



Thinking solidarity and translation together: Towards a new definition of solidarity

Dorota Goluch
Cardiff University, United Kingdom
GoluchD@cardiff.ac.uk

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Abstract: In a cross-disciplinary roundtable discussion on the feminist politics of translation, Judith Butler (Nagar et al., 2017, p. 113) aptly notes that “there can be no solidarity without translation, and certainly no global solidarity”. This article is the first dedicated attempt to define solidarity from within translation studies: it redefines the concept to foreground the role of translation, understood as a hermeneutic, interpersonal and semiotic process, in solidarity development. The article is also the first to bring together scholarship on solidarity from philosophy, political science and sociology, on the one hand, and translation studies, on the other. I show that insights from translation studies supplement scholarship on solidarity in the other disciplines, where translation is largely overlooked. I also apply analytical categories from those disciplines to discussions of solidarity in translation studies and demonstrate the *de facto* different understandings of solidarity behind translation scholars’ use of the term, thus initiating a discipline-wide theoretical conversation on the concept. Moreover, upon noticing that the role of translation in generating solidarity is not captured in any existing definition, I redefine solidarity as *a sense of interconnection and commonality in difference – developed through caring, careful and inherently incomplete translation – that pursues inclusion and impels action towards common good*. Finally, I signal how the definition can inform our understanding of the interlingual human translator as an active agent, adept at forging and facilitating solidarity.

Keywords: translation, solidarity, theories of solidarity, feminist translation, activist translation and interpreting, translator’s agency

1. Introduction

David Hollinger (2006, p. 26) writes that “among the greatest issues of the twenty-first century is the problem of solidarity, the problem of willed affiliation”, alluding to W. E. B. Du Bois’s statement that ‘the color line’ was the problem of the twentieth century. Solidarity emerges as a vital phenomenon today, as societies continue to become more diverse and people choose their solidarities on a variety of grounds, rather than relying solely on inherited bonds. Furthermore, growing interconnectedness makes questions of solidarity paramount: the global problems posed by the climate crisis and by the arguably unsustainable economic model of neoliberalism require globalised responses and new solidarities. As the discipline of translation studies engages with these and other critical contemporary issues, the concept of solidarity is also gaining importance in the field. In this article, I examine over a hundred of translation studies publications which refer to solidarity and find that the concept is used in diverse, sometimes disparate, ways but is rarely defined. I therefore turn to wider scholarship on solidarity in the fields of philosophy, political science and sociology to seek theorisations that would allow a more systematic reflection

on the varied understandings of solidarity in translation studies. Work on solidarity in these other fields offers useful analytical categories but hardly registers the relevance of translation to building and sustaining solidarity. Seeing that solidarity remains under-theorised in translation studies, and translation is largely absent from theorisations of solidarity elsewhere, I attempt to think translation and solidarity together and redefine solidarity.

The definition I propose is the first to incorporate translation as key to solidarity development. Translation is understood here in a broad sense of a hermeneutic process, “a meaning-making practice of human relationality” (Ergun, 2020, p. 114), and a semiotic practice, which “involves the mediation of diffuse symbols, experiences, narratives and linguistic signs” across modalities, language varieties and cultural spaces (Baker, 2016a, p. 7). The broad sense encompasses interlingual translation as a hermeneutic and semiotic practice that includes crossing a language boundary. In the article, the first section is devoted to analysing the applications of ‘solidarity’ in translation studies, the second section examines debates on solidarity in philosophy, political science and sociology, while the third and concluding one presents my definition of solidarity and its possible implications.

2. ‘Solidarity’ in translation studies

This section cannot do justice to all the multifaceted work in translation studies that refers to solidarity; the purpose, instead, is to analyse the main trends and examine the few definitions of solidarity present in the research. The discussion is based on a review of 111 translation studies publications which mention solidarity: the corpus comprises 47 chapters from reference works and 64 other publications. Reference works were included because they should be representative of disciplinary research trends; I used translation studies handbooks from John Benjamins, Oxford and Routledge (including 32 Routledge handbooks on specific areas of translation research) and the encyclopaedia of translation studies published by Routledge. I identified relevant chapters or entries by keyword searches in the online editions. Some chapters or entries thematise solidarity, while others employ the term more marginally, but to avoid arbitrary distinctions and gain a fuller overview I included all uses. Furthermore, 64 other publications come from two sources: 34 were identified through the largest disciplinary database, Translation Studies Bibliography, published by John Benjamins. I retrieved publications which include ‘solidarity’ in the (sub)title, keywords list or abstract and not anywhere in the text – this sub-corpus therefore includes only texts that thematise solidarity more fully. The remaining 30 publications were identified through general databases (the British Library Catalogue and Google Scholar), references in other publications and, in a few cases, my ongoing readings as a translation studies researcher. One limitation of my approach lies in including English-language texts only. Future analyses of non-Anglophone translation studies publications would show how the terms for ‘solidarity’ in other languages are used and theorised.

My analysis of the English-language publications yields three main findings. Firstly, the concept of solidarity is gaining importance in the field. Although ‘solidarity’ has not yet earned an entry in a reference work or been central to a monograph, my corpus shows that the number of publications employing this concept has increased in recent years. Publication of this special issue, the first one in translation studies to feature solidarity, further confirms that interest in the concept is growing. The second finding is that translation scholars develop valuable insights on solidarity, which complement the

scholarship on solidarity in other disciplines; at the same time, they rarely theorise solidarity for its own sake and very rarely define it. Thirdly, ‘solidarity’ appears within the corpus in very diverse, at times disparate, contexts. Within that diversity, I note two prominent trends – feminist approaches to translation and work on translation activism – and two further, salient clusters of publications: on cosmopolitanism and migration and on professional identity. I discuss that research below.

2.1 Feminist approaches

References to women’s solidarity appeared in texts by prominent feminist scholars already in the 1990s. For instance, when Luise von Flotow (1997) discusses translating the idiosyncratic style of American feminist texts from the 1970s, she argues that the problem of translating wordplay and its culturally bound meanings cannot be solved by general assumptions of women’s solidarity: it highlights differences in women’s contexts and exposes “issues of political solidarity” (von Flotow, 1997, p. 51) instead. Similarly, in a seminal 1992 piece on the politics of translation, Gayatri Spivak (2012, p. 313) dismantles notions of a “natural or narrative-historical solidarity” between women and argues for engaging with other women’s differences through intimate acts of cultural translation. She addresses translators of Third World women’s writing and urges them, first, to prepare well for their work – which includes developing nuanced linguistic knowledge and sensitivity to the author’s style – and then to ‘surrender’ to the text in an ‘erotic’ fashion (Spivak, 2012, p. 315). This combination of cognitive care and affect informs the definition of solidarity I propose later.

Spivak also invites First World feminists to try translation firsthand. She warns against merely assuming a “common experience” (Spivak 2012, p. 322) and suggests:

why not say, humbly and practically, my first obligation in understanding solidarity is to learn her mother-tongue. You will [...] feel the solidarity every day as you make the attempt to learn the language in which the other woman learnt to recognize reality at her mother’s knee.

Utopian as a general yardstick, the proposal is a challenge to a monolingual mindset. As with written translation, solidarity here develops from the labour of learning – a labour of love – that heeds the links between linguistic constitution and gendered agency, indicated in the quotation through the matriarchal lineage of language acquisition. While Spivak (2012, p. 322) denounces ideas of common femininity and its attendant expectations of easy translatability, she sees “tracking *commonality* through responsible translation” (Spivak, 2012, p. 323; emphasis added) as a process that respects and reveals difference.

The focus on differences between women’s positionalities is now firmly embedded in feminist approaches to translation, which champion intersectionality and transnational feminist solidarity (Castro & Ergun, 2017a). In Olga Castro and Emek Ergun’s influential work, solidarity is relevant for translation pedagogy and ethics. In a proposal for teaching feminist translation practice (Castro & Ergun, 2017b), the authors recommend that students read texts on women who construct solidarity across borders of caste, culture, religion, etc. They suggest that the students themselves try building solidarity across difference, e.g. sharing their life stories with fellow students. Furthermore, in her outline of feminist translation ethics, Ergun (2020, p. 119) asks how to translate in pursuit of solidarity, making solidarity one of the outcomes of ethical translation. The ethics include the guiding notions of loving

perception, vulnerable hospitality and interconnectivity. Interconnectivity is inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa's (2002, p. 5) view that "we are interconnected with all life".

Overall, I agree with feminist scholars that attending to difference is paramount, but I also embrace the idea of salvaging commonalities and interconnections. Furthermore, I agree that the 'tracking' (Spivak, 2012, p. 323) of commonality and difference is made possible by translation, where the translator combines affect with cognitive care (Spivak, 2012, pp. 312–315). I also note that among scholars of translation and feminism, solidarity is more often discussed as an attitude or relationship than action, even if feminist thought generally tends to presuppose an activist stance, and some of the scholars do examine solidarity actions *per se* (e.g. Abou Rached, 2020; Baldo, 2020). Besides, the scholars seem to rely on a tacit understanding of solidarity and do not define it.

2.2 Activism

Compared to the feminist approaches, research on translation and activism that references solidarity systematically features action as a component of solidarity and includes specific definitions. Different definitions are proposed as scholars examine solidarity of different scope: solidarity between people in the world, as well as solidarity between and within activist movements. The more general solidarity is important, for example, to the vision of ECOS (Translators and Interpreters for Solidarity),¹ an association founded in 1998 in Granada, which hosted an innovative forum on Translation/Interpreting and Social Activism in 2007. The group offers their skills for activities aligned with their vision of "a world which is more [...] solidarity-based" (Sánchez Balsalobre et al., 2010, p. 14) and defines solidarity, after the philosopher Adela Cortina, as "the attitude of a person who shows interest in others and makes an effort towards their undertakings and issues" (Cortina, 1997, p. 242; quoted in Sánchez Balsalobre et al., 2010, p. 9). This view of solidarity focuses on attitudes but invites action ("making an effort"), which is similar to what I propose in my definition. However, Cortina's definition could arguably cover cases of not just solidarity but also, for example, charity or advocacy, whereas my definition aims for greater specificity.

Research on translation and activism also investigates solidarity between movements. Pioneering studies by Mona Baker (2016a, 2016b, 2016c) employ the view of solidarity as *acompañamiento* (accompaniment), proposed by alterglobalist movements. Solidarity is conceived of as parallel but separate action, which "fosters diversity and decentralisation without creating or reinforcing hierarchical relationships between those helping and those-to-be-helped" (Maeckelbergh, 2009, pp. 175–176). Creating connections between separate actions often requires translation and Baker (2016a, p. 3) demonstrates activists' "inevitable reliance on different forms of translation to create networks of solidarity". She reports that actors of the 2011 Egyptian revolution built regional and intercontinental links through translation and subtitling (Baker, 2016c, p. 9). For example, the activist Philip Rizk recalls that videos and solidarity messages from protesters in Greece and striking factory workers in Argentina were translated into Arabic, whereby translation helped to tie the Egyptian revolt with other protests of a global movement (Baker, 2016b, pp. 229–230). *Acompañamiento* solves the problem of hierarchy and paternalism and distinguishes solidarity from charity and aid by removing direct support

¹ For more information, see Sánchez Balsalobre et al. (2010) and visit <https://ecosteis.wordpress.com/> (last accessed 13 February 2024).

altogether.² My definition allows cases of direct support but minimises the risk of paternalism in other ways.

Links between movements are also thematised by Michela Baldo (2020, p. 39), who focuses on socialist solidarity aimed at countering capitalism. Baldo shows that members of Italian queer transfeminist circles attempt ‘alliances’ with other collectives to fight precarity, sexism, racism and fascism but reports that, despite an ostensibly inclusive ethos, some male activists in allied antifascist collectives perpetrated abuse against women and LGBTQ+ activists. This prompts a cautionary remark that “solidarity [...] should be problematised” (Baldo, 2020, p. 41). I consider the question of inclusion pivotal for solidarity and incorporate it into my definition. Moreover, Baldo convincingly claims that translation acts can become “a form of solidarity” (Baldo, 2020, p. 41), in line with the idea that translation is performative, or a way of “doing things with words” (Austin, 1962).

As well as world solidarity and solidarity between movements, scholars discuss solidarity *within* movements. To Maria Tymoczko (2014, p. 322), politically engaged translators benefit from group membership as “solidarity is generally more enabling than relying on the self alone in contesting powerful interests”. Yet, volunteer translators and interpreters are rarely seen by fellow activists as activists in their own right, as opposed to service providers (Baker, 2016a, p. 2; Boéri, 2012; Delgado Luchner & Boéri, 2020, p. 253). Overall, I am inspired by the researchers’ focus on action (parallel action, performative translation), and an orientation towards action features in my view of solidarity. Yet, my definition is more specific on the conditions of solidarity than Cortina’s definition used by ECOS (Sánchez Balsalobre et al., 2010) and broader, in terms of who is involved, than the definition adopted by Baker (2016a).

2.3 Other approaches

References to solidarity appear in two other, smaller clusters of publications, which concern cosmopolitanism and migration, as well as translators’ solidarity.³ In the research on cosmopolitanism and migration, Michael Cronin (2006, pp. 14–20) refers to solidarity when developing the concept of micro-cosmopolitanism. Like cosmopolitanism, micro-cosmopolitanism decouples identity from a community of origin, but it reclaims the stronger conception of solidarity associated with communal belonging. To Cronin (2006, p.19), “solidarities of various forms, whether based on religion, ethnicity, language, gender or political orientation, help people to make sense of the world”. Importantly, local communities are not homogeneous or insular: the micro-level exhibits as much complexity as the macro-level (Cronin, 2006, pp. 15–16), making intra-group solidarities sites of difference, and micro-cosmopolitanism “allows for the trans-local spread of [solidarity] relationships” (Cronin, 2006, p. 19; for a compelling application of Cronin’s points see Maia, 2017). Another noteworthy study is Mattea Cussel’s (2023) examination of the relationships

² Attila Piróth and Mona Baker (2020) further discuss the advantages of solidarity over charity in their work on volunteerism. They argue that solidarity is reflexive and transformative, allowing critique and positive change of the contexts where it operates and of the parties involved (Piróth & Baker, 2020, p. 5).

³ ‘Solidarity’ also features in a small number of translation studies publications on such topics as conflict, crisis translation, ethics, literary translation, media, music, queer translation, sign language interpreting, training, volunteerism. Besides, several publications mention solidarity as a sociolinguistic relationship characterised by equality or proximity, expressed by e.g. using a sociolect or familiar forms of address. My own thinking about solidarity stems from studying intercultural perceptions (Gołuch, 2013; 2018).

between migrants and non-migrants, which employs contrastive categories of ethnicity-based solidarity and ‘democratic’ solidarity (Brunkhorst, 2005) based on difference.

Solidarity is also evoked in discussions of the translation profession, usually in positive terms. For example, Duygu Tekgül (2017, p. 64) reports that translators experience “feelings of excitement [...] and solidarity” following collaborative work. Scholars commend practitioners’ solidarity with persecuted translators and interpreters in conflict zones (Tekgül, 2017; Tryuk & Horváth, 2021, p. 297). ‘Solidarity’ appears in codes of conduct as well, for instance the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) expects members to exhibit solidarity through knowledge-sharing and collegiality where e.g. the ‘off-mic’ interpreter in a booth supports the ‘on-mic’ colleague (Yin & Ren, 2020, p. 206). Yet, professional solidarities are not without tensions; e.g. scholars report concerns about undercutting rates (Künzli, 2023). Furthermore, the AIIC has been criticised for elitism and restrictive entry conditions by Jesús de Manuel Jerez (2010), an ECOS member involved in training interpreters in the spirit of social solidarity. This shows conflicting visions of solidarity as support within closed groups, on the one hand, and commitment to wider social issues, on the other.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates a considerable breadth of scholars’ understanding of solidarity, from casual on-the-job collaboration in the booth, to local and trans-local belonging, to subtitling for networked activist collectives, to seeking commonality across difference in literary translation. Given the diversity of usage and scarcity of definitions, we might benefit from more dedicated theoretical engagement with the concept.

3. ‘Solidarity’ in philosophy, political science and sociology

To analyse the different uses of ‘solidarity’ in translation studies, I turn towards theorisations of solidarity in philosophy, political science and sociology. Engaging with the scholarship, I also notice that translation is absent from the theorising: that prompts me to develop a new definition of solidarity. Below I present analytical categories and debates regarding solidarity, structured around questions which should be addressed in a definition: *who* is involved in solidarity and on whose terms, *why* solidarity manifests and *what* it consists of.⁴

3.1 *Scope of solidarity, or the ‘Who’*

Different scopes of solidarity are discussed in Kurtz Bayertz’s (1999) oft-quoted article and its re-reading by Sally Scholz (2007): *human* solidarity – also referred to as *global* solidarity (Wilde, 2013) – encompasses all of humanity, *social* solidarity cements relations between members of a society or a group, *political* solidarity unites a group against injustice, while *civic* solidarity is concerned with redistribution of resources among citizens of a welfare state. At a more general level, solidarity involves relations within groups and between groups. Some scholars, especially sociologists, theorise solidarity primarily as intra-group ties: “following Émile Durkheim, the ‘groupness’ of any group may be referred to as its solidarity” (Hechter, 1987, p. 8). Others argue that “solidarity addresses a ‘they’ rather than a ‘we’” (Vetlesen, 1994, p. 324) and see solidarity happening between groups or differently situated individuals (e.g. Gould, 2007; Mohanty, 2003) or between people and animals (Harvey, 2007).

⁴ My reading focused on influential discussions, mostly from monographs, edited volumes and special issues devoted to solidarity.

These distinctions are helpful for mapping the different approaches to solidarity in translation studies: studies of activism tend to discuss political solidarity, although ECOS evoke human solidarity too, whereas professional solidarity is treated as social, or group, solidarity. All these types ultimately focus on intra-group ties, even if larger groupings inevitably comprise smaller units negotiating their differences. Feminist approaches and work on migration and cosmopolitanism escape easy categorisation because intersectional perspectives on women's solidarity (where gender similarity coexists with differences of class, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, etc.) and Cronin's ideas around micro-cosmopolitanism (diversity at local levels, trans-local solidarities) make the boundary between intra- and inter-group bonds blurry. The definition I develop is of global solidarity working towards ever-greater inclusion, which requires envisioning an enlarged intra-group bond but also navigating inter-group and inter-personal divides to create and maintain the bond.

A discussion of who is involved in solidarity prompts the question, "on whose terms?" and points towards risks related to power asymmetries between parties. Such risks include homogenising pressures on group members, exclusion of non-members from intra-group solidarities and paternalism towards the disadvantaged in inter-group solidarity. The first issue, how to forge solidarity respecting difference within the group, has been addressed by feminist scholars working on solidarity (also in translation studies, as discussed above). A solution I find particularly convincing is to approach the other through a form of non-appropriating affective stance, combined with solid knowledge of their circumstances. Sandra Bartky (2002) suggests approaching the other through sympathy, which she equates with the concept of *Mitgefühl*, or 'feeling-with', proposed by the phenomenologist Max Scheler. Feeling-with avoids emotional merging or mere projection of one's feelings onto the other: "I commiserate with your sufferings and take joy in your joys [...] but I experience neither your suffering nor your joy; they are *yours*" (Bartky, 2002, p. 81; original emphasis). Moreover, an intuitive feeling-with can only succeed if one knows the other person's circumstances, which involves linguistic and cultural knowledge (Bartky, 2002, pp. 80–81, 83). Drawing on Bartky, Jean Harvey (2007, p. 26) argues that the knowledge required for solidarity is more than information collected in a "detached data-gathering mode". She advocates for 'empathetic understanding', which requires empathy combined with learning about others in a mode of openness and, preferably, from their own accounts (Harvey, 2007, pp. 25–27). Another interesting approach is Jodi Dean's (1996) 'reflective' solidarity, which invites one to reflect on their blind spots and imagine the perspective of others who are absent from interaction. To intuit an absent other, one should think beyond familiar worldviews and idioms and "develop adequate vocabularies" (Dean, 1996, p. 172). Drawing on Jürgen Habermas's discourse ethics, Dean (1996, p. 180) considers reflective solidarity achievable because "it is possible, although it may be rare and transitory, to pass from one language to another". She thus evokes translation as a way of engaging with a hypothetical other; it is one of few references to translation in the scholarship on solidarity outside of translation studies.

The ideas by Bartky and Harvey inspire my definition but in conjunction with research from feminist translation studies (Castro & Ergun, 2017b; Ergun, 2020; Spivak, 2012), which offers further insight into the actual processes of relating. My definition includes a process akin to 'empathetic understanding', but I consider the process a form of translation. I believe that 'understanding' unhelpfully accentuates, firstly, the perspective of the subject seeking to comprehend an object and, secondly, the completeness of the process. 'Translation' can be used to the same effect, but the term can also draw attention

to the people involved in translation as subjects, not objects, and to the process in its open-endedness. The tentative, iterative nature of translation is captured in Dean's view of translation as transitory; I stress it in my definition by calling translation 'inherently incomplete'.

Examining who enters solidarity begs the question who does *not*. Some types of solidarity presuppose relatively rigid group boundaries, e.g. civic solidarity in a welfare state is limited to eligible residents. Political solidarities remain 'oppositional' (Scholz, 2007, p. 41) as adversaries are excluded. However, human solidarity should be fully inclusive. Some scholars critique the very concept. David Heyd (2007, pp. 119–120), for example, considers it impossible to identify with all human beings because there is no shared value or cause at stake. Others do envisage human solidarity, e.g. Lawrence Wilde and Richard Rorty, whose views I discuss below. I agree with the latter vision; *contra* Heyd, I consider tackling the climate crisis an all-human cause and, as I explain below, I consider happiness a shared human value. I recognise that identifying with all human beings at once seems impractical, but I envisage relating to certain people or groups *as* fellow human beings, not to entire humanity as such. I thus subscribe to Gould's (2007, p. 149) view of solidarities as overlapping networks which can grow towards global solidarity.

One more approach should be mentioned because it acknowledges questions of interlingual translation. Scholz (1998) discusses the philosopher Alain Locke's idea of cultures uniting in world solidarity, where artists, not politicians, come together across borders to spearhead and spread solidarity. Scholz draws attention to the problem of communication in world solidarity, where the question of language is not just cultural but also political. Locke's world solidarity, she concludes, would need to avoid imposing one language on everyone and would require a multilingual system and an appropriate theory of translation (Scholz, 1998, p. 8). This brief recognition of the need for translation in global communication is the only reference to interlingual translation I find in all the sociological, philosophical and political scholarship on solidarity I consulted. This is surprising given that scholars of solidarity refer to intercultural awareness (e.g. Wilde, 2013), supranational institutions (e.g. Brunkhorst, 2005) and transnational contexts (e.g. Gould, 2007).

A final point on inclusion regards not so much the scope but the ethos of solidarity. Wilde (2013, p. 1) makes it a very condition of solidarity that participants "pursu[e] social inclusion". He stresses that his definition is normative, postulating what ought to happen. It thus differs from a descriptive meaning of solidarity as group allegiance, which encompasses groups that endorse exclusion (Wilde, 2013, pp. 18, 43). My definition incorporates Wilde's condition. I also find this distinction helpful to understand better the two conflicting visions of solidarity evoked in de Manuel Jerez's (2010) critique of an interpreting professional association, mentioned earlier: a vision of solidarity as a world-facing professional ethos and as inward-focused professional cooperation. Under Wilde's normative definition, a professional association will count as solidary if it offers reasonably inclusive entry conditions; other types of associations would be solidary in a descriptive sense only.

While intra-group solidarity risks homogenising pressures within or exclusionary attitudes without, inter-group solidarity presents the risk of paternalistic relationships between groups. One response to the problem is the replacement of direct help with parallel action in *acompañamiento* (Maeckelbergh, 2009), mentioned above. This measure seems effective but, thinking about global solidarity, I do not discount cases of direct help. Another promising countermeasure to the issue of paternalism is the requirement of reciprocity: Bayertz (1999, p. 19; original emphasis) argues that those involved in solidarity have a "*mutual* right to expect help". Similarly, the feminist scholar

Chandra Mohanty (2003, p. 7; emphasis added) defines decolonial solidarity “in terms of *mutuality*, accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis for relationships among diverse communities”. However, Gould (2007, p. 157) aptly observes that for the most disadvantaged participants, the requirement of reciprocity may be only nominal. My definition stresses that in solidarity the participants are interconnected, so any help the advantaged extend should ultimately, if indirectly, benefit them too and as such differs from charity. This approach may not fully mitigate the risks of paternalism, but it allows for a broader range of interactions than *acompañamiento*.

3.2 Causes of solidarity, or the ‘Why’

There are various explanations of why solidarity arises and they point to utilitarian motives, emotions, values or norms as sources of solidarity (Komter, 2004, pp. 112–116). Given my interest in negotiations between commonality and difference, I see two main causes of solidarity: identification and common interests. Influential ideas on identification as a motive for solidarity come from Rorty. He maintains that shared susceptibility to pain and humiliation helps to enlarge the circle of ‘us’ and that one should learn to see others as “fellow sufferers” (1989, p. xvi). That, in his view, can happen when one engages with representations of other people and their pain in literature, film, journalism and ethnography. In addition, Rorty (1989, p. 191) states that the most effective identifications are those “where ‘us’ means something smaller and more local than the human race”; his examples include shared citizenship or experiences of parenting young children. To Rorty (1989, p. 192), such specific solidarities depend on which similarities and dissimilarities one finds salient. David Featherstone (2012, p. 22) goes a step further, arguing that Rorty views similarity and dissimilarity as static, while in fact “likeness is actively produced”. What I would add is that the negotiation and generation of commonality and difference happen through the process of translation.

Rorty’s focus on pain is criticised as overly negative by Wilde (2013, p. 118), who proposes ‘radical humanism’, a virtue ethics based on positive human potentials of rationality, compassion, productiveness and cooperation, as a key to global solidarity. Wilde sees the potentials as innately human but seeks to avert risks of cultural imperialism associated with essentialism. He therefore underscores that the potentials are “sufficiently general so that they can be realised in a wide variety of cultural forms” (Wilde, 2013, p. 118, see also p. 141). Like Wilde, I believe that human beings share something positive, namely a need and aptitude for happiness. Wilde (2013, p. 156) also notes that cultural contacts and products can help to increase identification with others and hence solidarity: he calls for language learning, travel and appreciation of other cultures’ art and literature. Translation, however, is not mentioned. Both Rorty and Wilde recognise the importance of cultural products and representations for enlarging solidarity but not the role of translation in creating and circulating them. This is symptomatic of a general neglect of translation in the scholarship on solidarity.

3.3 Components of solidarity, or the ‘What’

After discussing who is involved and why, I ask what constitutes solidarity. Not all theorists of solidarity name the “kind of item it refers to” (Harvey, 2007, p. 22), while those who do offer various labels, e.g. “a feeling” (Wilde, 2013, p. 1), “a bond” (Habermas, 1992, p. 252), “relation” (Featherstone, 2012, p. 5), “preparedness” (Stjernø, 2005, p. 2) – the terms generally denote attitudes, broadly understood, or relationships. Another important component of solidarity is action. According to some scholars, action is a desirable but not always immediate or manifest outcome of the relevant attitude or relationship.

For example, Wilde (2013, p. 1; emphasis added) considers solidarity “a feeling of sympathy shared by subjects within and between groups, *impelling supportive action* and pursuing social inclusion”. Other scholars, however, see action as constitutive of solidarity, particularly political solidarity, and not its second component. For example, Featherstone (2012, p. 5, emphasis added) defines solidarity as “a relation forged *through political struggle* which seeks to challenge forms of oppression”. My definition concerns global, rather than political, solidarity and includes two components: an attitude and potential action.

Regarding the attitude or relationship, scholars also debate whether it is primarily affective or cognitive. Some give more weight to feelings (Vetlesen, 1994, p. 328; Wilde, 2013, p. 1), others to reasoning (Habermas, 1990, 1992; Hechter, 1987), while yet others suggest that the two “work symbiotically” (Gould, 2007, p. 163; see also Stjernø, 2005, p. 32). In translation studies, solidarity is more often discussed in terms of affect (e.g. Baldo, 2023; Spivak, 2012), although some scholars refer to theorists associated with cognitive approaches, e.g. Cussel (2023) draws on Hauke Brunkhorst. In my definition, I adopt the view of a symbiosis between feelings and reasoning because different people may be better socially or neurologically equipped for one or the other. I now turn to an oft-quoted polemic on affect and cognition in solidarity between Jürgen Habermas and Arne Vetlesen – I do not side with either scholar but focus instead on how their arguments evoke notions of translation. Habermas includes solidarity in his discourse ethics, defining it as a “social bond” (Habermas, 1992, p. 252) among discourse participants embedded in “shared forms of life” (Habermas, 1990, p. 274); the bond covers an existing group and may extend to strangers (Rehg, 1994, pp. 110–111). The purpose of discourse ethics is to decide which norms should become universally binding and each participant contributes by evaluating a norm from their perspective but also from the perspectives of others (Habermas, 1990, p. 235) – the perspective-taking stems from solidarity. Habermas (1992, p. 269) argues that to actualise that solidarity, one first employs empathy, or “the capacity to transport oneself by means of feeling across cultural distance”. Afterwards, one abstracts from the positions of particular others and from one’s own and reasons whether the norm is acceptable to all (Habermas, 1992, p. 269). Opposing Habermas, Vetlesen (1994, p. 328) argues that in solidarity cognitive processes of imagination enable reaching out to others, but the final move relies on empathy; it is empathy that “brings the initially absent and unknown [...] ‘back’ to us”. Notably, both scholars conceptualise solidarity as movement across cultural distance (transporting, bringing back), which strongly resembles spatially-oriented Western images of translation as ‘carrying across’ (Tymoczko, 2014, pp. 6–7, for non-Western images see pp. 68–75). In my view, translation *is* a process through which solidarity develops, but Habermas’s and Vetlesen’s points imply that one can fully transport oneself to inhabit the other’s standpoint or transport that otherness back in familiar terms, leaving the self and the other intact. Such full translatability, or transportability, seems reductive towards the others; I see translation instead as inherently incomplete and potentially transformative.

To summarise, solidarity can comprise an attitude or relationship, which has affective and cognitive dimensions and is followed by action; solidarity can also be seen as a relation born from action. Solidarity unites groups, e.g. in human, social or political solidarities focusing on intra-group bonds, and it works between groups. It negotiates similarity and difference and may stem from identification and shared interests. Risks related to power asymmetries in solidarity include homogenisation, exclusion and paternalism. Moreover, the term ‘solidarity’ can be used in a descriptive or normative sense (‘what is’ and ‘what ought to be’, respectively). The analytical categories presented in this

section shed some light on the scholarship on solidarity in translation studies, by distinguishing between different phenomena – e.g. political solidarity and human solidarity discussed in the work on translation and activism – and between descriptive and normative uses of the term, e.g. in conversations around professional solidarity.

This section has also shown that theorists of solidarity in sociology, philosophy and political science hardly refer to translation, two isolated exceptions being Dean (1996) on reflective solidarity and Scholz (1998) on multilingualism in world solidarity.⁵ I suggest that research on solidarity from translation studies productively extends the research in other disciplines, e.g. feminist scholars working on translation allow us to see non-homogenising solidarity arise not from empathetic understanding (Harvey, 2007) but from translation, Cronin's (2006) micro-cosmopolitanism shows the boundaries between intra- and inter-group solidarity to be blurry, while Baker's (2016a; 2016b; 2016c) work demonstrates that translation is needed to connect the parallel actions in solidarity as *acompañamiento*. Furthermore, I argue that solidarity can be redefined to make the role of translation in its construction more visible. This is the focus of the final section.

4. Conclusion: Defining solidarity from within translation studies

In this section, I offer my definition of solidarity and discuss its possible applications within translation studies. I propose to define solidarity as *a sense of interconnection and commonality in difference – developed through caring, careful and inherently incomplete translation – that pursues inclusion and impels action towards common good*. I consider solidarity a *sense* to signal an interplay of affection and cognition – where sensing means feeling, but sense-making connotes thinking. *Interconnection* signifies Anzaldúa's (2002, p. 5) idea of interpersonal and planetary connectedness, included in Ergun's (2020) translation ethics. Because of interconnection with others, one has something to gain upon extending solidarity, even if the others are unlikely to reciprocate: in interconnection, helping one element of the system to survive allows the system to thrive. This reduces the risk of benevolent paternalism. It also increases effectiveness of solidarity by adding a dose of self-interest, seen as self-care rather than egoism.

At the heart of solidarity is *commonality in difference*, a notion inspired by feminist scholars. For example, Mohanty (2003, p. 225) claims that “in knowing differences and particularities, we can better see the connections and commonalities” and that “specifying difference allows us to theorize universal concerns more fully”. I think of commonalities very widely and include in that category shared interests, specific identifications “more local than the human race” (Rorty, 1989, p. 191), as well as the notion of shared humanity. Shared humanity may be understood in terms of human potentials (Wilde, 2013) or human aversion to pain (Rorty, 1989) mentioned earlier, but I also emphasise the human need for happiness as a universal commonality. The need can be called different names – quest for fulfilment, desire for peace, a want to feel well – and it is so basic that it can be mobilised without imposing culturally-specific values. Indeed, introducing a universal commonality, I subscribe to ideas that reclaim a version of universalism, while rejecting the (mis)use of the concept as, in Chinua Achebe's (1994, p. 60) words, “a synonym for the narrow,

⁵ Some important work in those disciplines does refer to solidarity and translation but is not focused on theorising solidarity (e.g. Doerr, 2018).

self-serving parochialism of Europe”. One useful idea, coined by the thinker Jean-Claude Milner (2011) and introduced to translation studies by Cronin (2013, pp. 117–118), is that of a bottom-up, or ‘difficult’, universal. To arrive at the difficult universal is to think through details rather than accepting abstract or established notions at face value, it is to “mov[e] towards a notion of emergent commonality based on difference, rather than similarity” (Cronin, 2013, p. 118). In the case of a shared need for happiness, the bottom-up movement should involve a detailed comparison of different ideas one and others have on how to fulfil the need and of different obstacles to fulfilling it. What may emerge is the commonality of the need itself. Furthermore, foregrounding the need for happiness, I seek to complement Rorty’s emphasis on suffering. Susceptibility to suffering and desire for happiness together enable two fundamental modes of relating, which are evoked in Bartky’s (2002, p. 81) statement on approaching the other: “I commiserate with your sufferings and take joy in your joys (how odd that we have no verb for this in English!)”. Those acts of relating can happen because of sharing the very attraction to happiness and aversion to pain. Overall, the notion of shared humanity guarantees a possibility of relating even alongside radical differences.

The sense of interconnection and commonality in difference, as I envisage it, can only be developed through *translation*, i.e. a hermeneutic, interpersonal and semiotic process directed towards making sense of others in relation to the self, in line with the definitions of translation as “a meaning-making practice of human relationality” (Ergun, 2020, p. 114) and mediation of signs and experiences (Baker, 2016a, p. 7). The translation should be *caring* and *careful*, which signifies a combination of affective investment and thorough knowledge – I draw here on the feminist proposals for combining affect and knowledge discussed earlier (Bartky, 2002; Harvey, 2007; Spivak, 2012). The translation should also be seen as *inherently incomplete* to stress that one cannot fully translate the other into one’s terms.

After describing how the sense of interconnection and commonality in difference develops, I add two defining characteristics, which are adapted from Wilde (2013, p. 1). Solidarity must *pursue inclusion* – attitudes or relationships which exhibit exclusionary characteristics would not count as solidarity. I only remove ‘social’ from Wilde’s (2013, p. 1) “social inclusion” to make the definition adaptable to relationships between people and animals. The second requirement is *impelling action*, which means that, while the proof of solidarity is not in the acting, solidarity is more than a ‘sense’ and gravitates towards action.

Below, I sketch the roles of translation and the translator that emerge from my definition and present a few implications of my approach for translation studies and for the interlingual translator. Translation – in the broad sense, which encompasses the narrow sense of interlingual translation – matters to solidarity in a few interrelated ways. Firstly, the process is what enables solidarity development. Secondly, while the process is key, one cannot always engage with others directly but may rely during the process on pre-existing representations, i.e. artefacts which are products of translation. Examples include (translated) texts, (subtitled or dubbed) audio-visual materials or recordings of (interpreted) speech. Thirdly, and this point applies to interlingual translation only, availability of such translation products in more languages widens the circle of others with whom one can develop solidarity. Fourthly, in addition to its relevance to developing solidarity, translation can constitute solidarity action.

Two simple examples should illustrate these points. In the first example, the translator is assigned to subtitle a documentary. Working on it, the translator engages in a hermeneutic and semiotic process – caringly, carefully and with a

humble recognition that any translation remains incomplete – which creates a sense of interconnection and commonality in difference with the people represented in it. The relationship has an inclusive ethos, and the translator feels impelled to act for common good – in other words, solidarity has developed. From this point, the interlingual translation assignment may turn into solidarity action, where the translator works with the people’s interests in mind. In another scenario, the translator reads an autobiographical book for leisure and develops solidarity with its author. Once solidarity is present, the translator may pursue interlingual translation as solidarity action, e.g. pitch the book to a publisher. Besides, in these examples, the autobiography and the documentary are translation products, artefacts through which the translator developed solidarity. By creating interlingual translations of these artefacts, the translator is enlarging their audiences and hence the potential for new solidarities.

I will now signal possible implications of my definition for translation studies, focusing on the translator’s agency and relationships with other agents, the choice of translation strategies, as well as translation and interpreting training. Firstly, whenever the translator sets to work, they *may* develop or reaffirm solidarity – because translation, in my definition, is where solidarity begins. The translator is not the impartial, impersonal mediator envisaged by many professional codes of ethics but a social and ethical agent, who may choose to open themselves up to the possibility of solidarity with others. Translators can develop solidarity with different parties, including creators of the source material, the people represented in it, translation users, fellow translators, other translation-related agents (e.g. wider editorial or localisation teams) and other groups relevant to the translators’ personal lives.

Solidarity as a relationship can be explored alongside other widely discussed relationships the translator may enter. These include fidelity, understood as the translator’s duty towards the source text and author, and loyalty, which is owed, simultaneously, to the author, the target audience and the client (Nord, 1997, pp. 123–128). Solidarity differs from these relationships as the translator does not enter it automatically – solidarity may or may not develop. Additionally, solidarity presupposes interconnection and at least nominal reciprocity, while fidelity and loyalty are one-directional and may imply subservience. Solidarity partly resembles cooperation (Pym, 2012, pp. 133–167; see also Lambert, 2023, pp. 65–73), where the translator aims to ensure that all parties gain something from intercultural exchange; one difference is that solidarity need not involve parties related to both the source culture and the target culture. Given that solidarity develops in selected cases and with selected parties, it is closer to the relationship of commitment, or being committed to a cause, explored by research on translation, ideology and power (for a sample overview see Brownlie, 2010). Yet, solidarity requires commonality, which is not strictly required for commitment.

I see solidarity as an interpersonal relation, not a textual or linguistic one, and do not associate it with any translation strategy. Yet, solidarity can impact textual or interpreting decisions as the translator may prefer strategies that seem beneficial to the solidarity partner(s). Importantly, the translator is always a solidarity partner themselves, so when considering strategies that challenge professional norms, they should weigh the benefits such strategies may bring others against potential damage to their own professional prospects. Another interesting point regards scenarios where the translator wants to bring parties from the source domain and the target domain together: they hope that their translation will allow the user to develop solidarity with the author or the people represented in the source material. The user will thus become a ‘translator’, in a broad sense, engaging with the translation product as a proxy for the people related to it. It will be up to the user to give their affect and be willing to learn

– i.e. make the ‘translation’ caring and careful – and to realise that they cannot translate the other exhaustively into their terms of reference. However, the interlingual translator behind the product could anticipate what sort of translation strategies might give the user the best chance of seeing commonality in difference.

Finally, my ideas on solidarity can be integrated into translation and interpreting training and continuing professional development. They could be used to explore the process of translation and the practicalities of combining affective attitudes with in-depth research and knowledge. Students and professionals may ask how the process is affected by technology, e.g. does postediting machine translated texts leave space for hermeneutic and interpersonal engagement, allowing opportunities for solidarity? Practitioners may note tensions between the demands of solidarity and professional expectations of neutrality. Yet, they may feel empowered by a conceptualisation that places translation at the heart of solidarity: the skills and sensitivities they are honing are vital to anyone seeking solidarity with others.

Overall, the article intervenes into discussions of solidarity by thinking solidarity and translation together. It shows that within translation studies there is scope for more explicit theorisation of solidarity, while theorisations of solidarity in other disciplines could pay more attention to translation. To address these gaps, I develop a new definition of solidarity – one that foregrounds the role of translation, a realm “where [...] difference and commonality, coexist” (Ergun, 2020, p. 122), in solidarity development. Adept at negotiating commonality and difference, the interlingual translator emerges as an active agent and a model subject capable of solidarity. This has implications for thinking about the translator’s relationships, translational strategies and translator and interpreter training. It also makes the figure of the translator, and translation studies’ insights on translation processes, especially significant to thinking and practising solidarity more broadly. This is because I suggest that anyone attempting solidarity must translate – i.e. engage with others in attentive, non-reductive ways – to discover or invent interconnections and commonalities in difference. Translation in its many guises is indeed, as Judith Butler (Nagar et al., 2017, p. 113) says in a roundtable discussion, indispensable to working towards global solidarity, and an orientation towards global solidarity, in turn, seems necessary to allow us to face the globalised problems of our century.

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