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Translation in Cross-Language International Business Research: Beyond Equivalence

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Abstract

In this paper, we problematize the way translation has been treated in international business (IB) research. We start by conducting an interpretive content analysis of both qualitative and quantitative cross-language studies published in four core IB journals over the course of a decade. Our analysis shows the dominance of a technicist view of translation associated with the equivalence paradigm. In contrast, we advocate a shift to a more contextualized approach informed by theoretical developments in translation studies. More specifically, we focus on two theoretical perspectives –skopos theory and cultural politics – which offer related but distinct approaches to rethinking equivalence. We conclude by advocating that the translation process be reframed as a process of intercultural interaction, rather than a lexical transfer of meaning. This reconceptualization would, we argue, open up what is currently a ‘black box’ in most IB studies. The contextualized approach that we offer has the potential not just to enrich the findings of studies, but also provide insights that are of multidisciplinary relevance.

Introduction

Language has been described as the essence of human life (Gadamer, 2004): it produces rather than just transmits meaning. In the social sciences, greater awareness of the constitutive role played by language in society (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Deetz, 2003; Iedema & Wodak, 1999) has seemingly not prompted researchers to engage in greater methodological reflection about how to approach cross-language studies (Temple, 2005); that is, studies in which linguistic boundaries are being crossed by the researcher and/or participants. Inattention to the methodological implications of cross-language research was

observed early on by Brislin (1970), whose review of 80 articles on cross-cultural psychology found that translation issues were either not mentioned or were under-reported.

There is evidence that this silence about cross-language methodological decisions is not just confined to Brislin's discipline of psychology, and that it persists even in more recent times. For example, Bradby (2002) points to '[s]ociology's lack of interest in language'. Temple and Young (2004: 163) assert that research on minority ethnic communities 'is written without any reference to language issues'. Even anthropology, with its focus on in-depth fieldwork, has been accused of treating foreign language interviewing as 'a taken for granted issue' (Winchitz, 2006: 84). In this paper, we examine how scholars in international business (IB) have approached cross-language research. Our key research question is 'how do IB authors account for the translation decisions they make in their research?'

This paper draws inspiration from Davis's (1971) seminal insight that challenging assumptions is what makes academic study valuable. We adopt Alvesson and Sandberg's (2011) 'problematization methodology' to develop new theoretical insights into translation. This theoretical approach involves identification and critique of the taken-for-granted assumptions underlying a particular theory or domain; and then development of an 'alternative assumption ground'. Our paper is structured in accordance with these steps. We commence by critically reviewing what, following Pym (2007), we term the 'equivalence paradigm', which has dominated existing literature on cross-language research methodology in IB. According to this approach, translation is the quest for conveying identical meanings. We then shift from the methodological discussion about equivalence to empirical practice, analyzing the approach to translation taken in cross-language studies published over a ten-year period in four IB journals: *International Business Review (IBR)*, *Journal of International Business Studies (JIBS)*, *Journal of World Business (JWB)* and *Management International Review (MIR)*. Our evidence highlights that the technician assumptions of the equivalence paradigm also underlie empirical studies in IB.

Having uncovered the prevailing assumptions in methodological and empirical studies in IB, we then turn to an alternative approach that has emerged in translation studies. While we agree with the need for transparency and rigour when it comes to translation, we argue that this does not require a mechanical process of arriving at the most identical target-language text as possible. Instead, we propose the shift to a more contextualized approach based on theoretical developments in translation studies. We conclude our paper by outlining the implications of such a shift for conducting and reporting on cross-language studies. We argue that adopting a contextualized approach to translation would enable researchers to take greater account of the cross-border and cross-cultural differences that are, after all, central to the rationale for IB forming a separate field of inquiry.

The Equivalence Paradigm: The View from Cross-Language Methodology

The literature on cross-language methodology in IB (and related disciplines in management and marketing) overwhelmingly adopts what in this paper we, following Pym (2007), term the ‘equivalence paradigm’. According to this paradigm, the aim of translation is to achieve a text in the target language that is equivalent – that is, of ‘equal value’ (Pym 2007) – to the original source-language version. A translation is equivalent if it achieves ‘the conveyance of identical meaning’ (Hult et al., 2008: 1035) between the target and source language versions¹. Consistent with our problematization objective, in this section we will outline the key assumptions underlying this paradigm, and the dilemmas that can result from the pursuit of equivalence.

Given that equivalence implies ‘equal value’, the quest for equivalence between texts assumes that two languages ‘do or can express the same values’ (Pym, 2007: 272). The complication arising from this assumption – that a word or concept may have a fundamentally different meaning in another language or be absent altogether, so the relationship between the two languages is asymmetrical – is acknowledged in existing literature, but its implications are often downplayed or sidelined. The most commonly cited method for dealing with non-equivalence remains Triandis’s (1976) proposal for research designs incorporating emic (culture-specific) as well as etic (universal) concepts and procedures. He reports one such design which began with a pre-test of emic statements, the results of which enabled the development of a culture-specific, language-specific scale. Translation from one language to another was minimized, surveys were tailored for each country, and emic understandings were incorporated into the survey instrument. Yet while Triandis’s combined emic/etic designs are well known to IB researchers, they have not been extensively used, with Schaffer and Riordan (2003) finding that 94% of the empirical studies they reviewed took the ‘imposed etic’ approach; that is, assuming that a concept is defined in the same way across cultures. Hult et al. (2008) do not even include emic approaches in their review of the empirical literature.

In IB and related disciplines, an imposed etic design is often accompanied by the use of back translation, which is regarded as the most effective technique for the ‘establishment’ of translation equivalence (see e.g. Hult et al., 2008: 1035; Peng et al., 1991; Sin et al., 2002). Douglas and Craig (2007: 31) note that in international marketing, back translation ‘is still the primary method used to check translation accuracy’. Their analysis of cross-language studies published in the *Journal of International Marketing* from 1993-2005 finds that 75% of papers report they used back translation (compared with 62% in Schaffer and Riordan’s review of a

¹Craig and Douglas, in their influential text published in 2000, define equivalence or comparability as having ‘the same meaning or interpretation’, in line with Hult et al. (2008), but add the proviso ‘as far as possible’ (p. 141).

different set of journals). The popularity of back translation is perhaps not a surprise, given it is grounded in etic assumptions of a symmetrical correspondence between languages (Douglas and Craig, 2007).

Yet the assumption that back translation establishes equivalence is questioned by the very author whose seminal paper on back translation, Richard Brislin (1970), is heavily cited in IB. In this paper, he warns that ‘a researcher cannot depend solely on the back-translation technique’ (p. 213) and advocates that it be combined with other methods. He outlines what he regards as the ideal of a multiple-method procedure, which comprises seven steps – only one of which is back translation². In particular, his study finds that a pre-test is ‘necessary’ (1970: 212) to eliminate translation errors, even after several rounds of back-translation. Yet Brislin’s advocacy of multi-method procedures has been largely overlooked by IB scholars.

Nevertheless, there are indications that in the past decade, a more critical assessment of back translation can be detected among commentators on survey methodology (Harkness, et al., 2010) – although this trend is rarely reflected in the IB literature (for exceptions, see Douglas and Craig, 2007; Usunier, 2011). Concerns about back translation are in fact not new, but rather are being rediscovered. Sechrest et al., (1972) warned early on about the ‘paradox’ of equivalence: the more equivalent the translation, the less likely it will be that cultural differences will be found (see also Sekaran, 1983). Another common criticism is that back translation encourages ‘a spurious lexical equivalence’ (Deutscher, 1973: 167); in other words, it may establish that two words refer to the same object, but this does not necessarily convey the intended meaning of the original text (see also Peng et al., 1991; McGorry 2000 for an example in an empirical study). Werner and Campbell (1973) suggest that in order for equivalent meaning and not just lexical equivalence between source- and target-language versions to be achieved, both versions may need to be modified in the process of translation. While Werner and Campbell still operate within the equivalence paradigm, they capture a crucial insight: loyalty to the source version may result in a text that is not easily comprehensible in the target language. Their version of back translation – decentering – avoids source-text dominance by involving several iterations of (back) translation, with the original text as well as the translated version being successively modified.

Instead of back translation, Harkness et al. (2010, p. 128) assert that another technique canvassed by Brislin (1970, 1976) should be regarded as the ‘currently most favored’ approach in survey methodology (see also Douglas and Craig, 2007): namely,

²The steps are: rewriting the original text to make it more ‘translatable’; hiring translators with content-specific knowledge as well as linguistic expertise; conducting a back translation; having the translation independently reviewed; pre-testing the instrument on a target-language population and then on bilinguals, one group of which receives the original and the other the translated version, to check that responses are similar across both groups; and formally reporting the degree of no-error standard that has been achieved.

committee or 'team translations' involving input from a diversity of individuals, including monolinguals whose assessment of the quality of the translation may well differ from that of bilinguals. The committee approach allows a much more thorough discussion of alternatives and different perspectives, in contrast to back translation, which Harkness and Schoua-Glusberg (1998: 112) liken to using a metal detector: 'It cannot identify what it picks up and, neither, unfortunately, can the monolingual researcher'. Ultimately, back translation involves a subjective judgement as to whether two versions of a text are equivalent or not (Sechrest et al., 1972). Given this dependence on judgement, Brislin (1970) and his contemporaries emphasize the importance of careful selection of the people to conduct the translation; in the end, this is what assures the quality of the translation, not the application of specific techniques and rules (e.g., Werner and Campbell, 1973).

In the literature on qualitative cross-language methodology (which is currently largely based in nursing and sociology, with little influence on management research), the equivalence paradigm has also been influential. Squires (2009) lists multiple criteria for evaluating the quality of cross-language qualitative research, with conceptual equivalence playing a prominent role in ensuring the trustworthiness of a study: 'Maintaining the conceptual equivalence of what a participant said during an interview is ... *the most important* part of mediating the methodological issues that arise from using translators [our emphasis]'. Among qualitative researchers, there has also been interest in back translation as '[t]he most common and highly recommended procedure for translating (Chen and Boore, 2009: 235). Language differences are viewed as a technical problem, as a 'barrier' to be overcome or at least reduced through the application of rigorous techniques; thus Squires (2009) explicitly uses the phrases 'language barrier' and 'methodological challenge'.

To conclude, while equivalence is widely accepted as the goal of translation, the equivalence paradigm has struggled with the notion of what equivalence actually means and how it can be achieved. At its worst, the drive for equivalence can result in a narrow focus on the lexical similarity of texts rather than their meaning, lack of clarity as to how to proceed if there is insufficient correspondence between two languages, over-zealous fidelity to the source text, inattention to the inescapable subjectivities involved in judging equivalence, over-reliance on back translation and an underlying positivism which treats language as the neutral transmission of messages. Limitations and assumptions that accompany the equivalence paradigm have been acknowledged in the literature, although less so in IB, but critics have typically suggested alternative routes to equivalence (e.g., decentering, use of team translations) rather than questioning it as a goal. We now turn to our analysis of empirical cross-language research in IB, in which we find even greater adherence to equivalence as the overriding objective.

Our analytical approach

In order to examine how IB authors account for their translation decisions, we conducted an interpretive content analysis³ of published journal articles. Unlike previous treatments of the topic (Hult et al., 2008; Schaffer & Riordan, 2003), our analysis was primarily qualitative, allowing for fine-grained coding, a more holistic interpretation of the meaning of the text, the consideration of context and the possibility of emergent insights. It also had a broader scope, covering not only cross-cultural studies, but IB research in general⁴. Additionally, it was not restricted to quantitative studies but also included qualitative papers, which were excluded from previous reviews.

Content analysis is often regarded as largely a quantitative technique based on the categorization of various textual features and frequency counts of the resulting categories (Ahuvia, 2001). Yet there has long been recognition that a purely quantitative approach to content analysis is not only restrictive, but can potentially even be misleading as it does not capture the full contextual meaning of texts (Kracauer, 1952). Traditional content analysis distinguishes between ‘manifest’ (literal, surface-level, direct) content and ‘latent’ (implicit, underlying, connotative) content, with the former regarded as more objective and more amenable to quantification (Berelson, 1952/1971). More recently, there has been increasing recognition that drawing distinctions between the two types of content is misleading, given that the reception to any content is necessarily interpretive in nature (Ahuvia, 2001). In the current study, we took advantage of the interpretive strengths of a more qualitative approach to content analysis (see also Welch et al., 2011). However, being interpretive is compatible with being systematic (Schreier, 2012), and in the remainder of this section we will detail the multi-stage process we went through to build our interpretation.

A key aspect of every content analysis is the selection of the texts to analyze. In our analysis we employed a purposeful sampling approach in order to increase the information richness and diversity of the investigated texts. Our sample comprises the leading IB-specific journals – *IBR*, *JIBS*, *JWB* and *MIR* – all of which impose English as the language of dissemination (to use the term suggested by Tietze and Dick, 2009). We chose these four journals because they represent the most highly ranked and specialized IB outlets, thus providing us with an insight into disciplinary practices (DuBois and Reeb, 2000; Piekkari et al., 2009). Chronologically, we followed up the study by Schaffer and Riordan (2003), which examined research in the 1990s. In the time period under investigation (2000-2009), a total of

³‘Interpretive content analysis’ is also variously termed ‘interpretive textual analysis’ (Gephart, 1997), ‘qualitative content analysis’ (Schreier, 2012) and ‘qualitative textual analysis’ (Seale, 2003).

⁴We should also clarify that while we acknowledge the recent growth in papers on language policies and practices in the MNC (e.g., Peltokorpi and Vaara, 2012; Piekkari et al., 2013), our purpose in this paper was not to review this literature, but to examine the use of translation across all topics published in IB journals.

1440 articles were published in the four journals (Table 1).

Our analysis of the four journals concentrated on empirical quantitative and qualitative articles. As far as quantitative articles are concerned, we analysed only survey studies, excluding empirical research based on secondary data or experiments. The reason for this focus is that survey research is not only the most popular form of data collection in IB, but it is also featured in the relevant methodological literature on cross-language research (e.g. Douglas and Craig, 2007). We commenced the analysis by categorizing every empirical article (omitting editorials, commentaries and conceptual papers) in the period under investigation based on the type of data collection used by the authors (qualitative and quantitative)⁵. We then scanned each of these articles to select for further analysis those that were cross-language in nature. Table 1 shows the results of this process: 401 cross-language studies, of which 334 were quantitative (72% of the total number of quantitative survey-based articles) and 67 qualitative (69% of the total number of qualitative articles)⁶.

Table 1 about here

Having assembled our dataset of cross-language empirical papers, we then employed two ‘cycles’ of analysis (Saldaña, 2009), with a different emphasis in each cycle. The first iteration could be labelled ‘summative’ (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005): we recorded and classified all the occurrences in the texts related to translation decisions. We scanned the entire content of each journal article, although the methods section of published articles received particular attention because language issues are commonly regarded as a methodological concern (Squires, 2009). Unlike in a quantitative analysis, interpretive content analysis is exploratory and flexible: it is both theory and data driven in that the preliminary list of concepts is extended or even challenged in light of new findings (Schreier, 2012). We commenced with, but then supplemented, a coding frame that was based on recommendations of the extant methodological literature on quantitative and qualitative cross-language research (e.g. Brislin, 1970; Schaffer & Riordan, 2003; Squires, 2009)⁷. In the first analytical cycle we constantly refined and expanded this initial coding frame to reflect the dataset and resolved

⁵We found that mixed-method (i.e. qualitative and quantitative) papers were primarily quantitative in nature. These papers described the qualitative study only briefly and did not present and discuss any qualitative findings (for a similar finding, see Nummela and Hurmerinta-Peltomäki, 2006). For this reason we included them in the group of quantitative studies.

⁶We cannot exclude the possibility that the number of (quantitative and qualitative) cross-language studies was actually higher, however we could only judge this criterion on the basis of what the authors have themselves explicitly mentioned. In the end, we went with the authors’ explicit claims.

⁷Specifically, we coded quantitative papers for language choice, (back) translation, pilot-testing of the study’s instrument, reviewers, discussion of equivalence and use of translators (see e.g., Brislin, 1970). We coded qualitative papers for choice of (interview) language, conceptual equivalence, translator credentials, researchers’ language ability, (back) translation of the interview guide, translation of interview quotations (see Squires, 2009).

difficulties in its application to our textual material. At least two of us coded each article, independently at first and then jointly in order to discuss insights and multiple meanings associated with the coding process.

During these multiple rounds of coding, we did not just record and count instances of keywords (e.g., back translation, equivalence), but we also examined the entire textual segment in which the keywords appeared, allowing us to understand their meaning in context. This holistic treatment allowed us to look at what was absent and not just what was present in the texts, the way in which particular terms were used, the meanings that authors attached to them, the words associated with key terms (e.g., the way in which ‘ensure’ was coupled with ‘equivalence’), and – critical to our problematization approach – the assumptions underlying this word usage.

The second cycle of analysis could be likened to what Gephart (1997) has termed ‘expansion analysis’. In this cycle, we linked the text segments that we had coded to the text’s broader linguistic, methodological and theoretical contexts. We linked the textual segments we had coded both to the linguistic context of the study, as well as to the methodological literature that the authors cited. Having identified the dominance of the equivalence paradigm in both the empirical and methodological literature, we began a theoretical journey to identify a contrasting paradigm, which took us to the area of translation studies. This stage required a high degree of theoretical sensitivity (Ahuvia, 2001), as well as a reflexive questioning of our own disciplinary assumptions.

Consistent with our approach, we are not claiming our analysis is either objective or the only possible interpretation of our data. Instead, we are claiming it is a plausible interpretation that is based on a careful reading of the texts. Rather than inter-rater reliability, interpretive content analysis relies on collaborative coding (Ahuvia, 2001; Schreier, 2012): this allowed us to check each other’s coding for consistency, pose rival interpretations, and develop an intersubjective understanding. We now turn to the key findings from this interpretive process.

Findings

In this section, we present our findings about how authors report on their translation decisions. We start by discussing what emerged from our analysis as an important consideration when making translation decisions: the linguistic context of the study. We distinguish between four types of cross-language study, each of which presents a different context for translation. We then turn to the quantitative studies in our dataset that mentioned translation, in which equivalence was the leading concern. Authors typically frame equivalence as a straightforward transfer of meaning that is attainable through the application of the correct technical procedures, foremost among them back translation. We conclude the

section by analyzing the qualitative articles, finding that, while it was unusual to discuss translation at all, or refer to equivalence directly, authors regard language as a potential barrier and threat to accuracy.

Translation context: four types of cross-language study

The cross-language studies in our dataset represent diverse linguistic (or translation) contexts. Not only do studies potentially involve multiple national languages, but IB researchers are also investigating a variety of multilingual communities: the multinational corporation itself, expatriate communities and MBA classrooms. We differentiated four types of cross-language studies, based on their national scope (single or multiple-country) and the linguistic makeup of the population being studied (mono- or multilingual). Table 2 shows the frequency of each type: in descending order, they are Types 3, 1, 2 and 4. Additionally, the table displays the extent to which articles in each type raised what we found to be the most common translation-related issues in quantitative and qualitative papers. During the course of coding, we also created a fifth ‘not clear’ category for those articles that contained too little information on the linguistic context of the study to be able to categorize them to a cross-language type.

Table 2 about here

The first type is a single-country study, conducted in an environment in which English is not an official or widely spoken language. For such a study, the development of a research instrument typically involves the researcher translating measures from English (if doing quantitative research) or translating an interview guide and interview transcripts (if doing qualitative research). The choice of language for such a study is usually not stated explicitly, but can be inferred to be the native language of the respondents. Other translation-related issues are not widely addressed either: back translation in 31% of articles, pilot studies in 31% and the use of reviewers in 29% (see Table 2).

Authors undertaking this type of study are reliant on their own language skills to translate and overcome language differences, unless they employ translators. Pla-Barber (2001) falls into the former camp: a Spanish author surveying Spanish companies in Spain, he is able to use his own language skills to translate questionnaire items from English and the results back into English. In contrast, Jiang and Li (2008) used a translator rather than translating their survey instrument into German themselves. A qualitative example of a Type 1 study can be found in Gamble (2006: 332), who notes that

The author's previous experience and facility in Chinese permitted interviews to be conducted on a one-to-one basis without a translator and for them to be transcribed directly by the author during the interview – tape-recording interviews would have inhibited interviewees' readiness to speak openly.

A notable exception to the use of the native language is Nielsen (2007) who, despite the fact that he is a Danish researcher surveying compatriots in Denmark, ran the questionnaire in English. He provides the justification that 'language was not a significant barrier to target respondents' (p. 347). The unstated assumption is that if possible, it is preferable to conduct the survey in English.

The second type consists of a single-country, cross-language study, in which the researcher is interviewing or surveying a multilingual population, such as expatriate managers, who are to be found within the boundaries of the same country. Given the linguistic diversity of this kind of sample, inevitably some research participants will be communicating in a non-native language. In order to reduce this number, one option in this type of study is to send out the survey in multiple languages. For example, Shi (2001: 191) provides a brief explanation of the decision to send out a survey targeting foreign invested enterprises in China in Chinese as well as English: 'Many managers representing foreign parties are local Chinese because of the localization of managerial personnel ... in recent years'.

Another option was to use only English to survey these multilingual communities, with authors assuming that respondents had sufficient language ability to participate in the survey. For example, English was chosen by Barner-Rasmussen (2003), despite Finns comprising the majority of the expatriates they were surveying. The authors are aware of the challenge that being surveyed in a non-native language might pose. They note that personally administering the survey provided them with the opportunity to overcome any potential barriers to comprehension caused by the choice of language: 'any terms or concepts respondents perceived as unclear during interviewing were explained to them in the language they felt most comfortable with (Finnish, Swedish or English)' (p. 50). Barner-Rasmussen is, however, a rare exception in explicitly discussing the complexities of surveying a multilingual population; overall, articles in this type do not emphasize translation-related issues (see Table 2).

The third type of study is a cross-country, cross-language study in which study participants are surveyed in multiple languages, most commonly their own national languages. This requires the translation of the research instrument into multiple languages; or, if a qualitative project, a bilingual researcher or multilingual research team. An example of a large-scale Type 3 study is Waldman et al. (2006), who surveyed culture and leadership in 15 countries as part of the GLOBE study. Moore (2003), in contrast, uses a fine-grained

ethnographic approach in her study spanning two countries. She was able to rely on her own language skills to use German when conducting interviews in the head office, supplementing her observations in the London subsidiary. Type 3 articles are the most likely to mention back translation (Table 2), although their use of pilot studies and reviewers does not differ markedly from Types 1 and 2.

The fourth and final type we identified is a cross-country, cross-language study in which a language – almost always English – is used as the lingua franca in the study. Here, the participants in the research are required to bridge the language divide, rather than the research team. The implications of this are usually not addressed in such studies. Overall, a widespread assumption prevailed in our dataset – among both qualitative and quantitative researchers – that global managers are competent English speakers. If a survey is being conducted in the multinational corporation, it is typically carried out in English, with no accompanying discussion as to whether this choice matched the language abilities and preferences of respondents, or whether it may have led to poorer quality responses than if the respondents had been surveyed in their native language. Pilot studies and reviewers are also seemingly not routinely used to check the language abilities of respondents (see Table 2).

There are a few exceptions to this trend. Some authors explicitly provide an assessment of their respondents' language abilities. For example, Zhou et al. (2007: 309) comment that the managers in international hotel chains whom they surveyed 'are generally fluent in English (the lingua franca of the hotel industry) and often speak multiple languages'. Venaik et al. (2004: 3) go one step further to suggest that translation and measurement equivalence were not challenges faced in their research project given the cosmopolitan nature of their sample:

Whether the same measures can be applied across respondents from different countries would be debatable were we interviewing consumers in less-developed countries. However, as our respondents were senior managers, mostly university educated, speak English, travel widely and have been exposed to the business concepts incorporated in our measures, this issue was of less concern.

Another initiative that we found, both in Types 2 and 4, is for authors to check in advance that it would be viable to send out the survey in English. Thus, Shay and Baack (2004: 223) state that 'Corporate officials from the participating organizations confirmed that all potential respondents possessed a working knowledge of written and spoken English, thereby supporting the use of English-only instruments'. 'Working knowledge' covers a wide range of fluency levels, of course. However, it does mean that even though the authors did not conduct a pilot test, they were able to receive some verification of the language abilities of respondents.

In conclusion, each cross-language type that we identified represents a different set of translation contexts. For Type 1 and 3 studies, the choice of language was usually the obvious one – the national language or languages of the informants – and the burden of translation was placed on the researchers, in that the research instrument for the study would need to be translated into the local language(s) and the results translated back into English for the purpose of reporting. Type 2 and 4 studies were more complex given the linguistically diverse nature of the sample. Here, there was a tendency to opt for English, pushing the responsibility for translation on to respondents. One of the key decisions that a researcher potentially makes is therefore not just how but whether to translate at all – or to avoid translation and assume that the language of international business is English. In the next section, we move to a discussion of those quantitative studies in which translation was undertaken.

Quantitative research: back translation and equivalence

We found back translation to be the technique most commonly mentioned in association with equivalence (or ‘consistency’, which is used as a synonym). Equivalence is in turn associated with (or even interchangeable with) accuracy, validity, reliability and quality. Authors assume that equivalence of meaning is achievable, although what constitutes equivalence is usually not made clear. There is some evidence that authors do not necessarily use the term in a uniform manner: does equivalence entail that meanings are ‘the same’ in the two languages (Brouthers, 2002), or just ‘similar’ (Arens and Brouthers, 2001: 386)? Marshall (2003: 431) specifies that ‘equivalency, rather than exact translation was sought’; whereas Jiang and Li (2008: 370) assert that equivalence procedures allowed them to arrive at ‘precise meaning’.

The concern with equivalence is in line with the literature on cross-language methodology. However, authors go even further in their claims than does this literature, and portray back translation as a *guarantee* of equivalence. The following quotations illustrate this amplification:

‘Back translation was used to *ensure* the equivalence of meanings’ (Nguyen, et al., 2006: 688; our emphasis)

‘The English version of these questionnaires was translated into Spanish in Mexico City and then back-translated ... to *ensure* construct and functional equivalence’ (Athanassiou et al., 2002: 143; our emphasis).

‘the questionnaire ... was then backtranslated into English to *ensure* the original meanings of the English version remained intact.’ (Brouthers and Xu, 2002: 664; our emphasis)

As these quotes suggest, ‘ensure’ (or occasionally ‘assure’ or ‘secure’) was the most frequently used word when associating back translation with equivalence. This contrasts with more modest assertions, such as that of Luthans and Ibrayeva (2006: 98), who prefer to state that back translation was conducted in order ‘minimize’ the problems related to ‘the transfer to other cultures and languages of the meaning and intent of standardized scales’. Yet the claim that back translation *ensures* equivalence would be contested by Brislin (1970) himself, who emphasizes that much depends on the quality of the back-translation process and its pairing with other procedures. He warns that on its own, an identical source- and target-language version only ‘suggests’ equivalence (p. 186). Researchers would need to provide evidence for the quality of the back translation before making any claim as to the degree of equivalence achieved. Instead, in our dataset of quantitative papers, back translation is regarded as in and of itself a form of quality assurance.

Accompanying this confidence in back translation is the tendency to regard language differences as an error that can be eliminated or at least contained:

‘The survey was translated and back-translated to prevent any *distortions* in meaning across cultures where necessary’ (Robertson, 2000: 259; our emphasis).

‘the survey instrument was translated by native speakers and then backtranslated as means of identifying potential terminology *problems*’ (Hult et al., 2000: 210-211; our emphasis).

These distortions are, moreover, not regarded as creating a serious dilemma, and only rarely are readers informed of changes that were made in response to translation checks such as back translation. Instead, Wong et al. (2006: 349) report that the original and back-translated English versions ‘revealed no substantial differences in the meanings of the items’.

Just as Brislin’s cautionary view of back translation is mostly not heeded – despite the fact that he is the most widely cited methodological authority in our dataset – neither is his recommendation that back translation be combined with other techniques. Instead, the assumption on the part of the majority of authors appears to be that back translation is in itself sufficient. A third of the papers that used back translation accompanied this procedure with a pilot study of the translated instrument, while 39% mentioned that they had the translated questionnaire reviewed by other parties than the translators. Only in 18 studies do authors

state they combined back translation with a pilot study and the use of independent reviewers. The committee approach is mentioned in only four studies. The drive for equivalence and comparability perhaps explains why we found only one example of authors who explicitly claim to have included a modest ‘emic’ pre-study to understand local meaning and interpretations before running a survey (Styles et al., 2008).

As well as the authors in our dataset deviating from Brislin’s recommendation of a multi-method approach to achieve equivalence, they also do not attach the same importance as he does to the quality of the translator. Slightly more than half of those who report they conducted a back translation do not then mention anything about a translator at all, who becomes invisible:

‘a survey questionnaire was developed in English, translated into Chinese, and subjected to a backtranslation procedure’ (Luo, 2002: 173)

‘Back translation was performed on each local language instrument until conceptual and functional equivalence had been achieved’ (Kotabe et al., 2000: 130)

‘The initial study instrument was blind translated into local languages and back into the original English’ (Dmitrovic et al., 2009: 528)

The back translation process is therefore divorced from human judgements, subjectivities and preferences. The use of the passive voice, combined with the absence of human agency, evokes a mechanical and objective procedure.

Of the articles that provide some details about the translators, most refer to the translators in extremely general terms and are not explicit about their qualifications for the role. An example can be seen in Zeugner-Roth et al. (2008: 587), who state that their survey was translated by ‘native speakers’ and back-translated by ‘experts of the English language’. In some papers, it is simply noted that the translators were ‘bilingual natives’ (Lindquist et al., 2001: 510) or ‘competent bilinguals’ (Leung et al., 2009: 88), which does not provide meaningful information given that it can be safely assumed that a translator would be bilingual. It was rarely clarified if the translator possessed not just linguistic expertise, but also the necessary level of content knowledge and familiarity with the context being studied.

We came across two papers in which the limitations of the back-translation technique are openly acknowledged, and additional steps were taken to achieve equivalence. In the first paper, three MBA students with appropriate language abilities were hired to review the back translations, with a fourth expert resolving the more serious issues ‘in consultation with the people who had translated and back-translated the concept in question’ (Elenkov and Manev, 2009: 363). Reviewers were ‘instructed to be essentially concerned with the actual meaning

of the concepts to be translated and not so much with the exact phrasing used in the translation/back-translation process'. In the second study, the shortcomings of back translation are used as the argument as to why a committee approach was selected:

the linguistic equivalence of our measures was established through the use of translation-back-translation procedures ... The method used was not a mechanical back translation procedure of first having one person translate from English to the native language, then another from the native language back to English. Rather, the procedure used was to discuss each question and the alternatives in a small group of persons fluent in both languages. Discussion occurred until agreement was reached as to the linguistic equivalence of the questions in both languages. (Harpaz et al., 2002: 236)

Given that the limitations of back translation are not widely recognized, it is perhaps not surprising that few authors report on taking steps to check for or improve comprehension in the data collection or analysis phases. One way to improve the chances that the research instrument is meaningful to participants was to switch from a mail to telephone or personally administered survey. For example, Wright et al. (2002: 171) explain that pilot testing of the survey alerted them to the fact that it was not well comprehended in all of the target countries. This insight allowed them to administer the questionnaire by means of face-to-face interviews in order to improve comprehension:

During the piloting stage, the questions proved to be easily understood by Russian managers, who generally gave full and realistic responses. In Belarus and Ukraine, managers seemed rather unfamiliar with Western terminology and it was decided to conduct face-to-face interviews.

Other than switching to the use of personal interviews, there are also four sets of authors who mention scalar equivalence (Ellis, 2007; Lenartowicz and Johnson, 2002; Lee et al., 2005), two who checked how language may have affected the results as part of the process of data analysis (Delerue and Simon, 2009; Zeybek et al., 2003), and three who discussed the limitations of the study due to translation issues (Bstieler and Hemmert, 2008; Davis and Meyer, 2004; Lindquist et al., 2001).

Qualitative research: mostly silent on language

Our overarching finding is that IB researchers conducting qualitative cross-language research largely do not account for their translation decisions in their reporting. In fact, none of the investigated papers refers to, or incorporates the insights of, the relevant methodological literature for conducting cross-language research (e.g. Squires, 2009). This

lack of sensitivity to language is rather paradoxical given Polkinghorne's (2005: 135) description of qualitative research as 'languaged data'. It also does not reflect the complexity of a qualitative research project, in which multiple translation decisions are faced: producing a target-language version of the interview guide, conducting the interview, transcribing the interview, analyzing the data and reporting interviewee quotations in the publication (Welch and Piekkari, 2006).

While we cannot explain this silence without having interviewed the authors concerned, a number of possibilities can be suggested. The first is that qualitative researchers lack the standardized procedures that are available to quantitative researchers. In fact, quantitative researchers sometimes refer to commonly accepted practice as a way of legitimizing their use of back translation, which they describe as 'widely recognized' (Luthans and Ibrayeva, 2006: 98), 'standard' (Hui et al., 2004: 52) or 'conventional' (Lin, 2005: 231). In contrast, qualitative researchers – at least in IB – do not have such well-established conventions to follow.

Another possible reason for the silence about language is that typically qualitative researchers (seemingly) relied on their own language skills during fieldwork. These language skills would mostly not be mentioned directly. This is in keeping with existing conventions for scientific reporting, in which the researcher's own identity and role in the study are omitted. While many qualitative researchers recommend greater reflexivity when it comes to reporting (Haynes, 2012), such a trend was not found in our dataset. A similar silence prevailed when it came to the role of the translator/interpreter, in the four cases in which they were used – despite the fact that in two of these studies, researchers relied on a company interpreter.

Given the overall inattention to language issues, it does not come as a surprise that qualitative researchers do not make claims of a study's equivalence. We found only a single article that explicitly mentions equivalence of concepts across contexts. Will and Redding (2009) explore the thinking of senior executives of leading German and Japanese firms about the ideal structure of the economy. The concept of 'senior executive', of critical importance to their study, was adjusted to the local contexts:

Our definition of 'senior executive' varied slightly to allow for the difference in governance structures between Germany and Japan. In Germany, we defined senior executives to include active or recently retired management and supervisory board members. In Japan, we defined senior executives as active or recently retired management board members (p. 867).

Nonetheless, all cross-language studies that mention translation decisions conformed to the assumptions of the equivalence paradigm – despite its underlying positivist assumptions – in

that their concerns centre on the accuracy of translation, with language considered a barrier to the validity of the study.

In 12 papers, translation – of the interview guide, of the interview transcripts or use of an interpreter during the interview – was mentioned. In three papers, authors explicitly state that they used back translation. Buckley et al. (2003), who investigated the reform of Chinese state-owned enterprises, developed an English-language version of the interview questionnaire as a first step. The questionnaire was carefully translated into Chinese and then back-translated into English, ‘as suggested by Brislin (1970)’, in order to ‘verify the content consistency between the two versions of the questionnaire’ (Buckley et al., 2003: 77; see also Buckley et al., 2006). Zhu (2009: 233) back-translated interview transcripts ‘in order to ensure preciseness of translation’.

Some authors mentioned the language of the interview, but because of the use of the passive voice, did not make it clear whether it was the author who conducted the interview or not. Of the 10 who did, most simply mentioned the language facility of the author(s), without elaborating any further. An exception can be found in Chapman et al. (2008: 222), who acknowledge the relevance of the researcher’s identity and view it as either a facilitator or barrier – depending on circumstances – during the interview:

‘The impact of the nationality of the interviewer (i.e., Polish) on the richness of the material coming from the interviews also needs to be addressed here ... This research was concerned with how the Germans and the British viewed the Poles, and how the Poles viewed the Germans and the British. Speaking about this to Poles, meant the interviewer and interviewee shared a common background, however, speaking about this to Germans, meant speaking to people that had every reason to be highly sensitive about the legitimacy of their opinions. Every effort was made, however, to create an atmosphere of cooperation with the interviewees.

The study by Tsang (2001) on foreign-invested enterprises in China was conducted in English, Mandarin or Cantonese. The author, who is bilingual in English and Chinese, handled all the interviews, and managed to establish a good rapport with the respondents by communicating in their native languages. Tsang also takes the next step of attempting to maintain the richness of the Chinese interviews by using native expressions throughout the discussion of the findings (for another example of the use of native expressions, see Ghauri & Fang, 2001). Reflexivity about the role of the researcher and the preservation of original phrases both suggest an alternative approach to translation, which we explore further in the next section.

Discussion: beyond equivalence

Our analysis of IB journals has shown that while researchers often do not feel the need to make their translation decisions explicit, those who do tend to invoke equivalence and characterize language differences as a problem that can be controlled through the application of suitable techniques, notably back translation. In this section, we take the next step in problematization and propose a different way forward. We follow the advice of other methodologists (e.g., Harkness et al., 2010; Wong and Poon, 2010) and turn to translation studies in order to develop an alternative assumption ground for conceptualizing translation. Translation studies, while under-utilized in IB (for a notable exception see Janssens et al., 2004), are the scholarly field that has conducted the most sustained debate about equivalence. Since the 1980s, a paradigmatic shift in translation theory has taken place to a more contextualized and socioculturally-oriented conception of the translation process. This shift away from equivalence to contextualization is based on reframing translation as a form of intercultural interaction, rather than a lexical transfer of meaning. While theoretical approaches to contextualization have proliferated in translation studies, along with a multitude of philosophical and disciplinary orientations (e.g., postmodernism, postcolonialism, discourse analysis and cultural studies), these diverse perspectives nonetheless converge on the need to go beyond the equivalence paradigm. They concur with the limitations of the equivalence paradigm that have already been voiced by those working within this tradition, but also go beyond them.

In this section, we will outline the alternative assumptions underlying this paradigmatic shift, which has been dubbed the ‘cultural turn’ in translation studies (Bassnett and Lefevere, 1990; Brisset, 2010), and their implications for how researchers approach cross-language research. Our purpose is not to provide an overview of all the authors and theoretical perspectives contributing to the critique of the equivalence paradigm. Instead, we concentrate on two: *skopos* theory (Reiss and Vermeer, 1984/2013) and cultural politics (Venuti, 1993; 2008), which offer related but distinct approaches to rethinking equivalence. Skopos theory was one of the earliest challenges to the equivalence paradigm and remains the most comprehensive in its proposal for an alternative assumption ground for translating all types of texts, including non-literary texts. Venuti’s conceptualization of translation as a form of cultural politics (1993) reflects more recent philosophical developments, notably poststructuralism and postcolonialism, and is the more critical of the two perspectives. While Venuti’s theory was developed based on the translation of literary texts, it has also been applied to cross-language research methodology by qualitative researchers who reject the positivist conception of language as a ‘neutral component of communication through which researchers obtain information’ (Hennink, 2008: 22; see also e.g., Esposito, 2001; Larkin at

al., 2007). We draw on this methodological literature to develop our implications for IB research.

Contextualizing translation: The ‘cultural turn’ in translation studies

According to skopos theory, translation is a form of communicative interaction (e.g., Snell-Hornby, 1988), rather than a narrow linguistic transfer. The notion of an interaction puts human agency and subjectivity at the centre. Translational interaction is initiated by the person or organisation who engages a translator (with the initiator also possibly being the translator) in order to complete a specific commission or assignment. The translational task starts with the translator’s understanding of the source text – with the target audience then in turn producing their own understanding of the translated text (Vermeer, 1998). These textual understandings are time- and place-bound: Reiss and Vermeer (1984/2013) reject the notion of ‘*the* source text’, arguing that it can only ever be ‘*a*’ source text which is read and translated in a particular way at a particular point in time. Translation is therefore an interpretive and hermeneutic activity. Both source and target texts have the status of an ‘offer’, which the audience may not receive as intended or anticipated.

Translational action is purposeful, with this purpose or *skopos* (σκοπός) shaped by the translator’s interpretation of the commission, as well as his/her expert judgement as to what will function best in the target culture (Vermeer, 1998). Assessing the quality of the translation is a matter of assessing whether this communicative purpose is achieved. A quality translation is one which is adequate to its purpose and ‘transmitted in a target-culture-adequate way’ (Vermeer, 1998) – not one which is most alike the source text (unless fidelity to the original is the commission that the translator is seeking to fulfil). As House (2006: 356) proposes, translation can be viewed as a process of recontextualisation; that is, ‘taking a text out of its original frame and context and placing it within a new set of relationships and culturally conditioned expectations’. Moreover, given the context dependence of the production and reception of texts, there can be no optimal or correct translation. Ultimately, the judge of whether the translation has achieved its purpose is the target audience (Nord, 1997).

Once equivalence is no longer the main objective, the source text is ‘dethroned’, to use Vermeer’s (1998: 52) term. This does not mean that equivalence is irrelevant, but it is a secondary concern, and potentially one that leads to poor results: ‘A “faithful” translation of a source text can lead to an “unfaithful” target text’ (Vermeer, 1998: 44); that is, one that is not adequate to its skopos. Reiss and Vermeer (1984/2013) also stress, along with other translation scholars, that it is not possible to produce a target-language text that is fully equivalent in all its features: not just the lexical equivalence favoured by back translation, but also grammatical, stylistic, pragmatic equivalence, and even equivalence of reader response

(see e.g., Baker, 1992 for different types of equivalence). In the end, the translator must decide which aspects of the source text can or should be rendered faithfully in the target text. Vermeer (1998) argues that more fundamental than the linguistic features of the text is its 'cultural' level (Vermeer, 1998). Meaning is ultimately cultural in nature, so unavoidably changes its value when it is transmitted from one culture to another (Reiss & Vermeer, 1984/2013).

In place of the source text, skopos theory elevates the role of the translator, who is ultimately the one to balance and adjudicate the multiple considerations involved in the translation process. In this process, the translator brings to bear his/her own worldviews and experiences, translational norms and preferred strategies, understanding of the source and target culture, and perceptions of the translational situation. Venuti's (2008) cultural politics perspective similarly agrees that the translator is not a neutral transmitter of the meaning of the source text, but rather is the active co-producer of the target text. Meaning is subjective and words are polysemous: the original source text 'is the site of many semantic possibilities that are fixed only provisionally in any one translation, on the basis of varying cultural assumptions and interpretive choices, in specific social situations, in different historical periods' (p. 13).

However, Venuti (2008) goes further by exposing the political nature of a translator's co-production. He traces how in the West (or at least, the Anglosphere) translation has been practised as a form of appropriation that erases the foreign and denies difference. He argues that the dominant translation style valorizes fluency, intelligibility and readability; in other words, the foreign is 'domesticated' and made to appear familiar because any potentially discordant foreign elements have been expunged. The end result of the translation process is 'an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to receiving cultural values' (Venuti, 2008: 15). Domestication can be linked to the colonial project of expropriation and cultural dominance; in this way, translation is inescapably a political exercise.

Instead, Venuti makes a case for what he calls a foreignizing approach to translation. In this approach, the reader from the target culture is confronted head on by the Otherness of the text. The translator is not smoothing over differences, but rather is deliberately 'disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the translating language' (Venuti, 2008: 15). A quality translation, in this view, is one which is able to preserve the foreignness of the text in such a way that challenges the receiving culture. Translation is not about finding similarities; rather, the translator has an ethical and political responsibility to respect and voice the Other. A translator can achieve this by borrowing words from the source language, retaining syntactical and stylistic features of the original text even if they deviate from target-language conventions, and preserving culturally-specific references even though they are alien to the target audience (Van Poucke, 2012).

Contextualization approaches, such as skopos and cultural politics theories, challenge key assumptions of the equivalence paradigm regarding the aim of translation, the role of the translator, the assessment of translation quality, the nature of meaning and the role of the translator (see Table 3). The equivalence paradigm is predicated on the possibilities of the translator-as-technician reproducing as close a copy of the original as possible and transferring meaning across languages and cultures without changing it. Underlying this view of translation is the positivist assumption of an objective, rule-bound process of linguistic transfer. As we have outlined, skopos and cultural politics theories challenge each of these points. They reject the notion of an unproblematic transfer between languages and cultures, emphasize the culturally dependent nature of meaning, set up alternative criteria for evaluating the quality of a translation and adopt an expanded view of the translator's role. They both reject the notion of translation as a quasi-scientific process executed by means of technical procedures such as back translation. Where they differ is in Venuti's emphasis on the inescapably political nature of the translator's role, and the resulting ethical obligations to represent the Other to the target culture.

Table 3 about here

Implications for International Business

We would argue that the alternative assumption ground of translation studies provides far-reaching implications for research practice in IB. Once equivalence is no longer the primary goal, the translator is not involved in a technical exercise of word substitution. Instead, translation is a decision-making process involving the researcher (as client) and the translator. Accordingly, documenting and accounting for the choices that the researcher and translator have made becomes a central methodological task – something that we found to be rare among the articles we analyzed. These decisions cover both fieldwork and the writing up of the study, and include whether to translate, which language(s) to use in the study, what is the translation purpose, the approach to translation to be taken, and how to report on translation in the write-up of the study. As contextualization approaches would suggest, these decisions all need to be made with reference to the translation context of the study – which, as we have seen, can vary considerably in IB.

The initial decisions are made by the researcher: whether to translate at all, or to use a lingua franca; and if a decision is made to translate, which language(s) should be used and whether a translator will be commissioned. If the researcher decides to initiate a commission, he or she not only needs to decide how many translators to use and how to select them, but also needs to follow up by agreeing on a detailed brief so the translator is knowledgeable about the translational purpose. Translational strategies and communicative priorities need to be agreed upon upfront, but also negotiated, adjusted and discussed during the course of the commission through a dialogic process. Together, researcher and translator(s) need to resolve

how to balance the need to produce a research instrument that is related to the original yet meaningful in the target culture. Equivalence is unlikely to be the translational purpose because, as Harkness et al. (2010) point out, research instruments such as surveys should not come across as translations, so above all need to be carefully contextualized into the target culture in order to be intelligible to respondents.

Given the centrality of the client-translator relationship and the translational decisions they make, we would suggest that rather than using a procedure such as back translation as supposed evidence of the quality of the translation, it would be more meaningful to outline and provide a brief justification of the translational approach and translator's qualifications. In short, this would make the translator visible in researchers' accounts (Edwards, 1998). As Temple and Edwards (2002) argue, the concept of reflexivity – the researcher's sensitivity towards how his or her identity and role have affected the findings – needs to be extended to the involvement of the translator/interpreter. They argue that a cross-language study should include an explicit discussion of 'the social location' of the translator and how this affected the process and outcome of translation. Reflexivity also applies if the researcher is responsible for his or her own translations (as was the case in many quantitative and the overwhelming majority of qualitative studies in our review). In such instances, Temple (1997) argues that reflexivity involves a form of 'intellectual autobiography'; in other words, the researcher needs to be transparent about how his or her personal experiences and world views shape word choices.

We would argue that Venuti's (1993) framing of translation as cultural politics also has profound implications for the reporting of research findings. As a discipline, IB has pursued sameness rather than difference due to the dominance of imposed etics, the pursuit of equivalence and the 'hegemonic' rise of English (Tietze & Dick, 2009). The ease with which difference is erased has been noted by Xian (2008), who reflects that it was impossible to convey the culturally specific meanings of her interviews with Chinese women at the same time as conforming to the style of English-language academic journals. A false sense of sameness was produced that potentially diminishes the richness and novelty of the research findings. Preserving native expressions in the text – which was pursued by some of the authors in our study – has been suggested as one 'foreignizing' strategy to avoid losing the meaning of terms that do not have an equivalent in the target language or have culturally-specific associations that are important to the research (Muller, 2007). Even if English is the language for reporting research results, it is still imperative to acknowledge the multilingual background of the text and inform the reader about linguistic ambiguities and complexities (Steyaert and Janssens, 2013).

Once conceived as a situated process of (re)constructing meaning, translation is no longer just hurdle to overcome when collecting data – the process also becomes data and a

potential source of theoretical insight. To paraphrase Usunier (2011), language goes from being a constraint to being a resource. The inextricable connection between text and context becomes a way to reach greater understanding of respondents, with insights from the translation process something that could usefully be treated as data and written up as part of the findings. As Brislin (1970) recognized over 40 years ago, seemingly technical procedures such as back translation and pilot testing can be *the* source of additional insights and of additional lines of inquiry. In this way, translation needs to be recognized as more than a concern to be addressed in the methodology section, but rather as an act of knowledge production to be reflected on in the findings of the study.

Conclusion

The majority of the IB studies published in the four core IB journals from 2000-2009 were cross-language in nature. Yet we have shown that current practice in IB research has not gone beyond a narrow technicist approach that prioritizes the achievement of equivalence. Few articles go beyond a cursory reference to back translation. Instead, we found that authors assumed that translation/back translation achieves the transfer of meaning from one language to another. These assumptions, we found, run contrary to the nuances found in Brislin's own work, more recent advances in survey methodology and developments in translation studies.

Our broader review of relevant literature in research methodology and translation studies allowed us to problematize the concept of equivalence and suggest a way forward for the IB field in the future. We would argue that the alternatives to traditional notions of equivalence allow translation to be seen as more than a procedural step to be reported in the methodology section of a paper. Rather than language being reduced to a technical procedure that is briefly dealt with in the methodology section, the cross-language encounter should permeate the entire paper. The process of translation can itself be treated as data and the source of contextual insights and conceptual understanding. Yet these insights are almost never reported in IB studies. Instead, we advocate that this process not remain a 'black box' but rather be opened up for analysis and reflexivity. However, this entails a reorientation of the IB field so that it places greater value on the representation and understanding of differences, and of context specificity rather than universality.

The conceptualization and problematization of the translation process that we have developed in this paper suggests it is not the mechanistic application of a lexical rulebook, but rather a highly situated and context-bound practice. It consists of multiple decision points and is dependent on the subjectivities and interpretations of the individuals concerned. In order to create a meaningful text, the translator needs to work with and achieve a resolution of multiple communicative tensions: between source and target cultures, between fidelity to the original and intelligibility to the reader, between sameness and difference, between

domestication and foreignization, and so on. Once this more complex view of translation is adopted, it assumes greater importance in the research process and is deserving of greater attention in journal articles. Only if translation is seen as a neutral transmission device, as in the equivalence paradigm, is it regarded as not worthy of treatment in the reporting of a study. In contrast, we would argue that international business research necessarily *is* about translation. Its rationale as a distinct field is that it is about crossing different national boundaries, language, cultures and life worlds – even when a common language is used (see also Janssens et al., 2004).

If IB researchers paid greater attention to language, they would potentially not just enrich their own studies, but also provide insights that are of multidisciplinary relevance. As we found in our analysis, IB researchers are often operating in highly multilingual contexts which are still not well understood even in fields such as translation studies. In these ‘in-between spaces’, in which hybrid forms of language develop and a high degree of linguistic improvisation can often be seen, we would anticipate that there is considerable potential for novel theorising. In this paper, we hope to have contributed to such a future research agenda, in which language is regarded not as a barrier to, but rather as a source of, theoretical insight.

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Table 1: Categorization of Journal Articles 2000-2009

<i>Type of Articles</i>	<i>Journal</i>				Total
	JIBS	IBR	JWB	MIR	
Quantitative Survey Articles					
Quantitative Survey Articles Published _(%)	122 _(26%)	131 _(28%)	96 _(21%)	113 _(24%)	462 _(83%)
Quantitative Survey Cross-language Articles _(%)	111 _(33%)	89 _(27%)	59 _(18%)	75 _(22%)	334 _(72%)
Qualitative Articles					
Qualitative Articles Published _(%)	24 _(25%)	19 _(20%)	35 _(36%)	19 _(20%)	97 _(17%)
Qualitative Cross-language Articles _(%)	12 _(18%)	11 _(16%)	29 _(43%)	15 _(22%)	67 _(40%)
Total Quantitative Survey and Qualitative Articles Published Articles per Journal	146 _(26%) 449 _(31%)	150 _(27%) 382 _(27%)	131 _(23%) 289 _(21%)	132 _(24%) 320 _(22%)	559 _(39%) 1440

Note:

¹ *JIBS*=Journal of International Business Studies; *IBR*=International Business Review; *JWB*=Journal of World Business; *MIR*=Management International Review.

Table 2: Characteristics by Type of Cross-Language Studies 2000-2009¹

		<i>Type of cross-language studies</i>					
	Definition	<i>Type 1</i>	<i>Type 2</i>	<i>Type 3</i>	<i>Type 4</i>	<i>Not Clear</i>	
		Single non-English speaking Country	Single country, Multi-lingual population	Multiple countries, multiple languages	Multiple countries, lingua franca	Linguistic context not described	
	Examples	Sinkovics and Penz, 2009; Krivogorsky and Eichensher 2005	Fryxell et al 2004 ; Robertson et al, 2003	Thomas & Muller, 2000; Shin, 2004	Lichtenthaler, 2009; Newburry et al. 2003	Andersson et al (2001); Jindra et al (2009)	
Cross-Language Quantitative Survey Articles							
<i>Categories</i>							
	Back-Translation	n=100 (%)	n=51 (%)	n=120 (%)	n=21 (%)	n=47 (%)	Total n=334 (%)
	Mentioned	31 (31%)	21 (41%)	72 (60%)	0	0	124 (37%)
	Not Mentioned	69 (69%)	30 (59%)	48 (40%)	16	47	210 (63%)
	Reviewers						
	Mentioned	29 (29%)	11 (22%)	31 (26%)	0	1 (2%)	72 (22%)
	Not Mentioned	71 (71%)	40 (78%)	89 (74%)	16	46 (98%)	262 (78%)
	Pilot Study						
	Mentioned	31 (31%)	7 (14%)	30 (25%)	3 (19%)	8 (17%)	79 (24%)
	Not Mentioned	58 (58%)	35 (69%)	74 (62%)	13 (81%)	35 (74%)	215 (64%)
	Not Clear	11 (11%)	9 (17%)	16 (13%)	0	4 (9%)	40 (12%)
Cross-Language Qualitative Articles							
<i>Categories</i>							
	Translation/ Back- translation of the interview instrument	n=15	n=10	N=14	n=2	n=26	Total n=67
	Mentioned	0	3	1	0	0	4
	Not Mentioned	15	7	13	2	26	63
	Translation of transcripts/quotes						
	Mentioned	1	4	2	0	0	7
	Not Mentioned	14	6	12	2	26	60
	Nationality/Language Competences of the Interviewer						
	Mentioned	0	3	4	0	1	8
	Not Mentioned	15	7	10	2	25	59

Note:

¹ To enhance readability and comparability of data for statistical testing figures for 0s and 100 percent are not reported.

Table 3: Equivalence paradigm and contextualization approaches compared

Key assumption	Equivalence	Skopos	Cultural politics
Translation aim	Transfer of source text	Achievement of communicative purpose	Exposure of reader to source culture
Evaluation of translation quality	Is it faithful to the original?	Is it functionally adequate in the target culture?	Does it represent the Other?
View of meaning	Invariant	Culturally embedded	Subjective
Role of translator	Technician	Cross-cultural expert	Co-producer
Paradigmatic basis	Positivism	Hermeneutics	Poststructuralism, postcolonialism

APPENDIX: Cross-journal Comparison

Looking at the findings in Table A1, it can be seen that the reporting of translation decisions differs significantly across journals for quantitative and/or qualitative papers. Regarding quantitative papers, the studies that appear in the most highly ranked journal (*JIBS*) are more likely to raise cross-language issues. The qualitative papers that mention how they dealt with translation are more likely to be found in lower ranked journals, but this is primarily the result of the absolute number of qualitative papers that appear in these journals. Overall, it seems that quantitative papers pay more attention to language issues than qualitative papers. As shown in Table 1, Type 3 is the most common category of cross-language studies used in quantitative (120 or 36%) articles. However, the 'not clear' Type is the most applied category amongst qualitative (26 or 39%) papers in the examined period.

Table A1: Sample Characteristics of Cross-Language Studies Across Journals, 2000-2009¹

	Mean(Std.dev)	χ^2 _(df) ²	Categories	JIBS	IBR	JWB	MIR	Total
<i>Quantitative Surveys Articles</i>				N=111 (%)	n=89 (%)	n=59 (%)	n=75 (%)	N=334 (%)
Back-Translation	0.377 _(0.49)	15.17 ₍₃₎ ***	Mentioned	53 _(47.75)	26 _(29.21)	27 _(45.76)	18 _(24.00)	124 _(37.13)
			Not Mentioned	58 _(52.25)	63 _(70.79)	32 _(45.76)	57 _(76.00)	210 _(62.87)
Reviewers	0.216 _(0.41)	10.09 ₍₃₎ **	Mentioned	25 _(22.52)	14 _(15.73)	21 _(35.59)	12 _(16.00)	72 _(21.56)
			Not Mentioned	86 _(77.48)	75 _(84.27)	38 _(64.41)	63 _(84.00)	262 _(78.44)
Pilot Study	0.476 _(0.70)	15.50 ₍₃₎ **	Mentioned	24 _(21.62)	32 _(35.96)	9 _(15.25)	14 _(18.67)	79 _(23.65)
			Not Mentioned	69 _(62.16)	48 _(53.93)	42 _(71.19)	56 _(74.67)	215 _(64.37)
			Not Clear	18 _(16.22)	9 _(10.11)	8 _(13.56)	5 _(6.67)	40 _(11.98)
Types of cross-language studies ³	2.60 _(1.35)	118.82 ₍₁₂₎ ***	Type 1	9 _(8.11)	35 _(39.33)	22 _(37.29)	34 _(45.33)	100 _(29.94)
			Type 2	32 _(28.83)	7 _(7.87)	11 _(18.64)	1 _(1.33)	51 _(15.27)
			Type 3	64 _(57.66)	19 _(21.35)	22 _(37.29)	15 _(20.00)	120 _(35.93)
			Type 4	6 _(5.41)	4 _(4.49)	1 _(1.69)	5 _(6.67)	16 _(4.79)
			Not Clear	0	24 _(26.97)	3 _(5.08)	20 _(26.67)	47 _(14.07)
<i>Qualitative Articles</i>				n=12 (%)	n=11 (%)	n=29 (%)	n=15 (%)	N=67 (%)
Translation/ Back- translation of the interview instrument	0.06 _(0.24)	2.95 ₍₃₎	Mentioned	0	0	2 _(6.90)	2 _(13.33)	4 _(5.97)
			Not Mentioned	12	11	27 _(93.10)	13 _(86.67)	63 _(94.03)
Translation of transcripts/quotes	0.104 _(0.31)	2.88 ₍₃₎	Mentioned	0	1 _(9.09)	3 _(10.34)	3 _(20.00)	7 _(10.45)
			Not Mentioned	12	10 _(90.91)	26 _(89.66)	12 _(80.00)	60 _(89.55)
Nationality/Language Competences of the Interviewer	0.12 _(0.33)	4.22 ₍₃₎	Mentioned	0	1 _(9.09)	6 _(20.69)	1 _(6.67)	8 _(11.94)
			Not Mentioned	12	10 _(90.91)	23 _(79.31)	14 _(93.33)	59 _(88.06)
Types of cross-language studies	3.21 _(1.62)	13.96 ₍₃₎	Type 1	2 _(16.67)	3 _(27.27)	6 _(20.69)	4 _(26.67)	15 _(22.39)
			Type 2	1 _(8.33)	2 _(18.18)	6 _(20.69)	1 _(6.67)	10 _(14.93)
			Type 3	1 _(8.33)	2 _(18.18)	6 _(20.69)	5 _(33.33)	14 _(20.90)
			Type 4	2 _(16.67)	0	0	0	2 _(2.99)
			Not Clear	6 _(50.00)	4 _(36.36)	11 _(37.93)	5 _(33.33)	26 _(38.81)

Note:

¹To enhance readability and comparability of data for statistical testing, percentages for 0s are not reported.

²The Fisher tests were undertaken to confirm these results.

³Type 1= Single non-English speaking Country

Type 2= Single country, Multi-lingual population

Type 3= Multiple countries, multiple languages

Type 4 = Multiple countries, lingua franca

Not Clear = Linguistic context not described

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$