

Knowledge and Translation in Education Crossing Boundaries

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Abstract

The significant developments in the global economy and information technology have been accompanied by a transformation in the nature and process of knowledge production and dissemination. Concepts such as the knowledge economy or creative economy have been coined to accommodate the new and complex developments in knowledge, creativity, economic, and technology. As knowledge and ideas are disseminated and conveyed more easily, cultural and educational boundaries seem to play a less critical role. While much of the current literatures on the knowledge and creative economy substantially reflect the economic impact of knowledge and creativity, they rarely touch upon the role of translation in facilitating this development. By extending the discussion on the role of translation as a generative process in the creative economy and its implications to crossing boundaries in higher education, this paper argues that translation plays a significant role in the creation of a hybrid milieu. This dynamic cultural hybridity is stimulated by the circulation of knowledge and information via translation, but is also, per se, a driver inviting greater engagement of ideas and knowledge given that translated works always require retrospective interpretations along with changing social and cultural mores. The discussion on the role of translation manifests its significance in several aspects. First, it discloses the profound role of translation in fostering the creative economy. Second, while adding complexity to the process of knowledge circulation and reception it also enhances understanding across different higher education contexts. Third, the understanding of this complexity calls for a more systematic and critical engagement with translation, knowledge and works translated in educational settings.

Keywords: Translation, Creative Economy, Knowledge in Education Crossing Boundaries

Introduction

The dramatic spread of globalization has exerted a profound influence on the life of human beings in various ways. A number of researches have eloquently delineated and characterized different ways in which forces of globalization shape contemporary modern life (e.g., Appadura, 1996; Bauman, 1998 & 2000; Castells, 1996). Among the many theoretical approaches devoted to understanding globalization, the concept of the creative economy involving ideas, arts, knowledge, etc., has gained much currency. Theorists of the knowledge and creative economy, such as Stiglitz, Drucker, Howkins, and Florida, have eloquently described the increasingly significant interconnectedness of knowledge, information technology, and economic development. At the same time, theories of the creative economy and its significance to education have flourished because of the critical role of education in producing knowledge and human capital. Nevertheless, not much of the discussion focuses much attention on the role of translation in relation to the creative economy. The interests of theorists apparently lie more in the economic and commercial power of knowledge and ideas. Discussions on the creative economy that neglect the issue of translation seem to imply, rather unrealistically, a world free of language and cultural differences. Moreover, theorizing creative industry without consideration of the role of language differences seems to be elite-centric, since it assumes universal proficiency in English as a *lingua franca*.

To explore the role of translation in the creative economy and its implications to cross-boundary education, investigations into aspects of translations within globalization that have not been addressed as much might be a helpful departure point. For instance, Venuti (1995) is opposed to the conventional concept of transparent translation/translators preferring instead to make it more visible with using *invisible translators/translation* as a cultural critique. Similarly, but more extensively, Bieleza (2005, p.143) is critical that much of contemporary globalization theories mainly address the growing capability for instant communications at the

global level but neglect the preconditions that enable them. The crucial role of translation in the chain of producing and circulating information flows at the global level has been invisible and transparent. This phenomenon presumes that information and knowledge can cross various linguistic and cultural communities without being changed. She elaborates that an examination of translation as a critical part of the globalization infrastructure allows us to explore “the articulation between the global and the local on a material level.” In particular, analyzing translation in today’s contexts “allows us to conceptualize and empirically assess how cultural difference is negotiated under globalization and how present trends towards cultural homogenization and Anglo-American domination are mediated at the local level through strategies of domestication and hybridization” (Ibid). Bieleza’s position questions what has long been taken for granted, namely, that information and knowledge flows can be disseminated and circulated smoothly without any modification.

In fact, Venuti and Bieleza are not alone. Other researchers too have urged for appropriate consideration of translation in the current global context from their various perspectives. Pym (2003) discusses on how translation, along with globalization, plays a role, although marginal, in production, marketization, and distribution of goods. Cronin (2003, p. 1) articulates that translation studies in today’s context is particularly ideal for a better understanding of both the transnational movement of globalization and anti-globalization, and investigates dimensions where globalization and translation intersect with each other and further the ways in which they impact on each other. Spivak (2008) takes up the broader perspective of cultural translation involving the complex intertwining of the politics of languages, cultures, and nations. The works of these researchers reveal a dimension in need of greater exploration in mainstream global studies.

Indeed, neglecting the role of translation in the current global economy not only hinders an understanding of the complex process of globalization, but also prevents us, particularly

education researchers, from achieving a critical in-depth engagement with the process of knowledge production, circulation, and reception at the global level. When education across boundaries has become a global phenomenon involving educational researchers, the circulation, dissemination, and reception of knowledge and information should also receive the appropriate level of attention.

Mindful of these concerns, this paper is devoted to revealing the interplay between knowledge, translation and the culturally creative economy in the current global education context. This paper begins by reviewing the leading literature on the creative economy as well as on creativity in translation, followed by a co-articulation of translation in relation to the unfolding of the creative economy. By using the insights of Benjamin and Bhabha, this paper argues that translation actually plays a stimulating and productive role in creating a hybrid milieu, which is critical in the development of a creative economy. Nevertheless, while following the discussions of Benjamin and Bhabha, this essay by no means denies the difficulties involved in the translation of knowledge. Rather, it their problematizing of the post-structural approach on translation that reveals a dynamically hybrid milieu that is produced and engaged by translation. While this hybrid culture as such is induced by translations of all kinds of cultural works, it further stimulates cultural creativity, innovation, and knowledge because of the in-definite and deferred meaning of translated texts. This paper concludes by discussing the implications of translation to the current borderless education context.

The significance of this research is seen through two perspectives. First, it illustrates the invisible but critical role of translation in fostering a creative economy. Translation is not only involved in the area of hermeneutic interpretations of different cultures and languages, but also in creative and transformative actions devoted to the circulation and dissemination of knowledge and ideas. These features accord well with the creative economy in its concerns on

how ideas propagate and multiply. The fact that the meaning of terms and usages are deferred and differ in various degrees during the process of transformation from one language to another, reveals an inherently dynamic milieu created by translation, requiring further re-reading and re-working. It is exactly this generative process that keeps ideas and knowledge emerging and growing. Second, this discussion also complicates the conventional thinking that knowledge can be translated and transmitted in a direct and linear fashion. Given that the emergence and formation of knowledge as well as ideas are subject to socio-cultural conditions, translating them need continuous deliberative retrospection. Awareness of this is of particular significance for discussions on education across boundaries for the way in which it reveals the contribution of translated works. Third, the understanding of the complexity further calls for a more systematic and critical engagement with translation, knowledge, and translated works in educational settings.

Creative Economy

Terms like cultural economy, knowledge economy, or creative economy have emerged to describe the latest developments in the economic scenario. Originally, “cultural economy” was first coined by the Frankfurt School philosophers like Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) to criticize the mass production of cultural products such as films and paintings, which were deemed to be employed as tools to serve capitalism. For them, the culture industry creates a sense of false consciousness among the masses and confuses their real needs with endless desire. Such confusion further endangers high culture and art that could meet genuine human needs, such as creativity, freedom, and happiness. From this perspective, the cultural industry could by no means be a real source of genuine creativity and knowledge development. Such critical views did to some extent reflect the powerful invasion of capitalism into the cultural sphere that could blind the public to their real statuses and needs. Nevertheless, I would argue that the public’s incapability to reflect on their actual positions, actually underestimates their

agency, and that in fact it is also a source for creativity, although this creativity might not be manifested in the ways recognized or appreciated by the high cultural classes.

Along with the drastic development of information and communication technology as the driving forces of globalization, much literature has sprouted since the Second World War to describe and analyze the emerging economic activities that surround knowledge and creativity (e.g., Drucker, 1969; Florida, 2002; Machlup, 1962; Stiglitz, 2002). In discussing this trend, Peters (2010) illustrates the three strands of the “learning economy”, “creative economy”, and “open knowledge economy” and describes how these terminologies attempt to theorize the knowledge economy, knowledge society, and more importantly, the “wider and broader changes in the nature of capitalism, modernity, as well as the global economy” (ibid, p. 67). To this can be added the term creative economy, which has arisen quite recently. Peters traces the initial usage of the term to Howkins (2001) and Florida (2002). The former featured creativity from various knowledge perspectives, the development of creative sectors such as movies, publications, etc., on the global scale, the critical role of technology and management in advancing ideas and creativity to become businesses, and the concept and significance of intellectual property and patents in the creative business. Florida referred to the emergence of “the creative classes” and their activities in various dimensions and illustrated their profound impact in shaping the contemporary life. Overall, the contributions of theorists such as Howkins and Florida lie in their identification and delineation of the newly emerging economy based on ideas, creativity, and knowledge – the turn from steel and hamburgers to software and intellectual property (Peters, 2010, p. 71).

One noteworthy feature of the creative economy to our discussion is “creativity and knowledge as a global public good.” Ideas are non-rivalrous (Howkins, 2001, p. 128), creativity cannot be owned in the traditional sense (Florida, 2003, p. xiv), and knowledge is a non-competitive public good (Peters, 2010, Lai, 2007, Stiglitz, 2002). Stiglitz especially

stresses on the critical role of knowledge sharing and flows for developing and under-developed countries. In other words, knowledge and ideas will not decrease by being shared or circulated. In particular, when they are processed in digital forms, there is almost no cost to their circulation and transmission. It is exactly this knowledge and ideas sharing and circulation that further stimulates the production of new knowledge and ideas that constitute the creative economy.

The new economy also draws policy makers' attention and gradually exerts its influence on education. For instance, the UN's Creative Economy Report (2008 & 2010) broadly investigated the multiple dimensions of the creative economy, such as the concept, context, and promotion of creative economy, while many Asian governments and educational institutions (e.g., Ministry of Education of Taiwan, 2003; Lai, 2007) also suggest that educators provide creative education classes in response to the creative economy, because education plays such a pivotal role on the supply and quality of knowledge, innovation, and creativity.

Nevertheless, while most research articulates on how knowledge, creativity, and innovation can be a highly profitable business contributing to economic development, and strongly recommend including knowledge transfer, cultivating creativity and innovation in education to continuously develop economies, such research and reports rarely go beyond the utilitarian view of the role of education in the creative economy. As Peters (2010) notes, much of the literature considers education, training, and skill acquisitions as a part of creative economy. He points to what is needed from educational policies to encourage a kind of creativity that takes into account not only the role of new social media but also the knowledge ecology that democratizes knowledge access and decentralizes knowledge production structures (ibid, p. 73).

Peters' articulation of knowledge ecologies reveals a terrain that concerns this paper, namely, the transmission and dissemination of knowledge and ideas on a global scale although

much of the literature in this regard either addresses the cost of knowledge and ideas (e.g., Stiglitz) or entirely disregards the issue. These perspectives neglect the complex process of knowledge and ideas production, dissemination, reception, adaption, and application. In a fundamental sense, knowledge and ideas are produced and emerge in different socio-cultural circumstances and need to be translated before they travel to and are adopted in other contexts. An omission of the role of translation in the discussion of the creative economy seems to presume that the world is free of linguistic and cultural differences, a presumption intimately associated with the global phenomenon of English as the *lingua franca*. In spite of the fact that English has become the primary working language, the need for translating knowledge and ideas from English to other languages still exist, not to mention that some knowledge and ideas that exist in English are actually translated from other languages.

This discussion on the relationship between language and knowledge can be furthered from at least two perspectives. One is that English has become the dominant working language producing and circulating knowledge, and the need to address the numerous challenges such as the quality of the transformation of knowledge arising from that. The second, related to the previous one, is the phenomenon of multiple translations between English and other languages for knowledge circulation and transmission. Both dimensions point not only to the question of the epistemology of language in relation to knowledge, but also to the broader ontological question of languages and knowledge and their interrelationships. Due to the limitations of the current scope and interest of this paper, I will focus on the complexity resulting from translating knowledge and ideas with an emphasis on its implication to education across borders.

Translation, Cultural Hybridity, and the Creative Economy

This section begins by discussing the idea of “translation,” and is followed by discussions on creativity in translation studies. Finally, I will be drawing potential implications of the

discussion to translation in knowledge and ideas dissemination – the primary mechanism for boosting the new kind of economy that has emerged.

Translation

It is commonly agreed that the most fundamental meaning of translation is the transferring of messages in one language to another - usually thought to be a fairly simple and straightforward process. This technical and mechanical view of translation is however limited since it focuses merely on the results of translation. The transferring process comprises a series of elements starting with interpreting and grasping signifiers in a language, and locating/inventing another signifier in the targeted language that could appropriately represent the signified from the source language. Since language is also among the essential attributes of cultural signs—including signifiers and the signified in a culture, translation, in a broad sense, is inherently involved not only in the nature of linguistic meaning but also in cultural interpretation and understanding. The possibility of correct understanding, precise interpretation, and representation of different cultures through various languages requires another space for discussion; for the present, it can be concluded that the role of translation is more complex than simplistic vocabulary and message transfers. Moreover, there are dynamic and productive interrelationships between languages, meaning, culture, as well as various other subjectivities. As Buden and Nowotnyv (2009) eloquently articulate:

...translation evokes an act of moving or carrying across from one place or position to another, or of changing from one state of things to another. This does not apply only to the words of different language, but also to human beings and their most important properties. They too can be moved across all sorts of differences and borders and so translated from one place to another, for instance from one cultural and political condition to another. Thus, one can culturally translate people... (p.196)

Constrained by the current scope of this paper, I will be focusing on the cultural dimension by delineating a potential condition of hybrid culture created by translation that is a desired condition for a creative economy as well as a critical drive for education across

boundaries. Before I further that discussion, I would like to borrow Cronin's words (2003) to end this section and open the next one,

Translation as an operation involving two or more languages has *ipso facto* considerable bi-sociative potential...more time has to be devoted to highlighting the epistemic specificity of translation...in the concept of distance, the nomadic and the bi-sociative. This emphasis should also include a more comprehensive understanding of the creative nature of the process itself". (p.127)

Cronin's note unpacks the complex dynamisms interwoven by threads of language, translation, knowledge, and cultures that on the surface is the embodiment of these threads and at the same time the inherent constituents driving the productivity of these factors. I will further pursue this complexity and its implication to the discussion on knowledge dissemination and cultural hybridity in education.

Translation and Cultural Hybridity

For the purpose of featuring creativity in translation that could facilitate cultural hybridity, it shall be helpful to briefly take a look at creativity in relation to translation. Issues on creativity in translation have been widely discussed in translation studies. For instance, the edited works of Perteghella and Loffredo (2006) approach creativity in translation from the perspectives of translators' subjectivity and the cognitive processes in the field of literary translation. These works reveal the micro dimension of creativity by looking into the subjectivity and inventiveness of translators, and constantly traverse between linguistic and cultural borders in the translation process. Moreover, translators' subjects also come into play in translation activities (Cappelen, 2008; Massardier-Kenney, 2010; Munday, 2009). Most of these researches consistently point out that translation is a creative and critical act.

At first glance, the discussion on the micro dimension surrounding nuanced experience, creativity and subjectivity of translators seems to have no direct association with the creative economy as a broader social milieu that could stimulate and invite more creativity. However, I would argue that this discussion sheds light on understanding translators' creativity and critical

acts. To support the perspective that translators' creativity and critical act in translation is a stimulus of a broader creative milieu, I should borrow Walter Benjamin's phenomenal views in his renowned work *The Task of the Translator* (1923/2004) where he discusses what he thought was the translator's task. This work has been famous for its obscurity, paradoxes, and difficulty in understanding. Nevertheless, one critical argument in this work that is commonly agreed upon is the conception of translation as a pursuit of the pure language. For the former, Benjamin articulates that different languages supplement each other in their intentions. In his words,

All supra-historical kinship of languages rests in the intention underlying each language as a whole – an intention, however, which no single language can attain by itself but which is realized only the totality of their intentions supplementing each other. While all individual elements of foreign languages – words, sentences, structures – are mutually exclusive, these languages supplement each other in their intentions... (p. 78)

Namely, translation reveals different conditions (in various cultures) of a signified and, at the same time, the signified become more complete. As Pym puts it (2010, p. 100), although there is no way that two different signifiers (from two different cultures) intending a similar signified can be full equivalents, "the attempt to translate them into each other...must produce some knowledge not only about the thing they signify, but also about the different modes of signification." I would argue that it is exactly the knowledge produced in the attempt at translation and the different modes of signification that allows one to see that translations complicate our knowledge toward an intention, an object, or a domain of subject, but at the same time, complete our knowledge toward them.

Benjamin's argument has significant implications for our pondering upon creativity in relation to cultural hybridity in two ways. First, at the micro level, it opens a door for us to see the generative process coupled with knowledge and language engaged with translators, as well as their creativity in searching, coining terms or sometimes even assigning new meanings to terms beyond conventional senses. Second, at the macro level of creativity to be a grand

cultural milieu, one sees the potential needs of translation for knowledge to become complete and holistic. In other words, the attempt at translating a body of knowledge produced in a cultural context to a diverse cultural context requires not just a translation and retrospective scrutiny of the translations. Since language per se as a carrier of knowledge approximates the complete and true picture via translation, it will at the same time, while consisting primarily of languages or signifiers, also approximate a true and complete representation through translation. However, in saying this I do not intend to imply that a body of knowledge, a book, or a text will become complete or true once they are translated into another language. What is true rather, is that since the translated works are generative and productive they become the stimulus of a creative milieu that could invite and inspire further engagement of invention and creativity for the purpose of unfolding and expanding knowledge.

Cultural Translation versus the Creative Economy

In furthering the discussion on Benjamin's articulation on translator's tasks and our present interests in a hybrid cultural milieu for creativity, one should by no means skip the cultural translation theory which also sheds light on the subject. Cultural translation theory takes a broader approach suggesting that once one starts to regard translation as a process, one will see that translation process is nearly omnipresent. "Any use of language (or semiotic system) that rewords or reworks any other piece of language (or semiotic system) may be seen as the result of a translational process" (Pym, 2010, p. 150). This broad sense of translation goes beyond (written and spoken) texts and leads one to see a dynamic, complex, and constantly generative translation space produced by the forces of globalization.

One major source for the cultural translation approach is drawn from post-colonial theories, which by itself is actually a debating terrain (Hall, 2006; Shohat, 1997). Accordingly, it will not be difficult to understand that researchers who draw insights from post-colonial theories might have different and sometimes even argumentative perspectives toward

translation. For instance, while Niranjana (1992), taking a similar approach to Said's discussion on Orientalism in colonial literatures, maintains that translations renew and perpetuate colonial domination (p. 3), Bhabha illustrates a hybrid space between cultures. Although I would not disagree with Niranjana's argument of the potential problem of translation in enhancing orientalism via translation, this argument seems not to take into consideration colonial subjectivities; they are just reflected in a subtly non-transitive and in-direct sense. As von Flotow indicates in her discussion on the perception of receiving cultures toward translated literatures (2007), the process and the outcomes of the literatures and the inherent representation of the colonized "depends as much if not more on the participation and choices of the receiving culture" (p. 187). Accordingly, voices of the receiving cultures of the translated works exist irrespective of whether they are adequately reflected. In particular, translations where the translators and the translated work in fact can form a hybrid space full of voices of the original and the translators.

In this regard, Bhabha's notion of cultural hybridity seems to provide a more nuanced set of lenses that help to scrutinize translation as a hybrid space. In his work, *The Location of Culture* (2004), Bhabha addresses the colonized's resistance to the colonials in their hybrid in-betweenness. The post-colonial hybridity was a survival strategy. He articulates that borders, which used to be conceived of rigidly clear and fixed, are everywhere but blurred within and between different cultures. Subjectivity is rarely fixed, but fluid and situational. Translators are actually situated in borders between different cultures; where they are is in fact indeterminate and constantly transformative. In this sense, "translation is a performative nature of cultural communication" (Ibid, p. 326). Translation is then not entirely translatable. Consequently, translated works are in a condition of always waiting and searching for more engagement with understanding, interpretation, and re-translation as they go through various time-space and socio-cultural contexts.

Apparently, Bhabha's major interest lies in the complex subjectivities under colonial contexts and as such, his concept of translation is not limited to its linguistic sense. Nevertheless, his notion of translation in a broad sense is of particular meaning to our understanding of cultural translation in relation to the phenomenon of education borders, knowledge, and the creative economy within this globalization context. Since "borders" are everywhere but at the same time could be situational and blurry, it will be insufficient to understand knowledge as being translated, transformed, and transited crossing educational borders in their original sense. Given that knowledge is embodied and constructed by languages, any translation of knowledge inevitably would face the kinds of situations discussed by Benjamin and Bhabha, namely that knowledge translated in fact enters an indefinite and uncertain condition. This however does not imply the futility and impossibility of translating knowledge. As Cronin spells out in his discussion on translation as a *Doubleness* in relation to globalization as a homogenization (2003, pp. 128-131): Thanks to translators, there are simulacrum of these "economically and culturally powerful originals." However, these translated copies can only be copies. "The attempt to create a true likeness can only succeed if it fails. The incompleteness of any translation is the very principle of its future creativity" (ibid, p. 131).

To sum up, the cultural translation approach provides the possibility to see the ways in which translation can be a driver for cultural hybridity. Since this hybridity is in a condition of incompleteness and is not static like a period, but dynamic like a dash, it opens and provokes creative and innovative engagement. This hybridity could be an implicit driver for the creative economy. The perspective further provides significant implications for pondering upon the dissemination and circulation of translated knowledge as they cross borders, which I discuss in the following section.

Knowledge, Translation and Education across Borders

Based on the discussions above, this essay draws two implications for thinking about knowledge circulations for education crossing boundaries. The first is an appeal for adequate reconsideration of knowledge translated from non-native contexts. The second is that viewing translated knowledge in a different way allows one to advocate a kind of translation that is a hybrid open space to generate more knowledge, innovation, and creativity.

By arguing for a more appropriate reconsideration of knowledge translated in education settings, this essay by no means seeks to devalue the significance of translation in education. Nor does it intend to claim the impossibility of transferring knowledge into a non-native socio-cultural context. Rather it is argued to be sensitive and open when reading and interpreting knowledge translated by being mindful of the complexity of knowledge translation. Given that to make texts meaningful in the socio-cultural contexts of target languages, translations from source to target languages require considerations of what Shan Te-hsing calls “double contexts of translation.” (2009) The meaning and application of knowledge need to be engaged by looking into the contexts in which they are generated. In this process, translated knowledge can be reflected, re-interpreted, and discussed, which then leads to the generation of further knowledge and creativities. Accordingly, this research proposes not being satisfied with the translation of cultural works from different cultures, but to develop a cautious and reflective reading of translated works. Only in this way could it become a hybrid, dynamic, and cultural translation.

Secondly, I should borrow Harris’ suggestion on thinking of translation as “a way of thinking about internationalization” in higher education (2009, pp. 223-233). Harris argues that it is constrained and mistaken to conceive translation as a simple technical sense of transferring meaning from one language to another. Echoing Benjamin and Cavell, she discusses languages as an embodiment of human beings. Languages are more than a means for conveying messages. They constitute us. This further relates to the question of what translation has to do with the

nature of meaning; and meaning has been and must remain a central concern of higher education and universities. Therefore, she proposes an idea of “higher education in translation” that appeals to enriching linguistic and cultural diversities via student bodies at the university (p.223). Harris’ suggestion allows one to see the significant role of translation in higher education settings, although her articulation on enrichment of students’ cultural and linguistic diversities for university in translation seems to need more elaboration as to how the diverse languages and cultures could stimulate each other, and generate a dynamic hybrid space. Since “cultural dimension has always been included in concepts of translation,” (Buden & Nowotny, 2009, p. 203), the dynamic hybrid space is constantly in translation and transformation. Native voices are no longer so “native” as they are, but hybridize each other. In the space, knowledge is translated in a continuously evolving fashion via re-reading, re-interpretation, and re-translation in their dialogues.

Conclusion

This essay discusses and argues for the critical role of translation in the creative economy in the current globalization context. By shifting the focus on translation as a generative process, one could find that translation as such is in fact a dynamic condition that can further be a driver for greater engagement with creativity and knowledge. Translation, as such, also plays a significant role in the educational terrain where borders becomes tricky situational. In this context, knowledge translated in educational settings needs adequate attention and commitment.

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