

## Management Learning

### Nothing left to learn: translation and the Groundhog Day of bureaucracy

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Abstract:	Beyond the existing theorizing of translation as a creative disruption in both occupational and semantic terms, the current study explores it critically in the experiential framework of professional translators and as a meaning-making process. Acknowledging the role of translation in creating dialogic and radical climates for learning, the article proposes to explore the other side of this relationship by studying how the limiting of space for translation delimits the possibilities for meaning-creation thus precluding dialogue. In addition to this general point, it ponders the specific aporia of organizationally-embedded adversity of translation in the occupational context (apparently) devoted to semantic labour, namely that of translator's work. It demonstrates that the rigidity of meaning-making and the inexorableness of partaking in the uncanny déjà vu, are the reflections of specific organizational (bureaucratic) frame, and posits that they may be used as experiential and semantic heuristics for better understanding learning and non-learning in organizations.

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**Abstract**

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**Keywords**

**Bureaucracy, learning, parasite, Serres, translation, uncanny.**

## Introduction

The liminal notion of organizational learning associated with the relaxation of rules and enabling a space for acquisition of new knowledge is increasingly discussed as a valid practical and theoretical alternative to more controllable frameworks (Clegg, Kornberger and Rhodes, 2004; 2005; citation concealed for review purposes). The aim is to typically reflect on the current dynamics of organizational knowledge accumulation and learning processes, rather than to further the agenda of efficiency (Clegg et al., 2004). Such account takes into consideration the emerging conceptualization of societal dynamics underlying the organizational realities in terms of destabilization (Kostera, 2014) and liquidity (Bauman, 2000), as well as transparency and translucency of the social process (Gabriel, 2005; citation concealed for review purposes). This ‘becoming’ perspective (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) on organization and organizing construes learning as a continuous process devoid of clear-cut boundaries, and in relational rather than essentialist terms. In this vein, Clegg, Kornberger and Rhodes conceptualized learning, in the consultancy profession, in terms of ongoing ‘translations’ “bridging between different language games that shape

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9 organizational reality” (2004, p. 40). Similarly, their useful concept of ‘parasitic’  
10 consulting (Clegg et al., 2004), enabling for self-reflexivity and dialogism of the  
11 learning process, is well aligned with the recent theorizing of learning in emergent  
12 (Antonacopoulou and Chiva, 2007), socially-embedded (Gherardi, Nicollini and Odella,  
13 1998), deconstructive (Garrick and Rhodes, 1998) and radical (citation concealed for  
14 review purposes) terms.

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21 And yet, despite concurring that those creatively disruptive ‘translations’ (Barrett, 1998)  
22 are sought for in organizations (Clegg, et al., 2004), the current study proposes to reflect  
23 on the possible limits of conceptualizing organizations in terms of ‘becoming’.  
24 Emphasizing these constructions of organizational realities, which already ‘became’, the  
25 other side of organizational learning is explored through scrutinizing the ‘bridging’  
26 capacity of ‘translation’ within the translator’s occupation itself. The parasitic logic  
27 applied to translator’s work immersed in the bureaucratic semantic frame points towards  
28 the uncanny notions associated with mechanistic disambiguation obliterating the  
29 dialogism of organizational learning processes. As observed by Kociatkiewicz and  
30 Kostera, attempts at control and ordering of individual and organizational identities  
31 create the feeling of oppression and the resulting inclination towards resistance or  
32 fatalistic resignation (2010, p. 277). Thus emerges ‘shadow’: which consists of  
33 elements, which in the process of identity construction remained unacknowledged and  
34 rejected (2010, p. 257).  
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9 The empirical case study used here is a somewhat extreme portrayal of organizational  
10 dynamics evoking the ‘shadow’ experience. The case in question is analysed through  
11 employing two closely related theoretical frameworks: ‘parasitic logic’ and the non-  
12 concept of ‘uncanny’. The study posits that despite organizational worlds emerging  
13 constantly (Clegg et al, 2005), the emergence patterns may be stable and mechanisms of  
14 control recurrent: the translator’s Groundhog Day consists of uncanny moments of  
15 being constantly reminded how unlikely change may be.  
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24 Inquiring into the linguistically mediated experience of ‘strange familiarity’ enables for  
25 rendering accessible the processes of colonizing the allegedly autonomous profession  
26 by strictly bureaucratic logic as well as creates the possibility to combine semantic and  
27 experiential dimensions in studying organizations. Covering the conceptual landscape  
28 of this research will precede and provide bearings for the subsequent analysis of  
29 interpretivist material. The study demonstrates how the rigidity of meaning-making and  
30 the inexorableness of partaking in the uncanny déjà vu can be considered experiential  
31 and semantic heuristics of particular organizational form entailing consequences for the  
32 prospect of organizational learning and non-learning.  
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## 46 **The area of inquiry**

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9 Repetition is among the classic themes of philosophical reflection on human condition  
10 (e.g. Kierkegaard, 1843/1964; 1844/1980) and it expectedly invites organizational  
11 inquiry into the role of incessantly recurring cognitive fragments (Weick, 1979) of  
12 which organizational sense-giving and sense-making are made (Pratt, 2000a; 2000b).  
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14 Naturally, retelling the acquired knowledge through repetition is also one way to evoke  
15 ('single-loop') learning (Argyris, 1977). However, exploring the learning process in a  
16 poststructural spirit invites broadening of the scope of inquiry beyond the mere fact of  
17 repetition. The relatively underused notion of 'uncanny' (exceptions include Jay, 1995;  
18 Miller, 1976; Ffytche, 2012; and Royle, 2003) and the conceptual framework associated  
19 with it, seem to provide a fitting pathway for exploring the repetition and recurrence in  
20 learning in experiential terms.  
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24 In the institutional context of the current study, the bureaucratic formalization enforcing  
25 coercion (Adler and Borys, 1996) extends to the intellectual processes rarely  
26 conceptualized in such terms, namely the textual translation. In this respect, the  
27 experience of uncanniness (rather than e.g. its aesthetics discussed by Beyes and  
28 Steyaert [2013]) provides an interesting and underexplored avenue for organization  
29 studies research. Conceptually, the study is also informed by the Derrida's theory of  
30 translation (Derrida 1976; 1985; 1987; 1988a; 1997a; 1997b; 1998a; 1998b; 2001) and  
31 Serresian 'parasitic logic' (1982).  
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### *'Parasite'*

The notion of 'parasite' is one way in which Derrida renders the ambivalence of and tension within the text (cf. 'supplement' (Derrida, 1976), 'pharmakon' (Derrida, 1981) and 'différance' (Derrida, 1978)) in order to critically approach the metaphysics of presence: a problematic predilection to favour the performative side of the established pairs of binaries, such as identity/difference or normal/abnormal (1976). Notably, host/parasite also belongs to this list (Derrida, 1988a), absolving the 'parasitism' from any form of negative connotation. Thus, the parasite is a form of exteriority, foreign and yet necessarily internal – paraphrasing Derrida one could say that being a host *entails* having a parasite. For Derrida all signs are iterable, that is they are repeatable across contexts (Derrida, 1988a). While the presupposed trans-contextuality enables subsequent iterations to remain 'the same', their being so, says Derrida, means that they can be recontextualized – or 'transported' (Derrida, 1988a) [1]. For a sign to be recognizable as a sign it needs to be both sensitive and insensitive, pliable and resistant to its new context (Nakassis, 2013). The meaning of a sign, argues Derrida, can be determined at any particular moment only if it is inherently indeterminate – this effectively splits the sign into what it is across contexts and what it is in a particular context, in other words into what it 'is' and what it 'is not' (Derrida, 1988a). Citation is what makes a sign transferable. That every sign may be cited means that it must be capable of losing its origins and of being recontextualized, otherwise it would not fulfil

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9 its function (Derrida, 1988a). This otherness inscribed within the sign, ‘the parasite’  
10 living off the sign’s actual ‘body’ is not simply external (Derrida, 1988a, p. 70). It is  
11 inextricably bound with the sign itself and, context permitting, occasionally takes over.  
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13 The parasite – that which is added, and yet remains internal – enables the sign to travel  
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15 between contexts and to be comprehended – tentatively apprehended – within them.  
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17 Derridian ‘logic of the parasite’ finds a reflection in his construal of translation [2].  
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19 Terms are never ‘pure’, they always infect one another even within a single language –  
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21 between different languages this process exacerbates (Derrida, 1998b). For Derrida a  
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23 ‘good’ translation means that some sort of ‘a universal language’ (Chattopadhyay, 2012)  
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25 is preserved, so that the reconciliation among languages is possible. The necessary  
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27 condition for that to happen is to resist the temptation of densely ‘filling-up’ the  
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29 translation with meaning; the ‘lack’ or a ‘remainder’ must be left. To be able to render  
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31 meanings in different languages those meanings need to be comparable, but not  
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33 identical – the space for ambiguity must be left in order to enable signifiers to float and  
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35 oscillate. Meaning resides in the un-decided space which ‘lacks’ immutable criteria –  
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37 stabilizing them and inflexibly attaching signs to particular places in the structure  
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39 disables true communication since the transmission of meanings becomes impossible  
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41 (Derrida, 2001).  
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48 The parasite takes without intending to give (the relation is asymmetrical), but it does –  
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50 as argued by Michel Serres – engender change in its host (Serres, 1982). Serres’  
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9 position is interesting here since it applies no less to communication theory than the  
10 history of human relations (Brown, 2002), thus accounting for the intersubjectivity of  
11 parasitic logic. The externality of the parasite may be demonstrated not only through  
12 semantic connection, but through the entirely exogenous, and thus new, platform of  
13 communication. In that respect Serres evokes a parable featuring the beggar, who  
14 soothes his hunger by smelling the tasty dishes prepared in the nearby restaurant. On  
15 that note, the cook approaches him demanding payment for the (alleged) services  
16 rendered. The emerging dispute between the two is resolved by a passer-by who throws  
17 the coin on the pavement and while it clings he announces that this sound should be a  
18 sufficient payment for the fragrance of the food never consumed (Serres, 1982). In  
19 Serres' reading of the story, the stranger does not provide anything apart from intrusion,  
20 but his intervention enables both parties to reformulate their relationship and effectively  
21 find a way to relate to one another. For Serres, this mechanism captures the basic rule  
22 according to which all human relations are formed: communication is enabled because  
23 the interrupter - the parasite - acts as a mediator by enforcing one of two choices both  
24 leading to a common action by the parties: they must decide to either incorporate it or to  
25 cooperate in order to expel it (1982). The meaningful exchange entails noise and  
26 interference produced in the course of transmission (ibid.). Being the disruption and  
27 interference, the parasite plays a crucial role in the development of ideas or theories and  
28 thus is constitutive for communication to occur (ibid.).  
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9 The parasite's semantic capacity to make communication meaningful (Derrida) and its  
10 role as an intersubjective condition of possibility for any communication to take place  
11 (Serres) can be seen as complimentary aspects of subjectively and intersubjectively  
12 meaningful communication. The embodied dimension of Serresian parasitic logic seems  
13 perfectly exemplified by the figure of the translator: his/her role is to enable the  
14 understanding of a specified content in another language – that is to find a way in which  
15 the two sets of signs can communicate with one another. Bar exceptions, the translator  
16 is not expected to create something new, but rather to retell a particular story using the  
17 words different to those, which were used by the original author. And yet, just like the  
18 passer-by from Serresian tale, s/he is not passive: the translator's agency is directed  
19 towards finding this particular level at which similar senses can be rendered. The act is  
20 parasitic: translator's disruptive action uses resources already provided by both  
21 languages, enabling them to communicate with each other (by exploiting them).  
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39 The conceptual abstraction of parasitic logic metaphorically emphasizes the positively  
40 heterogenous nature of a sign and the 'disruptive' essence of communication, rather  
41 than bemoaning their disappearance. The parasite stands for an integral part or side of  
42 our nature and of our language enabling us to create new meanings and learn. It does  
43 not mean that all communication is 'parasitic' and therefore that dialogic learning will  
44 necessarily characterize all social interactions. On the contrary, while the logic of the  
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9 parasite entails the futility of removal and reappearance of redacted content, it does not  
10 preclude an effort to do so; in fact the remainder of this article describes one (of many,  
11 surely) such attempts. The notion of ‘uncanny’ helps to understand the context and  
12 phenomena accompanying such eradication process.  
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### 17 18 19 20 *‘Uncanny’* 21

22 The uncanny is that which doesn’t sit with us because it is at the same time strange and  
23 familiar (Royle, 2003). The ‘transcendent’ may easily be contained precisely because it  
24 is not yet categorized and appropriated – it does not *yet* form part of an established  
25 order. A foreign element – an idea, justification or reasoning transcending all categories  
26 – may become a natural candidate to patch the holes in the current sensemaking process  
27 (e.g. Pratt, 2000a) and enable to learn something new (Otzel and Hinz, 2001). However,  
28 the strangely familiar – uncanny – is not otherworldly, it slips between the categories,  
29 defies easy classification. Originally, ‘uncanny’ was construed in clinical terms and  
30 qualified as disorientation originated due to the impression of foreignness of a thing or  
31 incident (Jentsch, 1906/1995, p. 2). Such impression is subjective, it may depend on  
32 previous experiences or be eradicated through training, hence no objective definition of  
33 the uncanny can be given. However, Jentsch identifies the typical instances in which  
34 ‘unhomelines’ can occur: bafflement regarding the conditions of origin of a particular  
35 act (for instance involving unusual strength or endurance); the confusion (or expectation  
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9 that confusion may arise) between animate and inanimate objects (e.g. steamboat may  
10 be taken for a living creature and a giant snake for a piece of wood) and the  
11 disorientation ensuing from observation of bodily or psychological dysfunctions and  
12 diseases (1906/1995). Especially the latter theme – a horror of not being able to grasp  
13 our body and psyche, that which is closest to us – is continued in Freud’s (polemic  
14 towards Jentsch) analysis of the uncanny (1919). For Freud, the uncanny ‘belongs to all  
15 that is terrible’ (1919, p. 1) by leading us back to something long known, once very  
16 familiar (ibid.). In this seminal work Freud recalls struggling to find his bearings in the  
17 pleasure district of a foreign Italian town and finds it uncanny how he involuntarily  
18 keeps coming back to the same place over and over again. The involuntary repetition  
19 forces upon us the idea of ‘faith’ and ‘inescapability’ (p. 11), where we would prefer to  
20 be able to talk about ‘chance’ only. All such ‘recurrent similarities’ (p. 11) are uncanny  
21 (1919, p. 12). However, the pivotal sense in which Freud talks about the uncanny is the  
22 context of repression: “uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something  
23 familiar and old-established in the mind” that has been estranged only by the process of  
24 repression (Freud, 1919, p. 13). The uncanny ought to have been kept concealed, but it  
25 has come to light. It is that which, crucially, has already been very familiar to us  
26 (heimlich), but became forbidden, awkward and unhomey (unheimlich) *because* it was  
27 repressed (Freud, 1919, p. 14). It is new, but old, like a ghost of the recently deceased.  
28 Whether subconsciously repressed (Freud, 1923) or deliberately forgotten, the unwanted  
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9 notions re-appear and shall be haunting one's attempts to, once again, resume 'life as  
10 usual'.

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12 The 'uncanny' evokes parasiting themes through conceptual association with  
13 'repetition', 'recurrence', as well as 'repression'. Indeed, if Derridian deconstruction  
14 involving the search for and inclusion of 'parasites' is an attempt to embrace and  
15 surface the once concealed full spectrum of meaning thus rendering justice to the sign  
16 and associated practice (1981), then Royle correctly renders it 'uncanny' (2003). The  
17 'uncanny politics of deconstruction' (Royle, 2003) involve the formation of the *I* which  
18 in Derrida's terms always constitutes itself through that which is not here, in  
19 relationship to something else, the other (1998). 'There is no thinkable or thinking I  
20 before this strangely familiar or properly improper (uncanny, unheimlich) situation of  
21 an unaccountable language' (Derrida, 1998c, p. 29). Thus, the 'uncanny' captures the  
22 tension between being and being some-thing, some-one, some-where, since the  
23 foundational decision already involves externality, effectively compromising the  
24 distinction between the external and the internal. Hence for Heidegger, the uncanny  
25 (*unheimlich*) is the man's essence (*Menschenwesen*), the human being is the 'uncanniest  
26 of the uncanny' (Heidegger, 1996, p. 68). Although this is what makes us what we are,  
27 or rather precisely because of that, the uncanny is 'terrible' and 'compels panic fear'  
28 (Heidegger, 2000, p.149).  
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9 *Parasite and Uncanny – experiencing work in bureaucracy*

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11 This paper posits that the emerging theoretical framework is fit to render the  
12 organizational actor's experience of depersonalized bureaucratic work imbued in  
13 rationalist logic and entailing recurrent repetition, as well as disidentification with the  
14 final product.  
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17 Grasping the organizational realities via interaction – with a recent memo, with an  
18 established policy document [3], through discussion ensuing in a project team meeting,  
19 etc. – introduces a mediating screen through which events, objects and people are  
20 construed. Doubling up 'reality' through reflection, mirroring the world through our  
21 attempts at understanding it, thus ending up with two 'worlds', similar and yet different,  
22 is often perceived to be our predilection – as Heidegger, Derrida, Serres and Royle  
23 would assent. Organizational mechanisms may be introduced in line with this  
24 propensity to multiply realities; the major difference between individual and  
25 organizational cognition process being that the latter's 'double' is more prone to be  
26 rationalized and objectified, e.g. as an instruction or as a 'code of conduct'. Admittedly,  
27 such documents, policies and codes – remnants of past sensemaking attempts – have  
28 tentative lineaments at their origins: they were most likely created through some sort of  
29 intersubjective process. And yet, while in many cases those externalizations will  
30 'embrace their parasite', i.e. remain tentative in spirit, prone to interpretation, etc., in  
31 other instances they will lose this interactive supplement and become super-objective,  
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9 immutable, unfeasible to amend and, as a result, easy to replicate (thus 'starving' the  
10 parasite). Importantly, in these cases – which the current paper is especially interested in  
11 – the replication refers to the *final product* rather than the sensemaking process involved  
12 in creating it. As in certain organizations the space for mediation and doubling up the  
13 'reality' is significantly reduced, the uncanny traits resurface in the relation between  
14 their very 'final', multiplied objects and human agents in whose job description those  
15 objects feature prominently. The question: "What does it mean to be the sense-maker?"  
16 is turned into: "How does it feel not to be?" In addressing the latter, accounting for  
17 conspicuous attempts to eradicate parasitism resulting in uncanny experiences will  
18 occur helpful, as this article will demonstrate.

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31 The degree of the said immutability of the final vocabulary will vary between different  
32 forms of social interaction and specifically, between different organizational forms  
33 emerging from them. The bureaucratic insistence on structural inflexibility and  
34 standardisation (Pugh, 1966) in correlation with the development of impersonal rules  
35 and centrality of decision making (famously observed by Crozier, 1964), amounts to  
36 'one size fits all (and always)' approach. It is combined with distancing the decision  
37 from the context of its applicability, as well as alienating employees from the result of  
38 their labour by implementing measures over which they have neither control nor  
39 ownership.  
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9 The above parasitic-uncanny frame appears well placed to explore the meaning making  
10 within the bureaucratic organizational form, complete with its sets of vicious circles,  
11 high repetitiveness of operation, insistence on rules and regulations disambiguating  
12 organizational reality and absolving employees from active sensemaking (except for  
13 rare ‘zones of uncertainty’ discussed by Crozier [1964]). This paper aims to consider the  
14 invoked disempowering effects of bureaucracies (Heckscher and Applegate, 1994), their  
15 perceptions as dysfunctional (Haslam, 2001) and dehumanizing (Bauman, 1989)  
16 through experiences and meaning-making of employees. The emphasis here is on (1)  
17 how these traits of bureaucracy are experienced, and (2) how accumulated experiences  
18 become embedded in individual mental frames of employees.  
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## 33 **Methodology**

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The current study explores the uncanny notions evoked by the numbing disambiguation process (‘starving the parasite’) experienced by a particular professional group in specific organizational context, namely that of translators working for the Institutions of the European Union.

Most Institutions of the European Union, including Council of the European Union, European Parliament, the Commission, etc. (‘Institutions’) have their own translating services. While English, French and German are the working languages of the EU, in



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9 principle, all important documents are translated into the national languages, because  
10 member states have the right and are expected to be addressed using their own  
11 respective languages. As a result, some documents need to be translated into all 24  
12 official languages of the EU. Despite the fact that only rarely such thorough translation  
13 process takes place, it is common to use more than ten languages, which renders the  
14 task of translation in the Institutions indeed enormous. According to recent estimates all  
15 translating staff of the Institutions amount to approximately 3000 employees (although,  
16 partly in relation to recent 'efficiency measures', their numbers are in the process of  
17 being reduced). The translating services within each Institution are compartmentalized  
18 according to nationalities: as a general rule translators work in their own national units  
19 under their own (national) Heads of Units.  
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33 The range of duties is strictly determined and in most cases limited to neatly specified  
34 responsibilities of the particular functional unit. As discussed elsewhere (citation  
35 concealed for review purposes), taking initiative is commonly discouraged and the level  
36 of expertise (expressed through the granular grading system) is broadly perceived as a  
37 token of relative power rather than problem-solving capacity. Hierarchy is strict and  
38 career advancement system is predominantly seniority-based (although favourable  
39 results of annual reviews can accelerate one's progression). Unsurprisingly, the  
40 Institutions with their emphasis on strict hierarchy, dependence on rules and regulations  
41 and formal authority are perceived as an embodiment of bureaucracy (Gravier, 2013).  
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9 In the current study, the paradigmatic autonomy of translator's profession  
10 stereotypically associated with high-skilled and creative work practice (e.g. Gouadec,  
11 2007) is explored in the context in which this autonomy and creativity are at best  
12 limited. The reinterpretation of the notion of translation and the translator's work in  
13 bureaucratic organizational setting provides a space for theoretical association of the  
14 standardisation and immobilization of signifiers in the translation process with the  
15 uncanny job experience and organizational design.  
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26 The inquiry into the 'uncanny translation' in the bureaucratic institutional framework of  
27 the EU involves an interpretivist study informed by the theoretical threads concerning  
28 the themes of *uncanniness* and *parasitic logic*.  
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33 In the course of research twelve employees of one of the translation units forming part  
34 of one of EU institutions (which shall remain anonymous to protect the informants)  
35 were interviewed. The interviews were semi-structured, the recorded material was  
36 transcribed and analysed.  
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42 The current approach broadly conforms to the thematic analysis framework, in which  
43 identified patterns (themes) within the data set are organized and analysed (Braun and  
44 Clarke, 2006). The themes 'represent patterned response or meaning within the data set'  
45 and aim to capture 'something important' about it (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Both  
46 implicit and explicit ideas should be identified (Guest et al, 2012), hence in the current  
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9 research organization of themes went beyond the semiotic presence of triggering  
10 keywords to include senses made by participants.

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12 All interviews were conducted without a specified preconceived agenda in mind (May,  
13 1991), other than to explore experiences of translators in an institutional context  
14 otherwise known (from literature and through multiple informal conversations with the  
15 EU employees conducted beforehand) for its strictness and high degree of formalization  
16 of procedures (although these notions were not imposed on participants in the interview  
17 questions). The first five interviews were considered a preparatory stage during which  
18 important themes were expected to emerge from interpretivist material in response to  
19 relatively general questions asked by the interviewer (e.g. ‘What do you value in your  
20 work?’, ‘How does the experience of working here compare to your previous work as a  
21 translator?’). Subsequently, the emerging themes addressing the experience of work  
22 were grouped into over a dozen categories – those relevant for the current article [4]  
23 included: automatization, standardization, simplification, normalization, repetitiveness  
24 (boredom), recurrence, creativity (or lack of it) entrapment and agency. Taking a cue  
25 from these focal categories, the subsequent (seven) interviews implicitly embedded  
26 them in the interview topics. For instance, as the first four categories were most  
27 commonly associated with the broader theme of a new translation system – not  
28 addressed by the direct question in the first set of interviews – at the second stage  
29 experiences associated with application of this system were more explicitly elicited  
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9 through questions. Thus, in order to bolster the analytic structure of the inquiry, in the  
10 second stage, incoming data were organized in an iterative fashion on the basis of  
11 themes already emerged (albeit without fully embracing the precepts of the grounded  
12 theory [Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Becker, 1970]). Similarly, to make the best use of the  
13 categories spontaneously appearing at the first stage, the emotionally-loaded themes of  
14 entrapment, (lack of) agency and repetitiveness were further inquired by probing into  
15 feelings associated with different aspects of work, e.g. the revision process and the  
16 obligation to use the automated database. Every effort was made to avoid any  
17 suggestions on the part of the interviewer: analytic categories characterizing focal  
18 themes were entirely absent from the questions asked. The analysis of the second set of  
19 interviews confirmed that the initial categorization of themes feasibly captured the main  
20 lines of inquiry: all the themes previously identified were further developed through  
21 interview content. At the second stage only one semi-independent theme emerged  
22 ('activities pursued beyond the work context'), which however is beyond the scope of  
23 the current paper. As after conducting 12 interviews it became clear that interview  
24 material became largely repetitive and the emergence of entirely new themes was  
25 unlikely, it was decided that no additional interviews were needed at this point [5].

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46 During the ex post analysis, the narratives which the above themes conveyed occurred  
47 to converge around two related, but identifiable plotlines: the experiential effects of the  
48 automatization of work and the semantic aspects of managing the translation process.  
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9 The conceptualization of the findings in these two broad categories was facilitated by  
10 introducing the theoretical frame combining multifaceted non-concept of the uncanny  
11 and (Serresian-Derridian) rendition of the parasitic logic, which (respectively)  
12 correspond to the plotlines of the inquiry.  
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17 The relevance of the subsequent facets of this theoretical framework emerges from the  
18 empirical themes, hence empiria interweaves with theoretical inquiry with the intention  
19 to benefit the line of argument.  
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26 As it is customary in interpretivist research (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Kostera, 2008;  
27 van Maanen, 1988) the interviews were supplemented by observations (field notes) and  
28 an analysis of auxiliary material (in this case consisting of official and internal  
29 publications of the European Union institutions, see [6]). The rules and procedures of  
30 working for the Institutions are highly centralized and must be obeyed by translators  
31 working for different linguistic units to the same (or very similar) extent (Staff  
32 regulations, 2004). Therefore, despite the fact that only one linguistic unit was  
33 approached, typically the processes of translation described in the study are  
34 generalizable to other translation units of the EU institutions. Research material was  
35 collected between March and June 2013. Names of the employees, the type of the  
36 linguistic unit approached, and its location were all changed to protect the informants.  
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## Empiria

Observing the architectural threads dominant in the materiality of EU Institutions one may be stricken by the invariance of homogenous ‘glass and steel’ look, especially in the Brussels ‘European’ and Luxemburg’s Kirchberg districts, where jointly most Institutions are located. Judging from the author’s numerous visits to these Institutions and from his conversations with members of staff, one can conclude that the spatial heterogeneity of working conditions for different translating units is similarly limited. The long corridors strewn with single offices on each side, washed out colors and minimalist décor are common features of many Institutional buildings, irrespective of the professional group occupying it – including translators. Regardless of the time of day, the stroll along the office spaces provides little insight into ongoing activity, as loud conversations are rare and most exchanges hushed. The subdued ambient of the back office is not representative for all Institutional spaces at all times, but those outbursts of hectic activity do not waive the atmosphere of quiet concentration and reticence in which translation work typically unfolds. The overarching feel, both in terms of space provided and the employees’ conduct, could not be more at odds with the stereotypical hype of ‘creative professions’ and places where they blossom.

*Work process – starving the parasite*

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11 *Automation.* The sequential and machine-like themes feature prominently in  
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13 employees' description of their work:  
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18 *I try to grasp the sentence before and the sentence that follows and I recreate the content*  
19 *in another language. It is a sequence.* (Jenny)

20  
21 *[It] is automatic; you don't need to think about it much.* (Claudia)

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26 Commenting on the scope of intervention expected from the translator, John says:  
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30 *The text is automatically displayed by [software], which is like a machine, [...] I just*  
31 *accept it. There is not much time to think about it and ponder the issue.* (John)

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36 Hence, translation is supposed to closely resemble the previous version of a similar text.

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38 In fact, the very high degree of resemblance is inscribed in the work routine (Michael).

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40 By 'reading the text again and again', the translator ensures that the end result is  
41  
42 'identical' (Jenny) or 'synonymous' (Steffen) with the original.  
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48 *Standardization.* The standards for translating words and phrases are being developed  
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50 by:  
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11 *The 'terminology group' [which] sorts this out for everybody's sake: [so that you can*  
12 *just] find words, phrases and put them in. (Claudia)*  
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17 Thus, vocabulary and phrasing of sentences are compared against the established  
18 pattern.  
19

20 It is often reminded that those rules used to be fluid, but they solidified with time:  
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26 *It all became standardised and people started to translate according to the strictly*  
27 *established rules. Today the text is supposed to be a standard one. (Andrew)*  
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32 Stabilizing pattern was eventually normalized (cf. Foucault, 1975), as discussed below.  
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37 *Simplification and disambiguation.* As Andrew explains:  
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41 *[Those texts] don't give you any freedom, there is no room for interpretation, there is no*  
42 *room for [such terms as] 'hereinafter'... I had a colleague once and he would use*  
43 *'hereinafter' a lot and they would just remove it from the text. There is no space for*  
44 *beauty here. [...] Ever since the vocabulary got set the freedom ended and the frames*  
45 *stiffened. (Andrew)*  
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9 Thus, closed circuit of predetermined, automated relay of information in the translation  
10 units of EU institutions seems to provide a conspicuous example of investing significant  
11 resources in eradicating the semantic space (or remainder) in the process of translation.  
12  
13 Mechanization and standardization of translation are accompanied by the simplification  
14 of the process. The disambiguation of meanings is one of its goals: ambiguity is an  
15 unwanted element; its occurrence is targeted, scrutinized and subsequently removed  
16  
17 (Karen).  
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27 *Repetition.* Many translators point towards another process accompanying the above:  
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31 *We need to refer to the previous versions, previous documents and established rules.*

32 (Claudia)  
33  
34

35 *When I create the translation memory [at the beginning of the translation process] it*  
36 *contains all terms appearing in the document [which were] already translated at some*  
37 *point by someone else. (Michael)*  
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43 Thus, the work process involves constant 'looking-back' and reaching into the past to  
44 access pre-established notions, which:  
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49 *[...] we have to stick to [...]. Things like quotation style, etc. are already set. You always*  
50 *have to check with [database]. (Michael)*  
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9 *If we're talking about short texts, such as notifications, etc., you have nearly 100% of*  
10 *repeatable content. (John)*  
11

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15 Employees emphasized repeatability as an immanent feature of translation:  
16

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19 *In our line of work the content gets very repeatable. (Ivonne)*  
20

21 *I start with the first segment, that is the first sentence and I go segment by segment,*  
22 *sentence after sentence, page by page... (Michael)*  
23  
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28 Repeatability is inherent as much in the job design as in the type of texts:  
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32 *Those texts are fleeting – they are only supposed to be used once and for a specified*  
33 *purpose. But you get the next ones and the next ones... and the next. (John)*  
34  
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38 *Normalization.* Translators often stressed 'normality' of everyday work routine  
39  
40 involving all above elements. As John emphatically declared:  
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45 *Why would you bang your head against the wall, why would you try to create something*  
46 *new or say that it isn't nice the way it is?! It is much better to use the established*  
47 *vocabulary than to figure things out on your own. I remember talking to this guy, I said*  
48 *'Listen, don't [try to be creative] because it only makes things difficult for us and you*  
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9 *make it difficult for yourself too'. [Eventually] he agreed that it makes no sense. [...]*

10  
11 (John)

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15 The conviction that the EU translator's job entails the need to embrace the above  
16 sentiment was indeed common (e.g. Karen, Claudia, Ivonne).

17  
18 Thus, the emerging function of automatic translation appears to be to disambiguate by  
19 reducing equivocality and to standardize the content through simplification and  
20 ensuring repeatability. The translation system arranges the words in different languages  
21 like pieces of a puzzle: each one can connect with a few others, but the number of  
22 connections is limited and predetermined and so is each piece's place in the emerging  
23 structure. 'Parasitism' is enabled inasmuch as each singular piece/word suits somewhere  
24 and connects with others, but only with particular others in a particular space: it cannot  
25 be turned around or upside down (metaphorized) as it would no longer fit. The  
26 connections are limited by the established rules, which preclude possible contents and  
27 relations in which the sign could feature. From the perspective in which the sign's  
28 function is to mediate in the process of communication and the conditions for such  
29 mediation process are correlated with the capacity of each sign to form relationships  
30 with other signs – whether through Serres' 'disruption' or Derrida's 'différence', both  
31 being instances of 'parasitic' logic – the structural translation mode in the institutions of  
32 the European Union is not an actual 'translation'. Meanings are being (or 'should be'  
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9 following the system's logic) rendered automatically without leaving space for an  
10 evident remainder. Here, the 'perfect translation' is tantamount to flawless unequivocal  
11 correspondence between two sets of signs. The capacity of the human being to 'disrupt'  
12 the automated matching is minimized, the human-parasite is no longer expected to act  
13 as a middle man between the two sets of data. Thus the semantic parasite must also go:  
14 the 'other within itself' - enabling connections due to being equivocal and ambiguous -  
15 is forced out by the seamlessly automated perfection of transmission.  
16  
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18  
19 In Derridian and Serresian terms each attempt to immobilize the signifiers in some  
20 predetermined position and to remove the translator-mediated process of content  
21 matching is tantamount to rendering those signifiers linguistic curiosities and to turning  
22 the, so-called, 'translation' into a meaningless disruption-free autotelic exercise.  
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26 The uncanny problem is that the parasite is not feasible to undergo the process of  
27 removal – not without obliterating the host.  
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### 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 *Experiencing work - the uncanniness of translation*

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42 The existence of something near identical hidden within something else - *mise en abyme*  
43 (Gide, A., in: L. Dällenbach, 1977/1989, p. 7) - is one of Freud's uncanny tropes (1919)  
44 stimulating the wildly uncontrollable repetition (Hertz, 2009). The structural *mise en*  
45 *abyme* is inscribed in the 'Russian doll' mechanism of language management involving  
46 three mutually inclusive instances: the centralized terminology database containing  
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9 obligatory terms and expressions; the local terminology base (specific to separate  
10 linguistic units within the EU institutions) enforcing their own rules (compliant with the  
11 general ones), and finally; the half-official 'group of experts' making micro-level  
12 decisions e.g. regarding the yet undecided issues (compliant with the general rules  
13 above). The rules and renditions are reinforced on the subsequent levels, as they  
14 reappear and multiply. This strict multilevel crosschecking and self-referencing system  
15 instantiates the reappearance of rules, words, meanings and signs in the subsequent  
16 instalments of the translation process. Once a particular rule of translation had been  
17 established...

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31 *...then it's got to be there and the terminologists include it in the database. If something*  
32 *is there we don't have to repeat the whole search again. And if it's not there it can appear*  
33 *in the automated memory. If something was translated at any point it will be re-used.*

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36  
37 (Karen)

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41 The meanings rely on each other, link to one another, changing them becomes unlikely:

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45 *These things are already settled, pre-established, and even if for some translators they do*  
46 *not seem settled it is very easy to verify that they are. (Chris)*  
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9 The infinitely multiplied content remains the same and should pose no obstacles, but  
10 interestingly, this immutability of the text can also be startling:  
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15 *I can be sure this text won't change really, I know the text from day one, and I don't need*  
16 *to wait up and see what's coming. (Paul)*  
17

18  
19 *This is all routine... It is already known. (Chris)*  
20  
21

22  
23 This inward looking past orientedness is captured by another set of uncanny tropes -  
24 Freud's 'double' (1919, p. 10) and Rank's *Doppelgänger* (1914), both referring to the  
25 creation of one's own mental image, long since left behind 'and one, no doubt, in which  
26 it wore a more friendly aspect' (Freud, 1919, p. 10). The *double* reminds one of oneself,  
27 because it used to be oneself (or at least an image of it) but ever since it became  
28 repressed or half-forgotten.  
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39 *In my previous job I had to come up with the way to say something in a few different*  
40 *ways, but we don't have that here. (Paul)*  
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43 *...Where I worked previously I was allowed to be a rather creative translator and [here]*  
44 *I was [also] trying to use my sense of what's good and what's not, but I was rather*  
45 *quickly tamed by others... (Carol)*  
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51 The past that does not let go – *déjà vu* represents the experiential feature of translation.  
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11 *The topic resurfaced over and over again and it was finally agreed that Institutions are*  
12 *introducing a linguistic novelty – [using the form proposed by the terminologists] became*  
13 *obligatory in legal texts, was endowed with the rank of an official legal term and must be*  
14 *applied by the translators. (Stan)*

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18 *[The new document] uses the memory containing all previously translated texts. Hence,*  
19 *the translator can retrieve something from this memory and he won't need to translate it*  
20 *again. (Stan)*  
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27 In Serra and Holt's uncanny artwork 'Boomerang' (1974), once uttered words come  
28 back, reoccur. Similarly, in translation system:  
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34 *These are the things you are stuck with. (Paul)*  
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38 Even though no longer actively performed, words and meanings stay within the  
39 experiential frame:  
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44  
45 *If something was already translated in some way in another institution you can't really*  
46 *change it. (Paul)*  
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49 *One time we had a long discussion around a particular sentence, it took three days.*  
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51 (Jane)  
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11 Just like in *Boomerang* translators appear surrounded by their own minds externalized  
12 through words:

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17 *I don't have to translate things, which were already translated at some point, but on the*  
18 *other hand if the system suggests something I don't have to accept it, I can decide that it*  
19 *is not good enough and choose something else... Ehm, actually in this case it is not really*  
20 *possible, because if something comes up on the grid it means that this document was*  
21 *already translated, so actually it makes no sense at all to do it again. If someone*  
22 *translated it, say, one year ago it makes very little sense to translate it again... (Carol)*  
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32 The struggle to decide one's own degree of agency is mediated by the content's constant  
33 reoccurrence. Mary seems to find it disruptive, making the reflection on her everyday  
34 work process difficult:  
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41 *So, I choose the text to translate and... hmmm... (pause)... I have to reflect on this for a*  
42 *second.... Well, I don't have the computer screen in front of me at the moment, but when I*  
43 *do, it is all purely automatic. (Mary)*  
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49 Official documents in the target language abound with words and expressions, which  
50 are considered by the interviewees as out of date or plainly wrong, to the point that  
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8 many translators not only feel confused, but also no longer feel in charge of the process.

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10 The following examples, evoked by translators in the context of devoiding them of  
11 agency over the meanings rendered, were subsequently scrutinized and verified by the  
12 researcher in the process of analysing official documents in the target language [6].  
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17 As pointed out by Stan, the English expression ‘active aging’ is obligatorily translated  
18 in the target language as the expression which could be understood [in English] as  
19 ‘aging actively’. The translators observe that:  
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26 *[It is] as if you could age ‘better’ or ‘more thoroughly’ – as if you weren’t waiting*  
27 *passively to grow old, but rather striving to get old by all means available... which is*  
28 *absurd... However, ‘aging actively’ was accepted and confirmed [...]. It became an*  
29 *exemplary of the bureaucratic jargon, which goes against the rules of using language.*  
30  
31  
32 (Stan)  
33

34  
35  
36 Another term widely used in EU speak, ‘to contribute’, is associated via database with  
37 the expression synonymous with ‘to contribute a contribution’ (in the English version).  
38 Paul is strongly opposed to what he perceives as an odd vocabulary misuse:  
39  
40  
41

42  
43 *I never used it, I always applied something else, but I was corrected many times...*  
44 (Paul)  
45

46  
47 ‘Best practices’, an expression popular in EU documents, is compulsorily translated as,  
48 rarely used, bureaucratic and ostensibly archaic term. As Paul observed direct  
49 translation would be most fortunate as it unmistakably renders meaning intended,  
50 however:  
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*Despite the fact that this formulation exists in many sources, it needs to be translated using the old term. (Paul)*

Contents not quite ‘one’s own’ and yet necessarily embraced – the uncanny struggle to differentiate between the animate and inanimate objects (Jentsch, 1906/1995) is ongoing:

*[As the] translation becomes more and more mechanized you are just a cog in the machine which must function one way or another. (Paul)*

*I’m just one of the points of passage in the production line of EU documents. (Stan)*

*Despite working in a ‘factory’... we are still thinking human beings! (Alice)*

The parallel uncanny thread sheds light on the psychological complexity of these recurring *déjà vu* through ontological confusion, which is not as much the question of the object, but rather the subject who construes reality in conceptually repressed terms. Something is uncanny because it was known, and an insufficient effort to forget it was made (Freud, 1919). As a result, the uncanny content is haunting us, making it difficult to tell what an object actually is, what certain activity is about or what identity the subject possesses:

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9 *Formally, what I do is called translating, but it is de facto copy-pasting rather than*  
10 *translating. (Stan)*  
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14 The automatized translation tools make  
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19 *... some people say that it kills our profession, but in fact the art of translation does not*  
20 *exist here. (Paul)*  
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23 *We are not translators anymore, we became the revisers [of the automated text]. (Alice)*  
24

25 *The word gets around that it doesn't matter who translates what because the outcome*  
26 *will always be identical, which is... as if we were machines or something... (Jane)*  
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31 As suggested by Freud and Heidegger, the uncanny is not psychologically-neutral:  
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36 *Automatized translation can mean that you end up with bullshit. (John)*  
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40 It may involve both the lack of clear purpose of professional activity and the sudden  
41 realization that it was misconstrued:  
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47 *Initially, I thought that the nicer means the better, but it doesn't work that way... the*  
48 *more scrupulous the better. (Jane)*  
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*Your brain just doesn't want to go on sometimes. The saturation point was reached, and the only thing you are capable to do at the moment is to create situations, which are hopelessly absurd and bear no resemblance to reality whatsoever. (Carol)*

*If [in the revision process] there are two, three changes per page I remain calm about all that, but if it is full of corrections... [emotionally charged tone of voice, unfinished sentence] (Carol)*

The pitch of expression indicates that the working conditions are not easily or willingly accepted and are often perceived as enforced:

*We must [emphasis] accept the translation of some expressions or notions due to purely political reasons, despite the fact that they are clearly incorrect and confusing. (Stan)*

*I never used [automated database], I always applied something else, but I was corrected so many times... (Paul)*

To the extent that work is sometimes construed in truly dreadful,

*[This] work is extremely boring [...] [It] is disastrous for translators. (Jane)*

*It is not like we are in a prison, and yet... [unfinished sentence] (Chris)*

...and fatalist terms:

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11 *And this won't ever change. (Paul)*  
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15 The emerging dynamics of the uncanny work process suggest that the repressed and  
16 managed meanings resume their existence, cause disturbance and ambiguity resulting in  
17 the vicious circle of boredom, recurrence and confusion with respect to one's role and  
18 professional identity.  
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## 24 25 26 **Discussion** 27

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31 The extreme reduction, simplification and standardization of translated content is  
32 achieved due to inflexible (or near inflexible) relationship in which signifiers stand to  
33 one another. Strictly speaking the logic of EU translation, so far partly embraced in  
34 practice, entails that words cannot be matched/translated 'better' or 'worse', but rather  
35 'correctly' and 'incorrectly'. The translation system's core is a threefold structure which  
36 in the order of increasing specificity and decreasing authority involves the centralized  
37 terminology database; the local terminology base related to separate linguistic units  
38 enforcing their own rules and the group of experts within each separate unit. While the  
39 particular renditions provided by the two latter may capture some aspects not included  
40 in the general database, they must comply with it and they may end up being  
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9 incorporated in it thus becoming parts of the centralized structure. This threefold design  
10 is the source of enforceable rules and procedures of translation between languages. The  
11 option to improve one's translation, if 'improving' involves bending or breaking the  
12 said rules in order to say something better, to more closely relate to common experience  
13 (the sense of which is often lacking, as most translators suggest) does not officially  
14 exist. Its scope is being increasingly constricted by the progressing application of  
15 automated translation tools, and in most cases is deemed to have already disappeared in  
16 practice. Such system prevents translators from forming new connections (including  
17 those already existing in the spoken language, since the official database is said to be  
18 reacting with considerable delay to such changes) and from combining the existing  
19 signs into new shapes enabling the sign's heterogeneity to thrive and thus to learn  
20 something new. As observed by one of the interviewees apparently referring to the texts  
21 not yet translated, their content is 'already known', it is pre-established and shall not  
22 change. According to the operating logic, translators become akin to machines –  
23 irrespective of actual machines doing a significant and increasing part of the translation  
24 work – automatically producing the standardized renditions which they are compelled to  
25 provide without a trace of individualized understanding: in any case this is how many of  
26 them experience it.  
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48 Starving the semantic parasite is accompanied by famishing the social one: as captured  
49 by translators' another constriction-oriented metaphor, namely 'the prison'. The pursuit  
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9 of an ideal translation involving no equivocality, no interpretation and no disturbance  
10 seems to involve lack of need for interaction as well. Admittedly, the intersubjective  
11 exchange has not disappeared entirely; it still exists owing to the group of experts and  
12 through the spontaneous outbursts of collegial exchange (citation concealed for review  
13 purposes), but from the system's logic perspective those instances and behaviours are  
14 redundant (e.g. 'experts' would not be needed if the actual system's perfection were  
15 achieved). The feelings of regulated isolation, of seclusion and imprisonment in the  
16 anonymous structure, appear to be firmly embedded in employees' experience. No  
17 'otherness', 'intrusion' or 'disruption' are required for the translation process to proceed  
18 – its content is already known.  
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21 Drawing on the standardization and simplification of content, the Institutions'  
22 translation system assumes this content's extended longevity in the translation process  
23 by enforcing the multiplication, re-appropriation and recurrence of pre-established  
24 meanings. Uncanny is associated with unsettling employee's psychological balance  
25 and/or their ways of conduct as well as upsetting the safety zones and boundaries, but –  
26 although the clinical precision is not to be expected when discussing such non-concepts  
27 – it extends beyond the notion of psychological discomfort to include, among others,  
28 infinite repetition, ontological confusion, déjà vu, 'doubling' and recurrence. While,  
29 admittedly, such characterization confounds rather heterogeneous psychological  
30 categories it is so because 'the uncanny' is an attempt to render particular aspects of the  
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9 heterogeneity of experience, namely those that deal with its unexpected multiplicity  
10 coupled with a sense of familiarity. The translators are ‘haunted’ by previous  
11 enactments of the translation process – the words they once uttered re-occur,  
12 unchanged, frozen in time. Pre-establishing the exact phraseology means that the  
13 relationships between signs are also immutable, they have already been seen in  
14 precisely such form previously, they have to be included now and be dealt with in  
15 identical manner in the future. The translation system does not allow forgetting, its logic  
16 is that of accumulation not selection. The latter occurs when central database is  
17 amended, but the change is centrally planned and modification merely reflects the  
18 already existing pattern, which once again does not allow it to be forgotten. Nothing is  
19 to be wasted, efficiency is the name of the game, the process is strictly ascetic – only  
20 and all necessary elements are employed. The attempts to close one’s eyes and not see  
21 the same again and again, to ‘forget’ the ever-so-familiar, are managed by the system’s  
22 internal logic – there is no space for ‘hereinafter’. The notional framework of the  
23 uncanny captures a range of aspects of this ‘strange familiarity’ which is not feasible to  
24 be consigned to oblivion – past professional identities invade the current ones; the latter  
25 are vague and uncertain; one’s infinitely multiplied reflection can be found in each  
26 translated sentence, words and meanings insistently re-occur. However, the uncanniness  
27 of translation reaches much further; also those relationships between signs which were  
28 forbidden and translated out of the system inevitably find their way back in. As  
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9 mentioned above, the parasite cannot be eradicated since it forms one entity with the  
10 host and only the (particular) perspective taken enables to differentiate between the two.  
11 The logic of the translation system provides such clearly delineated perspective: the  
12 system ‘knows’ exactly who the host is. But that does not make parasitic connections –  
13 or the multiplicity of meanings which a given sign or set of signs can have – disappear.  
14 They linger in the background and occasionally find their way to the surface eventually  
15 emerging as ‘nicer’, ‘better’ or more ‘humane’ ways of meaning-making; the ways  
16 invariably deemed ‘colloquial’, ‘obsolete’, or more likely simply ‘incorrect’, by the  
17 system. Given that by definition all translators employed by the Institutions are  
18 specialized in linguistics of various sorts, their knowledge regarding all kinds of  
19 semantic parasites is overwhelming. That only adds to the thorniness of its repression.  
20 ‘Nicer’ and ‘better’ parasitic connections do come back, and it is likely that they will  
21 continue to do so as long as the fully automatized and automated machine translation  
22 does not replace the current system involving human actors.  
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42 This anti-parasitic (uncanny) logic of translation in the translation units of the  
43 Institutions practically removes the need for ongoing and direct supervision and reduces  
44 the requirement for non-continuous control to its sporadic enactments (e.g. annual  
45 appraisals). In spite of strictly hierarchical structure, the major controlling mechanism is  
46 embedded not within the vertical supervision, but on a much more fundamental  
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9 semantic level. The very system employed in the translation process significantly limits  
10 the possibility of divergence from the pre-established framework since multiple possible  
11 meanings are not allowed to play in this language game (cf. Wittgenstein, 1953) and  
12 because those games, which are allowed must be played repeatedly, the bridge between  
13 them not being provided due to parasite's demise (cf. Clegg et al., 2004). If rules were  
14 forgotten, whether deliberately or not, they would have been 'reminded' by the system  
15 and – if still ignored – enforced through the horizontal peer pressure employing  
16 pragmatic arguments and the 'strangely familiar' system's logic. The autonomy of an  
17 individual translator is not much greater than that of an individual sign: the relationship  
18 in which both can partake is circumscribed and limited by the same instance – the (in  
19 the short period at least) immutable database. The lack of need to consult other  
20 vocabularies is simultaneous with lacking requirement for interaction. Both were  
21 captured by the translators as 'lack of need for research' – nothing can or will be  
22 discovered, nothing new or unexpected can be unearthed or learned, because such  
23 creative interactivity and exploration – the parasites – are translated out of the  
24 framework. The autonomy of the translator is limited to potentially affecting the content  
25 of the final database in the long run, if they partake in relevant discussions concerning  
26 new vocabulary. However, by the time it makes it to the final database it is no longer  
27 'new', it has been already heard, rehearsed and it became familiar. Setting identical  
28 iterations of translations against one another, making them bounce off from one another  
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9 without evident possibility to enact change on those relationships frozen in time, forces  
10 the similar *mise en abyme* on the translators' activity. Repetition becomes associated  
11 with boredom, automation with loss of purpose, externally imposed sensemaking with  
12 mindlessness and immutability with frustration. The translator's creativity disappears  
13 behind the veil of standardized homogeneity, autonomy is redacted, communication  
14 rendered monologic, specialization narrowed, regulations and guidelines rule and  
15 individuality is reduced. Of interest here is the disciplined and internally coherent  
16 manner of performing bureaucracy on the level of everyday experience aligned with the  
17 system's internal logic. Even if bureaucracies' typical 'features' (hierarchy, dependence  
18 on rules, formalized authority, functional specialization) were once imposed, now the  
19 bureaucratic control is stealthily embedded behaviourally as much as semantically.  
20 Thus, bureaucracy ingrains itself in the semantics of the system and the particular  
21 organization becomes its mere reflection.  
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## 40 Conclusion

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45 Beyond the existing theorizing of translation as creative and positive disruption in both  
46 occupational (e.g. Gouadec, 2007) and semantic terms (e.g. Barrett, 1998; Clegg, et al.,  
47 2004), the current study explores translation through experiential framework of  
48 professional translators and as a meaning-making process respectively, in both cases  
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9 arriving at potentially monologic notions of organizational learning. Supporting the case  
10 for the role of translation in creating dialogic and radical climates for learning, this  
11 article proposes to explore the other side of this relationship showing how the limiting  
12 of space for translation delimits possibilities for new meanings to be created and thus  
13 (dialogic) learning to thrive. In addition to this general point, the above study ponders  
14 the specific aporia of increasing difficulty of such translation in the occupational context  
15 apparently devoted to semantic work, namely that of translator.  
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24 The simplification, constriction and standardization on the semantic and societal levels  
25 within the framework of the Institutions was approached from the perspective of  
26 'parasitic logic' which provides an explanatory device for organizational actor's  
27 sensemaking. The experiences accompanying work processes in the translation unit are  
28 captured through the non-concept of the uncanny evoking repeatability, multiplication,  
29 unwanted recurrence and awkward familiarity. This paper argues that the basic rules  
30 ingrained in the bureaucratic logic, when applied to allegedly creative, dialogic and  
31 autonomous organizational roles, such as translation, imply the immobilization and  
32 infinite repetitions of these roles' avowedly free-floating content precluding non-  
33 monologic learning. The experienced boredom, frustration and purposelessness, are  
34 however not the simple results of strict control and lack of choice – often discussed in  
35 the context of deficiencies of bureaucratic structures – but rather of (apparently onerous  
36 in this case) psychological traits of the uncanny. The article posits that the impossibility  
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9 to forget and the inexorableness of partaking in the never-ending déjà vu, with all  
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11 'strange familiarity' of the context, are the reflections of the bureaucratic frame, and  
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13 may be used in future studies as experiential and semantic heuristics for understanding  
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15 learning and un-learning in organizations.  
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## Notes

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24 [1] Admittedly, the issue of 'context' in Derrida (and whether there is one) is somewhat  
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26 ambiguous (e.g. compare (1988a) and (1976)) and warrants a separate discussion, which  
27  
28 cannot be provided here.  
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31 [2] Derrida's 'issue of translation' is not to be understood solely as translation between  
32  
33 languages, but it is understood as such as well (Derrida 1985; 1987; 1990; 1990; 1997)  
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35 and probably becomes most explicit in the *Letter to a Japanese Friend* (1988b), in  
36  
37 which deconstruction and translation are perceived as closely related to one another.  
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40 [3] The Actor Network's perspective from which objects 'speak' and 'act' is a fitting  
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42 strategy for approaching the agencies inherent in materiality of the (work)place – such  
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44 perspective is in fact embraced elsewhere by the author. Unfortunately, due to limited  
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46 space ANT cannot be used in the current paper.  
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49 [4] Those themes (which are not discussed in the current paper, but were pursued  
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51 elsewhere), among others, include the sociomaterial trait and distant/tele-work.  
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9 [5] The anonymized interview transcripts as well as the interview question set are  
10 available upon the editor's request.  
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13 [6] Unfortunately, the bibliographical reference to these official EU documents cannot  
14 be provided: it would unambiguously point towards one of the official target languages  
15 of the EU, which, given a limited number of EU Institutions (and respective linguistic  
16 services within them), would make it easy to identify the unit and the participants.  
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