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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Exploring reproduction (or is it procreation?) over language boundaries: the challenges and hidden opportunities of translation

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Abstract This article addresses the challenges and benefits derived from having to present social science research in another language than one's usual working language. As objects of study are, in part, moulded by language, translation becomes an invaluable opportunity for critical reflection on our epistemic choices. The article thus proposes a brief inquiry into the words we use, in French and in English, to describe and discuss issues in assisted reproductive technology, or medically assisted procreation as one would say in French. The article first explores similarities and differences in the generic terms used in each language to refer to this area, and discusses the verbs used to describe different facets of the reproductive process. It then proposes a short discussion of two terms often used interchangeably in both languages, 'reproduction' and 'procreation', and introduces a third term, *engendrement* ('engendering') that has recently emerged in France as an alternative concept. The conclusion points to the impact that technology may have on the issues considered worthy of attention, and on the meaning of certain words, as reproductive acts are displaced from the body to the laboratory. It also urges greater attention to how language affects the way we conceptualize reproductive practices and issues, and to how we deal with these differences in international encounters.

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When recently preparing a preceding paper for a Franco–American conference on assisted reproductive technology (ART), I remember reflecting on the fact that the expression and acronym 'ART' could not be easily translated into

French. One could, of course, replace 'ART' with one of the two French expressions and acronyms currently in use, *procréation médicalement assistée* (PMA) or *assistance médicale à la procréation* (AMP), but these French expressions (which both mean 'medically assisted procreation')

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are not the exact translation of the English. The notion of assistance is present in both the English and the French expressions, but the French expressions emphasize the medicalization of reproduction whereas the English expression highlights the technology. This focus on technology is consistent with another Anglo–American acronym, ‘NRT’ (new reproductive technologies), used more frequently in the 1980s to designate in-vitro fertilization (IVF) and other related fertilization procedures, and rapidly adopted by French feminists in a literal translation (NTR – *nouvelles technologies reproductives*). The term ‘new’ was meant to distinguish these technologies from older ones, such as oral contraception, aimed at controlling fertility. However, in English, the term ‘reproductive technologies’ now tends to encompass all forms of intervention in the reproductive process, whether it be to control, promote or improve fertility. This extension of its use has not been taken up in France.

What do these small translation details have to say about the way in which we approach the issues related to assisted human reproduction? When, for the purposes of a conference, we have to translate certain expressions that are widely used and understood in our own intellectual surroundings but are not easily translated into another language, we suddenly discover that these words are invariably attached not only to local linguistic conventions and to a history of their use, but also to our disciplinary perspectives; to local social, economic and political contexts; and to conceptual and normative debates within these contexts. Just as when we must present field work performed in another country or even in a region of our own country where certain words are used differently (colloquial expressions, dialects), translating our ideas into another language involves putting our own thinking under greater scrutiny – a process more complex than simply finding the right word in a dictionary.

If we try to translate a series of verbs used in French to refer to different aspects of the reproductive process (*concevoir, enfanter, engendrer, féconder, fertiliser, générer, procréer, reproduire*, etc.), we discover that most of these terms have direct English translations – conceive, fertilize, generate, procreate, reproduce etc. – and the word *enfanter* can be translated as ‘to give birth’ or ‘to bear a child’. A common English translation for some of these terms is simply ‘to have children’. Moreover, as those who speak both languages well know, direct translations may not always be the most appropriate. For example, IVF is ‘in-vitro fertilization’ in English and ‘*fécondation in vitro*’ in French, reflecting a well-known translation difficulty in demography: the ‘fertility rate’ translates as ‘*le taux de fécondité*’ in French. The verbs mentioned above are not equivalents for one another; they refer to specific aspects of the reproductive process as it develops over time, and must be mobilized accordingly. For example, conceiving and giving birth most often describe what happens in women’s bodies at two different moments. However, certain terms may lose their reference to bodily processes when used to describe technical acts that displace this act to a biomedical context, such as the term ‘assisted conception’. ‘Procreation’ and ‘reproduction’ are more general terms which, in the latter case, also apply to animals and plants. ‘Procreation’ is generally limited to human reproduction in both lan-

guages, but is used much more frequently in French than in English. A term recently popularized in the social science literature in France on assisted reproduction, *engendrement*, is not easy to translate (engendering? begetting? generation?): should it eventually be understood as a possible synonym for ‘procreation’ and ‘reproduction’? The nuances among these three terms, as they are played out in French social science debates, may be completely lost in translation. In other words, despite the presence of the same words in both languages to discuss human reproduction (or should we say procreation?), some words occur more frequently in presentations and writings than others, some not at all, and the patterns of these occurrences differ from one country to another, even when these countries use the same language; they also evolve over time in any one country.

In addressing the challenges of presenting our research in a different language than the one in which we usually work, I will limit my discussion to a short reflection on two sets of words we use to discuss issues in assisted reproduction. Following a short overview of some specific problems raised by the translation of social science texts, I will first develop my introductory remarks on the generic terms we use to designate this particular field of inquiry and practice, in an attempt to provide an overview of the way our apprehension of this field has evolved over time. I will then examine two keywords, ‘reproduction’ and ‘procreation’, and add a third term, *engendrement*, which is beginning to be widely used among social scientists working on assisted reproduction in France, so as to explore what this word has brought to the discussion on these issues, and consider the translatability of the word and of the discussion into English.

Translation as an investigative tool in the social sciences

As a person who has lived most of her life in a multilingual environment and who works regularly in at least two languages, it is only recently that I have begun exploring how the translation of key social science concepts has affected the way they are interpreted and used in the receptor language. In a recent paper written in English on the ‘gift relationship’ and the use of discarded human tissue for research (Bateman, 2016a), I suddenly realized that the three social scientists who had first applied Marcel Mauss’ *Essai sur le Don* to the circulation of human body parts and substances in medical practice – political scientist Richard Titmuss in the UK on blood donation and banking (1970), and sociologist Renée C. Fox and medical historian Judith Swazey on organ donation in the USA (1974) – had most probably read Mauss’ essay in its English translation, as ‘The Gift’. This led me to write a second paper on what was gained and what was lost by working with Mauss’ essay in its English translation, and particularly with his concept of *don* as a ‘gift’ (Bateman, 2016b). I also co-organized, between 2010 and 2012, a collective inquiry into the concept and practices of human enhancement, conducted through a series of meetings held in English with scholars from seven different countries and from 14 disciplines, working regularly in five different languages (French, English, Italian, German and Swedish) (Bateman et al., 2015). One of the challenges in

this area was exploring the various French renditions of the word 'enhancement', most frequently translated either as 'amelioration' or 'augmentation' (Bateman and Gayon, 2013); however, neither of these translations fully reflects the conceptual complexity of current use of the English-language expression 'human enhancement'. Just as the word *engendrement* mentioned above, the term 'human enhancement' and the French word *don* raise the spectre of untranslatability.

As complex a task as it is to translate into another language, it is interesting to note that the theory and practice of translation has only recently emerged as an area of study: university programmes in translation studies (known as *traductologie* in French) were set up in the early 1970s. Most of the work produced in translation studies concerns either literary translations (literature and poetry) or the special problems raised by what is termed 'non-literary translations' (technical manuals, medical and scientific articles and information, etc.). Social science and social theory are usually subsumed under the category of literary translations, despite the fact that the translation of texts from the human and social sciences raises problems that are peculiar to these fields. The American sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein was one of the first social scientists to point to these difficulties:

...a social science text utilizes concepts as the central mode of communication... On the one hand, they are shared references of meaning, shared summations of data or classifications of reality... On the other hand, these concepts are not *universally* shared and are quite often the subject of open and violent conflict... [T]he translator must know (a) the degree to which any concept is in fact shared and by whom, both at the time of writing and at the time of translation, and (b) the variations of sharing communities in each of the two languages... (Wallerstein, 1981: 88).

From this perspective, a translator of social science texts must ideally be someone who has the necessary translation skills but also a social science background that allows him/her to evaluate how best to render the original term in another language.

Wallerstein's approach to translation, which consisted of laying down a series of ground rules for addressing these difficulties, has been criticized as an attempt to find standard or conventional solutions to translation problems, so as to arrive at a universal conversation in the social sciences (Price, 2008). Wallerstein may have had this in mind, but does not explicitly state this in his article. Indeed, he highlights the fact that concepts are not universally shared and are often the source of conflict. Overall, his ground rules seem to point to the importance of maintaining, within the translated version, the link with the original concept and its context. Sociologist Jonathan Price, on the other hand, emphasizes that translating social science goes beyond this task: it involves conceptual clarification and may also imply conceptual elaboration, eventually through atypical translation choices, so that the overall meaning of the original text is easily apprehended and understood in a distinct intellectual and social context. We find here the classic tension for all translators between remaining faithful to the original wording and intellectual framework

of a text, and producing a readable translation that makes the author's meaning readily accessible to a different linguistic, scholarly and cultural community.

This tension is exacerbated by terms that are difficult to translate. French philologist and philosopher Barbara Cassin, who has dedicated much of her recent work to questions of translation, has notably edited an encyclopaedic dictionary of 400 philosophical terms considered 'untranslatable' (Cassin, 2004); it has since been translated into several other languages, including English (Cassin, 2014). Cassin notes that an 'untranslatable' is not a word, expression or text that cannot be translated, but that 'one never stops (not) translating'; translation of these words is thus 'an open and always ongoing process' (Cassin, 2016: 243).

Two things are notable about the original French version of her encyclopaedia, as opposed to the English version whose title gives central importance to the question of untranslatability (*Dictionary of Untranslatables: a Philosophical Lexicon*). The French volume relegates this question to a subtitle, whereas the title, *European Vocabulary of Philosophies (Vocabulaire européen des philosophies, 2004)*, highlights the European nature of this venture and thus the plurality of philosophical perspectives that informed it. Indeed, if the entries are all written in French, the headwords (or lemmas) come from at least 15 languages and reflect the diversity of perspectives that have contributed to the clarification of key concepts in philosophical thought. Moreover, echoing Price's remarks on conceptual elaboration, in her view, each new translation of the dictionary should be 'an interpretative appropriation of the first gesture, adapted to a new language and a new cultural frame. It has its own aim, which totally reshapes the original French intention' (Cassin, 2016: 254).

Cassin sees translation as essential to understanding language, and frequently cites German philosopher, philologist and linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt on this point:

the plurality of languages is far from reducible to a plurality of designations of a thing; they are different perspectives on the same thing, and when the thing is not the object of the external senses, one is often dealing with as many different things fashioned differently by each language (Cassin and Goffey, 2009: 366).

Translation implies 'understanding how different languages produce different worlds, making these worlds communicate, and disquieting them by playing the one against the other, in such a way that the reader's tongue goes to meet that of the writer' (Cassin and Goffey, 2009: 363). By acknowledging this diversity of perspectives, we establish a more complex relationship with what we consider as universal categories:

Whenever we translate, we move between languages, we 'de-essentialize'. It is always a matter of showing the gap, the *entre* [what is in between, *my translation*], instead of fixed essences or unique ideas (Cassin, 2016: 262).

Translation ultimately implies developing the necessary skills to handle this diversity of perspectives – what she calls a 'know-how with differences' (2016) – so as better to explore the distance which separates our expression of an idea or our description of an object from that of another linguistic and social science community.

The idea that it is important to preserve this plurality of perspectives within scholarly discussion is at the origin of a more pragmatic project: the Social Science Translation Project. Michael Henry Heim, Professor of Slavic Languages at the University of California at Los Angeles and Andrzej W. Tymowski, Director of International Programs at the American Council of Learned Societies, brought together, for a series of three meetings held in 2004–2005, a group of translators, editors and social scientists from four countries (China, France, Russia and the USA) to ‘demonstrate the key role that translations play in the field and to promote communication in the social sciences across language boundaries by providing practical advice to people who commission, edit, and use translations of social science texts in their professional activities’ [<https://www.acls.org/Past-Programs/Social-Science-Translation-Project> (last accessed 20 May 2020), see also Poncharal (2007)]. The result was a set of guidelines in English (Heim and Tymowski, 2006), subsequently translated into seven other languages: Arabic, Chinese, French, Japanese, Russian, Spanish and Vietnamese. The aim of these guidelines was not simply to emphasize, once again, the specific difficulties of translating social science texts; it was, above all, to advocate the desirability of commissioning more translations, especially into English (as most translations are from English into other languages), and to review the practical problems of training, choosing and working with translators in this particular area. The guidelines end with an unusual plea for social scientists to write in their own languages:

The tendency for English to become the *lingua franca* of the social sciences (a *fait accompli* in the natural sciences) constrains their ability to generate Humboldt’s ‘different perspectives.’...[T]he forms of thought and argumentation in the Anglo–American social science community have become a Procrustean bed to whose dimensions all conceptualizations must fit. The result is an increasing homogenization and impoverishment of social science discourse (Heim and Tymowski, 2006: 27).

A recent report by the British Council, ‘Languages for the Future’ (2013), more generally concerned with supporting and promoting the UK’s economic, cultural, educational and diplomatic ventures, also warns of the perils of relying on English as a language for international communication. Without denying the importance of having a common language for communication, the report emphasizes the need to develop the public’s competence in foreign languages as a key to discovering other environments and views of the world:

Every language offers a rich and unique insight into different ways of thinking and living as well as into the history of the myriad of cultures and peoples across the globe (British Council, 2013: 4).

If translating an original document can be one way of preserving the precision and the nuances of one’s thinking, this does not preclude learning the language of translation. Functionality and even fluency in another language does not necessarily make one a good translator, but it does provide the means of exploring other ways of describing a situation and of expressing ideas. In so doing, it also offers a valuable vantage point from which to consider the possibilities and

limits of one’s own language in dealing with the same situations and ideas. It is from such a dual perspective that I conduct this brief inquiry into the words we use, in French and in English, to describe and discuss issues in ART (or, as we would say in French, medically assisted procreation), in an attempt to understand how linguistic differences affect our conceptualization of reproductive (or should I say procreative?) practices and issues.

A few words about my method of inquiry

Before resuming my overview of generic terms, let me briefly list the tools I have used to undertake my inquiry into the terminology employed since the 1970s, in English and in French, to study assisted reproduction. A very useful tool was Google Scholar, which collates publications from numerous disciplines and countries. By operating searches of different terms, such as ‘new reproductive technologies’, ‘assisted conception’, ‘assisted reproduction’ and ‘assisted procreation’, and then listing the results by relevance and verifying them by date, it was possible to see what term seemed most common in any particular period and then whether or not it tended to disappear at a later date. For English terms, I also used Google Books Ngram Viewer, an interesting word counting tool, but less reliable because of the impossibility of verifying that the sources used are specific to our object of study. It also has not been updated since 2012. I then tried to confirm these findings by doing the same searches in both science and social science databases, such as Springer, Science Direct, International Bibliography of the Social Sciences, JSTOR, Sociology Collection and Project Muse for English-language references; and Cairn, Francis and Persée for articles in French; and by consulting books on these subjects and their bibliographies. Although my searches were done both in English and in French, the increasing pressure on non-English-language social scientists to publish in English made it interesting to investigate whether the French terminology is adopted in English-language publications and to what extent.

Concerning the history of the words we use to refer to reproductive actions and practices, I worked basically with etymological dictionaries in both languages: in English, the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, the *Online Etymology Dictionary* and the *Middle English Compendium*; and in French, the *Dictionnaire Historique de la Langue Française* (Robert) and the *Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales*, a compendium of online dictionaries of both old and modern French. In some cases, scans of the original documents (old dictionaries or ancient manuscripts), accessible online, were consulted.

Naming our object of study

Based on this cursory review of the words used in both social science and medical publications, ART appears to have become the most widely used term, not only by social scientists but also by physicians and biologists publishing on their practice. One also finds ‘assisted reproduction’ or even ‘medically assisted reproduction’, the latter for the most

part in English-language publications written by French, Belgian and Italian authors, mostly in the field of medicine. One does occasionally find the English equivalent of the French term – ‘medically assisted procreation’ – but once again used mostly by medical authors from countries where this is the direct translation of the locally used term (France, Belgium, Italy and Portugal; countries where romance languages dominate). Moreover, these occurrences concern, for the most part, articles published during the late 1990s and the first decade of the millennium. They tend to disappear as we advance in the millennium. Ngram Viewer shows that ‘new reproductive technologies’ was the only expression in the 1970s and the early 1980s. ‘Assisted reproduction’ was the most widely used term from the 1990s to about 2010, after which it declines towards a similar frequency of occurrence with other terms. There seems to be a general decline in the occurrence of all terms after 2005, as if the terminology was once again shifting in this area. Since the activity and the number of publications does not seem to be decreasing, what is most probable is that the older generic terms, used to address issues common to all the practices, are giving way to a greater variety of terms addressing either specific aspects or new developments of these technologies.

In France, the term *procréation médicalement assistée* (PMA) arose in the 1980s after IVF became an established medical procedure in French hospitals. The term was used by social scientists, physicians and biologists in French-language publications. The alternate expression *assistance médicale à la procréation* (AMP) was forged in 1994 by French legislators for use in the first French law regulating reproductive procedures (artificial insemination, IVF and their variants) and has remained the standard juridical term to this day. It is the only term one finds in the law being presently revised by the French Parliament. In the last decade, the expression and the acronym ‘AMP’ has lost terrain in public debate to the initial version ‘PMA’, understood (but not always correctly so, in my view) as a term more sensitive to social and political issues.

The expressions ‘ART’ and ‘PMA’, fairly widespread today, have not always been the standard terms. In the 1970s and the early 1980s, in both English and French, the word ‘artificial’ was frequently present in the terminology – artificial insemination, artificial fertilization, artificial procreation, artificial reproduction – in reference to the technical act that substitutes the ‘natural’ (heterosexual) mode of reproduction. A book written in English by two sociologists, Robert Snowden and Geoffrey Duncan Mitchell, on the earliest of the reproductive practices – *The Artificial Family: a Consideration of Artificial Insemination by Donor* (1981) – extends the artificiality of the technical act to the family it creates. The word is also present in a book by feminist author Gena Corea, *The Mother Machine: Reproductive Technologies from Artificial Insemination to the Artificial Womb* (1985). If the word ‘artificial’ qualifies the technologies, it also qualifies the mother who has been transformed into a machine.

Today, the word ‘artificial’ seems to have disappeared completely from the discussion of reproductive issues in both countries, signalling a normalization of these reproductive procedures. In French, the word does tend to linger on in the acronym ‘IAD’ for *insémination artificielle avec*

sperme de donneur (‘artificial insemination with donor semen’), mostly found in medical publications. However, one does find alternative terms in French for what is now called ‘donor insemination’ in English. In French, the standard term has become *insémination avec tiers donneur* (‘insemination with a third-party donor’) or, more generally, *procréation avec tiers donneur* (‘procreation with a third-party donor’) with no associated acronyms. In 2010, sociologist Irène Théry proposed another term, *engendrement avec tiers donneur*, to which I will return in a moment.

The word ‘artificial’ has also been replaced, in some contexts, by ‘assisted’ or ‘assistance’. Despite the existence, in English and French, of an alternative term – ‘reproductive technologies’, often qualified as ‘new reproductive technologies’ – a novel expression emerges in English-language publications (particularly in the UK), for the most part in the 1990s: ‘assisted conception’. Compared with the French notion of ‘assisted procreation’, the English term is much narrower in its implications – assistance is limited to achieving pregnancy – whereas the French term *procréation* encompasses the whole process of generating new life and bringing it to term. Moreover, in English, there are no specifications as to what type of assistance is needed, whereas in all the current French expressions, assistance is always explicitly medical. Indeed, the legal framework adopted in France does not treat reproductive procedures as ordinary medical acts, but as medical acts with implications that require oversight by the French Parliament concerning what is socially admissible in terms of procreation. Within this framework, physicians retain considerable gatekeeping powers, even if they are also restricted in what they are allowed to do.

In English, it is ultimately the phrase ‘assisted reproduction’ that prevails, possibly indicating a similar ambition to take charge of the whole reproductive process. The established use of ‘assistance’ in both languages, whatever the accompanying term (‘conception’, ‘reproduction’, ‘procreation’), also probably reflects the fact that reproductive technologies have become increasingly complex, thus almost always requiring the intervention of an ever-growing field of competent professionals.

Reproduction or procreation?

One of the most striking differences between the French and English generic expressions is the stability over time of the respective preferences for the terms ‘procreation’ and ‘reproduction’, despite the fact that the two terms exist in both languages. However, when trying to find an explanation as to why authors use one term rather than the other, I have found few clues. One does find developments, particularly in anthropology, about the relation between the biological aspects of reproduction, sometimes referred to as the ‘facts of life’, and the social aspects of kinship, but these arguments rarely involve a discussion of the words themselves. In many books and articles, ‘reproduction’ and ‘procreation’ are used interchangeably but with a clear preference for one term in each language.

In French, I was unable to find a lengthy discussion of either word, including in well-known encyclopaedic dictionaries of philosophical, sociological or medical terms.

There are entries on the body, sexuality, gender and sex, but nothing on reproduction or procreation. Occasionally, a rare entry is limited to assisted procreation. Cassin's dictionary of 'untranslatables' has nothing on procreation or reproduction, although the latter term (taken in the sense of producing a duplicate or a copy) is cited in the index and directs one to a major entry on the term 'mimesis', and to two smaller ones on 'imagination' and 'imitation'. There is also a major entry, with the headwords in English, on 'gender and sex'. In English, the *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Sociology* has no entries for 'reproduction', 'procreation', 'assisted reproduction' or even 'childbirth'. Topics related to 'gender and sexuality', 'family and friendship' and 'health and medicine, gerontology and aging' can be found, including an entry on 'body and sexuality' and on 'embodiment', but with no reference to 'procreation' or 'reproduction'. As reproductive technologies progressively separate sexuality and reproduction, have non-medical procreative practices become obsolete as an object of study?

Fortunately, a rich collective volume, edited by Nick Hopwood, Rebecca Fleming and Lauren Kassell, called *Reproduction: Antiquity to the Present Day* (2018) makes up for this dearth of information on the subject. The volume confirms the central importance of reproduction as a keyword in the English language, understood 'both as a biological universal and as time-bound practices' (Hopwood et al., 2018: 4). According to the editors of the volume, reproduction is a specifically modern set of ideas and practices:

Before the nineteenth century, most educated people wrote not of 'reproduction' but of 'generation', a larger, looser framework for discussing procreation and descent. 'Generation' was an active making, and commentators likened the genesis of new beings to artisanal processes such as brewing, baking and moulding clay. Generation encompassed not just animals and plants, but minerals too, though the human soul received special attention. Only in the mid-eighteenth century did the word 'reproduction', literally 'producing again', begin to gain currency as the common property of all living organisms (and only them) to beget others of their own kind. Used most influentially in this sense by the director of the King's Garden in Paris, Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, in 1749, the concept meant a more abstract process of perpetuating species, which were then increasingly defined as 'populations' (Hopwood et al., 2018: 4).

In his chapter on the keywords 'generation' and 'reproduction', Hopwood specifies that Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle* gives new prominence and new meaning to the term 'reproduction'. It both widens and narrows the scope of 'generation' by establishing that the phenomena of reproduction should be looked at in general. It thus signals 'the elevation of the species above the individuals that perish' and distinguishes 'a defining property of living beings from a process some still allowed for minerals' while letting 'plants and animals share an activity' (Hopwood, 2018: 294).

In an earlier article on the concept of reproduction, Jordanova (1995) also refers to the appearance of the term

'reproduction' in the writings of the naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon. According to one of his English contemporaries, the Methodist John Wesley, Buffon "substitutes for the plain word *Generation*, a 'quaint' word of his own, *Reproduction*, in order to level man not only with the beasts that perish, but with nettles or onions" (cited in Jordanova, 1995: 372). Indeed, Jordanova points out that reproduction as a general biological process 'marginalizes human agency and abstracts the process from the bodies and the persons involved'. Given that human reproduction, just as animal and plant reproduction, can be understood mechanistically, the specialness of humanity might be threatened.

It is most probably not a fortuitous fact that this change in terminology, from 'generation' to 'reproduction', occurred at a time when biology was undergoing a major paradigm shift from an observational to an experimental science, and when disputes concerning the origin and the development of the embryo, known as the 'epigenesis—preformation debate', were stimulating debate and experimentation among European scientists (Rostand, 1951). However, Jordanova also points out that the term 'reproduction' emerges in close association with technical processes, the production of goods and that of the labour force:

Recovering the cultural history of the production/reproduction nexus requires special care precisely because in Western cultures that are deeply imbued with an ethos of scientific rationality the symbolic order is largely denied. We have become accustomed to seeing reproductive processes as unmythified, and this view impedes our historical imagination (Jordanova, 1995, 373).

Finally, she also points out that during the 18th century, "a significant shift occurred, away from associating children 'naturally' with their fathers and towards associating them 'naturally' with their mothers" (Jordanova, 1995: 373).

But where should one situate the term 'procreation' in this history of reproductive terminology? The word is frequently used in the collective volume on *Reproduction*, indeed more than once, both in the general introduction and in the section introductions, as well as in several chapters; however, surprisingly, it is absent from the index. In fact, it seems to need no definition, as in the following sentences from the general introduction: 'In the sense of procreation alone, reproduction has had extraordinary reach.' (Hopwood et al., 2018: 3) or 'This volume foregrounds questions of change and continuity from antiquity to the present, and selects topics that point to a broad history of procreation, without claiming to be comprehensive' (Hopwood et al., 2018: 16). What then is the sense of procreation? Could the book have been titled *Procreation: From Generation to Reproduction*?

In reviewing the etymological history of the French verbs related to the reproduction process, I discovered that certain words emerged at an earlier period in the history of each language than others. *Concevoir*, *enfanter*, *engendrer* and *générer* were among the oldest verbs, originating in 12th century France. *Procréer* arrived slightly later, in the

14th century, whereas *reproduire* emerges in the 16th century, and becomes a noun – *reproduction* – in the late 17th century. Moreover, many English-language terms come from Old or Middle French – this is the case for ‘conceive’, ‘procreate’, ‘reproduce’, ‘generation’ and ‘reproduction’; only a few come from Old English, such as ‘breed’ and ‘beget’. The Latin roots of most of these words remind us that Latin was a language of scholarly exchange at that time in most European countries, but also that Anglo–Norman French was readily spoken by English royalty, courts and administration between the 11th and the 14th century (Walters, 2001: 12–14; 89–94).

It is often said that ‘procreation’ is a term with origins in Catholic theology and that this would explain the frequent use of this term in France, but my etymological inquiries have – so far – provided no evidence to substantiate this claim. There are etymological references to specific religious uses of words such as *concevoir* (with respect to the immaculate conception) and *ré-générer* (being born again through baptism), but no such use is mentioned for *procréer*. According to Hopwood, it is the Latin word *generatio* that, in Christian theology, refers ‘to the begetting of God the Son by God the Father’ (Hopwood, 2018: 290). Nor is the command to ‘be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth’ (Genesis 1: 28), already present in the Old Testament, specific to scholastic theology. In the unfinished last volume of his history of sexuality, *Les aveux de la chair* (Confessions of the Flesh), Michel Foucault (2018) argues that medieval Christianity’s norms and rules concerning marriage, sex and procreation had already been adopted by early Christians, and that these norms were largely inspired from similar restrictive norms of stoic philosophers in ancient Greece.

Indeed, the etymological examples of this verb, first used in the early 14th century – for example, *hoirs pourcreez de eus deus* (literally, ‘heirs procreated by the two of them’) – designate the children brought forth from one’s own body, when referring to lineage, inheritance, legitimate and illegitimate children. The noun *procréation* appears in the phrase *procreacion de lignee* in a popular medieval account of the life of Julius Cesar, *Les Faits des Romains*, written in Old French in the early 13th century. Medieval historian Maaike van der Lugt notes that ‘studies focused solely on the theological, legal or medical frameworks obscure the extent to which procreation pervaded multiple discourses and transcended disciplinary divides’ (van der Lugt, 2018: 167). It is not clear here whether her choice of the word ‘procreation’ in this chapter of the collective volume on *Reproduction* is intentional or whether it simply reflects the fact that van der Lugt works in France. If one finds the term *génération* in French 17th and 18th century treatises on the biology of reproduction, the word *procréation* appears frequently in the 19th century popular manuals on the ‘art of procreating the [two] sexes at will’ (*l’art de procréer les sexes à volonté*), which usually means the art of procreating a male child (Darmon, 1977). Despite this variety of uses over the centuries, the words ‘procreate’ and ‘procreation’ tend to refer to the bodily acts involved in generating and bringing forth children.

Whereas ‘procreation’ is a term widely used today by the French, it is, paradoxically, in the work of British anthropologist Marilyn Strathern that I found long commentaries of her respective use of the words ‘reproduction’ and ‘procreation’ (1992a, 1992b, 1993, 1995). Surprisingly, whereas her initial publications on the subject refer to ‘new reproductive technologies’ (1992a, 1992b), a co-edited volume published in 1993 with her colleagues Jeannette Edwards, Sarah Franklin, Erich Hirsch and Frances Price, is titled: *Technologies of Procreation: Kinship in the Age of Assisted Conception*.

Strathern’s views on procreation are based on her critique of the ‘natural’ basis of kinship in *After Nature: English Kinship in the Late Twentieth Century* (1992a), a book that extends anthropologist David Schneider’s analysis of kinship in American culture to Euro–American culture:

Schneider’s *American Kinship* depicted sexual intercourse as a core symbol: the diffuse enduring solidarity of close family relations was attributed to sharing substance through the act of procreation. Procreation was a natural fact of life (Strathern, 1992a: 43).

However, she argues against the self-evident reality of procreation as a ‘natural’ fact, introducing the word ‘reproduction’ in a way that distances it from its association to a biological process:

It was not so very long ago that the ‘natural’ child was a stigma. The naturalness of the procreative act was not sufficient to establish real relations. There was also the issue, we might say, of the naturalness of social status. Reproducing one’s own did not literally mean one’s genetic material: one’s own flesh and blood were family members and offspring legitimated through lawful marriage. Although illegitimate (‘natural’) children were consanguines, they did not reproduce their procreative parents socially. ... If there were once, so to speak, a natural conjoining of natural and social relations, it would be taken for granted that the paramount social reality was the legitimacy of the claims to kinship. But it is as though social legitimacy has since [through new reproductive technologies] been displaced by the legitimacy of natural facts (Strathern, 1992a: 52).

Given the polysemy of the term ‘natural’, as Strathern points out, the qualification of procreation as a ‘natural’ fact is ultimately confusing, and becomes an obstacle to understanding what procreation is and what relationship it has to kinship.

In the co-edited volume, the reference to nature disappears and Strathern once again specifies her respective use of each term.

‘Reproduction’ has to do with replicating an original, not identical but similar to the original, with producing offspring of one’s own kind, whereas ‘procreation’ has to do with the ‘act of begetting’, the ‘effectiveness of the capacity’ to produce offspring: ‘Reproduction’ – that is, replicating an original – enjoys the *double entendre* of representation and of having offspring.

A reproduction repeats the original, but not quite in the same way. It thus represents it, but in a fresh manner, as we may say offspring represent (reproduce) their parents.... Unlike 'reproduction', 'procreation' is not about the relationship between an original and its offspring/products. 'Reproduction' intimates the completed outcome of a process that leads to further examples being laid beside an original – an original thought brought to mind, a copy of an artefact, children who take after their parents; in short, a species seen again in its 'own kind'. Certainly the idea of human reproduction is only thinkable in terms of a process that results in children. 'Procreation' has a different connotation. 'Procreation' refers to the generative moment, to the act of begetting, to the effectiveness of a capacity. It means to bring into being, to bring forth. Offspring may be implied, but nothing about their similarity to the original. Translated as 'begetting' or 'propagation', the term tends to be used only of bringing forth young in the biological sense. Here it has a restricted, even old-fashioned air, especially in its connotations of male parenthood: the male progenitor is a procreator (Strathern, 1999 [1993]: 207–208).

Strathern goes on to explain why she has chosen to speak of technologies of procreation:

We might, then, think of the effects of the new technologies in people's views of the world as not so much reproductive as procreative. Rather than raising the question of reproduction, that is, how close, to the original the product is, procreation indicates the capacity to create something that will stand in the stead of the original (Strathern, 1999 [1993]: 208).

Echoing certain aspects of Jordanova's analysis of reproduction in the 18th century, Strathern uses the word 'reproduction' in a socially significant sense that draws from its biological meaning of producing offspring of the same species. However, she also highlights in her use of 'procreation' a meaning related to human agency and capacity, whether it be in the context of sexuality or technology. Her definitions bring the reality of reproductive and procreative acts and intentions to the fore, which gives us good reasons to further explore the differences in the use of the two terms. In France, this discussion has become even more complicated, with the introduction of a third term, *engendrement*, which for the moment we will translate directly, even if it is awkward in English, as 'engendering'.

Engendrement: an old term, new uses?

As mentioned above, Irène Théry has proposed, in articles written during the last decade, the use of the term *engendrement avec tiers donneur* ('engendering with a third-party donor') to refer to any form of procreation with donor gametes, and the expression *don d'engendrement* (which we could translate as 'donation of engendering capacity') as a replacement for the expression *don de gamètes* ('gamete donation') that reduces one's gift to the reproductive cells. Indeed, Théry advocates the use of the word *engendrement* in the circumstances of reproductive technology as better suited than *procréation*, because – as she under-

stands this latter term – having children should not be reduced to a biological process:

I proposed in an earlier study [Théry, 2006] to use the term 'engendering' rather than 'procreation', so as to clearly indicate that human engendering cannot be reduced to a set of biological acts, but that it includes a signifying dimension testifying to the fact that it always takes place in a context: that of a human world (Théry, 2010: 126 – my translation).¹

Her proposal is, in fact, inspired by her reading of a book on abortion by sociologist Luc Boltanski called *La condition foetale. Une sociologie de l'engendrement et de l'avortement*, published in France in 2004 (translated into English in 2013 as *The Foetal Condition: a Sociology of Engendering and Abortion*), and which Théry reviewed in 2006:

Boltanski's investigation... attempts to show that one of the main areas in which we presently oppose the biological and the social, human procreation, is in reality a process necessarily embedded in the shared meanings and common values of a society: in other words, it is an 'engendrement' that cannot be reduced to its mere description as a physiological fact of 'biological' reproduction, because individuals attribute meaning to it (Théry, 2006: 485 – my translation).²

It is unclear in her argument, however, what inherent aspect of the term *engendrement* makes it better suited than 'procreation' to describe the social meanings and values conveyed in the act of having children. Or maybe *engendrement*, 'reproduction' and 'procreation' are simply synonyms, but in that case, what justifies a preference for 'engendering'?

To delve further into the question, let us look at why Boltanski himself chose this term. I will not here present the book's argument, which I have done elsewhere (Bate-man, 2006), but simply focus on his reasoning for choosing the word *engendrement*:

Seeking to stress the symbolic dimensions of the events that accompany the entrance of new beings (or their failure to enter) into the world of humans, I largely excluded from my vocabulary terms that had medical, biological or demographic origins or connotations, for example, 'reproduction', 'procreation' or even 'womb' (for which I generally substituted the phenomenological term 'flesh'). Moreover, to designate what happens when a woman finds herself pregnant, I opted for the terms

¹ Pour ma part, j'ai proposé dans une étude antérieure [Théry, 2006] d'employer le terme engendrement plutôt que celui de procréation, pour bien indiquer que l'engendrement humain n'est pas réductible à un ensemble d'actes biologiques, mais qu'il inclut une dimension signifiante témoignant du fait qu'il est toujours inscrit dans un contexte: celui d'un monde humain (Théry, 2010: 126).

² [L'enquête de L. Boltanski... s'attache à montrer que l'un des domaines privilégiés où l'on oppose aujourd'hui le biologique et le social, la procréation humaine, est en réalité un processus nécessairement inscrit dans les significations et les valeurs communes d'une société: autrement dit, un engendrement, impossible à ramener à sa seule description comme fait physiologique de reproduction 'biologique', puisque les individus lui accordent un sens (Théry, 2006: 485).

'engendering' rather than, for example, 'having a child', for – and this fact is precisely at the core of my research – not every being engendered is the occasion for the birth of the child (Boltanski, 2013: 7).³

As indicated by Théry, Boltanski wishes to emphasize the symbolic dimension of the process by which new individuals are brought into the world of humans. To do so, he begins by recusing any vocabulary that has to do with medicine, biology or demography; in other words, any word associated with the physiological process of human reproduction or with concerns about population (the number of humans). On this point, the choices made by Boltanski's translator can be questioned. The translation of *génération* as 'procreation' is, in my view, an error; as we have already seen, generation is etymologically an older term, distinct from procreation, and, as Boltanski himself points out, was associated with the biology of reproduction in the past, including that of animals, plants and even minerals. It is presently a frequently used demographic term. To my knowledge, 'procreation' has never been identified as being part of the technical vocabulary of medicine, biology or demography. The translation of *enfantement* as 'having a child' – an expression which can apply to either a man or a woman – also seems an unsatisfactory choice. In French, the word *enfantement* is clearly associated with 'pregnancy', 'child-bearing' and 'giving birth'. It is also important to note that in this excerpt, Boltanski does not oppose 'engendering' and 'procreation', as Théry does, but *engendrement* ('begetting') and *enfantement* ('childbearing' as I would translate the term), suggesting a strongly gendered view of what is at stake in his sociology of engendering. It is as if Boltanski wanted to strip *engendrement* (translated as 'engendering') from any association with the body, in particular the female body, so that 'engendering' is exclusively understood as an abstract process of production of meaning. But he gives no explanation as to why he chose the term *engendrement* to convey this meaning.

However, it is of interest to note that *engendrer* is the verb one finds most frequently in the French translations of Chapter 5 of the book of Genesis in the Bible. This is the chapter that lists the descendants of Adam and establishes his genealogy. In both French and English, God 'creates' Adam/Man in his image/likeness, but in French, Adam and his descendants 'engender' first a son, and then sons and daughters. In the English translations, Adam and his descendants 'beget' (older translations) and, in more recent versions, they 'father'/'become the father' of sons and

daughters. The term *engendrer* and its corresponding terms in English focus here on the male role in bringing new lives into being; it is used in establishing a written account essentially of Adam's first-born male descendants. The words 'procreate' and 'reproduce' are absent from the text.

I myself have used the French word *engendrement* in several publications. In a paper published in 1999, the term was a response to a translation problem. The *Cahiers de Genre* wished to publish an adapted (shorter) French version of an article titled 'Embedding the embryo' (1998), published in English with my co-author anthropologist Tania Salem. In preparing the original English version, we had chosen to describe the medical activity involved in IVF as 'the medicalization of impregnation' (Bateman and Salem, 1998: 107). With hindsight, the word 'impregnation' seems all the more appropriate as a 'Letter to the Editor' to *The Medical World* written in 1909, allegedly revealing what may have been the first case of donor insemination, was titled 'Artificial impregnation' (Hard, 1909). In the French adapted version, after discussion with our translator, we chose the word *engendrement* to translate 'impregnation' (Bateman and Salem, 1999: 55). It might have been just as appropriate, if not more so, to use the word *fécondation*, but given that IVF is already *fécondation in vitro* in French, the notion of a medicalization of fertilization would go unnoticed. This is also why I avoided using the medicalization of fertilization in English. What we really wanted to state was that medicine had become involved in the activity of making women pregnant.

I had already attempted to make this point in earlier papers written directly in French. After checking to see what word I had used, I discovered that the term was once again, *engendrement*, precisely to emphasize the very particular nature of the medical activity being undertaken (such as in the following excerpt):

However, the question arises as to whether a medical act, whose aim is to make women pregnant/to conceive [beget] children/produce offspring, can in all circumstances be assimilated to other current medical acts and evaluated in the same way ([Bateman]Novaes, 1992: 171 – my translation).⁴

In this excerpt, there is more than one possible translation for the word *engendrement*. I have retained three possible options: one that emphasizes the sexual connotation of the medical act of assisted reproduction; and two others which focus on the desired result: children to be born. To use 'produce offspring' in this context might evoke the fabrication or manufacturing of children, in which the sexual dimension of acts of fertilization and insemination is lost. The purpose in my paper thus leads me to favour the first option, although other uses of *engendrement* may make one of the two other translations more appropriate. This example nonetheless points to the multiple facets of this term in French, and to what may be lost in the process of communicating the idea in the English language.

³ Souhaitant mettre d'abord l'accent sur les dimensions symboliques des événements qui accompagnent l'entrée (ou pas) de nouveaux êtres dans le monde des humains, nous avons exclu de notre vocabulaire les termes qui avaient une origine ou une connotation médicale, biologique ou démographique, comme ceux de 'reproduction' ou de 'génération', ou encore celui de 'matrice' (auquel nous avons substitué celui, d'origine phénoménologique, de *chair*). Par ailleurs, pour désigner ce qui se passe quand une femme se trouve 'grosse' – comme on disait autrefois – nous avons opté pour le terme d'engendrement plutôt que, par exemple, pour celui d'enfantement, car, et ce fait est précisément au cœur de notre recherche, tous les êtres qui se trouvent engendrés ne donnent pas lieu à la naissance d'enfants (Boltanski, 2004: 19).

⁴ La question se pose néanmoins de savoir si un acte médical, dont l'objectif est l'engendrement, peut être entoutes circonstances assimilé à d'autres actes médicaux courants et évalué de la même manière ([Bateman] Novaes, 1992: 171).

If *engendrement* has become a highly visible term in the French social science discussion of reproductive issues, it is not certain that its specificity can be maintained in translation or even that it will easily find its place in the conceptual frameworks used by scholars in English-speaking countries. The English words that best translate its meaning are either archaic ('to beget') or highlight male procreative participation ('to father'), which may give *engendrement* a meaning more concrete than originally intended in Boltanski's conceptual framework. However, one understands that his translator preferred to avoid a more current translation alternative, such as sociology of reproduction or procreation, which would simply obliterate the distinction made by the author. Surprisingly, none of the reviews of *The Foetal Condition* published in English-language journals from Australia (Millar, 2014), Canada (Conley, 2014), the UK (Lewis, 2015; Ross, 2016) and the USA (Kimport, 2014) make any remarks on the choice of 'engendering' to translate *engendrement*, and only one reviewer comments on the differences between the English and French terms:

An ambitious sociology of this active verb, 'engendering', which evokes a process of 'fabrication', seems to promise that it will take a lively view of the metabolic contribution of those who people the earth with the product of their wombs. Admittedly, the original noun *l'engendrement* belongs to a different, less active category, more akin to the subject-evacuated concept in English of 'genesis' (Lewis, 2015: 125).

The future of the term 'engendering' in English will depend on whether an outdated use in this language, that of causing children to be conceived and born, can acquire renovated meaning in discussions of reproductive issues. It will not necessarily reflect the issues at stake in the French social science debate, but may offer new perspectives in English-language discussions.

Conclusion: translation as an epistemic tool

When meeting at an international conference, it is most probably the non-English speaker who will have to translate her ideas into English, the *lingua franca* of today's scientific community. Only under rare circumstances is an English-language speaker faced with the task of presenting her work in another language. However, as I have attempted to show in this article, seeing one's object of study from the vantage point of another language is an inestimable opportunity to reflect on the assumptions that underlie our own research and that of colleagues who work in a distinct linguistic community. As Cassin would put it, it allows us to observe 'how different languages produce different worlds' (Cassin and Goffey, 2009: 363), even though the objects we study may appear to be the same. It should be no surprise to social scientists that language conveys those elements of context that vary from country to country (and even between countries that share the same language), thus also modulating our thinking on what we consider key issues and on the way these issues should be framed.

The overview of the generic terms used to discuss assisted reproduction since the 1970s has suggested how the field has evolved over time. These (not so) novel repro-

ductive practices – artificial insemination goes back at least to the early 18th century – have become standard medical procedures leading to generic expressions shared by diverse professions, most commonly 'assisted reproduction' and 'assisted reproductive technology'. However, certain culturally located generic terms persist, such as 'medically assisted procreation' in France, pointing to certain aspects of these practices that may yet need to be explored. Moreover, the general terminology may be disappearing in favour of specialized terms associated with novel developments and practices in the field, such as might be indicated by a recent term, 'reprogenetics'.

Moreover, whereas many of the terms used in English to describe procreative acts were originally derived from French words during the early and late Middle Ages, there seem to be distinct uses of these words in each language. Even when certain nouns, such as 'conception', 'procreation', 'generation' and 'reproduction', have the same spelling and meaning in the other language, there are preferences in word use that go well beyond stylistic considerations. The stability over time of these preferences – for 'reproduction' in English and for 'procreation' in French – is one of the most intriguing examples of this phenomenon. Although the elements discussed here are not sufficient to conclude on this point, these two words seem to represent different aspects of the institutions and practices associated with bringing children into the world. Hopwood et al. consider 'reproduction' as the modern successor of the much older term 'generation': it thus comprises both a 'biological universal' and 'time-bound practices', both 'individuals' and populations, (2018: 4). Jordanova and, above all, Strathern make a distinction between 'reproduction' and 'procreation', in which the first has more to do with the replication of an original, with the perpetuation of the species and the population, whereas the latter is a 'generative moment' that highlights 'human agency and capacity' (Strathern, 1993: 207–208) and 'the bodies and the persons involved' (Jordanova, 1995: 372). There is, nonetheless, room for overlap between these perspectives, for word use is far from consistent within each language.

Indeed, in his chapter on the keywords 'generation' and 'reproduction', Hopwood refers to the Greek and Latin roots of the word 'generation', *genesis*, which he translates as 'procreation', and *genos* which is lineage, family and race. The word *generatio* in a fourth-century Latin translation of the Bible assembles these two meanings: it is both 'process and product, the action of *engendering* and the posterity of the person' (Hopwood, 2018: 290, *my emphasis*). It is the term 'generation' that has Christian theological roots. Was 'generation' used at the time in ways similar to the word 'procreation' today? We find quite exceptionally in Hopwood's chapter the word 'engendering' used here in the sense of begetting; it is interesting to note that in the early Middle Ages, the French word *générer* replaced an earlier verb form, *gendrer*, which later became *engendrer*. The original double meaning of *génération*, the process and the product, the action and the posterity, was later separated into two words, *engendrement* and *génération*. Will the untranslatable *engendrement* eventually offer a perspective that is distinct from the other terms? Much will depend on whether and how the word continues to be

used (or not) in both French and English, and whether usage extends beyond social science circles.

If much attention has been focused on the way in which reproductive technology has radically transformed family and kinship relations or made possible radical interventions on bodies, reproductive cells and embryos, changes in the way we experience procreation in contexts where medical assistance and technology come into play have tended to go unnoticed. Even the social norms that organize procreative activity more generally seem to have eluded social science scrutiny as assisted reproduction and its associated practices take centre stage. We may, therefore, need to pay more attention to the variety of words that describe procreative actions and situations, and to the impact that technology may have had on their meaning and their use as these are displaced from the body to the laboratory.

What I hope this short article has brought to this symposium is greater awareness of how our objects of study are, in part, moulded by the language we use, in particular by the world views and elements of context that language conveys, and how the translation of our work into another language may be an invaluable opportunity for critical reflection on our epistemic choices.

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