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Crossing borders and boundaries: Translation ecosystems in international business

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ABSTRACT

The field of International Business (IB) has traditionally focused on the crossing of national boundaries. In this Perspective, we argue that organizational, knowledge domain, and language boundaries are equally important for understanding translation activities in cross-border business. We integrate three kinds of translation (organizational translation and knowledge translation from Organization Studies and interlingual translation from Translation Studies) to deepen our understanding of core IB phenomena and pose new research questions. We introduce the framework of a translation ecosystem for integrating the micro perspective of translating agents, the meso perspective of organizational units, and the macro perspective of the larger social and linguistic contexts that influence translation. This framework allows IB scholars to identify important but invisible boundaries in cross-border business. The translation ecosystem requires the kind of multi-level research that has been recognized as crucial for taking the field forward and offers the potential for making contributions both to IB and to translation research beyond the disciplinary boundaries of IB.

1. Introduction

For many International Business (IB) scholars, translation connotes a fairly mechanical process of converting one language into another as faithfully as possible. Such a view overlooks significant developments over the last two and a half decades in both Translation Studies and Organization Studies. Each field has developed much richer concepts of translation that recognize how movement across boundaries, whether linguistic, national, organizational, or knowledge, changes what is being moved. In this Perspective, we argue that the disciplinary fields of Organization Studies and Translation Studies have developed concepts of translation that can be used to address fundamental challenges in working across boundaries and thereby enrich IB scholarship.

Some IB scholars have already begun to draw on these broader concepts of translation, especially those developed in Organization Studies. The movement of organizational systems and practices from headquarters (HQ) to subsidiaries within multinational corporations (MNCs), for example, has recently been studied as *organizational translation* (see for example Gutierrez-Huerter O, Moon, Gold, & Chapple, 2020). This work builds on the subfield of organization studies known as Scandinavian institutionalism, which has used "translation" as a metaphor (Boxenbaum & Pedersen, 2009) to analyze how organizations import management models and practices originating in a different country or industry and how these are reinterpreted in their new context: for example, Danish firms adopting American-style diversity management systems (Boxenbaum, 2006). Other IB scholars have drawn on another literature in Organization Studies, that of management of innovation. This subfield has developed the concept of translation to refer to the challenges of *knowledge sharing* across functional or disciplinary domains, each with its own specialized language and mode of developing and testing knowledge (most notably the work by Carlile, 2004). This concept of translation has been used in recent work on boundary-spanning both within MNCs and with external partners and sources of technology (e.g. Birkinshaw, Ambos, & Bouquet, 2017; Monteiro & Birkinshaw, 2017). IB has been slower to recognize the potential value of developments in the field of Translation Studies (Piekkari, Tietze, & Koskinen, 2020), even though Translation Studies has expanded well beyond purely linguistic or textual analysis focused

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on fidelity to a source text. Instead, this field studies how translations and translators are systemically embedded in their larger contextual and institutional environments and how these affect the choices that translators make in their complex task of conveying meaning across language boundaries.

We believe that a translation approach that builds on the developments in both Organization Studies and Translation Studies provides a useful framing for a number of longstanding issues in IB research, including headquarters-subsidiary relationships, global integration and local responsiveness, boundary-spanning, and the movement of organizational systems and processes across MNC subsidiaries. It also offers new research avenues for IB. This article aims to demonstrate the value of integrating the work on organizational and knowledge translation in Organization Studies with insights into the challenges and processes of interlingual and cultural translation drawn from Translation Studies. Doing so enables IB scholars to identify boundaries that have remained largely invisible but that may be much more important than we realize.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. We illustrate the value of a translation approach in IB by providing a short "mini-case" and interpreting it first from the perspective of IB. We then demonstrate how bringing in the different but potentially complementary perspectives of organizational and functional translation from Organization Studies and interlingual translation from Translation Studies provides a deeper understanding of the challenges involved in the mini-case. We then review how the changes in the organizational architecture of MNCs since the beginning of the 21st century have increased the number and complexity of boundaries in MNCs, turning the MNC into a *translation ecosystem* in which multiple translations are occurring and interacting across organizational, knowledge, and linguistic boundaries. The MNC's translation ecosystem is, in turn, nested in larger external translation ecosystems. This approach has the potential to integrate multiple levels: the micro perspective of translating agents, the meso perspective of the organizational units for which translating is an essential element of their activities, and the macro level of the larger social and linguistic contexts that influence translators and translating processes. Finally, we discuss the methodological implications of using a translation approach.

2. IB and the three approaches to translation: An empirical example

This section starts with a mini-case based on a real-life example of a Nordic MNC rolling out its talent management programme to an R&D unit in China. We first examine the mini-case in terms of issues raised from the IB perspective, and then turn to three different translation approaches: two grounded in Organization Studies and the third taking in Translation Studies. We demonstrate that each approach brings new dimensions to this particular case, and provides IB scholars with additional insights and relevant research questions. We then show that IB, and the MNC in particular, provides a distinctive context for combining insights across the three translation perspectives and developing an integrated translation approach that contributes to translation research across all three fields.

A mini-case on a Nordic MNC.

A service-oriented Nordic engineering MNC was recently ranked by Forbes as one of the 100 most innovative firms in the world. Prior to this global recognition, it had launched a company-wide talent management programme that the corporate headquarters introduced across the network of foreign subsidiaries. The new programme aimed at attracting, identifying, developing, and retaining employees so that they would have the right knowledge, skills, and attitudes for their current and future job roles. This change initiative, advocated by a US-based international management consultancy and orchestrated by the global HR function, was implemented throughout the regional and local organizations that were grouped under the MNC's global matrix structure.

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In line with the Nordic values, the company had adopted an egalitarian and inclusive approach to talent management in terms of treating every employee as talent. This was well aligned with its diversity, equity, and inclusion policy, inviting all employees to take ownership of their own career development. The new talent management system was also rolled out to the global R&D centers that were located in the Americas, Europe and Asia-Pacific. These centers played a significant role in developing and sustaining the firm's competitive advantage. One of the global R&D centers was based in China, a strategically important market for the firm. China currently generates more than 25% of the company's total sales and represents more than 25% of its global workforce.

The Nordic MNC rolled out the new talent management programme in English, the common corporate language, in which high potential staff were expected to be fluent so that they could be sent on rotational assignments to other units for career development purposes. However, in China, the MNC had decided to expand the recruitment base for the company by relaxing the global criterion of English fluency, enabling the routine use of Chinese in internal communications.

2.1. International business approaches to the mini-case

Many IB scholars would first see the mini-case in terms of the classic MNC dilemma of balancing global integration and local responsiveness (Prahalad & Doz, 1987). On the one hand, the new initiative introduces a concept of human resource management (HRM) and an associated set of practices to be aligned across the company, becoming a vehicle for cross-border integration. On the other hand, most IB scholars would acknowledge the case for at least some local responsiveness to the Chinese environment.

More specifically, the mini-case could be viewed as a case of practice *transfer* from corporate HQ to a subsidiary (Hawkins & Walter, 1981; Stopford & Wells, 1972; Zander & Kogut, 1995). The movement of organizational systems and practices across borders in MNCs has long been recognized by IB as an important area for theory and research: as early as 1958, John Dunning published a study of how the "managerial techniques" that U.S. firms introduced into their British subsidiaries were influencing U.K. management (Dunning, 1958). The primary focus for IB has been the outcomes (*what*) of practice transfer – what gets replicated, what gets modified, which modifications occur and why, and which elements of localization contribute to the local effectiveness of the practices (e.g. Festing & Tekieli, 2021; Kostova, 1999; Ouyang, Liu, Chen, Li, & Qin, 2019).

Most of the IB research on cross-border practice transfer in MNCs since the late 1990s acknowledges that practices change as they cross borders, using various terms to describe the processes involved in the changes: localization (e.g. Björkman & Lu, 1999; Pudelko & Harzing, 2008), adaptation (e.g. Ansari, Reinecke, & Spaan, 2014; Jensen & Szulanski, 2004), hybridization (e.g. Abo, 1994; Yahiaoui, 2015), and recontextualization (Brannen, 2004; Brannen, Liker, & Fruin, 1999). What these different approaches have in common is the assumption that changes occur largely because of the conditions imposed by the external cultural and/or institutional environment (for the mini-case, between the home country of the MNC and China). IB scholars look to these contextual factors, often using quantitative methods, to explain what changes occur in the transferred practices.

Another relevant core IB research area is that of the relations between MNC headquarters and its subsidiaries (Brooke & Remmers, 1970), which provide the larger organizational context for the talent management initiative. As we saw in the preceding section, the roles and relationships involved in HQ-subsidiary relationships have been a central area of IB since its earliest years (see reviews by Birkinshaw & Pedersen, 2009; Kostova, Marano, & Tallman, 2016; Meyer, Li, & Schotter, 2020). Many IB researchers would immediately see the talent management programme as an HQ-driven initiative involving complex issues of the relationships, interests, power, and politics. IB scholars have identified a range of possible subsidiary response strategies from

resistance through ceremonial adoption to full integration of the initiative with its HR systems (Ambos, Fuchs, & Zimmermann, 2020; Levy & Reiche, 2018; Schotter & Beamish, 2011). Subsidiary responses become especially challenging when, as in the mini-case, an MNC headquartered in a relatively small home country introduces a change initiative in a subsidiary located in a very large and growing (i.e. strategically important) emerging market (Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2008). One key question would be whether key managers in the Chinese unit would see the programme as serving their subunit's interests in terms of its local competitive challenges and its position in the MNC (Bouquet, Birkinshaw, & Barsoux, 2016). A closely related question is the extent to which the Chinese subunit had a voice in developing the initiative, or whether it was presented to them as a fully-developed programme (Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2008; Ferner et al., 2011; Kostova & Roth, 2002).

Recently, research on HQ-subsidiary relationships has identified the critical importance of the boundary spanners who facilitate communications and interactions across the HQ-subsidiary boundary (see the overview by Schotter, Mudambi, Doz, & Gaur, 2017). In the mini-case, this arena of IB research would focus on who occupied boundary-spanning roles between the HQ and the Chinese subunit before and during the talent management initiative: the identities and capabilities of the boundary spanners, and the extent of their boundary-spanning activities. IB researchers have identified a variety of roles for which boundary spanning is a central activity: local subsidiary managers who have returned from foreign assignments (Roberts & Beamish, 2017), expatriate managers in the subsidiary (Harzing, Pudelko, & Reiche, 2016), and HQ executives who travel frequently to subsidiaries (Birkinshaw et al., 2017). However, as Mäkelä, Barner-Rasmussen, Ehrnrooth, and Koveshnikov (2019) have pointed out, simply because an individual crosses a boundary in their assignments does not necessarily mean that they are effective communicators across that boundary.

Boundary spanning activities are also significant in the third IB topic raised by the mini-case: the internationalization of R&D and global innovation. As a recent review asserts, contemporary MNCs have built geographically distributed networks of R&D centres that enable them to "create, assimilate, integrate, and exploit new knowledge on a global scale" that is, they argue, "the raison d'être for the MNE as an organizational form" (Håkanson, Kappen, & Zander, 2021, p. 110). For most MNCs, China has become a critically important location for R&D, because of the availability of well-educated technical personnel, the growing innovative capacities of the Chinese technology system, and the size of the domestic market (Asakawa & Som, 2008; Gassmann, Beckenbauer, & Friesike, 2012; Haour & von Zedtwitz, 2016). In 2000, there were 200 foreign-affiliated R&D centres in China; by 2015, there were 1500 (Jolly, McKern, & Yip, 2015). Thus, the Nordic MNC is one of many foreign companies with R&D centres in China, and it faces a common problem: the increasing difficulty of attracting and retaining capable local R&D personnel in competition with each other and with increasingly innovative and attractive Chinese companies, who are themselves becoming MNCs and offering global careers to technical employees (Prud'homme & Von Zedtwitz, 2018). From the viewpoint of international R&D studies, the key question would be how effectively the corporate talent management initiative addresses the distinctive recruitment and retention problems faced by the Chinese R&D unit in the intense competition for technical talent in China.

Finally, in addition to these interpretations of the mini-case, a growing number of IB scholars are interested in the implications of language challenges (Karhunen, Kankaanranta, Louhiala-Salminen, & Piekkari, 2018; Tenzer, Terjesen, & Harzing, 2017). For such scholars, the mini-case raises questions about the potential challenge of adopting English as the corporate language in Nordic MNC as a whole and the distinctive commitment to the use of the local language in the Chinese R&D unit. The (in)ability of local key managers and researchers to speak either the home country language of this Nordic MNC or the official corporate language may inhibit knowledge flows between the headquarters and its China operations and between Nordic engineers worldwide and the R&D specialists in China. It may also mean that the corporate talent management initiative, intended to guide high-potential employees into global careers, may need extensive local tailoring to suit not only the particular language environment of the Chinese subunit but also the unique context of a local subsidiary whose expansion and growing strategic importance may create distinctive opportunities for employees to rise locally, without the need for international postings.

2.2. *Building an integrated translation approach*

The translation approach that we advocate in this essay integrates three different but potentially complementary bodies of work on translation. Two are grounded in Organization Studies: organizational translation originating in Scandinavian institutionalism (Czarniawka & Sevón, 1996; Wedlin & Sahlin, 2017), and translating across specialized fields of knowledge in the management of innovation (Carlile, 2004). Each has separately found its way into recent IB research: for example, organizational translation into research on MNC practice transfer (e.g. Gutierrez-Huerter O et al., 2020) and Carlile's model of translating across knowledge boundaries into work on MNC boundary-spanners (e.g. Birkinshaw et al., 2017; Mäkelä et al., 2019). The third is the discipline of Translation Studies, which focuses on interlingual translation and which has yet to be fully recognized as a potential resource by IB scholars.

In the following sections, we briefly explain the approach to translation developed in each of the three areas, and suggest what each would add to the IB reading of the mini-case. We then demonstrate that the three translation approaches are potentially complementary (see also Røvik, 2016; 2022, ,forthcoming), in part because each focuses on a different type of boundary. Organizational translation focuses on inter-organizational and intraorganizational boundaries, as externally generated organizational models and practices cross first the boundary between the organization and its external environment and then move across the organization's hierarchical levels. Knowledge translation focuses on translation across different expert domains, both between external and internal knowledge communities and across functional boundaries within the organization. Translation Studies focuses on interlingual boundaries, both across and within national borders. We build on this complementarity to discuss what an integrated translation approach can bring to IB.

2.2.1. *Translating across organizational boundaries*

Over the last two and a half decades, Organization Studies scholars have developed the framing of *organizational translation* to study how management models (concepts and practices) travel. Originating in the Nordic countries and seen as a hallmark of "Scandinavian institutionalism" (Boxenbaum & Pedersen, 2009; Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996), this approach focuses on the travel of ideas about organization and management across societies. It was both a further development of the work of John Meyer and others on the global diffusion of Western forms of organizing, such as universities, corporations, and public administration (see Strang & Meyer, 1993; Meyer, Boli, Thomas, & Ramirez, 1997; Meyer & Bromley, 2013) and a critique of its framing of the travel of ideas as "diffusion" – a term whose passivity seems to attribute the travel of ideas to the irresistible power of the ideas rather than to human agents (Boxenbaum & Pedersen, 2009; Sahlin-Andersson, 1996). It also drew on Actor-Network theory (the work of Callon and Latour) to substitute the more active "translation" for "diffusion" to describe the process by which ideas and organizational models travel across borders between countries and boundaries between organizations (Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996). The Scandinavian institutionalists drew on the work by Meyer and his colleagues in looking at the macro-level actors – consultants, academics, the business press – who transmit general models of

organization and management and the institutional influences on how those general ideas changed in new institutional contexts. They also looked at how local translators shaped and re-shaped those models in specific local contexts, drawing on the work of March and Olsen (1983; 1989) to examine editing processes as being shaped by institutional "logics of appropriateness."

Organizational translation research does not start from an analysis of the larger context of the receiving organization – such as national culture or institutional logic – and its similarity to (or difference from) the originating context (though when the researcher is translating the work into an academic article, such context often provides the frame for the research account). Instead, it focuses on identifying the *translators* and the *translation processes* by which those translators modify an abstract model or practice to make it both comprehensible and acceptable to local receivers (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008). For example, *recontextualization* is a translation process (built on the work of Callon and Latour) which points out that bringing an idea or model into a local context requires using its local "cultural code" (Rottenburg, 1996). This concept focuses on how a practice moving into a new setting may seem to be the same but is given a different meaning by those participating in its adoption. The concept of recontextualization has also informed some IB work on the localization of transferred practices (e.g. Brannen et al., 1999; Brannen, 2004; Värlander, Hinds, Thomason, Pearce, & Altman, 2016). In the organizational translation approach, it is usually paired with the process of *decontextualization* – the construction of abstract models stripped of their originating context (as with "lean management" that was originally derived from the Toyota production system). A recent IB study using a translation approach to understand the introduction of a new method for CSR accounting in MNC subsidiaries (Gutierrez-Huerter O et al., 2020) drew on a different set of translation processes suggested by Gond and Boxenbaum (2013): *filtering, reframing,* and *bricolage*. These are specific examples of a larger set of translation processes identified by Sahlin-Andersson as *editing* processes, by which elements of the original model are changed or removed to appeal to a specific receiving audience (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996; Sahlin-Andersson & Wedlin, 2008). Finally, the translation process of *materialization* focuses on the process by which an abstract general model is turned into physical artefacts (such as codes or rules posted on office walls or printed onto individual wallet-sized cards), incorporated into training materials or programmes, and finally materialized into physical activities.

Most organizational translation research has centred on translators and translating processes in the receiving organization or context, such as European health systems emulating the very specific model of Johns Hopkins Hospital (Kirkpatrick, Bullinger, Lega, & Dent, 2013), or New Zealand unions introducing a UK model of trade union-supported learning for workers (Cassell & Lee, 2017). In keeping with institutional theory, the approach recognizes that in their efforts to produce a translation that is comprehensible to receivers, translators are constrained by the cultural codes and established practices of the receiving context, but that these are neither unitary nor unchanging, providing translators with some measure of choice. In organizational translation, translators rarely work alone: their interactions with other local translators and with receivers, and sometimes with the "sources" of the original, influence their translations.

An organizational translation approach to the mini-case would focus on identifying the key local translators at various levels of the Chinese unit and the translation processes they use to explain the model and edit it for their local unit in terms of specific practices and activities. It would look at the interactions between the local translators and the HQ-based initiators of the talent management model, both as the model was being formulated and after it was introduced into the Chinese unit. It would ask how those interactions shaped how local translators interpreted and translated the model. Moreover, it would focus on the initiative after it moves across the boundary between HQ and the Chinese R&D unit, and on what happens as it crosses organizational levels within the Chinese unit. It would examine how the model is translated into specific documents and on-line materials (such as training materials and the templates for collecting and encoding information about employees identified as high-potential "talent"). It would emphasize that moving the model into the Chinese subunit is an ongoing process, involving sequential acts of translation as it moves to the front lines.

Scandinavian researchers in this tradition also have an interest in the broader infrastructure of global "management knowledge" (Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002; Wæraas, 2021), which is composed of an array of consultants, academics, and business media that generate and disseminate management models of "best practice." This is highly relevant for the mini-case: the concept of "talent management" originated with McKinsey in the late 1990s and was picked up by practitioners and consultants in the early 21st century (Cappelli & Keller, 2014). Academics were slower to translate it into a focus for further theory and research (Lewis & Heckman, 2006), but they have increasingly added to the flow of translations from practice to abstract model and from models to practices (e.g. Claus, 2019; Schuler, Jackson, & Tarique, 2011; Meyers, van Woerkom, Paauwe, & Dries, 2020). The mini-case would provide an opportunity to explore the role of consultants in bringing the initiative into the Chinese unit, and the extent to which the Nordic MNC's approach to talent management is similar to or differs from the approach that has been taken in Chinese business schools, local companies, and other MNC subsidiaries in China.

2.2.2. Translating across knowledge domain boundaries

The second Organization Studies translation approach comes from Carlile's (2002; 2004) work on the challenges of working across specialized knowledge domains in new product development. Carlile pointed out that each domain of knowledge develops a specialized language, by which he meant not only terminology but also cultural codes: specifically, basic and often unarticulated assumptions about how to generate and validate knowledge (such as the value of experience, what constitutes valid data, or even causality). Carlile argues that routine interactions across domain boundaries lead to and depend upon developing shared knowledge and a common language at the interface, which facilitate knowledge *transfer* across those boundaries.

However, as the novelty and complexity of the task necessitating cross-boundary interactions increase, the capacity of the common language to represent adequately the differences and dependencies across the knowledge domains falls. Knowledge transfer is no longer an adequate description of the process needed for effectively working across the knowledge boundary, because, in Carlile's words, "the current lexicon is no longer sufficient to represent the differences and dependencies" of the knowledge domains (Carlile, 2004, p. 558). What is required is *translation* to expand the shared meanings and interpretations through the activities of boundary spanners, communities of practice, and close interactions on cross-domain teams, a key activity of all of them being translating across knowledge boundaries (Carlile, 2004, p. 558).

The work on boundary spanning in the knowledge management literature focuses on *horizontal* translation across knowledge domains – which adds an interesting dimension to the use of the term "boundary spanners" in research on HQ-subsidiary relations. The use of the term "boundary spanners" in HQ-subsidiary research recognizes, explicitly or implicitly, that the boundary between HQ and a subsidiary is a knowledge boundary as well as a boundary in an organizational hierarchy (implicit in the terms "HQ" and "subsidiary"). A subsidiary has specialized local knowledge, whereas the HQ has specialized strategic knowledge of the MNC system as a whole, and these involve different languages, as Brannen and Doz (2012) have suggested. In addition, in the networked MNC, subsidiaries have specialized mandates for certain activities in which they are the knowledge experts, and confront translation challenges in crossing knowledge domain boundaries with HQ and other subsidiaries (Cantwell & Mudambi, 2005; Meyer, Mudambi, & Narula, 2011).

Schotter (2021) recently pointed out that collaborative

boundary-spanning in projects (the context in which the term "boundary spanners" was developed) may differ from the hierarchical boundary-spanning in HQ-subsidiary relations. He suggested an incompatibility between the responsibilities for control and for knowledge transfer involved in executive HQ roles, observing that effective boundary spanners in HQ rarely resort to invoking hierarchy to resolve tensions and misunderstanding and work instead to develop mutual comprehension and shared interpretations (*translating* in the framing of the translation approach). Explicitly comparing HQ-subsidiary boundary spanners engaged in facilitating coordination and control relationships with those involved in horizontal knowledge sharing is a potentially fruitful area for future IB research.

In the mini-case, this perspective would focus on the challenges of working across the boundary between two expert functions: HR and R&D. Carlile's model suggests that the magnitude of those challenges and the extent of translating required will depend on the complexity and novelty of the initiative. If it is an incremental addition to established HR systems and processes, translation across the two domains will proceed relatively smoothly; if it constitutes a significant departure from current practice, translation will be much more demanding. Researchers using this perspective would be alert to the creation of "boundary objects" to aid translation (Carlile, 2002; 2004): materializations of the new system with which both sides can interact and explore (for example, test versions of the forms to be filled out by high-potential employees).

In international business, crossing organizational and knowledge boundaries is often complicated by the need to cross language boundaries. In the following section, we explore the contributions of Translation Studies to understanding the challenges and processes of moving across languages.

2.2.3. Translating across language boundaries

Translation Studies as an independent discipline, breaking away from comparative literature and applied linguistics alike, dates from two parallel developments in the 1970s. In and around the Netherlands, a group of young scholars began to emphasize the cultural context of translation, the independent relevance of the target text, and the textual manipulations needed for it to fit the receiving local environment and expectations – hence the (contested) label of the Manipulation School (Hermans, 1999). At the same time, German researchers were creating an approach that also focused on the receiving end, emphasizing the necessity of fitting the translation to its purpose, the aim for which it was needed. This *Skopos* (from the Greek word for purpose) School emphasized the functional nature of translation (Nord, 1997). What these two approaches have in common is a break from the dominance of the source text and the idea of fidelity as the guiding principle of translation work. Instead, they emphasize the purposeful re-creation of a new text across a linguistic and cultural divide, into a particular context and for a particular audience. The discipline was institutionalized in the 1980s and 1990s along with this cultural, functional, and target-oriented ideology that was increasingly grounded in the recognition that translation changes the source, and that the choices made by translators shape those changes (*translator agency*).

Translation Studies has provided a useful framing of translator strategies with Venuti's (1995; 2013) distinction between the two contrasting translation strategies of *domestication* (for example, by employing familiar terminology and explications of context, and even relocating the physical settings) and *foreignization* (strategies such as using some foreign words from the original text, and deliberately emphasizing the different and the innovative). The two strategies posit two different ways in which a translation can be made acceptable to receivers: as an extension of what they already know, versus something innovative and new. This means that translation is inherently ideological and "a political act" (Laaksonen & Koskinen, 2020).

Translation Studies reminds IB researchers that interlingual translations will still be required in many locations where the MNC operates, regardless of whether the company has formally adopted English as the official corporate language. The need for such translation is also likely to increase the closer the organizational unit is to the operating front lines. However, the level at which interlingual translation becomes necessary will vary considerably across countries, and China (the site of the mini-case) is a country where local languages are commonly used in MNC operations. It is also a country with a large and well-developed translation industry, supervised by the government, which educates and certifies professional translators in large numbers (Hu, 2020).

This raises several questions from the Translation Studies perspective on the mini-case that IB scholars rarely ask. Are communications from HQ routinely translated, or only selected communications, and if the latter, how are these selections made and by whom? Translation Studies also draws our attention to the question of who is providing these translations and to their "translator competence". Are the translators professional translators or paraprofessional translators who provide informal translations in the course of their managerial or operating roles? How skilled are they at translation, and how do they acquire those skills, especially the paraprofessional translators? And if professional translators are used, do they have repeated engagements with that MNC (or even full-time positions within the MNC) that enable them to develop organization-specific knowledge that contributes to effective organizational and interlingual translation? Is there less variation across translator strategies and processes in China because translator education and certification are centrally supervised and standardized by the government? Do local editing practices that render foreign terminology into locally familiar terminology reduce the potential innovativeness of talent management as a practice introduced in an MNC subunit?

A Translation Studies research team investigating the mini-case would require expertise in Chinese language and culture. The researchers would seek to identify and collect a paper trail of documents, or recordings of oral translations, from source to target. The original source in this case is the consultant-originated practice, but it might well be that the translation process would start with the documentation sent by the headquarters. Depending on how systematically the translation practices were organized (another relevant object of analysis in itself), this paper trail would likely also include previous translations on the same topic, glossaries, terminology, and other relevant material used in the process of translating. In contemporary translation processes, these are often digitalized, and the role of translation technology would also be of interest, and the potential use of computer-aided translation and machine translation solutions would be investigated. As the English-Chinese language pair is among the most mature in automated translation technology, some of these tools are likely to be used not only by professional translators but also by other employees working across this linguistic boundary. A rising research interest in Translation Studies is collaboration, both among humans and between humans and non-humans, tools and artefacts, and the ways in which translation processes are situated in a network of relations (Risku & Rogl, 2020).

2.3. Identifying the synergies across the literatures

We argue that each of the three translation perspectives provides useful insights for IB research although they differ in significant ways (summarized in Table 1). The differences across them can become complementarities in the context of the multiple complex boundaries of the MNC.

As the table shows, the three perspectives address different kinds of boundaries, all three of which are present in MNCs. Scandinavian institutionalism focuses on the boundary between the organization and the external environment, the source of "imported" management models and practices, and the boundaries between the levels of the organization as the imported model moves closer to the front lines where models are incorporated into specific activities. The management of innovation focuses on the horizontal boundaries between specialized domains of knowledge. Translation Studies is concerned with interlingual boundaries, recognizing that these are also cultural. What IB provides is both a

Table 1
Comparing IB with three translation approaches.

Comparative dimension	*International Business*	*Organization Studies*		*Translation Studies*
		Scandinavian institutionalism	*Innovation and R&D studies*	
Core focus	Cross-border business activities and how they are organized	Movement and transformation of management ideas and organizational practices from one institutional context to another	Developing innovations across specialized knowledge domains	Re-verbalization of the meaning in another language and inevitable shifts in meaning between source and target texts
Type of boundary	National and MNC boundaries	Institutional and organizational boundaries	Knowledge boundaries between domains of expertise	Interlingual and cultural boundaries
Type of translation	Beginning to draw on Organizations Studies for translation approaches	Organizational translation – management models & practices	Knowledge translation – communicating across and combining fields of expertise	Interlingual translation
Level of analysis	The firm on the meso level	Institutional fields on the macro level; institutional work and micro-processes of translation on the micro level	New product development project groups on the micro level	Minutiae of texts and meanings on the micro level; agency of the translating actors
Dominant explanations of changes in what moves across boundaries	Cultural and institutional distance between home and host country	Institutional frames/filters; active agency of local translators	Novelty and complexity at the knowledge boundary	Purpose (*Skopos*) of the translation; intervening cultural and contextual factors

focus on yet another kind of boundary – national borders – that has yet to play a significant role in either Organization Studies approach – and a context (the MNC) in which all these types of boundaries and translations are relevant, frequent, and interacting.

The field of Translation Studies has developed an approach to understanding boundaries and translation that is highly relevant to IB. A boundary delimits two spaces (in/out, us/them, familiar/foreign). Boundary work can be seen to take place in a liminal space, between entities that are separated by difference. Conroy, Collings, & Clancy (2019, p. 519), for example, discuss how managers in MNC subsidiaries "create, maintain, and develop social spaces of engagement with key decision makers" as they try to understand and influence HQ decision-makers. Such social spaces can be seen as translation spaces: i.e. "a space where translation needs to happen for mutual comprehensibility and where multilingual repertoires meet and mix" (Cronin, 2006, p. 68). Translation activities highlight the existence of a boundary to be spanned, which renders the need for translation visible.

Whereas IB has tended to focus on HQ boundary spanners, a consistent theme of the organizational translation literature has been that most translation work is carried out by local translators at each level of the organization. This body of work highlights the choices and constraints translators confront in producing translations that are accessible and acceptable both to local receivers and to the initiators/commissioners of the translation. As a conceptual framework, the translation approach provides important insights into the range of translator strategies adopted by local translators and inquires into why they are adopted. Strategies for comprehensibility range from domestication/foreignization to materializations of the translation (text formats, presentations, visualizations, demonstrations).

The translation approach also highlights the significant challenges of translating across the hierarchical levels of an organization. The translation processes required for attempts to learn across the organizational hierarchy and to cascade down directives, requests, and other communications within the MNC are complex and extensive. Early organizational translation scholars focused on the process of decontextualization as translations travel up an organization, losing contextual information and being framed in increasingly abstract terminology. Recontextualization was used to refer to translations as they move down, requiring increasing levels of interpretation until they are translated into activities on the front lines (e.g. Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996). Later work has elaborated on the specific translation processes and strategies for decontextualization and recontextualization, and have called for more research into translating norms and processes (e.g. Wedlin & Sahlin, 2017). More recent organizational translation work has also highlighted the various forms – *materializations* – that translations take, from the ubiquitous PowerPoint decks that travel around a company to the reduction of complex organizational concepts and "strategic intents" to large numbers of measurable "metrics" that HQ requires its subunits to prepare and submit upwards on a regular basis.

However, many of the translators and their translations can be challenging for researchers to identify in the MNC without extensive fieldwork. In this context, Translation Studies refer to the concept of *translator invisibility*: Venuti (1986, p. 2) observed that "the more fluent the translation, the more invisible the translator". He asserted that those receiving a translation often look for "immediate intelligibility and the appearance of factuality" (Venuti, 1986, p. 5) but fail to recognize the translator's role in shaping what is reaching the receiver – and what has been left out. The complexity of translation and the "invisibility" of local translators and local translations may well be important in explaining the frequently observed paradox that MNC HQs today have more information about and communications with their geographically dispersed subunits than at any time in their history, and yet, senior executives frequently misjudge the effects of their communications, actions, and initiatives on those subunits.

Translation Studies reminds IB researchers that interlingual translations will still be required for organizational and knowledge translation in many locations where the MNC operates, regardless of whether the company has formally adopted English as the official corporate language. That need also increases, as Carlile's work indicates, as the novelty and complexity of the tasks increases. Any new initiative will require more interlingual translation than routine communication, and the amount of translation will vary across countries. Translation Studies also, as we have pointed out, draws our attention to the question of who is providing these translations (professionals or paraprofessional, informal translators) and to their "translator competence" (Røvik, 2016; 2022, forthcoming). Arguably, subunits vary considerably in the number and skills of the people available for translating roles. However, IB has paid remarkably little attention to how translators in MNCs increase their translation competence through experience and through working with more experienced translators.

The challenges of translation may be opaque to the HQ initiators who roll out corporate programmes. By investigating what, if anything, gets fed back to the initiators of translations in MNCs and how these initiators respond, the translation approach could complement IB's established interest in reverse transfers of innovation (largely in terms of technological innovation). Furthermore, local translator initiatives across the MNC are part of the equation, too. They matter not just in terms of whether local modifications are accepted but also whether they are even noticed by the initiators, and if so, whether they affect HQ translation strategies.

The ubiquity of translation processes, both organizational and interlingual, in MNCs raises the question of how these processes develop and change within an MNC over time, as individuals and subunits engage in repeated translating activities. One way of approaching this

has been suggested by organizational translation scholars – the translation ecosystem (Wedlin & Sahlin, 2017) – to which we turn next.

3. An integrated translation approach: Translation ecosystems

Crossing national borders is the defining feature of the IB field. IB scholars, especially those studying MNCs, must also deal with the complications of interactions between borders and other kinds of boundaries, both within the MNC and, in many cases, in external business networks. Within the MNC, four types of boundaries – national, organizational, knowledge domain, and interlingual – are present, and translation activities of various kinds are occurring simultaneously and interacting in ways that have yet to be explored. The ubiquity of translation in MNCs raises the question of how translating processes develop and change over time, as individuals and subunits engage in repeated translating activities. One way of approaching, translation ecology, has been suggested by Wedlin and Sahlin (2017). Translation ecology recognizes that any specific translation process is influenced by previous translations and by other translating activities that are occurring simultaneously elsewhere in the same social system (an organization, an industry, or a country).

From this perspective, the MNC can be seen as a *translation ecosystem.* The concept is drawn from biology, where the term "ecosystem" refers to a bounded system (a physical space) populated by different species connected by complex processes of resource exchange and conversion. "Ecosystem" refers to the empirical phenomenon and the term "ecology" to the theoretical approach to the phenomenon. Several aspects of this concept make it a stimulating metaphor for advancing our understanding of translation in IB, as it has in other subject areas such as strategy (e.g. Jacobides, Cennamo, & Gawer, 2018). Ecosystem analysis focuses on how resources are changed (converted or "translated") in different ways by different species/actors in an ecosystem. Whereas social network analyses focus on links between the nodes of a network system, the different actors in an ecosystem may not interact directly, even though they are drawing on (and translating) the same resource. Ecosystems are *nested*: the shallow end of a pond, for example, can be analyzed as an ecosystem, but it is also an interdependent part of progressively larger freshwater ecosystems (the pond, the regional watershed, etc.) and overlapping diverse ecosystems (such as the grasslands that surround it).

In the following sections, we first explore how the MNC can usefully be studied as a translation ecosystem, and then how locating the MNC in larger translation ecosystems sheds light on a number of key IB issues.

3.1. The MNC as a translation ecosystem: borders and boundaries

In MNCs, national borders and organizational boundaries coincided until well into the 1990s. The country subsidiary was the basic building block of MNC organizational architecture (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989; Birkinshaw, 1996; Stopford & Wells, 1972). Some MNCs had a geographic structure, in which a single national subsidiary in a host country covered the range of products and functions in that location. MNCs with a global business division structure, on the other hand, might have several subsidiaries in a host country, one for each major business, each responsible for the local value chain, reporting to the global business division headquarters (HQ), which in turn reports to corporate HQ. In the late 1980s, when IB research began to embrace the model of the MNC as a differentiated network, the principal intra-organizational boundaries across which the activities they studied were conducted were simultaneously a subsidiary boundary and a national border. The networks linking country subsidiaries with each other and with "headquarters" (corporate or divisional) became the primary focus of the growing number of studies of MNCs as transnational networks (e.g. Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989; Gupta & Govindarajan, 1994).

In most contemporary MNCs, however, changes in organizational architecture in the last two and a half decades have made the relationship between national borders and MNC organizational boundaries both much more varied across companies and more complex within each MNC. The change most widely studied by IB scholars has been the outsourcing of various activities in the value chain, especially in manufacturing MNCs, in what Peter Buckley (2009, 2011) has called the "global factory". Value chains have been divided into increasingly focused and specialized sets of activities – "fine-slicing" (Buckley & Strange, 2015) – and contracted to external suppliers operating in advantaged locations. This has created increasingly numerous and complex interactions – and translating activities – across the boundary of the MNC. This external fine-slicing has been accompanied by a parallel internal fine-slicing of activities into increasingly specialized subunits. The integrated country subsidiaries that were the organizational "nodes" in the differentiated network MNC of the late 1980s and early 1990s were being dismantled by the early years of the 21st century (Birkinshaw, 2001). In the subsequent decade, they were sliced into multiple smaller subunits in each country, focused on a single function (sales, production, R&D, even support functions such as IT or finance), often in a single business or product line (Mees-Buss, Welch, & Westney, 2019). In many manufacturing firms, a "front/back" structure separated local market-facing activities (marketing, sales, and distribution) from the "back end" of technology development and operations. Managers of these different subunits, though located in the same country, engaged with different sets of external partners and suppliers and reported to different upper-level executives. They routinely engaged in working across borders, often across linguistic boundaries, and always across organizational boundaries.

In addition, a growing number of corporate activities have expanded their reach into the various subunits of the MNC (Strikwerda, 2014). To give one example, P&G (the global consumer products company) lists on its "Executive Team" website corporate officers for its global businesses, five regional geographies, and for R&D. In addition, it includes a corporate officer for each of the following: Sustainability, Analytics & Insights, Product Supply, Communications (responsible for "every aspect of P&G's ongoing IT and Digital transformation"), Equality & Inclusion (in addition to the HR executive), and Global Business Services, which "operates and supports the infrastructure, operations, systems, and shared services that run P&G" (P&G, 2022). These corporate activities are geographically distributed, and often have employees physically located within the operating units but with either a shared reporting line to a local manager and to the corporate function, or only to the latter. In the words of a recent study, "a range of international structures appear to have overtaken the national subsidiary from above" (Edwards et al., 2022, p. 205). They have also transformed "HQ" into a more complex and geographically distributed set of specialized activities (Nell, Kappen, & Laamanen, 2017). Each of these corporate functions is an expert knowledge domain with a specialized language and models, engaged in ongoing translation activities as it interacts with various operating units.

Organizational translation – in terms of moving new models and practices into geographically distributed subunits – has long been an important activity in MNCs, and has become increasingly so in the 21st century. MNCs have responded in recent years to volatile and complex international environments by changing their strategies, organizational architectures, systems, and processes, and engaging in multiple initiatives across the complex, dynamic, and interactive boundaries involved in cross-border business. Moving these initiatives into the geographically distributed network of focused subunits involves not only organizational translation but often simultaneously translation across language and knowledge domain boundaries. We know very little about how these various initiatives are related, either at the initiating corporate level or within the various receiving subunits, or how MNCs foster what Røvik (2016, 2022, forthcoming) has called "translation competences" at these levels. Although the IB field has increasingly recognized that "history matters", IB researchers have tended to analyze MNC change initiatives independent of past initiatives. However, both

organization theory and managerial experience attest to the power of the legacy of previous change initiatives on how new initiatives are shaped and received. Viewing the MNC as a translation ecosystem brings these issues into sharp focus, and opens up new avenues for IB research.

3.2. MNCs in translation ecosystems: the external context

An MNC is also nested within other translation ecosystems that affect the MNC's translation processes. One is the larger global translation ecosystem engaged in identifying "best practice" and translating it into general management models – an ecosystem that includes global consultancies, business schools, other MNCs, the business media, and professional associations (Engwall, Kipping, & Üsdiken, 2016; Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002). Each local subunit is in turn nested within the local translation ecosystems of organizational translators in other companies and the interlingual translations and translators. How an MNC's translation processes influence – and are influenced by – these varied related ecosystems is an area of research where IB could make a significant contribution, not only to longstanding IB research areas but also to Organization Studies and Translation Studies, where translation ecology has yet to be empirically developed.

Translation ecosystems are differentiated by level (global, regional, national) and by translation domain (the CSR translation ecosystems differ from the accounting ecosystems, for example). The mini-case of the R&D unit in China presented above provides a useful example, depicted in Fig. 1.

The Nordic MNC's internal translation ecosystem involves primarily the HRM/Talent Management unit at both the corporate and local levels and the R&D organization. These two knowledge domains interact in translating the organizational practices associated with the talent management initiative into the Chinese R&D unit. The Nordic MNC is itself nested within the global HRM/Talent Management translation ecosystem, which developed the concept of talent management, and from which the external consultants involved in launching the Nordic MNC's initiative were drawn. However, as Fig. 1 shows, there are also external Chinese HRM/Talent Management ecosystems, one composed of local companies and one composed by other Western MNCs, which influence how the models are translated, in both linguistic and organizational terms. The R&D unit, in turn, is embedded in an R&D translation ecosystem populated by other R&D organizations in China, both local companies and other Western MNCs. The extent to which the MNC's local and corporate translators are aware of and influenced by translators and translations in these ecosystems is a promising area for research.

4. Methodological implications

All three translation approaches recognize that translation is far from being a technical process grounded in stable equivalence of meaning across boundaries. Translation changes what moves across those boundaries, whether they are organizational, knowledge domain, or linguistic boundaries. Seeing the MNC as a translation ecosystem recognizes that bringing a management model, an innovation, a practice, or a change initiative into an MNC and moving it across the subunits involves all three types of boundaries simultaneously, and inevitably, the different kinds of translating processes will interact. As yet, however, we have almost no understanding of *how* these translation processes interact in an MNC ecosystem. Undertaking empirical research on the complex translation ecosystem of an MNC will require that IB's research paradigms are reorintated to better address the processual, spatial, and temporal dimensions of translation. In the following section, we briefly explore some of these implications.

4.1. From the meso level to the macro and micro levels of analysis

The case study, which is the dominant research strategy in IB, remains useful for developing the translation ecosystem approach because it incorporates, by definition, multiple layers of context (Welch, Piekkari, Plakoyiannaki, & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2011). Inspired by the extended case method in anthropology and sociology (Burawoy, 1998;

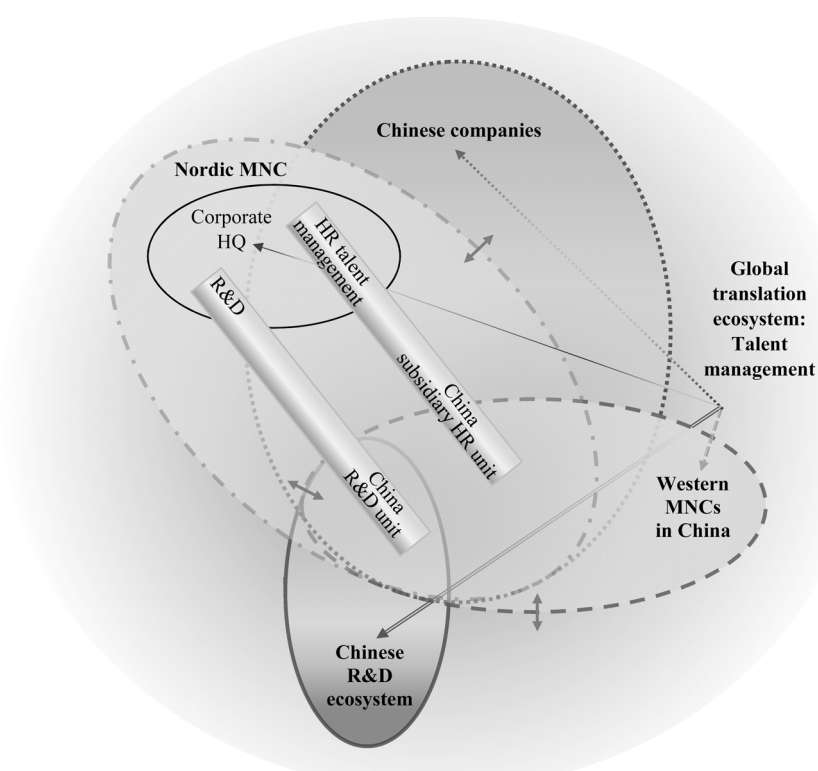

Fig. 1. Translation Ecosystems.

2009; Welch, Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, Piekkari, & Plakoyiannaki, 2022), we argue that the translation ecosystem takes a specific translation activity (such as introducing a new talent management programme into the Chinese R&D subunit) as its point of departure, and then empirically defines the boundaries of the case through what Ragin (1992) calls "casing." Building on Burawoy's (1998) approach, Welch et al., (2022, p. 16) argue that in case studies "theorizing requires 'extending out' from immediate field observations to the general, from the micro site to macro forces, and from the present to the past". These broader, macro-level forces at the national, regional, and global levels of analysis are mutually constitutive of each other, and have an impact on the immediate social interactions underpinning translation activities. In ecosystems, translations build on earlier translations, both external and internal, involving path dependency and historical influences of past translator decisions on contemporary ones.

However, as an ethnographic method, the extended case method has not been much used in IB (Nguyen & Tull, 2022), perhaps because methodological innovations developed in one disciplinary field are often confronted with "translational distance" before they are considered applicable and legitimate in another. Another reason may be that making the analytical move across micro and macro is challenging. Macro-level forces such as trade relationships between countries, diffusion of new management fashions, or changes in geopolitics or financial markets are easily overlooked or taken for granted both by researchers and participants in the field (Burawoy, 1998; Welch et al., 2022). Participants may experience macro forces locally without necessarily being aware of them or able to articulate their effects in a research interview. As a result, scholars tend to assume that the social structures and relations they are observing are more stable and enduring than is the case (Welch et al., 2022, p. 15).

4.2. From heavy reliance on interviews to multiple data sources

In a translation ecosystem, a change of language is a tangible marker of a boundary. Since crossing language boundaries often leaves a paper trail (which is increasingly "virtual" – in digital archives), IB researchers can expand on the use of documents and web-based materials such as on-line training sessions, for example. Textual analysis can identify elements tailored for local needs and negotiations inscribed in these texts. A translation ecosystem approach can therefore encourage IB researchers to reduce their heavy reliance on interviews as the main data source (Piekkari, Welch, & Paavilainen, 2009). By studying the nitty gritty of the everyday work on the micro level through ethnographic methods (Koskinen, 2020), IB researchers could analyze how small decisions grow into policies and practices, and what a large amount of translation work is needed to implement a change.

When using interviews, IB researchers could include retrospective questions about previous translation initiatives or knowledge of similar initiatives in other companies to capture the historical and temporal context of translation processes. Research participants could also be asked about the language resources devoted to the translation initiative under study, the role of translators, and the availability of supporting materials in the corporate language (usually English) as well as local languages. When the data show that a particular translation strategy is in use, interviewees could be invited to comment on the actual interlingual translations on the basis of a fragment of text, PowerPoint slide, or other such textual artefacts. It would also be interesting to ask whether the allocation of language and translation resources varies between locations within the MNC. For example, would the Nordic MNC in our mini-case also relax the corporate language requirements for English language fluency for its Spanish-speaking or French-speaking countries? Probably not, as these markets were not regarded as strategically important as China. The allocation of critical resources raises questions about the internal hierarchy and status within the MNC from the viewpoint of corporate management's future expectations.

Translated texts could also be studied as boundary objects, allowing for "different groups to work together" (Star, 2010, p. 602). As a boundary object, translations create positive or negative emotional bonds towards both the content at hand as well as the communication partners in question. They can be analyzed "as a repository of documented information on how the intersection of social worlds (Star & Griesemer, 1989) has been constructed and negotiated in a particular boundary crossing event" (Piekkari et al., 2020, p. 1325).

4.3. From solitary to collaborative and linguistically reflexive research

The design and execution of a study framed as a translation ecosystem may be more achievable for a research team rather than a sole researcher. The team members need to have competence in a wide range of data gathering and analysis techniques combined with requisite language and translation competence. Undertaking cross-language research for generating novel findings also calls for reflexive skills on the part of the researchers. Reflexivity is based on awareness of "what we know and how we know it, by revealing some of the assumptions on which knowledge is based" (Kelemen & Rumens, 2008, p. 190). Translation requires such reflexivity about how and why practices and knowledge change when crossing language boundaries.

Based on their own experiences within a bilingual (Finnish, English) research team with asymmetrical language relationships, Thomas, Tienari, Davies, and Meriläinen (2009, p. 321) advocate "a form of radical reflexivity". It refers to awareness of how language asymmetries inform the relative constellation of researchers and consequently also the very generation of knowledge itself, because English tends to be attributed - unconsciously - as the language of knowledge. In a "dialogical space… the members of a research team can explore theoretical assumptions, power relations, and identity work within the research collaboration" (Thomas et al., 2009, pp. 321-322; Horn et al., 2020, pp. 224-229) establish the term "linguistic reflexivity" which enables researchers to question received vocabularies and analyze data differently as a reminder to remain open to emergent meanings. They also add that "translatorial reflexivity" may be a way forward to better understand how the role of translation shapes the outcomes of research (Horn et al., 2020, p. 229).

5. Discussion and conclusions

In this Perspective, we have argued that the MNC offers an ideal setting for integrating the three perspectives on translation. A translation approach allows us to see the MNC – the key object of much of the IB research – in a different light. It also invites us to rethink reflexively the ways in which we study core IB topics and questions. Despite the many changes in the MNC architecture during the past two decades that have transformed the internal and external organizational boundaries and turned national country subsidiaries into specialized subunits, IB scholarship has clung to the traditional vocabulary such as "subsidiary" (Edwards et al., 2022). In other words, we have domesticated the organizational transformation of the MNC by translating the changes into familiar language such as HQ-subsidiary relationships.

Ecosystems are in a constant state of emergence and change, and the same is true of translation ecosystems. Management styles, organizational structures, recruitment policies, and new generations of the workforce, among other things, constantly reshape – translate anew – the ecosystem under study. Researchers therefore need to be alert to the temporality and ephemerality of what they observe, both looking backward into historical developments and remaining alert for weak signals that may indicate radical retranslations in the making. One global megatrend that is already affecting organizations and organizing is digitalization and the increasing role of artificial intelligence in previously human-led processes. Interlingual Translation Studies has been one of the first areas to develop functioning machine translation solutions based on AI, and the discipline has already witnessed a radical reorganization of practices. As organizational translation is now

increasingly encountering similar phenomena, multidisciplinary approaches will be useful in understanding the new roles for humans in collaboration with learning machines in the translation ecosystems of today and tomorrow.

In this essay, we have argued for the translation ecosystem as a metaphor for understanding IB phenomena more holistically. Like a biological ecosystem, the MNC is connected to numerous ecosystems through its locally embedded units, but the MNC itself can also be conceptualized as a translation ecosystem. It is composed of many varied translators and translation activities, which draw on (and react to) past and current translations and translating activities. Theoretically, we have made the case that the concept of the translation ecosystem enables a more holistic understanding of how management models and organizational practices move across borders, uncovering the multi-level nature of translation processes taking place in the MNC across different "webs of meaning". Weick (1989, p. 529) has argued that metaphors are among "the few tools to create compact descriptions of complex phenomena". Boxenbaum & Rouleau (2011, p. 290) add that metaphors "make it possible to creatively combine multiple perspectives and to envision entirely new conceptual landscapes." Metaphors are particularly useful in early stages of theorizing because they provide a provisional way of seeing organizational life – they signal and open up new research streams (Cornelissen, 2005). The translation approach provides IB with just such a stimulus for theorizing.

However, Translation Studies reminds us that in IB translation is much more than a metaphor. Working across boundaries involves linguistic translation, both intralingual (when communications cross boundaries of expertise and interest) and interlingual. Translation Studies expands our understanding of the set of actors, activities, and outcomes that underlies the organizational translation metaphor. As we have shown in this Perspective, integrating the insights of these two fields into IB theory and research can provide creative directions for IB research.

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