Travelling Languages

Culture, Communication and Translation in a Mobile World

Edited by
John O'Regan, Jane Wilkinson and
Mike Robinson

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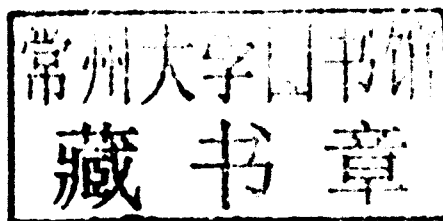Culture, Communication and Translation
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Oliver Radtke is a PhD candidate working on the theme of Chinglish, a rather peculiar yet creative mix of the Chinese and English languages. He was awarded an MA in Modern Chinese Studies from Heidelberg University, Germany, and Shanghai International Studies University, China. His thesis dealt with the sociopolitical relevance of the Chinese blogosphere. He has published three books entitled *Welcome To Presence: Abenteuer Alltag in China* (2007), *Chinglish: Found in Translation* (2007) and *Chinglish: Speaking in Tongues* (2009). He is also the founder-moderator of www.chinglish.de, the online museum for all things Chinglish.

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Jane Wilkinson is Lecturer in German at the University of Leeds, UK. She was Chair of the International Association for Languages and Intercultural Communication (IALIC) between 2008 and 2010. Her research focuses on borders and border crossings in contemporary German-speaking culture, and she is the author of *Performing the Local and the Global: The Theatre Festivals of Lake Constance* (2007) and several articles on cross-border cultural events at the German-Polish border.

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INTRODUCTION

Travelling languages: culture, communication and translation in a mobile world

This issue of *Language and Intercultural Communication* features a selection of the papers presented at the tenth annual conference of the International Association for Languages and Intercultural Communication (IALIC) in association with the Centre for Tourism and Cultural Change at Leeds Metropolitan University in December 2010. The theme of this tenth anniversary conference, chosen to highlight and explore research synergies in the fields of intercultural communication and tourism, was *Travelling Languages: Culture, Communication and Translation in a Mobile World*. Based on the commonly held assumption that we now live in a world that is 'on the move', characterised by growing opportunities for both real and virtual travel and the blurring of boundaries between previously defined places, societies and cultures, the theme is firmly grounded in the interdisciplinary field of 'Mobilities'. 'Mobilities', a term coined and developed by Sociologist John Urry at the turn of the twenty-first century (see, for example, Urry, 1999; 2007), deals with the movement of people, objects, capital, information, ideas and cultures on varying scales, and across a variety of borders, from the local to the national to the global. It includes all forms of travel from forced migration for economic or political reasons, to leisure travel and tourism, to virtual travel via the myriad of electronic channels now available to much of the world's population. Underpinning the choice of theme was a desire to consider the important role of languages and intercultural communication in travel: an area which has, perhaps surprisingly, tended to remain in the background of Mobilities research. When we travel abroad or enter into virtual relationships and transactions with organisations or individuals in other parts of the world, we often encounter new languages and have to develop new means of communication and interaction, whether by learning new languages ourselves or by seeking the assistance of intermediaries. In both cases, some form of translation between languages and cultures is involved and a degree of intercultural competence, a concept much analysed and debated in the pages of this journal, is required. Scholars with an interest in intercultural communication, language education, and linguistic and cultural translation thus have potentially much to contribute to the Mobilities debate, as is clearly demonstrated in the seven contributions to this Special Issue.

The papers which are included in this Special Issue represent eclectic understandings of the dual concepts of mobile language and border crossings, from crossings in 'virtual life' and 'real life', to crossings in literature and translation, and finally to crossings in the 'semioscape' of tourist guides and tourism signs. In the way in which the papers have been arranged in this issue they more or less correspond to one of these dimensions. Thus, the first pair of papers, by Broughton and Dooly respectively, are concerned with border crossings in cyberspace, and with the paper by Penman and Omar form part of a trio which are devoted to borders both virtual and real. In his paper, Lee Broughton explores the culturally productive activities of

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a transnational virtual community of Spaghetti Western fans, who come together on an Internet message board called the *Spaghetti Western Web Board*. The paper presents a detailed examination of the participatory activities of this select group of film fans. As such it aims to demonstrate that this transnational body of Spaghetti Western fans, who cross virtual borders in order to communicate with each other online, are a 'virtual community'. By using theories connected to virtual communities, new technologies, fan cultures and tourism, Broughton seeks to show how the culturally productive activities of this transnational virtual community of Spaghetti Western fans resulted in some of their number crossing real borders and meeting each other face to face on the suitably dust-blown plains of Almeria in Spain, the object of their individual sojourns being the iconic sets and locations of their shared passion – the Spaghetti Western film genre. In his paper Broughton shows how this internationally disparate group of individuals has evolved into a state of 'virtual togetherness' which inspires them to travel across real borders to meet one another in person. Broughton documents how the virtual space which has motivated the fans to become physically 'visible' to one another also has its melancholy obverse, in that the real spaces where they meet, of iconic film set locations and shoots, are suffering their own decline, and steadily becoming invisible to the people who value them most.

Melinda Dooly's paper complements Broughton's by also being focused on intercultural communication in virtual space. Where the focus of Broughton's paper is more generally sociocultural, Dooly's is pedagogic, and concerns a year-long network-based exchange between two groups of student teachers; one group in Catalunya (Spain) and the other group in Illinois (USA). The student teachers were involved in various collaborative activities during their online exchanges, and Dooly's paper looks principally at the student teachers' collaborative designing of teaching sequences and podcasts. She shows how the participants' online interaction was facilitated through diverse communicative modes such as Skype, Moodle, Voicethread and, interestingly, the online 3D virtual environment of *Second Life* (*SL*), where the participants adopt avatars (virtual representations of themselves) in order to interact with one another while undertaking a series of activities. Dooly's paper is a timely revisitation and augmentation of a discussion which was instigated in a previous issue of this journal by Diehl and Prins (2008), who examined intercultural literacy and cultural identity in *SL*. In her paper Dooly answers the call of Diehl and Prins for research into the educational potential of *SL* for intercultural learning and the development of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). Dooly argues that ICC is a key element for success and/or a possible stumbling block in virtual interaction, and so, following Bhabha (1994) she interrogates what ICC in this type of 'third space' may mean. The evolution of virtual communication by means of *SL* and other online forums such as *Facebook*, which can also involve the anthropomorphic 'degendering' and reincarnation of online interactants, implies the development, according to Dooly, of a 'new communication semiotics' which has consequences for the teaching and learning of ICC. In these circumstances Dooly enquires whether language learning and intercultural education should now incorporate within them a 'critical intercultural semiotic awareness' which is more suited to the new media age.

The third paper in the theme of virtual and/or real border crossings concerns neither humans specifically, nor avatars, nor virtual worlds, but inanimate objects. In their paper, Christine Penman and Maktoba Omar examine the role of material goods in the transnational experience, and people's relationship to these goods when

they are in transit between cultures. Of specific interest to Penman and Omar are the kinds of commodities that international students bring from home when living in the UK. Their aim is to provide an emic perspective on cultural flows, in this case of goods as transnational objects. Combining Piercean semiotics with, among others, Bourdieusian and Deleuzean cultural theory, Penman and Omar develop a theme and theoretical construct within which transnational objects appear, and are interrogated, as spatial extensions of the self which connect translocated users, in this case international students studying in the UK, to private conceptions of home. In this circumstance, the authors argue, the goods become part of the students' personal biographies and irreducibly linked to feelings of nostalgia and attachment, and so to the search for 'authenticity' by means of the consumption of objects. The personal investment of individuals in objects as extensions of an imagined self is redolent of Marx's critique of the commodity and of how values of exchange and use come to adhere to it (Marx, 1961 [1887]), and just goes to show that whatever iterations the commodity has gone through, it is still the perceptions of individuals which give it value rather than anything inherent in it. Employing the theoretical frame which they have constructed as an optic, Penman and Omar present, in the second half of their paper, a quantitative analysis of transnational objects such as food, literature, music, toiletries, clothes and fashion, and of the relationship of translocated individuals to them.

Under the second theme in this issue, of crossings in literature and in translation, we have two papers, one by Meenakshi Sharma, and a second by Alison Phipps. In her analysis of literary representations of English-educated Indians in England Sharma examines the experience of language learning and travel, and the myths and illusions which accompany this process. She suggests that under British rule and during the first decades of independence in India, English was taught primarily using literature, and that, as a result, educated Indians travelling to England had clear expectations of the country gleaned from their reading. Moreover, this literary immersion fostered in many Indians a strong sense of identification with an 'imagined' England. Sharma shows how many Indians travelling to England in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s were surprised to find a country very different to that presented in the literature. She focuses specifically on the depiction of this very specific form of 'culture shock' in fiction and autobiographies before concluding with a discussion of the way in which younger generations of Indians identify with England today. Their exposure to constant multimedia images from the English-speaking world coupled with the growth of English as a global lingua franca creates an even greater sense of confidence and familiarity with the language, people and culture than that inspired by literature in earlier decades. This confidence can, however, still be shattered and expectations disappointed when young Indians travel physically rather than virtually to England.

Physical, bodily experiences are the focus of Alison Phipps' contribution on 'Travelling languages? Land, languaging and translation'. Phipps proposes a new understanding of language and translation as grounded in the land and our relationship with it, and thereby signals a departure from the preferred pairing of language and culture, which sees languages as culturally constructed and mediated and somehow apart from the physical world we live in. She suggests that we inhabit languages in a very similar way to landscapes, i.e. when we learn and use languages, we embody them and experience them physically, a process she calls *languaging*. Building on the concept of languaging, Phipps argues that translation can also be

examined as a 'sensory activity' born of our relationship with the world around us which is formed through sight, sound, touch, taste and smell. She uses Brian Friel's play *Translations* and Margaret Elphinstone's novel *A Sparrow's Flight* to analyse the senses and emotions involved in translating and attempting to speak a new language. In both examples the characters find themselves able to communicate their feelings through reference to the land around them and therefore do not share the disorientation of travel presented in Sharma's paper.

Under the third theme in this Special Issue, of crossings in the 'semioscape', we have a first paper by Maria João Cordeiro concerning the language representations employed in Portuguese phrase books and tourist guides, and a second by Oliver Radtke and Xin Yuan on 'Chinglish' in bilingual tourism signs in China. More familiar to many reading this journal will be the term 'linguistic landscape' (cf. Shohamy & Gorter, 2009), for referring to the study of public signage in urban settings, and into which Radtke and Yuan's paper more easily sits. Also, relevant here are the five 'scapes' of Appadurai (1996), ethno-, techno-, finance-, media- and ideo-, to refer to different types of global flow. To this we may add the 'semioscape', to refer to the global flow of signs in the world, and which, in the context of this issue, includes the various 'semio-texts' with which travellers, sojourners and 'border-crossers' in general come into contact, whether in the virtual plane or the real. Into this category the phrase books and tourist guides of Cordeiro's paper readily fit, as do most of the other 'texts' which are documented in the various papers in this issue – as either objects, film sets, online networking sites or as plain written texts. Now is not the time to engage in an extended discussion of the text, or of the semioscape, but it ought to be evident that when we say 'text', we do not confine it to the written mode.

In her paper, Cordeiro, also following Appadurai (1996), employs the term 'languagescape' and addresses what she sees as the lack of research into the linguistic aspects of globalisation. She argues that the success of the ever expanding global travel and tourism industry is largely dependent on removing 'friction' from the interaction between hosts and guests by creating an 'illusion' of a monolingual world through translation, normally into English, of all tourist information, or through the publication of easy-to-use language guides and phrase books for tourists. Using Portuguese guides as a case study, she maintains that these publications at once reassure and motivate the learner by claiming that it will be easy to learn enough of the language 'to get by', but that a little effort will open doors to the 'real' people and culture of the destination. She goes on to demonstrate the way in which such guides 'break' the language, and by extension the culture and people of a destination into easily consumed categories which mask the 'chaos' and complexity of an increasingly fractured multilingual world.

The final paper in this Special Issue 'translocates' the reader to the phenomenon of 'Chinglish', or Chinese–English translations which are to be found on public bilingual signage in the People's Republic of China. After a short review of the existing literature, Radtke and Yuan attempt to establish a typology of Chinglish by means of a corpus-based statistical analysis. The study finds that the majority of so-called 'errors' in Chinglish are due to over-literal translations which are concomitant with a proliferation of grammatical mistakes. In the view of the authors, the disfluency and in some cases nonsensical nature of the Chinglish sign is in large part due to the reliance on machine translation by the local government bodies responsible for public signage. A significant theme in Radtke and Yuan's

paper is the decorative use of English in the commercial realm, where the existence of non-Chinese lettering is used to establish, in their view, an appearance of cosmopolitanism by means of English as a given and perpetually iterative 'international brand'. Radtke and Yuan's paper is a salutary reminder of the interminable commodification and reification of English to the point that the presumed language of global communication is so commodified and so reified that its value is reduced to that of a sign which, outside its brandedness, has been emptied of signification.

This Special Issue concludes with two book reviews: Fred Dervin reviews *Introducing Intercultural Communication*, by Shuang Liu, Zala Volčič and Cindy Gallois (Sage, 2011), and Paolo Nino Valdez reviews *The Language and Intercultural Communication Reader*, edited by Zhu Hua (Routledge, 2011).

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Crossing borders virtual and real: a transnational Internet-based community of Spaghetti Western fans finally meet each other face to face on the wild plains of Almeria, Spain

Lee Broughton

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Since the rise of the Internet, the act of border crossing has become a pursuit that must necessarily be conceptualized in both real and virtual terms. By using theories connected to virtual communities, new technologies, fan cultures and tourism, this paper seeks to show that the culturally productive activities of a transnational virtual community of Spaghetti Western fans resulted in some of their number crossing real borders and meeting each other face-to-face. My findings are in part supported by evidence collected via a participant observation exercise and e-mail interviews.

Com o avanço da Internet, o ato de se cruzar fronteiras tornou-se um projeto que deve necessariamente ser pensado tanto em tempo real quanto virtual. Recorrendo a teorias sobre comunidades virtuais, novas teconologias, fã-clubes e turismo, este trabalho irá mostrar que as atividades culturalmente produtivas da comunidade de fãs de Spaghetti Westerns, estabelecida num ambiente virtual e transnacional, fizeram com que vários de seus participantes cruzassem fronteiras reais e se encontrassem pessoalmente. Essa constatação é em parte baseada em evidência que obtive por intermédio de um exercício de observação participativa e entrevistas por e-mail.

Introduction

The box office success of Sergio Leone's *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964) resulted in a worldwide vogue for Italian Westerns. Leone's films, and several other so-called Spaghetti Westerns, were released theatrically in America and Britain but hundreds of other genre entries failed to find American or British distributors. American and British reviewers tended to dismiss these films as worthless, ersatz Westerns that lacked cultural roots and the genre eventually came to an end in the late 1970s (see Frayling, 1981). In recent years some Spaghetti Westerns have undergone critical re-evaluations, resulting in new acknowledgement of their cinematic worth. But while Leone's films remain popular, much of the rest of the genre enjoys no public profile. However, cult cinema fans throughout the world do still champion the genre's wider

catalogue to this day and a number of these fans now gather together at an Internet message board called the *Spaghetti Western Web Board*.

Having been a fairly regular contributor to the *Spaghetti Western Web Board*, I posted a message on 1 February 2006 explaining my academic interest in fan culture theory and asking whether anybody would object to me gathering evidence and quotes from the board in order to map the fan culture activities that occurred there. I received a number of positive responses and, more importantly, no negative responses. Remaining aware of Seiter's (2000) concerns regarding subjects modifying their behaviour in order to impress their observer, I detected no change of behaviour in any of the web board's members during the course of my ethnographic exercise, which ran for a year. Reference to the identities of the posters quoted, the titles of their messages and the messages' URLs has not been made in order to preserve the posters' anonymity and privacy. Quotes from the message board are simply attributed to the Spaghetti Western Web Board. Those who took part in e-mail interviews were happy to be identified.

This article represents the first detailed examination of the participatory activities of this select group of film fans. As such it seeks in the first instance to prove that this transnational body of Spaghetti Western fans, who cross virtual borders in order to communicate with each other on-line via the *Spaghetti Western Web Board*, are a 'virtual community' (Rheingold, 2000). The test criteria for evidence of virtual community used here is drawn from the work of Denzin (1999), Rheingold (2000) and Bakardjieva (2003). Secondly, this article seeks to map some of the practices of cultural production that are evidenced on the web board. The methodology employed – participant observation and e-mail interviews – is drawn principally from the work of Wakefield (2001) and Bird (2003). Jenkins (1992), Bacon-Smith (1992), Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) and Hills (2002) have all developed theories connected to fan cultures that are primarily focused upon the activities of fans of cult television texts. I use these theories to test the *Spaghetti Western Web Board*'s members' cultural production, thus proving that fan culture activity can be found amongst cult film fans in this instance.

In the course of doing so, I show that a transnational body of Spaghetti Western fans – who first met each other by crossing virtual borders – were finally moved to meet each other face to face at the Spanish locations where their favourite films were shot. The impetus for this in-person meeting was the circulation of a fan-produced film, Mario Marsili's *C'era una Volta il Western* (2003), whose content suggested that many of the iconic buildings and shooting sites associated with Italian Westerns would soon be lost to the ravages of time or industrial redevelopment. Seen by some participants as a last chance to personally view the remains of the genre's filming locations before they disappeared forever, this in-person group meeting necessarily involved the physical crossing of numerous real world borders. This physical crossing of real world borders in turn resulted in the web board members embarking on a still ongoing mission to capture filmic and photographic records of what remains of Almeria's Spaghetti Western filming locations so that they might be digitally preserved for the enjoyment of future generations. Two films shot during the trip to Almeria and web sites subsequently created by members of the *Spaghetti Western Web Board* were used as the primary research resources for the final third of this article.

Virtual borders, virtual community

Most Internet users' on-line activities reflect their off-line interests too. Hence, fans of *The X-Files* (Wakefield, 2001) and *Dr Quinn, Medicine Woman* (Bird, 2003) are drawn to become members of Internet message boards that are devoted to their favourite television shows. An American citizen, John Nudge advises that he created the *Spaghetti Western Web Board* in 1998 after he realized that some members of a Sergio Leone message board needed a space to discuss Italian Westerns that were not directed by Leone (personal communication, 4 March 2007). While acts of self-disclosure have revealed a transnational membership, with individuals posting from the USA, UK, Canada, Denmark, Germany, France, Japan, Turkey, Australia, South Korea and beyond (Spaghetti Western Web Board – hereafter SWWB – 2006), the board members tend to communicate in English. Anybody with an Internet connection can access the *Spaghetti Western Web Board* and, mindful of the emotional hurt and communal disharmony that the offensive personal attacks known as flaming can provoke, the board carries the following welcome message:

> Hola, Amigo! Welcome to the SPAGHETTI WESTERN WEB BOARD. All posts relating to Spaghetti Westerns are welcome, but, please, no cussing, name-calling or eye-gouging... No slanderous or deliberate attacks on other people will be tolerated... the Marshal and his deputies, have the sole discretion with regard to deleting posts they feel are detrimental to the board... Leave your smoking guns at the Marshal's office or you'll be asked to leave town. (SWWB, 2006)

As if taking its cue from Rheingold's pithy subtitle to *The Virtual Community* (*Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*) (2000), the welcome message playfully likens the web board to a lawless, Wild West town on the edge of civilization and this sense of play feeds into some posters' messages when they use language associated with Westerns. One member announced their permanent departure with the words, 'adios, amigos y amigas... this board has been a great blessing to me... but... it is time I mounted up and moseyed on down the trail' (SWWB, 2006).

The inherent sense of playfulness found in the use of this kind of Western-themed lingo – known the world over thanks to the popularity and pervasiveness of Hollywood Westerns – plays an important role in the way that some board members communicate and relate to each other. It effectively represents a common vernacular language whose use can play a part in helping individuals from different cultures, who have crossed virtual borders in order to gather together, communicate with each other and feel at ease. As such, the web board remains remarkably flame free and although the board's members are predominantly male, there is little evidence of the kind of confrontational and argumentative 'male styles' of communication that Bird observed in some fan forums (2003, p. 66).

Like many such fan forums, the web board represents an asynchronous form of communication. This means that whenever a message is posted to the *Spaghetti Western Web Board*, other board members are at liberty to post a response in the form of a reply message within their own time, be it hours, days or weeks later. Kollock and Smith refer to these kinds of message boards as '"pull" media' because their core content attracts interested participants who then have to consciously choose which messages they read (1999, p. 6). Messages on the

Spaghetti Western Web Board usually receive multiple replies, leading to an ongoing state of group-based discursive activity, but the resultant message threads have a finite life: stacked in date order, they are automatically deleted after approximately two months.

Jordan indicates that virtual communities literally coalesce around the 'text [being] fired back and forth' by participants on Internet message boards (1999, p. 57) while Denzin asserts that individuals 'establish their presence . . . [in such virtual communities] . . . through their regular participation in the conversational topics of the group' (1999, p. 114). Repeated participation on a message board results in the individual establishing a virtual 'personality, self and reputation' (Denzin, 1999, p. 114). In December 2006 a tradition of posting Christmas greetings revealed 48 regular *Spaghetti Western Web Board* posters who might collectively be considered a virtual community (SWWB, 2006). Rheingold describes virtual communities as:

> social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on . . . public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace. (2000, p. xx)

Nudge observes that 'many of the [*Spaghetti Western Web Board*] regulars joined early [on], . . . within the first year or so . . . [and] . . . we've become good friends over the years' (personal communication, 4 March 2007). Exercises in self-disclosure have encouraged posters to reveal their birthdays, allowing one archivist member to initiate regular 'birthday greetings' messages (SWWB, 2006). Fernback maintains that 'if communication is the core of community, then [a] community is real whether it exists within the same physical locality or half a world away via . . . telephone wires (1999, p. 213). The *Spaghetti Western Web Board* is a site of much communication, averaging over one thousand postings per month (SWWB, 2006; SWWB, 2007).

Furthermore, actors and directors associated with the Italian Western genre have at times visited the board, sometimes offering first hand testimonies that allow members to add further detail to their personal histories and knowledge of the genre. Nudge observes:

> We've had a number of Spaghetti Western insiders post – Hunt Powers, Robert Woods, Sergio Donati, Aldo Sanbrell, Robert Mark, just to name a few. Dan Van Husen is a regular. One member has struck up a friendship with Nicoletta Machiavel-li . . . [while] . . . another tracked down Charles Southwood, who everyone thought was just a pseudonym for an Italian actor (he's American, and that's his real name). For years we've been trying to find the name of the man who played Guy Calloway in *For a Few Dollars More*. Last year, out of the blue, his son visited to tell us his father is a Spanish stuntman . . . [called] . . . Luis Rodriguez. (personal communication, 4 March 2007)

Most of the professionals that Nudge refers to had their identities confirmed when they were subsequently interviewed for the fanzine *Westerns All'Italiana*.

In seeking evidence that confirms that an on-line gathering is a virtual community, Rheingold adopts and expands upon a schema developed by graduate student Mark Smith (1992), which asserts that 'three kinds of collective goods . . . [act] . . . as