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We have never been un(der)developed: Translation and the biosemiotic foundation of being in the Global South

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1. Introduction

In his chapter on sentience, Terrence Deacon (2013, 498–99) quotes a scene from a science-fiction book by Terry Bisson in which two aliens are investigating humans after picking up a radio broadcast from earth. In their discussion about the human beings that they have discovered, they have the following dialogue:

> *"They're meat all the way through."*
> *"No brain?"*
> *"Oh, there is a brain all right. It's just that the brain is made out of meat!"*
> *"So … what does the thinking?"*
> *"You're not understanding, are you? The brain does the thinking, the meat."*
> *"Thinking meat! You're asking me to believe in thinking meat!"*
> *"Yes, thinking meat! Conscious meat! Loving meat. Dreaming meat. The meat is the whole deal! Are you getting the picture?*
> *"Omigod. You're serious then. They're made out of meat"*

In his introduction to an edited volume on postcolonialism, Henry Schwarz (2005, 5) deals with the history of colonization on our planet and then closes his overview of history and scholarship with the following disclaimer:

> *One must be cautious however, as are the exemplary scholars named above, in invoking such seemingly ancient antagonisms lest we fall back into naturalistic excuses such as 'human nature' for explaining violence against others. As in all responsible scholarship, one must vigilantly contextualize and historicize the sources of conflict so that the world history does not appear as one long succession of colonizing regimes*

To my mind, these two quotes represent one of the major problems facing current scholarship on the problem of what it means to be human. The first quote considers the human meat and finds it hard to believe that this meat is able to think. The second quotes considers the human spirit and finds it hard to believe that this is the spirt of meat. In other words, the two quotes represent two sides of the Cartesian schism.

The scholarly relevance of the first quote is a growing movement I detect in biology, and in biosemiotics as a particular effort in this direction, to bridge the Cartesian schism[1] between body and mind by providing an explanation of how it came to be that "meat can think" (Barbieri 2007a, 2007b, 2009; Favareau 2007; Henning and Scarfe 2013; Hoffmeyer 2003, 2008; Hoffmeyer and Emmeche 1991; Kauffman 1995, 2000, 2008, 2013; Kull 2007; Kull and Torop 2003). The effects of the Cartesian schism can, amongst others, be seen in the strong divisions between natural sciences and the humanities, the former dealing with matter and the latter with

[1]As scholars like Merrell (1998) argue, the Cartesian schism has influenced a variety of aspects of Western thinking, leading to a number of persistent binaries such as mind and matter and nature and culture.

mind. The works referred to above, mostly from biosemiotics, I argue, represent a movement by scholars from the natural sciences to explain the thinking capacity of meat in its animal form (including human animals) without violating the laws of physics and without assuming some supernatural addition to matter.

The relevance of the second quote is a similar, reciprocating movement that I detect in the humanities (Deacon 2013, 2014; Deely 2007; Gorlee 1994; Korning-Zethsen 2007; Kress 2010; Merrell, 1998, 2000, 2003; Wheeler 2006; Marais, 2014b; Marais and Kull 2015; Petrilli 2003). This chapter is an attempt to join in this debate from the humanities side of the Cartesian divide, i.e. to include considerations about the meatiness of thinking and the implications thereof for translation studies. In a postmodern climate of thought, one of the larger intellectual projects would be to continue to rethink the Cartesian divide. Whilst scholars in the humanities know a lot about thinking, I claim, following Merrel (1998; 2000; 2003), that we have not theorised enough the meatiness of thinking, the materiality of being human. Though Marxist thought and forms of embodied-cognition studies,[2] amongst others, are dealing with embodiment and the materiality of human existence, it remains on the agenda of the humanities to reciprocate the move by biologists in order to work out the implications of new developments in their thought are and to see where and how we can meet them.[3]

From both sides of the Cartesian divide, complexity thinking is used to provide a conceptual space for thinking about these matters (Merrell 1998b, 2000, 2003; Morin 2008; Deacon, 2013; Kauffman 1995) (for an overview of complexity theory, see Marais 2014). Underlying the conceptual effort in this chapter is thus a philosophy or meta-theory of complexity. I have made the argument elsewhere that, given a philosophy of complexity and given a Peircean understanding of translation, translation studies is in the unique position to argue for translation as one of the missing links in thinking about the Cartesian divide (Marais 2014a; 2014b; 2015; 2016). Linking my thought to the likes of Latour (2007), Searle (1995; 1998), Sawyer (2005) and others, I have argued that social reality emerges from the semiotic interactions between human beings (Marais 2014a, 2014b, 2016b; Marais and Kull 2015), tying it to Olivier de Sardan's (2005) anthropological views on development as this very emerging of social forms. Whereas most of the scholars upon whom I base my work have argued that society emerges from linguistic interactions (Sawyer 2005), I am expanding that notion by arguing that society emerges from semiotic interactions between all kinds of living beings. In Peirce's conceptualisation, these interactions all constitute translations, i.e. the process of creating

[2]I have to make it clear that I am not going the route of cognitive science, rather following Merrel (1998, 96) and Deacon (2014) in maintaining that cognitive science should be embedded in a conceptualization of semiotics.

[3]Coming from South Africa, I am well aware of the dangers of eugenics and the horrific implications of linking character traits to race. But why would anything be a more acceptable excuse for conflict than human nature. And why would the nature of the beings that cause conflict be irrelevant to understanding that conflict? If we cannot have a theoretical framework within which to explain (human) nature without using it as an excuse, our scholarly endeavours have not advanced much. If our basic assumptions require of us to belie either the meat or the spirit, they are not worth the paper on which they are written. I am not unaware of the fact that 'human nature' is a problematic concept in the humanities. Neither am I unaware of the fact that 'human nature' has been used as instrument to cause immeasurable suffering. I am not unaware of the fact that some scholars from the natural sciences would like to claim that human beings are 'nothing but' matter and physics and chemistry, and for good reasons (see Merrel (1998a) for a detailed analysis of linguicentrism and ocularcentrism in Western thinking). I am not unaware of the fact that scholars from the humanities would like to claim that human beings are 'nothing but' mind and spirit that have transcended its meatiness, and for good reasons. And I am not unaware of the fact that many scholars from both fields will deny holding these positions and yet operate on this distinction in every part of their work.

interpretants (Gorlee 1994; Marais and Kull 2015; Merrell 2003; Peirce 1994), which means that translation can be studied as the process underlying the emergence of the social or cultural. It needs pointing out here that my conceptualisation follows the Peircean conceptualisation of semiosis,[4] where language is just one of the modes of semiosis, not all of it (Deacon 2014, 97; see Merrel 1998, 2000, 2003 for lengthy and detailed discussions about how much more than language is entailed in semiosis).

So, in this chapter, I wish further to work out aspects of this theory of translation, which entails intersemiotic translation in its broadest conceptualisation (Aguiar and Queiros 2013) and its implications for the emergence of society, i.e. a semiotics-sociology of translation (Latour 2007). The particular questions that I wish to address here are as follows. Can we have a translation studies that explain translation on a continuum ranging from the biological through to the social without recourse to some form of dualism? Can we have a translation studies that explain the whole range of translational actions, not only translational phenomena linked to language and not only translational phenomena linked to biases in particular cultures, e.g. literature? Perhaps, in its most basic form, it boils down to: Can we have a translation studies that explain how any and all translation contributes to the emergence of social reality, once again without the Cartesian split between nature and culture?

In short, therefore, I shall take as my point of departure the argument made by philosophers, theoretical biologists and biosemioticians that human nature is inextricably, paradoxically both meat and mind. I shall argue that semiotics and biosemiotics provide us with conceptual tools not only to accept this dictum but also to study it empirically. In particular, I shall argue that translation, conceptualised by Charles Peirce as the process of creating interpretants, creates the conceptual space to study the emergence of mind, and therefore the social/cultural, from matter.

In previous work, I tried to link translation to development, but found that my conceptual underpinning for this effort was rather thin. By linking translation and development by means of a biosemiotics framework, I am trying to put forward a richer, postmodern, in the sense that Deely (2007) uses the word, conceptualisation for the emergence of the social and the cultural, i.e. development (Olivier de Sardan 2007). This work in translation and development links up with the current interest in the sociology of translation[5] and the agency role of translators in social matters. As can be seen from the above, this framework is inter-, multi- or even transdisciplinary, as are all efforts of this kind. Far from a full conceptualisation of the matter at hand, in this chapter, I am merely trying to provide some basic markers of a broad meta-theoretical, somewhat philosophical, interdisciplinary framework as a starting point for considering the broadest possible range of translations where translation is a semiotic, not a linguistic, phenomenon.

In this chapter, I am thus trying to explore what would happen if we did factor in human nature as one of a number of possible explanations for why society is the way it is, without falling back into eugenics. How can we free the humanities from the implications of the Cartesian schism, explaining human nature and not using it as an excuse? I am trying to cooperate with

[4]The term ‘semiosis’ is use when referring to the semiotic process or action.

[5]In translation studies, sociology of translation refers to sociological aspects of the phenomenon of translation (Wolf 2009; 2011; 2012). In sociology, sociology of translation refers to a sociology that is characterized by processes of translation (Siever 2016).

theoretical biologists and biosemioticians in conceptualising the erasure of the Cartesian schism. I am probably questioning some of the most basic tenets of Western thought on what it means to be human. I am probably also trying to develop an ecological way of thinking about the role of translation in the emergence of human existence in all of its facets. I am definitely suggesting that translation studies would benefit from expanding its interest beyond translation proper (Jakobson 2004; Korning-Zethsen 2007).

2. Translation: The process underlying semiosis

Roman Jakobson conceptualised translation on the basis of semiotic theory (though Eco (2001), for one, does not agree with his conceptualisation). Following Peirce, Jakobson (1980, 10) argues on the basis of the continuous and infinite nature of the semiosic process that all interpretation is translation. He (Jakobson 2004, 139) claims that '… the meaning of any linguistic sign is its translation into some further, alternative sign, especially a sign "in which it is more fully developed". On the basis of this conceptualisation, he distinguishes three types of translation. The first, he calls intralingual translation or rewording, and by that, he means 'an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language' (Jakobson 2004, 139). The second category is interlingual translation or translation proper, which refers to '… an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other sign' (Jakobson 2004, 139). The third category is intersemiotic translation, which is '… an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems' (Jakobson 2004, 139).

For Jakobson/Peirce, semiosis is a process of creating meaning by means of a creating interpretants, i.e. interpretation. The interpretant, Peirce (1994, 1.339) argues, can and usually does become a representamen itself, leading to yet another interpretant, ad infinitum. The point is that every interpretant develops the previous interpretant further (Merrell 1997, 11), specifying it or giving more information about it. It is in this sense that semiosis is a never-ending process, with the ability always to create new interpretants and with a final interpretant either a theoretical or a pragmatic matter (De Waal 2013).

As I argued elsewhere (Marais and Kull 2015), Jakobson's view leaves translation studies scholars with a problem. The way in which he conceptualises intersemiotic translation is limited to the interpretation of 'verbal signs' by means of 'nonverbal sign systems'. He does not comment on whether the opposite is also possible, that is, whether one can translate 'nonverbal sign systems' into 'verbal signs', which is actually what Peirce's conceptualisation allows for. His linguistic and perhaps anthropocentric bias causes him to ignore intersemiotic translations between non-verbal semiosic systems, which biosemioticians, amongst others, claim do exist (Hoffmeyer 2008; see also Gorlee 1994; Kress 2010). Jakobson thus opens up the possibility of intersemiotic translation, but he does not follow the logical implications of his argument to its conclusion. Rather, he limits his conceptualisation to forms of translation that are related to the meaning of 'translation' in the general sense of the word, i.e. interlinguistic translation.

If one reads what Peirce says on translation, on which Jakobson based his argument, it is clear that Peirce does not limit translation to verbal semiosic systems (Gorlee 1994, 26–27, 31). However, his conceptualisation also raises some questions. Most of his references to translation take the form of the following quote, on which Jakobson grounds his interpretation of Peirce:

> *[…] conception of a 'meaning,' which is, in its primary acceptation, the translation of a sign into another system of signs […]* (Peirce 1994, 4.127)

In one interpretation, translation and interpretation could be seen to be the same thing, which means that the creation of meaning (interpretation) 'is' translation. So the question is: Was Peirce not aware of the problem he was creating by equating interpreting and translation, or did he have something else in mind? What Peirce meant is lost forever, but I argue that his work provide evidence that he did not try to equate translation and interpretation.

Consider the following quote from Peirce:

> ***Transuasion*** *(suggesting* ***translation, transaction, transfusion, transcendental,*** *etc.) is mediation, or the modification of firstness and secondness by thirdness, taken apart from the secondness and firstness; or, is being in creating Obsistence.* (Peirce 1994, 2.89)

In it, Peirce discusses semiosis, the way in which signs work or in which meaning is created, sign-action. The outcome of this process is thirdness, or an interpretant or series of interpretants or interpretation. The process through which this takes place is translation, i.e. the translation of interpretants into interpretants. It is not verbal meaning that is translated, but firstness and secondness that are translated by thirdness or into thirdness. This quote clarifies two matters. Firstly, translation entails much more than interlingual translation (Gorlee 1994; Merrell). In fact, it should include all forms of biosemiotic translation. Secondly, translation denotes the semiotic process of turning interpretants into more interpretants. Translation is essentially a process, a linking-creating process, a meaning-creating process. In this conceptualisation, translation is the semiosic process that leads to interpretation as an outcome of the process.

So, for the link between translation and development[6] to be clarified, I am expanding Peirce's framework into a complex emergent conceptualisation of semiosis with a focus on process and organisation (Deacon 2013; Merrell 1997, 2003). I have thus proposed to explicate his notion of semiosis by conceiving of semiosis from a complex dynamic systems perspective (Marais and Kull 2015) in the same vein as Merrell (1997; 2003) has suggested. This means that the study of semiosis should include not only the logical relationships between representamen, object and interpretant but also a focus on the historical-material processes of semiosis, the relationships-processes between semiosic phenomena in real time and space, the way in which semiosis entails a process that creates and develops meaning (Robinson 2011). In particular, the study of semiosis should also focus on signs of firstness and secondness, as Merrell (2003) convincingly argues.

The logical implication of the view propounded above is that development also entails semiosic development, i.e. the development of one interpretant into another interpretant. For this view, Olivier de Sardan's (2007) work as well as the wide-ranging work of Latour (2007) provides ample evidence. Suffice it so point out here that development is thus a process based on the translation of systems of meaning into further systems of meaning, be those systems economic, political, cultural, legal, et cetera.[7] It is also a process in which human beings respond to a particular time-space environment by constructing meaningful responses. Humans and groups

[6]Development is a highly fuzzy and contested notion, referring to many things and representing many different perspectives. For an overview, see (Brett 2009; Coetzee et al. 2001; Haynes 2008; Rabbani 2011). In particular, Olivier de Sardan (2007) uses the term development to refer to all human responses or adaptation to their environment, a position I strongly support later in the chapter. Other than my discussion in Marais (2014), I think it wise not to provide a definition here as it will lead me in a totally different direction than where I want to go.

[7]Note that Roland Barthes (1986) has argued in the 1960s and 1970s already that social and cultural systems are also semiotic systems (see also Gorlee 1994, 33–37).

of humans are inevitably drawn by time and space to interpret their environment by constructing cultural, social, material interpretants. They are then drawn to respond to those interpretants by translating them into more developed interpretants. In this conceptualisation, development does not have the connotation of better or more advanced. Rather, it has the qualification of providing greater understanding, being more meaningful, a response that is more apt, allowing organisms to flourish (Merrel 1998). Given this conceptualisation, one is now free not to ask of development-interpretants how they compare with other interpretants but whether they are meaningful, given the particular spatial-temporal constellation. Because development is always normative and ethical, one also asks whether this particular interpretant allows the organisms to flourish. And because fallibilism is inherent in human interpretants, one would always need further translations, searching for interpretants under which humanity can flourish even more. What is a crucial implication of this view, however, is that development is a meaning-constructing movement too, apart from what else it may be.

A possible interpretation of my argument as claiming pan-semioticism requires a short comment here. My argument here and in the following sections claims, on the basis of the strong link between Peirce's semiotics and his phenomenology, that all human action, including development, entails a semiotic aspect.[8] The wording is crucial here. I do not claim that all action is semiosis. I argue that all human action, including all and any mental actions that humans take, entails a semiotic *aspect*. It is not all semiosis, but it all has a semiotic aspect, just like it all has a time or space aspect. As phenomena of the human experience, it cannot be different.[9]

3. Biosemiotics: Expanding meaning

Although my view of semiosis above opens up the space to conceptualise the development of meaning and meaningful systems in human society or culture, I need a second step in my argument for it to overcome the Cartesian schism, an aim I set out in the introduction. This step entails expanding semiosis to include biosemiosis. With this move, I shall be able to present a unified explanation of the development of meaning by living organisms, of which *homo sapiens* forms part.

I take my lead from Peirce, who views semiosis as one of the habits that living organisms have taken (1994, 1.409). All living organisms need to interact with their environment and need to interpret information from the environment in terms of their own existence. Kauffman (2008) calls it the distinction between 'yum' and 'yuck', which is basic to the survival of all organisms. John Deely (2007) refers to a basic interpretation that all organisms have to make whenever they perceive something, namely approach, avoid or ignore. This interaction with the environment on the basis of interpreting information thus entails semiosis (Cobley 2010, 3–4). Semiosis refers to the ability of all living organisms to take any phenomenon (representamen) as standing for or in the place of any other phenomenon (object), leading to (further) meaning (interpretant). This is the basic semiosic ability that distinguishes living systems from non-living matter (Favareau 2007; Hoffmeyer 2008; Kull 2007; Sebeok and Danesi 2000). It is also

[8]For views on semiosis in non-human animals, see Favareau (2007) for a detailed bibliography. Also see Sebeok (2001) and Von Uexkull (1940)

[9]For a detailed discussion about Peircean phenomenology, see De Waal (2001; 2013). For a detailed discussion about semiosis as the link between reality and mind, see Deely (2007) and also Cobley (2010).

sometimes called the lower semiosic threshold. If one takes the various aspects of this conceptualisation, they refer to the following:

- '*to take*', in whichever way, e.g. through highly developed sensory awareness such as consciousness or through rudimentary sensory awareness (without consciousness)
- '*something*', whatever it may be, including all things possible and impossible that can be distinguishable, i.e. the proverbial difference that makes a difference
- '*as*' anything that a living being takes it for, from the survivalist yum or yuck, the quite tangible iconic and indexical to the fantastic symbolic
- '*something else*', whatever the 'else' may be, namely the interpretant which can be as simple as yum or yuck or as complex as a god or a worldview or a culture.

The ability to function semiosically allows organisms to form a response to their environment, taking into account the needs of the organism as a whole. As this ability evolved, it allowed more than mere unmediated responses. It allowed organisms to transcend the confinements of space and time by being able to interpret things in reality as signs of things that are absent (Deacon 2013). With the semiosic ability, organisms can interpret things from other spaces or from other times, both past and future, as signs relevant to their existence. Thus entered the absential, i.e. meaning, intentions, aboutness, into the fray of organism life.

The emergence of the biosemiosic ability thus entails one of the explanations of the absential in organism life. Developing Deacon's (2013) fascinating work in this field further is a job for another day. Suffice it to say that the evolution of the organism's ability to deal with more than the "im-mediate" by means of the "mediate", to some extent, frees its existence from the constraints of space and time, allowing it better options for survival. In fact, my argument is that, in humans, this ability has evolved so far that they tend to think that they have severed the link with time and space and body all together, giving birth to all kinds of radical constructivist ideas (see also Merrel 1998; 2003). A post-Cartesian thinking should maintain the semiosic paradox, namely that meaning entails constructing a response to an environment, an 'Other', as a Second (Merrel 1998). At least, meaning has a spatial-temporal substrate in the human brain, and even the most fanciful flights of the imagination relate somehow to the coordinates of time and space. In Deely's (2007, 13) words, semiosis and biosemiosis assist scholarship in their efforts to 'transcend the oppositions of nature to culture, inner to outer, *ens reale* (being independent of mind) to *ens rationis* (being dependent on mind). The way in which biosemiotics of the Peircean persuasion allows one to conceptualise both mind and matter in paradoxical fashion allows one to conceptualise a translation studies for all possible translation phenomena.

So, with the addition of a biosemiotics perspective, I can now consider the way in which meaning develops in living organisms through translation, focussing on, but not limiting myself to, human beings.

4. The development of meaning: Translating interpretants

In this section, I draw together the ideas on translation and biosemiotics made above and work out some pointers of the implications thereof for thinking about development. Though translation studies have been involved in thinking about developmental contexts by means of its links with postcolonial and cultural studies and, more recently, the interests in agency, sociology and power, it has not yet conceptualised its thinking in terms of thinking in the field

of development studies. Similarly, development studies has, with one or two exceptions, not conceptualised its thinking in terms of translation studies (Lewis and Mosse 2006).

One of the large points of debate in development studies is the high failure rate of development efforts of all kinds. Each new turn in development studies claims to have found the missing link which the previous approaches missed. A point that is made time and time again in the context of development failure is that development efforts are often more about the development specialists who want do get something done than about the people who "need development" (Westoby and Dowling 2013, 55–56), i.e. about applying technical know-how rather than (also) facilitating the creation of meaning. My argument in this section is that the semiotic response theory of development that I am putting forward can assist with this problem in a number of ways. Firstly, it provides scholars of development with a descriptive approach whereby to describe and understand development practices rather than tools for doing it or norms for what societies should look like. Secondly, with the complex adaptive systems philosophy underlying the semiosic response theory of development, it will become clear that it is part of the reductionist fallacy and the Cartesian schism to think that semiosic systems as complex as development contexts can be managed to success. Thirdly, it provides a framework for translation studies scholars to study all kinds of translational actions that contribute to the emergence of society. Lastly, it conceptualises development as (also) a meaning-making endeavour, a meaning-making response to a particular space-time.

In what follows, I provide a brief conceptualisation on current thinking in development studies. I then briefly discuss Olivier de Sardan's development anthropology and Nussbaum's capabilities approach to development as a link to my thinking before attempting to explore the implications of the biosemiotic response theory for development.

Development studies is an interdisciplinary field of study that arose at the end of World War II (see Section A in Coetzee et al. (2001) conceptual and historical perspectives on development thinking). Whilst development or progress has been the topic of thinking since the Ancient Greeks, development studies is a phenomenon with its own history, aims and conceptualisations (Rist 2002). It developed in the wake of the fall of Empire and the decolonisation of the middle of the 20th century, looking for alternative relationships between the former colonial states and the new, independent states. Broadly speaking, it operates as an interdiscipline between economics, political science and sociology. Historically, the field of study moved through three broad phases. Firstly, the structuralist-functionalist phase between 1945 and 1970 operated on the basis that, if the correct structures like democracy and a free market was in place, development would follow naturally. Secondly, between 1970 and 1990, market liberalism dominated with countries from the Global South expected to follow market control strictly. Thirdly, since the 1990s, one finds a neoliberal approach coupled with massive criticism against the development project as such, mainly from deconstructionists. Currently, thinking is permeated with some kind of complexity thinking which tries to balance the market with some state control and input from civil society (Brett 2009).

The thinking espoused in the previous paragraph all pertains to macro-level theories. Korten (1990) actually argued convincingly that development takes place not only at the macro-level but at four levels or, in his terms, generations: providing direct help, e.g. food, to people in a moment of crisis; building capacity for people to solve their own problems, e.g. training; efforts to change local, national and global institutions and policies; mobilizing people's movements

around the world. Thus, one of the shifts in thinking about development has been to community development, a people-centred approach or what is sometimes called a bottom-up or grassroots approach.

In particular, Olivier de Sardan (2005, 15) suggests a comparative approach to development in which development is conceptualised as an adaptive response to a particular context. In his view, social change occurs pervasively, and all societies have to respond to it. He argues that all societies, not only postcolonial or un(der)developed ones, have to develop in response to social change. Olivier de Sardan (2005, 69) thus puts forward a localised approach to development in which he emphasises the meaning-making nature of development, without theorising it semiotically. He (Olivier de Sardan 2005, 91) rather theorises it hermeneutically, i.e. as interpretation, creating meaning. His work of opening up development studies to the interests of meaning and understanding is invaluable, and much of what I wish to do builds on his initiative.

Nussbaum's human capabilities approach has become influential as a people-centred approach to development. Her argument is that economic and political measurements at the macro-level, e.g. GDP or whether there is a democratic government in a country, do not necessarily say anything about what it means to be human in a particular country (Nussbaum 2011; Nussbaum and Sen 1993). One example is that a high GDP could hide a wide gap between rich and poor by focussing on the average income per capita. She thus argues that development should be aimed at creating opportunities for human beings to develop their potential, whatever that may be. To this end, she presents a list of capabilities that she claims have some general relevance all over the world and could thus be negotiated in every development situation to decide on a focus (Nussbaum 2011). Whilst I agree that her theory entails a major step forward, it leaves out semiosis in general and language in particular as a crucial factor in development. Also, it is driven by a particular set of goals, rather than open-ended as a complex adaptive process inherently is.

Furthermore, development studies could benefit from a semiotic conceptualisation for at least two reasons. Firstly, a semiotic conceptualisation will provide development studies with a descriptive tool that will be valuable in efforts better to understand what development entails. Approaches like the human capabilities approach are highly normative in that it sets values that needs to be achieved. It cannot be denied that development is a value-laden endeavour, and I would not want to change that. What I would suggest is to broaden the thinking with a descriptive approach that will help with understanding a problem that we do not understand well (yet). Secondly, with a semiotic approach to development, considering development as a clash of "universes of the mind", to quote Lotman (1990; 2005), will allow one better to understand and guide the process itself, not as some goal to be strived for but as responding to the environment into which we are born by creating our own meaning to the best of our ability. I think the point is that nobody knows what the end-result of development will be. It is an open-ended process. Thus, goal-oriented development studies run the risk of closing down the openness of an essentially open, non-linear, complex semiosic process before it has even started.

Westoby and Dowling (2013) takes an important step in the direction of conceptualising development in terms of meaning-making when they base their approach to community development in dialogue. With this move, they not only invite language into the debate, but,

more basically, they situate development at the level of intersubjectivity, to which I return later. This truly postmodern approach, in the sense that Deely (2007) defines it, does not aim at an outcome and, in this sense, cannot fail. And this is an important point. Development have been conceptualised normatively since its inception, and thus it is no wonder that it failed. Being human cannot be a failure. Responding to an environment into which you were born can probably be regarded as more effective or less effective, but can it be said to have failed? You can only fail if you do not reach a pre-set goal. For humanity, there is no such goal, which is why I chose the title (borrowing from Latour (1993): We have never been un(der)developed. Being human, being a semiosic being, means responding in a creative way by constructing meaningful responses – with no (pre)determined goal. These are the implications of the continuous nature of semiosis. In fact, Olivier de Sardan has emphasised this basic point: Development is a meaning-making response to an Other, a point that I am working out semiotically in what follows.

To conclude, whether conceptualised at macro or micro levels, whether thought of as economic, political or human-centered endeavour, whether a technical or a hermeneutical or a dialogical activity, development entails a biosemiotic aspect. Development presupposes biosemiotic interactions between human beings (Sawyer 2005), which, given the argument above, presupposes translation. Once again, I am not claiming that development is biosemiosis or translation. I am claiming that development entails a biosemiotic and thus a translational aspect, or that it presupposes biosemiotics and translational interaction.

Following the above, I now draw a few outlines of a semiotic response theory of development, in which translation entails, as argued in the first section, the semiosic process. So, my argument runs as follows. Living organisms arrive in a pre-existing world. For their survival, they need to respond to this world in an appropriate way. If not, they will not flourish, at best, or they will not survive, at worst (Cobley 2010, 3–4). Except for the physical and biological responses, living organisms have to respond to their environment semiosically. In other words, they have to respond to their environment by "interpreting" stimuli from the environment as information about something. In Kaufmann's terms, they need to decide whether something is "yum" or "yuck", and in Deely's terms, they need to decide whether to avoid, approach or ignore. Now, for simple organisms, this process is also simple and could be called something like 'proto-semiosis' because there is no consciousness in the sense that there is with humans. However, it still is a 'proto-decision' based on semiosis because it can go wrong. Reading 'yuck' for 'yum' wrongly can be fatal.

This very basic semiosic responses developed in higher life forms to become much more complex. In plants, it takes a different form, in non-human animals, yet another form, and in human animals, yet another form. All life forms, however, share this ability and task. The important point that flows from this discussion is that all organisms are, temporally speaking, secondary to their environment. This means that they need to respond to that environment. I am well aware that the notion of response will not sit well with many scholars because the Western paradigm of thought (even translation studies) have been emphasising human agency and mastery over the environment through constructivist thinking. It is indeed my intention to deconstruct this way of thinking by arguing that organisms are, first and foremost, responding to an environment in order to maintain their existence. I shall return to the constructing part of this response in a minute.

The implication of this point is that the relationship to the environment should be a factor in development thinking and practice. Deely (2007) argues convincingly that relationality is at the heart of life. No living organism lives without real relationships with other organisms or the environment. The environment in which any development action takes place has been shaped by a particular space and time, which needs to be factored into thinking about the action. This means that a semiotic response theory takes a stance against culturalist reductionism in which development (or postcolony in most cases) is seen as a contestation of ideas with little attention to the material conditions in which the contestation takes place and which makes possible the contestation itself.

The second point of my argument is that development, conceptualised in terms of semiotic responses, is thoroughly political and ethical. It is such because the "Other" is factored into the definition of response. As indicated in the previous paragraph, one of the problems that humanity has not yet able been to solve is that of relationality, in particular, relations with the "Other". Deely (2007) argues that one of the reasons for this is the solipsistic bias in modernist philosophy. His argument is that, because of the Cartesian schism, intersubjective intentionality between humans and their environment has been rejected. What I can know is inside of my head, the prisoner of arbitrary linguistic symbols. My knowledge is something that I, as an agent, construct irrespective of an environment. In fact, I am not able to know that environment, nor am I able to know the human "Other". The implication is solllipsism: I am contained inside my mind activities. By means of a semiotic conceptualisation, Deely shows the way in how we would be able to say that intentional existence, i.e. living, entails relationships and cannot be thought of apart from relationships, which are suprasubjective. To use Deely's example, a frog cannot be a frog without its relationship to the swamp in which it lives. It is related to that swamp for food, shelter, breeding partners, oxygen, water, et cetera. The important point is that these relationships are not incidental or epiphenomenal. The swamp is constitutive to the frog's being. It is the relationship between the frog and the swamp that allows the frog to exist. A semiotic response theory of development allows one to overcome the solipsism of modernist, and so-called postmodernist, thinking. Deely argues that most of what is called postmodern philosophy is still caught in this solipsism, whilst real postmodern thinking is communicative, suprasubjective, relational, dialogic (as Westoby and Dowling (2013) are arguing).

So what is the other? In development, the other is matter, time, space, organisms (human and non-human), society, culture. These are all others with which human beings have to deal in trying to create a meaningful existence. Development will thus have to deal with the irrefutability of the other. In this sense, a semiotic response theory to development is deeply political and ethical. Per definition, it deals with relations, which relates to power, responsibility and ethics.

This response to the other, however, is a construction of meaning, achieved by translating. In this regard, Deely (2007) again points the way. Thinking of human beings as meaning-creating animals rather than merely thinking or doing animals hold much more potential for development (Deely 2007; Merrell 2003). Falling back on Peirce, humans become aware of (firstness) the other (secondness) by means of a meaning-constructing activity (thirdness), i.e. translation. Being human means that this triad underpins your existence. You are continually translating objects into interpretants or interpretants into interpretants. Whilst it is true that the other is, temporally, first, semiotic agents respond with a constructing activity, interpreting the

secondness of the other, responding to it by creating interpretants, which are actions, cultural artefacts, societies. Development is thus both a response and a construction. Deely (2007) points out that one will never be able to sever the ties between self and other, knowledge of reality and reality. These notions are relationships. Thus development is relationally constructed in a meaning-making response to an Other.

The theory I am suggesting thus allows one to ask different questions about development. Rather than asking how we can all attain certain standards, we can ask: How do human beings construct responses to their environment in order to flourish? Rather than asking with Brett (2009) how the whole of humanity can achieve what the West has, we can ask: How do human beings construct responses to the agency of the Other? Asking these questions from a non-prescriptive, non-normative, yet deeply political and ethical perspective, may allow us better to understand or better to do development.

Conceptualising development from the perspective of complex semiotic responses by means of the translation of interpretants, we would have a descriptive approach to development that is non-reductionistic, ethical, with a non-dualist ontology and the ability to deal with both the material and the virtual nature of human existence.

5. Translating development: Two cases

My aim in this section is to demonstrate the analytical purchase of the theoretical markers I have put forward, analysing (non-language) semiotic phenomena and translation processes in a developmental context.

In South Africa in general and in South African universities in particular, transformation is high on the agenda. In the South African context, transformation refers to the need to redress the inequalities caused by years of colonisation and apartheid in particular. In this sense, it is both a decolonisation and a development project with the aim of giving Black South Africans their rightful place in their country of birth. Thus, like all South African universities, the UFS is grappling with the transformation process, changing names in public spaces, considering the removal of colonial and apartheid statues from public spaces and reconsidering its language policy. Against this background, I present two sets of data, which do not necessarily form part of the mainstream debate on transformation, but which illustrates some of the points I tried to make above. The first set of data refers to the construction of new buildings on campus and the second to the gowns used by officials during official events of the university. Both sets of data were chosen because they entail semiotic and translational aspects which are not linguistic in nature.

Firstly, in Figure 1, I present you with one possible semiotic system which could act as a source system when thinking about housing on a South African university campus, in particular if you wish to create a space at the university that could be called ‘African’. Please note that I am not arguing the case for such a space. I am merely engaging in a thought experiment, claiming that should a university’s management decide that part of their transformation drive would be to develop some form of indigenised semiotic universe (Lotman 1990; 2005) on the campus, this could be one source from which to draw meaning. The particular figure pictures indigenous housing juxtaposed to an ox wagon (brought to South Africa by white settlers). It most probably represents Griqua housing in the eighteenth or early nineteenth century. Note the round shape and that it used natural material, i.e. grass, wood and sticks. Once again, I am not suggesting that modern housing should look like any of the two possibilities in Figure 1, although

translating them into modern semiotic systems would not be beyond the imagination. I am pointing out the fact that any or both of these could have acted as source semiotic systems for housing projects at a university in an African context.

Figure 1: Examples of traditional housing in South African history

Compare this possible semiotic source system to the current semiotic target system. Figure 2 pictures the latest residences that have just been erected on campus. It is clear that there is no relationship between the semiotic systems in Figure 1 and Figure 2. Figure 2 most probably used particular European semiotic systems as sources if one looks at the straight lines and the materials, i.e. bricks, steel and glass. There is nothing in this target system that gives any clue to having been linked to the semiotic systems of housing in Africa. By not translating from this kind of source system, the UFS, it could be argued, is choosing to make use of foreign semiotic sources, therefore translating, through their choice, a particular semiotic system onto the campus of the UFS. In this case, they are translating from a system that has no connection to African semiotic systems. African semiotic systems are thus negated or ignored via the translation choices of the management of the University of the Free State. In the process, the UFS is building a university with strong links to Western semiotic systems. On the positive side, one could argue that they are trying to create a university with a universal, not tribal, semiotic universe.

Figure 2: New UFS residence

The second set of data refers to clothing. Figure 3 is a photo of Basotho in their traditional clothing. My interest here is on the blankets, which by the way is made for the King of Lesotho by a British company (but that is a story for another day). In the region in South African in which the University of the Free State is located, the Basotho are the majority population group.

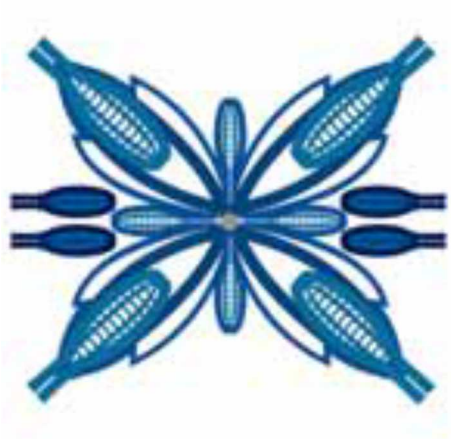
Figure 3: Basotho in traditional dress

Figure 4 shows the Chancellor and Vice-chancellor of the UFS with a guest speaker after a recent graduation ceremony. So, on the surface, this picture could have been taken anywhere else in the world, with typically Western gowns, caps and hoods.

Figure 4: Academic dress at the UFS

However, if one were to zoom in on the gowns of the dignitaries (especially on the back), one would see that the UFS has taken some of the motives from the Basotho blankets and worked them into the Western academic gowns. An example would be what is represented in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5: Motive on the academic dress



This second set of data shows how two meaning systems, or semiotic systems, have been combined to create new meaning. In the combination of Western academic dress with Basotho traditional dress, the UFS is maintaining meaningful links with two sets of meaning systems: Western academia and African cultural roots. Though this hybridity is, in this particular set of data, merely at a symbolic and perhaps ceremonial level, it is nonetheless an example of how the translation of meaning can lead to development, i.e. the creation of new systems of meaning. In this particular case, officialdom has been indigenised to some extent by endowing an institution of Western origin with symbolism from the African context.

Obviously, the data that I presented offers scope for much more detailed analyses that what I presented. This will have to wait for another day, though, as I here only wanted to point to the way in which translation studies could do descriptive, comparative analyses of intersemiotic translations that play a major role in determining the development of a society.

6. Conclusion

Studying the semiotic features of social and cultural structures and artefacts allows scholarship of all kinds to maintain a meaning-making interest in the development of society. Meaning, which lies at the heart of organismic life, is the antidote to technique, mechanism, reductionism, rationalism, which have come to dominate the modernist and even the so-called postmodernist paradigm in Western thought. Like the subtitle of Henning and Scarfe's (2013) edited volume claims to be "Putting life back into biology", translation studies could be "Putting meaning back into development". One of the implications of my thesis is that translation studies has it within its conceptual apparatus to assist the world in understanding its development. Would this translation studies entangle itself from the strangle-hold of language and base itself in semiotics, this world will open up for the field of study.

Translation studies scholars have at their disposal the notion of translation, of the process of meaning-making, of the transformation of objects into interpretants and interpretants into new interpretants, of the complexity of semiosic processes with which to serve scholarship on development. They have the conceptual apparatus to explain the "thinkiness" of meat and the meatiness of thinking. They have the conceptual apparatus to help solve one of the most pervasive problems in all scholarship: the Cartesian schism. In this sense, translation studies would be able to partake in the construction of a really postmodern scholarship that explores the nature of relational existence within a wholly ecological paradigm.

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