TRANSLATION OF SCIENCE – SCIENCE OF TRANSLATION

INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP

Friday and Saturday, January 24 and 25, 2014

Ludwik Fleck Center, Schmelzbergstrasse 25, 8006 Zürich
Translation of Science – Science of Translation

Inspired by Ludwik Fleck’s epistemology and with regard to Fleck’s own work and writings the workshop explores different aspects of the «problem of translation».

On the one hand, the workshop will discuss literal translations of texts written by Fleck into different languages (German, Polish, English), focusing particularly his monograph, Entstehung und Entwicklung einer wissenschaftlichen Tatsache, Basel 1935. On the other hand, the translation of scientific knowledge in different cultural and disciplinary contexts will be highlighted in the framework of Fleck’s epistemology.

Translation is is a central motive in Fleck’s processualist epistemology and an intrinsic part of its social foundation. It is not a problem that may be added to scientific knowledge production but in fact lies at its heart. At the same time Fleck makes it very clear that any «correctness» or reproducibility in translations or knowledge communication is questionable. In his concept of «Denkverkehr» or «thought traffic» every migration and circulation of thought between collectives of thinking is conceived as a kind of translation. It naturally comes with understanding as well as with misunderstanding and ignorance. Translation is always as much transformation as it is transposition.

Translation needs not to be limited to not merely linguistic and cultural aspects. As Fleck has emphasized, it may include the materiality of knowledge production, the different styles of practices, and the multiple forms and ways of knowing, e.g. in clinical reasoning or in laboratory research. Today, translation serves as an essential interdisciplinary tool – in translational medicine or translational science. It aims to «circulate» findings from laboratory benches to clinical bedsides in a more efficient way, by accelerating the translation process from chemical agents into drugs for humans or from laboratory methods into diagnostic tools.

Finally, «translation» has also gained prominence as an analytical concept in historical and sociological studies of science and medicine.

With a keynote evening lecture by Ilana Löwy, in several sessions with short talks and ample discussions, but also with source centred (closed) working sessions, the workshop aims at exploring, comparing and bridgeing the aspects depicted above.
Program Friday

Friday, January 24

15:15–15:30  Welcome and Workshop Introduction

15:30–16:10  Pawel Jarnicki
Ludwik Fleck’s philosophical writings:
some editions and translations compared

16:10–16:50  Rainer Egloff/Martina Schlünder/Oriana Walker
The American translation of Fleck’s Monograph –
contexts and problems

16:50–17:20  Break

17:20–18:00  Wojciech Sady
How to translate incommensurable texts?

18:00–18:15  Break

18:15–19:45  Keynote Evening Lecture
Ilana Löwy
Found in an imperfect translation: the meandering
of the thought of Ludwik Fleck
Abstract
Program Saturday

Saturday, January 25

09:00–10:00  Pawel Jarnicki
The first and the last philosophical texts
of Ludwik Fleck, and the translations compared –
a working session

10:00–10:15  Break

10:15–10:55  Sandra Lang
Fissures in Communication:
Translating Translational Medicine with Ludwik Fleck

11:00–11:40  Beatrix Rubin
Plasticity, conceptualisation and translation
in the development of the neurosciences
during the 20th century

11:45–12:30  Closing Discussion
Abstracts and biographical notes

Ludwik Fleck’s philosophical writings: some editions and translations compared

Pawel Jarnicki

The most important book of Ludwik Fleck: Entstehung Fleck und Entwicklung einer wissenschaftlichen Tatsache was written in German, most of the theoretical articles were written in Polish. In brief: in Polish there are two editions of collected works of Fleck’s philosophical writings, but the translation of the book written in German is inconsistent with articles written in Polish, both editions lack indexes of terms; in German, there are three books with Fleck’s theoretical writings and none of them collects all philosophical works, but the translation of articles written in Polish is partially inconsistent with the book written in German, none of the editions has an index of terms; in English, there is a bad quality translation of Fleck’s book written in German with bad quality index of terms, the translators of Fleck’s articles (published in three issues) made different decisions than the translators of the book, so the terminology is also inconsistent. One of the reasons of such state of the art is that some of Fleck’s texts were re-discovered after some of the translations were made. Philological analysis of his texts and translations is sine qua non of critical collected edition of Fleck’s philosophical writings. At the workshop a short history of editions of Fleck’s writings, short comparison of published glossaries will be presented and at the working session – first findings of the philological analysis.

Pawel Jarnicki, PhD, is a Polish philologist, affiliated with Ludwik Fleck Center and Project Science Foundation (Wrocław, Poland). His main fields of scientific interest are: the problem of metaphor in science and Ludwik Fleck’s philosophy of science.
The American translation of Fleck’s Monograph – contexts and problems

Rainer Egloff/Martina Schlünder/Oriana Walker

In 1979 the University of Chicago Press published an English translation of Ludwik Fleck’s book on the development of scientific facts originally written in German and released 1935 by the Swiss publisher Schwabe. Even though a bunch of editors and translators were in charge of the project or contributing to it – among them such well known scholars like Robert Merton and Thomas Kuhn – it turned out to be a (linguistically) difficult task to catapult Fleck’s book from the margins of “old Europe” to the heart of Anglo-American academic elite institutions and programs. The talk explores the cultural and linguistic difficulties of this trajectory between continents, cultures, religions, times, and languages.

Rainer Egloff is a historian of the social sciences academically. He is affiliated with Collegium Helveticum and its Ludwik Fleck Centre. Professionally, Rainer is working in early risk detection for Swiss Re.

Martina Schlünder is a medical doctor and a historian of science and medicine and currently a Research Fellow at the Ludwik Fleck Centre at Collegium Helveticum with a project on Fleck’s epistemology and the history of serology (funded by OPO Foundation).

Oriana Walker is a PhD student in Harvard history of science, and currently a Visiting Fellow, Centre for Religion and Society, University of Victoria (British Columbia-Canada).
Abstract: It has been noticed that translational biomedical research is subject to the same errors criticized in mainstream medical research and practice: Instead of bridging the gap between basic science and clinical application an implementation, translational medicine falls into the institutionalized research silos and reproduces them. Offering a Fleckian perspective on the difficulties that contemporary translational medicine faces, this input deals with competing incommensurable thought styles with controverting proto-ideas and the separating socialization of young academics.

Sandra Lang is an MA candidate in Sociology at University of Freiburg (Germany). Since October 2013, she also is an intern with Ludwik Fleck Center at Collegium Helveticum

Plasticity, conceptualisation and translation in the development of the neurosciences during the 20th century

Beatrix Rubin

The concept of plasticity denotes adaptation based on functional change of different parts of the nervous system. I propose that plasticity is at the centre of a conceptual transformation in the neurosciences, which has occurred during the second half of the 20th century and continues into the present. Following an analytical framework developed by Ilana Löwy I suggest that plasticity functions as a loose “boundary” concept (Löwy, 1992). As such, plasticity not only enables different empirical conceptualisations within the neurosciences, but also permits the translation of these into novel therapeutic approaches for the treatment of nervous system disorders.

Beatrix Rubin is a neurobiologist by training. She is associated with the Collegium Helveticum and is a member of the Department of History at the University of Basel. She has done research both in neurobiology and in sociology and history of science.
How to translate incommensurable texts?

Wojciech Sady

The perfectness of translation is limited by a kind of the discipline. Translations of contemporary texts in mathematics, physics etc. can be perfect, because (1) the logical structure of such texts is relatively simple and clear, and (2) in different contemporary languages there are sublanguages – developed by scientific thought collectives – that are mutually equivalent. In philosophy no translation can be perfect, because (1) the structure of philosophical discourse is usually extremely complicated and its logical analysis is often very risky, and (2) the philosophical discourse depends heavily on specific features of native languages and such languages in many respects are more or less different. But when we make the Fleckian reconstruction of the history of a scientific discipline we face yet another problem: how to translate old scientific texts belonging to thought styles that are incommensurable with scientific language we use today? How to translate eg. Aristotelian *aition, kinesis, energeia, dynamis*? Or how to translate Maxwell’s *aether* into the language of contemporary physics? If Fleck is right, there is no general solution to this problem. But the quality of translation depends on translator’s consciousness of it.

Wojciech Sady, * 1952, MSc in physics, PhD in philosophy, is Professor of Philosophy in the Pedagogical University of Cracov, Poland. He has translated several Philosophers into Polish, Fleck among them. He published (in Polish) a book *Fleck o społecznej naturze poznania* (Fleck on the social nature of knowledge) and an entry on Ludwik Fleck in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Sady currently works on both a sociological (Fleckian) and rational (quasi-Lakatosian) reconstruction of the history of physics of the second half of XIXth century.
Venue

Ludwik Fleck Center at Collegium Helveticum, Schmelzbergstr. 25, 8006 Zürich

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Registration

Workshop registration is welcome: info@fleckzentrum.ethz.ch. Free Participation. An electronic reader with preparatory texts will be distributed to the registered participants.