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Englishization and the Politics of Translation

Abstract

Purpose This article investigates the treatment of translation within the international business and management (IBM) literature in order to highlight colonialist assumptions inscribed in this treatment as a result of the hegemonic status of English.

Design/methodology/approach This investigation takes the form of a systemic literature review to examine the treatment of translation in the IBM literature through a postcolonial lens.

Findings The findings demonstrate that despite growing interest in language in international business, matters of translation have received comparatively little attention. However, those articles which do address translation matters tend to do so in five key ways, including epistemological/methodological considerations, exploring translator agency, the investigations of the discursive void/conceptual fuzziness between languages, and approaches which discuss translation as social practice.

Research limitations/implications Despite our critique of English language hegemony, our literature review is restricted to English-language journals, which we acknowledge as problematic and discuss within the article.

Practical implications In exposing the limited treatment of translation within the literature, we provide a call to action for IBM scholars to be more explicit in their treatment of translation in order to ensure representation of cultural and linguistic Others, rather than providing domesticated accounts of multilingual research.

Originality/value Although there have been other articles which have examined translation in the past, this article is the first to do so through a postcolonial lens, demonstrating from a linguistic perspective the colonialist assumptions which are still prevalent in IBM knowledge production as evidenced by the treatment of translation in the field.

Key words Translation, postcolonial theory, language, representation

Introduction

In this article we contribute to postcolonial, critical international business research through an investigation of how the English language and translation are used in the knowledge production process. Through a systematic literature review which includes both methodological papers which specifically address translation in international business and management (IBM) research, and papers which deal with language diversity as an empirical phenomenon, we demonstrate that the majority of studies treat translation as an administrative, mechanistic

necessity, and that only a minority use it to break open the hegemonic assumptions and practices of knowledge production within international business. Furthermore, we argue that the role of English and translation need to be incorporated into critical, post-colonial international business research, which remains to date firmly monolingual.

We adopt a postcolonial approach as our primary theoretical lens through which to interpret the data, as we consider it to be an under-utilised tool through which to explore language practices (e.g. Boussebaa *et al*, 2014). We use our systematic literature review in the field of IBM in order to illustrate the scant attention which matters of translation are afforded in the extant literature, and argue that this is due to the colonialist assumptions which haunt management and organisation studies (Fougère and Moulettes, 2012).

Given that language-sensitive international business is no longer in its infancy and has now reached a degree of maturity (e.g. Karhunen *et al*, 2018; Tenzer *et al*, 2017) we believe that the time is ripe to explore approaches to translation in management from a postcolonial perspective which explores the politics of power and privilege which are present in the production of management knowledge, particularly international research which is then packaged for dissemination in the English language. Although this issue is drawing scholarly attention (e.g. Xian, 2008; Tietze, 2018; Boussebaa and Tienari, 2019), a postcolonial approach helps us to further demonstrate how the privileging of English reflects the colonialist assumptions inherent in much IBM literature (Westwood, 2006; Jack and Westwood, 2006; Westwood and Jack, 2007; Jack *et al*, 2011). Despite early consideration in this strand of critical management studies (e.g. Jack, 2004), language has been an aspect of this dynamic which has hitherto been largely ignored. For example, Westwood (2006) suggests that the inclusion of local informants could challenge the hegemony of Western knowledge production. However, he minimizes the specific issue of language in order to emphasize metaphorical, rather than interlingual, aspects of translation “firstly, they are more often required to research and write in a language other than their own, but *more importantly* [emphasis added] they will be translating their knowledge and cultural content into forms comprehensible to western audiences” (p.107).

Within the field of management and organisation studies more generally, postcolonial approaches are not new, and have been used in order to interrogate issues such as international knowledge transfer (Chio, 2008; Mir, Banerjee and Mir, 2008); global careers (McKenna and Peticca-Harris, 2015), workplace diversity (Prasad, 1997); identity work (Srinivas, 2013) and language management practices (Boussebaa, *et al*, 2014), amongst others. However, outside

of *critical perspectives on international business*, postcolonial approaches remain relatively scarce in the mainstream IBM literature. Even within this critical tradition however, there is still a blindness to issues of language and translation. Although a relatively early work in this area by Jack (2004) highlights the linkages between English language use in international business and power, subsequent pieces have tended to ignore issues of language and translation, and largely consider postcolonialism through a monolingual perspective (Steyaert and Janssens, 2013), despite language and accent being a visible site of tension in neo-colonial encounters (e.g. Thomson and Jones, 2015).

Theoretical lens

In this study, we have particularly drawn upon the work of Gavin Jack and Robert Westwood (e.g. Jack, 2004; Jack and Westwood, 2006; Westwood, 2006; Jack *et al*, 2011) who have made a significant contribution towards opening up a critically interrogative space in which the ongoing effects of colonial projects and their impact on IBM can be investigated. Postcolonial studies is a heterogenous field (Nkomo, 2011), which has origins in literary criticism, but now ranges from cultural studies through translation studies to management and organisation, and as such, has an array of theoretical underpinnings (Westwood and Jack, 2007). However, it is generally “concerned with revealing continuities and persistent effects of the colonial project and colonial experience in *contemporary* ways of knowing and acting in the world” (Westwood, 2004, p. 57)

Postcolonialism offers a theoretical framework within which the continuing effects of Western imperialism and its influence on management can be understood (Mika and O’Sullivan, 2014). As a political engagement with research practice (Jack and Westwood, 2006), postcolonialism offers a space in which scandalization (Steyaert and Janssens, 2013) can occur, and points to the way in which, since the Second World War, centres of management knowledge production have been established primarily within North America and Northern Europe (Jack, 2004; Westwood, 2004, Üsdiken, 2010; Grey, 2010). Such an approach led to the existence of colonialist binaries (Prasad, 1997) in which cultural Others were exoticized and constructed in terms of their opposition to the West, which was depicted as superordinate; the epitome of modernity and progress, standing in stark contrast to the more primitive “Orient” (Said, 2003). From the perspective of management knowledge production, this has meant that peoples and cultures outside of these dominant centres are frequently essentialised as an object of study (Fougère and Moulettes, 2012) and only “conceptualised through the refracting lens of Western

categories, constructs and theories” (Westwood, 2004, p. 63). The continued dominance of these centres of knowledge production has meant that such an approach has produced little self-scrutiny, and is rarely recognised for the ideologically bound and parochial perspective that it is (Boyacilliger and Adler, 1991; Westwood, 2004; Jack, 2004; Jack *et al*, 2011; Boussebaa, 2020).

Accordingly, there is now a substantial critique of the ways in which American management practices have been transported to developing economies under the guise of modernity, which reinforces the boundary between these centres of knowledge production and those on the periphery which at the same time legitimises and strengthens their hegemonic position (e.g. Alcadipani and Caldas, 2012).

From a translation perspective, postcolonial approaches have a long tradition of explicitly viewing acts of translation to be exercises of power and which necessarily engage with the politics of representation (e.g. Spivak, 2012).

However, due to the centrality of the UK and the US as centres of management knowledge production, this is a struggle with which IBM research has not fully engaged, as it treats English as the universal, theory-neutral language through which reality can be objectively reported, as explored in the following section.

The Politics of English

Within the literature on language management in international business, there is a substantial body of literature which argues English to be a “neutral” vehicle of communication, one which can be divested of ownership by native speakers, to be owned by the international business community (e.g. Neeley, 2017). Whilst this is appealing from the dominant functionalist perspective, it ignores the ways in which the English language achieved its global reach, firstly, through the colonial expansion of the British Empire, which relegated local languages to vernacular status whilst privileging English as the language of the elite (Gopal, 2019), and more recently, through the spreading of the management gospel (Tietze, 2004), which privileges English as the vehicular language of management knowledge.

In this respect, IB remains mired in parochialism (Boyacigiller and Adler, 1991) and often fails to interrogate its own ontological and epistemological position – rather than being truly “international” business, it is often little more than Anglo-American/Northern European business (Westwood and Jack, 2007). Given this positioning, it is unsurprising that the role

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3 which the English language plays within this is rarely subjected to sustained critique – albeit
4 with some exceptions (e.g. Boussebaa and Tienari, 2019; Tietze, 2018).
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7 The English language has become the global lingua franca of knowledge, commerce and
8 culture. Its influence is so dominant that it is not possible to partake in the global (knowledge)
9 economy without having access and a degree of mastery over the English language. While
10 enabling global flows and sharing of knowledge, there are also other consequences, as in some
11 academic disciplines, including management and business (Steyaert and Janssens, 2013;
12 Tietze, 2018) it has become the dominant language outside of which no valid knowledge claims
13 can be made and where the most powerful centres of knowledge production are the US,
14 followed by the UK (Üsdiken, 2010; Grey, 2010). The use of English is so ingrained in
15 business disciplines that is taken to express objective and universal truths – even in accounts
16 which subscribe to critical or constructionist epistemologies and which are located in
17 multilingual research contexts (see Gaibrois, 2018; Tietze, 2018; Steyaert and Janssens, 2013).
18 Such cavalier treatment of the English language has also consequences for the reconstruction
19 of academics within Anglophone terms (Boussebaa and Brown, 2017), for the content and
20 contours of knowledge accounts (Tietze and Dick, 2013) and also for the kind of knowledge
21 that is produced (Tietze, 2018) in line with the perspectives of these influential centres of
22 management knowledge production. Boussebaa and Tienari (2019) refer to the totality of these
23 processes, institutions and practices as ‘Englishized’ as expressive of the politics of knowledge
24 production. They are hegemonic as they implicitly privilege the meaning systems and values
25 of the powerful centres of knowledge production (Boussebba and Brown, 2017; Meriläinen *et*
26 *al*, 2008; Tietze and Dick, 2013), e.g. through topic selection, to decisions where to publish.
27 An additional consequence, which is rarely articulated, is also that the use of English renders
28 translation invisible, and, so it is assumed, unnecessary; this, in turn, can lead to a closure of
29 meanings, leaving only visible, countable and valid knowledge claims made in English
30 (Meriläinen *et al*, 2008).
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49 *The Politics of Translation*

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51 Of particular relevance to this discussion is Translation Studies, which has been influenced to
52 a much greater extent by postcolonial thought than the field of management. As a discipline,
53 it has long grappled with the tensions between domestication and foreignization (Venuti, 1993),
54 i.e. the extent to which the translated text should move away from its original form in order to
55 conform to the cultural and linguistic expectations of the reader, or conversely, the extent to
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3 which the reader themselves should move away from their own cultural context and norms to
4 transport themselves closer to the text.
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7 Kanneh (1997, p. 272) reminds us that “*gaining knowledge of other cultures is not a simple,*
8 *uncomplicated matter of neutral translation from one social order to the direct relativity of*
9 *another.*” There is no absolute equivalence of meaning between languages (Chidlow *et al.*,
10 2014); the translation of meaning is always a precarious act, rendering meaning negotiable.
11 Such negotiation is always a political act as it is situated historically and geopolitically and the
12 meaning which becomes accepted will depend on the relative power dynamics between the two
13 languages in the translatorial relationship (Kanneh, 1997).
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17 As the language of management knowledge production and writing is English, its meanings
18 systems are treated as the universal, ‘naturally-given’ ones, creating a scenario in which other
19 languages, and the acts of translation which through which they are rendered in English, as
20 largely invisible (Venuti, 2008).
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23 Here, the dominance of English is contributing to a “domesticating” effect in management
24 research (Venuti, 1993). Its dominance is cemented within the assumption that all management
25 knowledge can unproblematically be expressed in English, be it by management researchers or
26 managers implementing the use of BELF (Business English as a Lingua Franca).
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29 It is assumed that BELF is a neutral vehicular language of communication that is owned by
30 “nobody – and everybody” (Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen, 2013, p. 29) and therefore
31 has a hybrid nature: it allows space for the expression of users’ diverse cultural backgrounds.
32 We recognise the utility of BELF in communicating in multilingual environments; however, to
33 claim neutrality is a de-historicized perspective, ignoring historical and geopolitical factors that
34 have led to the contemporary choice of English as a global language of communication
35 (Boussebaa, 2020).
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38 Therefore, we argue that within academia itself, the choice of BELF allows UK and US
39 interests to be propagated by contributing towards their maintenance as powerful centres of
40 knowledge production (Üsdiken, 2010).
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43 From a postcolonial perspective, the omnipresence of BELF in in international business is an
44 example of the continued “presence of the colonial” (Mir and Mir, 2009 p. 104). This symbolic
45 presence - which removes the possibility of dialogue due to the continued imposition of
46 colonialist ideologies - means that local knowledge is not valued; but is still used, distorted to
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3 fit an external agenda, in the same way that a domesticating approach does from a translation
4 perspective. For example, even in multilingual workplaces where BELF is present, native
5 English speakers are still able to claim “ultimate linguistic authority” (Lovrits and Bres, 2020,
6 p.12) over the quality of English used by non-native speakers, and rather than being perceived
7 as neutral, different varieties of English are placed in a hierarchy (Boussebaa et al, 2014).
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12 A further explanatory concept from postcolonial theory, which has gained some traction within
13 management and organisation studies, is that of hybridity. This idea, as considered by Bhabha
14 (2004), suggests that colonial encounters can lead to the creation of a third space. Through
15 processes of mimicry, the colonized subject, in trying to reproduce the dominant logics of the
16 colonizer, will often produce something different, which can be a hybrid form in which the
17 colonized is able to assert their own identities. Although in management studies, translation
18 has largely been treated as a mechanistic task (Peltokorpi and Vaara, 2014), this assumption is
19 not taken for granted in Translation Studies, in which the translator plays a much greater agentic
20 role, and in which the creativity and pluralities inherent in the process are recognised (Munday,
21 2016; Pym, 2014). When translation work is made visible as an agentic social process
22 (Tyulenev, 2014), translators emerge as key agents who influence the character of such third
23 spaces in which meaning and equivalences between languages may clash, and out of which
24 new and hybrid forms of meaning are born.
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36 Hybridity has already been used as a theoretical lens in management and organisation studies
37 (e.g. Yousfi, 2014). However, beyond works such as Gaibris (2018), Bousebaa et al (2014),
38 and Janssens and Steyaert (2014), a consideration of hybridity in language practices has yet to
39 make significant inroads in language-sensitive international business. This indicates the
40 “*imprint of [...] colonialist doctrine [...] whenever the various apparatuses of the Western*
41 *world (and that includes [...] academics, scholarly journals, [...]) assert their right (or*
42 *obligation to “guide” the rest of the world, be it for intellectual, economic, social, or political*
43 *“development” (Prasad, 1997, p. 304). In short, the use of English, and more specifically,*
44 *BELF, within IBM represents a form of “hegemony at home” (Bhabha, 2004, p.xv) in which*
45 *other languages and ways of knowing, are marginalised and silenced due to continued*
46 *colonialist influence linked to the existence of centres of knowledge production (Üsdiken,*
47 *2010).*
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57 In the light of our discussion, postcolonial studies, with its emphasis on encounters between
58 peoples and nations, which necessarily involve communications across language boundaries,
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3 translation has to be a frequently enacted practice. It is also a theoretical lens through which to
4 begin such an interrogation. Furthermore, an emphasis on translation enables us to open up
5 the possibility for a genuine recognition and acknowledgement of cultural and linguistic Others
6 in management research, by presenting our research contexts and participants in their
7 complexity, rather than the sanitised version (Xian 2008). While there have been notable steps
8 towards establishing an understanding of translation as a process of social interaction within
9 the international business literature (e.g. Lecomte *et al*, 2018; Brannen and Mughan, 2016;
10 Chidlow *et al*, 2014), such an approach is still a minority one, which we aim to advance through
11 this review.
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19 **Methodological Approach**

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21 In line with recent literature reviews on language in international business (e.g. Karhunen *et*
22 *al*, 2018; Tenzer *et al*, 2017), we reviewed business articles which explicitly dealt with the
23 issue of translation. Translation was chosen as the main focus because we argue that the lack
24 of attention which it has received in the management literature (Zhong and Chin, 2015) is
25 reflective of the domesticating agenda of international business – despite the multilingual
26 contexts in which data is collected, the accounts are typically sanitised to the extent that readers
27 are often unaware that the data has been translated at all, how, and by whom (Xian, 2008).
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34 Such questions are not only pertinent in the IBM literature. Much empirical work in the field
35 of management and organisation studies in general also relies on data which was collected in
36 languages other than English and has the same challenges, which is why we have not restricted
37 our search to IBM journals alone, but also management and organisation studies more broadly.
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42 Therefore, in this systematic literature review, we have incorporated two types of paper –
43 firstly, those which deal specifically with translation as a methodological issue in management
44 research, and secondly, those which address language diversity as an empirical phenomenon
45 in the context of IBM. We have selected these two areas for our review due to the fact that
46 international business is the area of management which, due to its nature, has engaged the most
47 with interlingual diversity (Piekkari, Welch and Welch, 2014) and therefore is presumed to
48 engage with translation as part of this field of enquiry. Further, given that management studies
49 more broadly is facing calls for greater methodological pluralism rather than emphasizing the
50 discipline's positivist roots, we were aware that there are a number of methodology papers
51 which deal specifically with translation as a methodological issue when engaging in
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3 multilingual, qualitative research and therefore, wished to incorporate perspectives from such
4 articles into our review.
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7 The time period of publication was determined as the period between 1997 and 2019, as 1997
8 saw the landmark publication by Marschan *et al* which began to establish language as a
9 legitimate and distinct area of study within International Business (Brannen *et al*, 2014; Tietze
10 and Piekkari, 2020). In order to perform the search, Scopus was used, as the largest scholarly
11 database on business and management texts, in order to access a wide cross-section of articles.
12 We excluded book chapters and monographs from this review due to the lack of consistency in
13 indexing these in search engines.
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20 The search parameters were defined as language/linguist*/bilingual/multilingual +
21 “international business” + translat* within the entirety of the article.
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24 Using this method meant that the search would pick up any variations of translation, including
25 translator and translating, in addition to variants of linguist, such as linguistic (Tenzer *et al*,
26 2017). The search included management issues relating to language and translation more
27 generally, without restricting it specifically to international business journals, as with Chidlow
28 *et al*'s (2014) literature review on translation, from which the present study differs in a number
29 of ways. Firstly, we have included management and international business journals more
30 broadly, rather than focusing on the four which Chidlow *et al* (2014) reviewed. Additionally,
31 our review spans a longer time period – 1997-2019 versus 2000-2009, and is a thematic review
32 underpinned by postcolonialism as a theoretical lens, which represents a substantial departure
33 from prior research which has reviewed the treatment of translation in international business
34 from an equivalency perspective (e.g. Chidlow *et al*, 2014; Holden and Michailova, 2014).
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43 These search terms lead to the identification of 1,009 articles published in business and
44 management journals which met the criteria. A very small number of articles (fewer than ten)
45 which were not in English were removed from the list. Our use of English-language search
46 terms only is not unproblematic, given the previous discussion regarding the hegemony of
47 English in academia. Although previous literature reviews (Karhunen *et al*, 2018; Tenzer *et al*
48 *et al*, 2017; Chidlow *et al* 2014) also restricted their searches to English-language articles, and
49 this is therefore in line with established conventions, we recognise the contradiction between
50 our central arguments and this approach, which we discuss in more detail in the following
51 section on reflexivity. The abstracts of the remaining articles were then reviewed to understand
52 the focus of the paper. This led to articles which dealt with computer languages and translation;
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3 translation as a metaphor; translation in literary or non-business settings; and non-business
4 journal articles being removed. Additionally, we incorporated only articles which were
5 published in either international business or general management journals, and removed
6 articles from disciplinary-specific journals which primarily related to tourism, accounting and
7 marketing. Although such disciplines deal with organisational settings, they have their own
8 traditions of discussing language use, which have hitherto not had significant dialogue with
9 international business (Piekkari *et al*, 2014), which is the field which has hitherto engaged the
10 most with matters of language and translation, although we acknowledge in particular the
11 increasing interest within accounting of translation related matters (e.g. Evans, 2018;
12 Kettunen, 2017). This led to the establishment of a list of 180 papers which discussed in some
13 way language and translation in an organisational setting.

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15 From this list, a content search of the term *translat** and its variants took place, to uncover the
16 extent to which the article engaged with issues of translation. Following this process, articles
17 which only made a cursory mention of translation as a language management strategy, were
18 removed so that only those articles which dealt with translation work in a substantive way were
19 remaining. This process demonstrated the silence which still exists within business on
20 translation issues, as illustrated by significant number of the papers which examined language
21 use in organisational matters did not discuss translation. After this process, only 61 articles
22 remained, which were then reviewed in their entirety by the authors.

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39 During this review process, the articles were examined to determine the ways in which they
40 engaged with and discussed translation processes, enabling a thematic categorisation based on
41 this treatment. We were particularly interested in those categories which indicated a discussion
42 of translation that was not purely mechanistic. Both authors established a list of themes on this
43 basis, which were discussed in dialogic exchange throughout the process. From this, we
44 identified an overview of how translation was discussed in this literature, and then from this
45 considered those themes which emphasized translation as a social practice. This led to five
46 major themes which we present in a later section.

47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 *Reflexivity*

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56 As we are discussing issues of language and translation, it is helpful to briefly outline our own
57 linguistic identities, so that as authors and researchers, we may interrogate whether we are
58 appropriately positioned to research across such linguistic and cultural boundaries (Jack and
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3 Westwood, 2006; Westwood and Jack, 2007). Both authors are from the Global North, are
4 currently working in British universities, and have multilingual backgrounds. The first author
5 is British and speaks English as a first language, and also speaks Spanish and (some) French,
6 having used both languages extensively for business purposes throughout her career, and spent
7 a period living and working in Spain. The second author is German and speaks German as a
8 first language, but has lived and worked in the UK for over thirty years.
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11 Likewise, some reflexivity about our epistemological position is required to explain the
12 analysis of the articles. Our motivations for engaging in this literature review are stimulated
13 by our own experiences with multilingualism. Therefore, when engaging in reflexivity in order
14 to interrogate our perceptions of what we and others take for granted (Cunliffe, 2016) we
15 acknowledge the influence of our personal life and language competences and interrogate what
16 it means to our understanding of language and translation that our own multilingualism comes
17 from fluency in multiple colonial languages (Phipps, 2019). We engage with reflexivity to
18 interrogate our own relationship with linguistic Others, and to highlight the boundaries of our
19 knowledge (Cunliffe, 2018). This is an issue with which we grappled through the process of
20 analysis and writing of this literature – not least given that we are writing it in English,
21 something which we critique as a major contributor to the domesticating agenda of
22 international management research (Tietze, 2018) and the erasure of indigenous identities. In
23 particular, we note that our review solely used English-language search terms. This review
24 does not incorporate insights from work published in other languages which may well address
25 translation issues, and also excluded a small number of articles in Mandarin which appeared in
26 the search, which we were unable to appropriately engage with for the purposes of literature
27 review. Thus, we recognise the extent to which our own knowledge production is bounded by
28 our linguistic capabilities and therefore demonstrates how, even in the act of challenging
29 dominant assumptions, we continue to maintain them, demonstrating their hegemonic status.
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33 However, in line with Spivak (1988), we consider that this does not preclude us from reflecting
34 on such research issues. By making the partiality of our knowledge and perspective visible
35 (Wray-Bliss, 2003) we hope to stimulate further reflection on these issues amongst the
36 audience of *critical perspectives on international business*, as to open up dialogue on this area
37 to a broader audience is part of the process of scrutinization and scandalization of our own
38 research practices (Steyaert and Janssens, 2013).
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41 **Current Status of the Field**

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3 The review uncovered five major findings. The first two relate to epistemological positions
4 and consequent methodological decisions evident in the papers. Findings three, four and five
5 express the thematic approaches developed in reviewed papers, through which translatorial
6 agency, situatedness and context contingency (social practice) and opportunities to generate or
7 manipulate meanings through translation (equivalence) are debated.
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10 11 12 *Epistemic and methodological approaches* 13

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15 The first important finding is a simple, yet significant one: few of the papers deal with
16 translation in a meaningful way; given that they all deal with language diversity and therefore
17 translation is inherent to the subject matter, this is a substantive finding. This demonstrates the
18 lack of awareness about the consequences of translation in this field, which we argue is not
19 engaging in epistemic reflexivity, in which interests are exposed, fundamental structures – in
20 this case, the unproblematic acceptance of English as a publication language – are questioned,
21 and the participation of those being researched is encouraged (Johnson and Duberley, 2000).
22 Very few of the papers make explicit their epistemological and ontological assumptions
23 regarding the nature of language and English specifically.
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27 Secondly, within the methodology papers which address translation, they do so in one of two
28 ways. One approach is to address translation from a mechanistic perspective, which is
29 primarily concerned with the translation of survey instruments across different languages (e.g.
30 Briseño *et al*, 2019; Littrell *et al*, 2018; Cascio, 2012). It emphasizes translation equivalence
31 and back translation (Brislin, 1970) as a mechanism to achieve this. A second body of work is
32 primarily concerned with translation of qualitative, multilingual data, which highlights the
33 difficulties of the translation process of management research due to the situated nature of texts
34 (e.g. Abalkhail, 2018). It critiques the dominant mechanistic approaches (e.g. Schedlitzki *et*
35 *al*, 2017) and advocates cultural and political approaches to translation which embrace social
36 context (e.g. Usunier, 2011; Xian, 2008).
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40 For example, Xian (2008) describes how her translation of interviews reflecting the lived
41 experience of Chinese women entrepreneurs, which took place in Chinese, became part of the
42 analytical process itself. In this detailed discussion of the translation decisions made as part of
43 the research process, and how they could influence the interpretation and understanding of the
44 participant's accounts, she explains how "there is no separation, at this stage, between data
45 interpretation and data translation" (p.241).
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3 Under such approaches, translation becomes a tool which opens up access to different
4 knowledge traditions (Chanlat, 2014); although the hegemonic status of English within
5 management (Schedlitzki *et al*, 2017) often acts as a barrier.
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8 9 *Translator agency*

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11 Our third finding relates to a body of literature which strongly points to the translator as an
12 active agent in knowledge transfer and meaning making. Different groups of translators can be
13 identified: professional translators (e.g. Blenkinsopp and Shademan Pajouh, 2010; Boncori and
14 Vine, 2014), and “paraprofessional” translators (Tyulenev, 2014), who translate or interpret in
15 situ and often ad hoc. These are also referred to as boundary spanners within the terminology
16 of international business (e.g. Aichhorn and Puck, 2017; Barner-Rasmussen and Aarnio, 2011),
17 whose work includes translation or interpreting when engaged in multilingual work settings.
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20 Translator agency is greater in situations where discursive void or “fuzziness” are present, as
21 discussed in a subsequent section. A key example of translator agency is found in Tietze et al
22 (2017) who demonstrate the influential role a translator played in facilitating a 2-day workshop
23 on talent management in Slovakia. The translator considered his frequent interventions as
24 expressive of how “his translation and interpretation work was conducted through the historical
25 lens of communism” (p.164). In other words, the decisions he made about how to translate
26 were not neutral, but deeply influenced by his historical understanding of the context and the
27 organisation itself, and he used this knowledge to “bring a sense of immediacy and urgency to
28 the intervention” (p.164).
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40 Within these groupings of translating agents, professional translators are rarely discussed in
41 depth. The exceptions are Blenkinsopp and Shademan Pajouh (2010), who point out the
42 decisions made by translators if faced with the lack of equivalent concept and meaning, and
43 Tran et al, (2017) who discuss how they work in conjunction with paraprofessional translators.
44 Otherwise they are discussed as a cost item (Boncori and Vine, 2014).
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50 With regards to paraprofessionals, emphasis is given to their feelings and emotions of about
51 translation work (e.g. Aichhorn and Puck, 2017), their gatekeeping positions (Welch and
52 Welch, 2008), and whether their particular positioning as boundary spanner provides them with
53 prestige and influence or excessive workloads (Zhang and Harzing, 2016; Hinds *et al*, 2014).
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57 Little, however, is known about what Holz-Mänttari (1984) described as translatorial action,
58 i.e. the very translation acts and decisions through which third spaces are created and hybrid
59 meanings are (potentially) generated (for an exception see Piekkari *et al*, 2013).
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Translation as social practice

Before we discuss the fourth theme in the literature, it is necessary to point out that agentic understanding of translation is interlinked with viewing acts as translation as socially and culturally embedded practice – though it makes analytic sense to keep them apart in this section. The papers on which this section is built emphasize the social practice elements more strongly than the agentic-bound papers. These articles emphasize that translation is much more than the mechanistic process of translating text from one language into another, but that it involves a great deal of social networking activity (Holden and Von Kortzfleisch, 2004). Consequently: “processes of interlingual translation involve translators in making decisions between alternative linguistic frameworks of understanding and meaning [...] decision-making processes are themselves embedded in wider social and cultural systems” (Ciuk and James, 2015, p. 569). Therefore, translator agency can be considered as being embedded social practice in that translatorial decisions are constituted through both in situ and by individual (or collective) action. A useful example of translation as social practice is found in Tran et al (2016) who discuss how Facebook crowdsourced translation as part of the company’s internationalisation process. Volunteers were recruited to provide translations into multiple languages, and tools on the site itself enabled users to view the original text plus translations suggested by their peers. The final translation decision was one approved via a voting system, in which “each translation competed against other translations, and the one with the highest rating was chosen” (p.490). This was then given final approval by a professional translator. As a result, hundreds of thousands of individuals participated in these translation processes, in order to reach a shared agreement about the most appropriate translation to be used by Facebook.

Beyond this, our review reveals that the area of IB which deals to the greatest extent with the concept of translation as social practice is that of international knowledge transfer. This has undoubtedly been influenced by the contributions of Holden (e.g. Holden, 2002; Holden and Von Kortzfleisch, 2004; Holden and Michailova, 2014) and Welch and Welch (e.g. Welch and Welch, 2008). The knowledge transfer literature more broadly emphasizes how ideas change as they travel across different contexts (Czarniawska and Sevón, 2005), although not necessarily in an interlingual sense (Ciuk and James, 2015). The social practice approaches add to the understanding of translation as it emphasizes the networked, dispersed and often collective efforts to arrive at shared meanings or to render particular meanings dominant over

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3 others. In this regard, they expand our understanding of agency as moving beyond individual
4 foci.
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7 *Lack of Equivalence of meaning: Discursive void and 'fuzziness'*
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10 Our final finding relates to those papers which specifically highlighted how translation deals
11 with a lack of an appropriate terminology between source and target languages. This lack of
12 equivalence can be a total absence of vocabulary and meanings of the subject area or it can
13 take the form of the existence of vaguely similar vocabulary and meanings, so that the
14 resulting fuzziness of conceptual meaning and practical applications provides a 'wiggling
15 space', where meanings can be reshaped, challenged and manipulated. The first lack of
16 equivalence has been coined as "discursive void," (Tietze *et al*, 2017) who highlight that
17 management concepts do not necessarily move between languages which have evolved in
18 different political and cultural contexts. Holden and Michailova (2014) demonstrate this in
19 relation to the translation of the Handbook of Knowledge Management into Russian, and
20 evidence the difficulties in translating KM concepts into the Russian language. They discuss
21 how the term "knowledge sharing" which, in Western management discourse, views
22 knowledge as a resource which can be shared amongst a community, does not easily translate
23 into a Russian context where knowledge is viewed as a source of power, which is often hoarded
24 at the top of an organisational hierarchy.
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27 Blenkinsopp and Shademan Pajouh (2010) demonstrate how professional
28 translators/interpreters deal with the lack of equivalence for a Farsi word (and its practice)
29 *tarouf*, which expresses a culturally specific practice of civility and reciprocity in social and
30 business settings. In the examples provided, the lack of equivalence enables translators to make
31 decisions, be it to simply not translate a concept, to add on their own personal perspective on
32 its meaning or even the 'invention' of additional features to the central theme to be translated.
33 As discussed previously, translator agency is quite high in these contexts.
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36 Examples of research accounts that document the translation of texts, concepts and meanings
37 that are characterized by an inherent 'fuzziness' are Logemann and Piekkari (2015), who
38 capture how the translation work of incoming documents and instructions sent by headquarters
39 done by a subsidiary head enabled this manager to write his own preferred interpretation of
40 what the central change programme meant into the guidance that went out to the subsidiary
41 workforce. His aim was to safeguard as much as possible the relative independence of the
42 subsidiary. Here the "fuzziness" of translations is highlighted, particularly when dealing with
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3 issues of organisational specificity as in the account provided. Likewise, papers by Bjørge and
4 Whittaker (2015) and Ciuk and James (2015) and Ciuk *et al* (2019), investigate the translation
5 of corporate values across linguistic boundaries for use in organisational subsidiaries. Here the
6 fuzziness of translation is highlighted when dealing with issues of organizational specificity -
7 corporate values being such an area where vagueness enables a degree of subtly changing their
8 meanings when translating them 'into' the receiving context. In this regard 'fuzziness' creates
9 a space where divergent interpretations, even if only nuanced and subtle, can be inscribed into
10 the translated text and meaning. The papers led by Ciuk (Ciuk and James, 2015; Ciuk *et al*,
11 2019) show how a corporate change programme was interlingually translated by a group of
12 employees and consultants from (Headquarter) English to subsidiary Polish and how, in this
13 process, some meanings were locally adapted.

24 **Future Research Agenda**

25 Our findings fall into two groups: one about the philosophical-epistemic aspects of the
26 treatment of translation and a second group which identified three interrelated themes which
27 yield understandings of agency, social and cultural practice, and meaning-making from a
28 translation perspective. We now relate these findings with the concepts and debates developed
29 in the first part of the paper, so that we can take them forward into grounded, substantive
30 recommendations for a future research agenda.

36 *Reflexivity and Representation*

37 In the reviewed papers there is a distinct lack of epistemic reflexivity about how the use of
38 English and 'Other' languages are accounted for. If translation is discussed at all, it is often
39 treated through mechanistic approaches (back translation) as the favoured way to deal with
40 language data; although in some qualitative projects, approaches which understand translation
41 as cultural, political negotiated meaning making were also used. Mainly, these papers point to
42 the analytic richness which can be gained if incorporating translation into the methodological
43 repertoire. However, whether used in a mechanistic or in an interpretive spirit, in either case
44 translation is not used to reflect upon the imbalances inscribed in colonial encounters
45 themselves (rare exceptions include the papers by Ciuk and James, 2015; Ciuk *et al*, 2019). In
46 total, however, epistemic reflexivity is quite low and consequently, very few of the papers
47 make explicit their epistemological and ontological assumptions regarding the nature of
48 language, English specifically, and translation.

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3 Our findings bear out that the phenomenon of Englishization continues to shape the knowledge
4 accounts of international business; a concomitant phenomenon is the relative translation-
5 blindness of most international business research, even if (self-) labelled as language-based or
6 language-sensitive. Yet there are also some studies, particularly those espousing social
7 practices approaches, which integrate agentic-decision making with historically, culturally and
8 social-politically grounded translatorial work. These accounts tend to have a relative higher
9 degree of epistemic reflexivity in that they account for authors' linguistic background or their
10 role in the translation of empirical data.
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18 The question arises as to how to engender what Westwood (2004, p. 106) describes as “the
19 total reconfiguring of research practices, including their ontological, epistemological,
20 methodological, ethical and political dimensions”. In doing so, he argues, the politics of
21 representation can be addressed and broken open as to make space for the knowledge and self-
22 representation of local people.
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27 We recommend increasing epistemic reflexivity within the reporting structure of research
28 accounts: authors reveal their positions, including their linguistic ones, as part of their
29 methodological reporting including the translation work they, or indeed other agents, have done
30 to enable the production of respective research accounts. This practice addresses the existence
31 of hegemonic publication practices because hegemony thrives when left invisible and
32 unreported. Thus, articulating the linguistic Other, giving it room and space in research
33 accounts, is creating a space for the local in the colonial encounter. Such practices could easily
34 be integrated into existing protocols of how one reports one's ontological and epistemological
35 commitments as well as accounting for research design and (data) analysis. To stress, such a
36 change in reporting practices is not just a superficial add-on to existing reporting mechanisms,
37 nor just a way to deepen data analysis – though it may well achieve this (Xian 2008), but it is
38 a means of de-centring the text/knowledge production process by acknowledging the existence
39 of ‘the Other’ (language, knowledge, way of being) as legitimate and important within IBM
40 research accounts. While Westwood remains sceptical about the possibilities of translation,
41 we would advocate to make translation central to cross-language research accounts as an
42 epistemological challenge. Consequently, the reported translation process, with all its
43 difficulty, messiness and boundedness renders open the representational process, which mainly
44 remains unaddressed to date. However, there are the beginnings of change as the foundations
45 of problematizing English and addressing its role in knowledge creation are currently being
46 laid (Tietze and Piekkari, 2020).
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3 That said, reflexivity is not to be contained exclusively within the methodological section of
4 research accounts. Instead, we promote the use of particular literacy strategies throughout the
5 research text. We follow Venuti's (1993) idea of foreignization understood as a way of writing
6 in which the original language and meaning are represented, preserved and protected as a
7 means to achieve a different form of representation. In line with Chakrabarty (2008) we argue
8 that, not only should English be provincialized, so should epistemic traditions which privilege
9 European and American knowledge over indigenous forms of knowing. This will take the form
10 that in the bodies of research accounts, the language of the local is left visible, intact and
11 integrated (e.g. Mika and O'Sullivan, 2013; Xian, 2008). As a consequence, its very existence
12 subverts the smoothness of an otherwise domesticated account. In their analysis of textbooks
13 Fougère and Moulettes (2012) describe texts as 'haunted' by the colonial legacy, i.e. they are
14 based on implied epistemic assumptions privileging Western perspectives. In adopting
15 representational writing strategies based on reflexivity and foreignizing, such ghosts could be
16 exorcized, at least to an extent.

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19 However, it is not sufficient to change the practices which underpin the writing of individual
20 research accounts. We know from our discussion that paper-production processes are
21 underpinned by the political Englishization process of management and based on a series of
22 institutionalized practices (Boussebaa and Tienari, 2019; Steyaert and Janssens, 2013; Tietze,
23 2018). The majority of the reviewed papers have low or no awareness of the Englishization
24 that underpins their very existence. These institutional practices are difficult to decentre;
25 however incremental gains may be had through changing journal editorial policies along the
26 lines that research accounts reporting from multilingual projects are expected to account for
27 their translatorial methodological choices or that each published paper needs to have an abstract
28 in at least two languages (journals outside the management disciplines have already developed
29 such good practices).

30 *Thematic and conceptual trajectories*

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32 The literature review showed three interrelated themes: translator agency, translation as social
33 practice and meaning making in contexts of no or only partial equivalence of meaning. While
34 some reviewed papers are rich in detail, there is currently no clear trajectory within which to
35 take the notion of translation forward as a focus of empirical research and concept-building
36 based on it. In other words, there is an emergent, but still scattered, body of work which
37 analyses the dynamics of the colonial encounter - in particular in the context of cross-language
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3 knowledge transfer. However, it lacks an integrated or shared understanding of translatorial
4 action (Holz-Mänttari, 1984) as a means to investigate embedded translatorial agency as it
5 unfolds in the knowledge transfer contexts and how it contributes to hybridity, change,
6 resistance and also adoption.
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11 The constructs discussed in the first part of the paper, i.e. the notion of the third space and
12 mimicry/hybridity are useful in understanding the power dynamics inscribed within colonial
13 encounters, and have already been used to understand such relationships with regards to
14 knowledge transfer (e.g. Mir and Mir, 2009; Frenkel, 2008). We see these encounters as being
15 in the first instance, language and translation-bound encounters. We therefore recommend
16 combining the notion of translatorial action with the conceptual vocabulary of the third space
17 and hybridity to explore in depth how translatorial action can make a difference to the skewed
18 balance within this encounter. While there is some scattered knowledge about how translatorial
19 action informs such encounters (e.g. Ciuk and James, 2015; Ciuk *et al*, 2019) there is a need
20 for more studies researching such encounters from a translation perspective within a variety of
21 different settings and theoretical orientations.
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31 We therefore recommend that a fleet of empirical studies is necessary to build a body of work
32 that is conceptually sophisticated and located, geopolitically, in ‘peripheral countries’ whose
33 voices should be heard and left visible in future research accounts. Thus, the empirically-based
34 body of work we envisage is firstly, thematically focused on language diversity and translation
35 as it unfolds with in situ between different language users. Secondly, such studies draw on the
36 established and highly effective vocabulary of the third space as the space where the “*cutting*
37 *edge of translation and negotiation between the colonizer and the colonized is to be found*”
38 (Bhabha, 1994, p. 38) and where hybridity as the outcome of this encounter is generated and
39 critically commented upon. Thirdly, these studies need to be written as highly reflective pieces
40 where authorship and translatorship are visible, discussed and embedded in debates about what
41 constitutes originality and imitation, on what grounds such claims are made, and who benefits
42 from them.
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51 **Conclusion**

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54 The use of language is never neutral as language practices are embedded in political, social and
55 historical contexts. Therefore, the use of English as a taken-for-granted language of knowledge
56 and lack of attention paid to translation are based on essentialist, universalist assumptions about
57 the nature of knowledge and how to represent it in written research accounts. Indeed, the
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3 communities of critical and postcolonial scholars is yet to engage with its own use of language,
4 and in this regard its own ways of representing its knowledge claims and truths reflect, even if
5 only unconsciously, the oligarchic ordering of knowledge and the privileging of English
6 language meanings and values. In particular, postcolonial studies are almost by definition
7 located in 'Other' language environments and likely to be, if empirical, multilingual in
8 character; if theoretical, they may draw on 'other' concepts and words reflecting traditions and
9 orderings that fall outside the knowledge producing Western epistemological preferences. We
10 therefore advocate that the inclusion of translation decisions goes some way to address the
11 politics of representation as "It is through the process of translation, the central problematic
12 for postcolonial analysis, that indigenous knowledge is lost" (Long and Mills, 2008, p.394).

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