, which in this case highlight the reality of the oppression.

Kalakh continues her analysis of these cues as creating multimodal metaphors, using Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) *Metaphors we live by*. So, she identifies derived metaphors running through the animentary, such as THE PERMIT SYSTEM IS A LOSING GAME. The identifying narrative clues include Palestinians drawn like toys unable to make their way through the maze of paperwork. This cueing of a multimodal metaphor may point to the progress that Sadler was looking for in his discussion on the relationship between narrativity and metaphor. What this metaphor certainly does, if available to the viewers, is to guide them to Gao's "felt feeling" described earlier.

We end this particular story with the conclusion that the translator, whether she be the animator / storyboard designer / localiser, or indeed 'translator', is certainly not an innocent bystander, but is engaging the reader in a story. How far she is prepared to experiment, to transcreate or simply effectively 'do her job', will depend a great deal on that wisdom Sadler referred to. That means first understanding the nuanced toolkit that we heard about as we sat around the fireside overhearing Theo Hermans, Sue-Ann Harding and Julie Boéri.

We might see the development of wisdom, then, as essential in both training translators about the complex pressures they face and in enabling clients and the wider public to better understand what translation can and cannot do.

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