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# Words to think with: An introduction

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. . . my answer to the question, ‘Can an African ever learn English well enough to be able to use it effectively in creative writing?’ is certainly, ‘Yes.’ If on the other hand you ask, ‘Can he ever learn to use it like a native speaker?’ I should say, ‘I hope not.’ It is neither necessary nor desirable for him to be able to do so. The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use. (Achebe, 1965, p. 347)

In 1991 one of us, Annemarie, was riding in a lift in Chicago – where this particular *thing* is called an elevator. ‘He is going slowly’, she said. Other people looked puzzled. This wasn’t because she had breached the silence usually observed in lifts: this was a university campus and it was okay to talk to strangers.<sup>1</sup> The moot point was the *he*: in English a lift or an elevator does not have a gender: it is an *it*. This is not the case in various related languages. For instance, in French *it* is ‘*un* ascenseur’ and not ‘*une* ascenseur’ – a *he*, not a *she*, and certainly not an *it*. The confusion was settled with a friendly: ‘*Ohhhh . . . you mean the elevator!!*’ But the mismatch offers an interesting lesson. It suggests that the theoretical proposition, so strange at the time, that *things* might be *actors* was easier to invent in French than in English. In French things are more person-like than in English because they have a crucial attribute that marks persons (or does it?) – that they are *a man or a woman*.

There is further way in which French makes it easier to imagine that *things act* than English. This is that *faire* (to do/make something) and *act* (to do/accomplish something) are also different. In English *acting* is usually done from a particular place, a centre. The French *faire*, by contrast, tends to point at events that occur without a prime mover: goings-on that happen thanks, or due to, efforts distributed between the participants. For example, in English *I cook*, while in French *je fais cuire*, ‘I make cook’: my *faire* is relevant, but it is the *food* that cooks. In English cooking is *done to* passive food, while in

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French food itself is actively *doing* the cooking. It doesn't do so all by itself. I facilitate it along with the pan, the heat beneath it, and other bits and pieces. In other words, in French cooking is a process involving different elements that *invite* or *make* each other act; that *afford* each other to do what they do; or in some cases simply *allow* it. The lesson is that in French 'acting' is not a solitary affair but involves a range of f/actors which/who make each other *faire faire*: *faire cuire* (make cook); *faire bouger* (incite moving); *faire penser* (encourage thinking). *Faire faire*, indeed, translates into English in a range of different ways.<sup>2</sup> It is possible to *explain* all this in English as we have just done. But at the same time, this short account suggests another reason why *actor-network-theory* was invented in French rather than in English, and why it was easier to imagine 'actors' as 'networks', as *acteur-réseaux*, in Paris than in London or New York.<sup>3</sup> The linguistic repertoires available in French simply make it more likely that actors of all kinds, human and otherwise, might act together, forming a network in which each contributes to the *doings* of all the others. Analogous arguments can be made for other agency-decentring terms such as 'discourse', 'assemblage' or 'rhizome'.

But if French allows for ways of thinking that are a lot less obvious in English, this raises a larger question. Might there not be further interesting words and ways of wording lying dormant in other languages? Dormant, that is, from the perspective of academic writing done in English. And such is the question that animates the present monograph edition of *The Sociological Review: what kinds of intellectual inspiration might we find in 'non-English' linguistic repertoires?* This is an urgent question. For here is the problem: when 'international' academic conversations restrict themselves to using the intellectual tools available in English, they become limited and parochial. To say this is not to say that the horizons of monolingual academic work are necessarily *national*: English is first language in many countries. Neither is it to suggest that they are *univocal*: the coexistence of *lift* and *elevator* reminds us that 'English' is itself diverse. But even so, academic conversations become limited and parochial because to work in English alone is to forgo the verbal richness afforded by moving between languages and working *inter-linguistically*.

For instance, in English a person is, by tradition, either a 'man' or a 'woman', but until recently 'man' was also a generic term that encompassed 'woman' and hid her from view. Feminist critique has interfered with this, which shows that with enough effort linguistic repertoires may be transformed. But Dutch would have made the task easier. For while it is no less sexist overall, it offers a helpful third term. Alongside *man* (man) and *vrouw* (woman), the Dutch harbours the term *mens* – human being. There is no *man-kind* in Dutch, instead there is *mensheid*. Things are not *man-made*, but *door mensenhanden gemaakt*, made by the hands of *mensen*. The word *mensen* is a linguistic gem in that it helps to avoid subsuming *women* to *men*. This term also offers speakers of Dutch an easy way of avoiding the obligation of specifying whether a particular person is a *man* or a *woman*: a *mens* is not marked first and foremost by his/her – their – gender.<sup>4</sup> Other languages take this a step further. Rather than offering ways of escaping from binary gender categorisation, they avoid it altogether. They typecast people in other ways, for instance by age, occupation, or wealth. Indeed, one ends up asking what is so interesting about gender. Oyèwùní tells us that before Yoruba was infiltrated by English terminology (she calls this 'Western') it did not even have words for *man* and *woman*.<sup>5</sup>

Different languages, then, are concerned with *gender* to differing degrees. At the same time, *gender* itself is a term that deserves attention. In the 1960s and 1970s, English-language academic work painstakingly distinguished *gender* from *sex*. This made it possible to disentangle the social and the biological differences between *men* and *women*. The former could not be explained by the latter, but had historical, social and cultural roots.<sup>6</sup> By now this claim is a commonplace. But the dominance of English in the social sciences means that along with this the term ‘gender’ has travelled into other languages and squeezed alternative linguistic possibilities. Take, for instance, the French expression, *rapport de sexe*: this foregrounds neither the supposed characteristics of individuals nor their supposed identities, but instead stresses the way in which people who have been slotted into one or other of two sexes are made to *relate*.<sup>7</sup> Or take the German *Geschlecht* and the Dutch *geslacht*: neither separates the biological from the social. This means that while the terms *Geschlecht* and *geslacht* allowed scholars to engage in historical, social and cultural investigations of masculinity and femininity, they also, early on, encouraged them to investigate how biological disciplines such as anatomy, endocrinology, genetics and physiology enact ‘sex’ in different ways.<sup>8</sup>

So this is the tension. As they attune to *international* discussions scholars working in other languages import English terms that do useful work in the context of particular debates. However, this means that the potential intellectual value of the words of their own languages is at risk of disappearing, and it is this disappearance that concerns us here.<sup>9</sup> In this monograph we do not address this by analysing the effects of English on whatever it risks eroding. Instead, we foreground the possible value for English of importing some of the intellectual resources embedded in other tongues. Our question is how, when, and where *other terms* might enrich academic texts written in English. This in turn raises a series of further questions. For instance, is it possible to simply import *words* and *ways of wording* into the ‘imperialist tongue’, or do vested academic interests and conventions prevent this? Do particular ways of understanding ‘language’, ‘theory’, ‘analysis’ and ‘discussion’ set limits to what can be said and done in (English-language) academic writing? And if so, how might these understandings be adapted and tweaked? And if importing additional linguistic resources into English is indeed possible, then what is actually worthwhile importing? What kinds of lessons might ‘English’ usefully learn?

We do not address these questions in general. Instead, each of the contributions to this monograph explores what it takes and what it adds to think in *other terms* by presenting a detailed analysis of a case: a specific ‘foreign’ word and some of the practices in which it figures. In the last section of this introduction, we briefly present those cases. But first we make two short detours. We start by offering a rough sketch of the institutional arrangements within which English functions as an academic superpower. Then we reflect on how best to frame our concerns about the erosion of multi-linguistic intellectual life and the promise of enriching English with *other terms*.

## Submitting

A classic way of contributing to the ‘international’ academic literature is to *submit* an article to an English-language journal. The term is telling: for as they *submit*, would-be

authors are bowing to the authority of a journal. Its editors and referees judge whether the subject-matter of the submission is relevant, its argument properly made, its empirical grounding solid, its references well chosen, its originality sufficient – or whatever other criteria they take to be important. Alongside the judgement of the text as a whole, individual sentences are also judged. These should be *well-phrased*. Neither too long nor too short, nor should they be too abstract or informal. There should not be so much jargon that reading becomes an ordeal, but still enough to mark a text out as academic rather than a piece of journalism. And, of course, the text should be written in *proper* English. *Received* English. Depending on where the journal is based, this may be British or American English. Inflections which reflect how people speak in New Zealand, South Africa, India or any of the many other *Englishes* are unlikely to be welcome. And it is not just editors and referees who keep authors in check. So, too, do software spellchecks. On the screen as we draft this text, Microsoft Word (set to ‘English [United Kingdom]’) underlines the word ‘Englishes’ with a red wavy line: the plural is being marked as *wrong*.<sup>10</sup> And the price for those who would want to avoid linguistic submission tends to be high, as there are structural feedback loops in place. ‘International’ (that is English-language) journals and their ISI or ISCI scores are central to many systems of research assessment. This leads to a straightforward conclusion: publish in English or perish.<sup>11</sup>

The homogenisation that goes into academic submission echoes the consolidation of national languages that took place in many nation-states from the late eighteenth century onwards. Out of all the linguistic variants that were – and to some extent still are – in use within national borders, just one was elevated above the rest and crowned as the official national language. In the process, the others were downgraded to the lowly status of *subsidiary languages*, or to the even lower one of *dialects*. The specificities differed between countries, but the linguistic standardisation of France became the exemplary case of *normalisation*.<sup>12</sup> Committees of experts in Paris were given the task of consolidating *the French language*. They set the norm. People brought up to speak Breton were not forced to submit to this norm, but because French became the working language for such ‘national’ endeavours as parliaments, schools, universities and newspapers, holding on to Breton meant being silenced, excluded, left without a voice. The norm was not imposed as a formal rule, but following it allowed a person to achieve much more in public life. In different variants, national languages established themselves in most other countries of Europe and pressed other languages or dialects to the periphery.<sup>13</sup> Sometimes this was not a matter of normalisation alone, but took more forceful, regulatory shapes. For instance, in Scandinavia Sámi languages were ruled out and state languages harshly imposed: children were sanctioned if they spoke in the school playground as they did at home. Elsewhere, more subtle pressures led to similar effects: John’s grandfather spoke a version of Lowland Scots until shamed into giving this up as a young man. Europeans also imposed their national languages on the people in their colonies, and after independence many former colonies went on to adopt a single national language.<sup>14</sup> In others it remained common practice to shift between four or five languages in daily life – a customary skill in large parts of the world. Nevertheless, most *states* are monolingual, or work with two languages at most.

Similar mechanisms are now at work on a global scale: a single language, English, has come to dominate in many ‘international’ settings including air traffic control, software

development, multinational corporations and international organisations, from the World Health Organization to the European Central Bank. And the same is true for science. The natural sciences were there first: *Nature* and *Science* – and many more journals – appear in English. In the social sciences there is somewhat more linguistic variation with lively discussions and excellent journals and book series in fields such as sociology, social anthropology and ethnology in French and German. Even so, texts written in French or German do not move as easily as their English equivalents. Yes, French travels to Senegal and other former francophone colonies; or to universities in Brazil or Mexico; or to departments of Romance Language Studies in the US.<sup>15</sup> German, in its turn, is read in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, and by a diminishing number of people further afield for whom it is a second or third language. But the dominant language travels a good deal more easily and in many places English has become the *sine qua non* for an academic career. In most of the academic world a reading knowledge of English is essential and writing in English is often obligatory as well. Translations are few and far between – waiting to be translated is likely to take forever.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, one's ideas may have been attributed to an author who has written about them in English.<sup>17</sup> Hence, publishing directly in English comes to be an asset. For a university post in the Netherlands it is by now obligatory and in the Scandinavian countries this tends to be the case as well. In Taiwan or Japan, 'international' publications also help. There are (still?) exceptions to this English rule. In South America most university students and their teachers work and write in Spanish or Portuguese. And, although the industry of 'Chinese English'-into-'English English' editing is huge, large numbers of Chinese scholars get by very well without English, too. That said, the level of normalisation is impressive. In 2005, three quarters of the social science papers that were published globally appeared in English, distantly followed by German and French (around 7% each), while no other language scored more than 2%. Japanese, with more than 8% in 1945, had fallen off the chart.<sup>18</sup>

English, then, has come to stand for *international*. But as Ammon (2012, p. 342) observes: 'English is just not a real lingua franca in the sense of being a non-native language for all its users as was Medieval Latin, but an asymmetric global language, whose advantages are unequally distributed.' For (this is obvious but often gets forgotten by monolingual speakers) those who learned English when they were young need a lot less *effort* to read and write in that language – *their* language – than those who did not. This effort is not equally distributed. For those who have been growing up with Norwegian or Dutch, English is less alien than for those whose first tongue is Hungarian or Vietnamese. But, in one way or another, the task of crafting texts in a language that one does not live in day-by-day forms a substantial overhead for all those who have to do this. It takes added effort, it means making mistakes, and it means being put right. It also means never being sure: only a few people get to really *master* what to them is at first a foreign tongue. To compensate for lack of mastery, you may ask for editorial assistance. But for this you need financial resources or friends who are willing to help. And such support only goes so far: editors cannot sharpen a point that you were unable to articulate in the first place. Nor can they compensate for your failure to be in-the-know if you have not read up on what is currently *hot* in the places from where the journals issue forth. Academic fashions change pretty fast!<sup>19</sup> And then, last but not least, there are obdurate linguistic mismatches. What you hope to say may be alien to English. If it is then you

face the question as to what to squeeze, what to transform, what to betray, and what to hold on to.<sup>20</sup> That is, you face matters to do with *content*, and it is these that lie at the heart of the present volume. But in which terms to address them? For – this much is obvious by now – terms always carry intellectual baggage; they do *work* of one kind or another. And this is why we do not rush to outline our concerns but instead approach them in a roundabout way. So in what follows, we briefly present four English-language expressions that are simultaneously helpful and frustrating. Difficult to avoid, they also carry intellectual baggage that we would like to leave behind. These notions that both express and distort our concerns are: *language*, *translation*, *equivocation* and *(non-) native speaker*.

## Framing the issues

It makes sense to say that to write academic texts in English is to make use of the possibilities but also to hit up against the limits of a particular *language*. It is also useful to say that alternative intellectual tropes are embedded in other *languages* such as French or Mandarin. However, the term ‘language’ also suggests that *words* and *ways of wording* can be categorised and organised into distinct and separate slots, but there are good reasons for resisting this idea. One is that it arose along with the nation-state agendas of normalisation that we have described above. To use the term *language* is, at least implicitly, to reproduce the divide between a dominant national language and subordinate regional languages and dialects. A further problem is that *languages*, like the nation-states that they serve, all too easily seem to have distinct boundaries that clearly demarcate them from other languages. The implication is that fluidities within and overlaps between different ways of speaking are marginalised (as, for instance, with the gradients between the ‘dialects’ of ‘German’ spoken along the Rhine, all the way from Switzerland, via various *Länder* in Germany, to the mouth of the river in the Netherlands).<sup>21</sup> In addition, and this is what is most important in the present context, to talk of *language* is to imply that it is possible to disentangle how people talk (or sign or write) from the *practices* in which they do so. It is to suggest that vocabularies and grammars (or signs and syntax) lead lives of their own on a plane removed from their mundane incarnations.<sup>22</sup>

So the word *language* is useful because it underscores the fact that the ingredients that allow a person to speak (or sign or write) are not invented then and there but precede any particular utterance. It reminds us that relating to others in verbal ways depends on shared linguistic repertoires. However, there is a lurking risk that ‘language’ is taken to coincide with the words in dictionaries and the syntax found in grammar textbooks, while the irregular specificities of words-being-used-in-practice are treated as mere idiosyncrasies. Indeed, the discipline of linguistics was crafted on the distinction between what De Saussure (1960) called *langue* (language, linguistic system), a relatively stable object amenable to scientific research, and *parole* (word, linguistic utterance), day-to-day parlance too elusive to be caught in schematic overviews. If we were obliged to accept this divide, we would say that this monograph is about ‘parole’. However, in conformity with recent movements in linguistics, we prefer to avoid the distinction altogether.<sup>23</sup> Why should scientific enquiries restrict themselves to the study of stable objects? They might just as well attend to phenomena that are situated, specific or idiosyncratic.<sup>24</sup> And as social

scientists we have a further reason for leaving the *langue/parole* division behind. Our primary concern is not with words ‘themselves’ but with what linguistic repertoires *do* and *facilitate* in the worlds around them. This is why the authors gathered together in this monograph work ethnographically. Our focus is on situated practices populated by diverse f/actors, including words and ways of wording, which are all shaped by and help to shape events as they unfold.<sup>25</sup>

Once again, it is possible to say all this in English. However, other linguistic traditions may offer alternative sources of inspiration. For interestingly, not all such traditions have a word for ‘language’. Ariel Heryanto (2007) explores this for the case of Indonesia. Here many ‘languages’ were spoken but the word *language* – or rather the word *taal*, which has similar abstracting propensities – was introduced to the archipelago by the Dutch. The colonial administration worked in Dutch, and for interaction with the colonised mostly used another *taal* – a trade language called *Maleis* (‘Malay’ in English). When Indonesia liberated itself from colonial rule in the late 1940s, it elevated *Maleis*, with necessary adaptations, to the status of its national language, calling it *bahasa Indonesia* (the ‘Indonesian language’). As *Maleis* had no word for *taal*, the term *bahasa* was imported from Javanese to fulfil this nation-building task. In Javanese, however, *bahasa* had never been used for anything like an abstracted ‘language’. Instead this word alluded to a wide range of polite and cultivated ways of *doing* which included *speaking properly*. And this earlier incarnation of the term intrigues us. For yes, it was part of the celebration of Javanese high culture, but interestingly it also took *talk* to be an integral part of *practice*.

Our argument, then, is that if we frame the dominance of English by talking of the power of the ‘English language’ we are casting our concerns in a particular *English* intellectual mould. While this mould is not confined to English (think *langue* and *taal* and the present-day meaning of *bahasa*), it still awkwardly suggests that signs and syntax can be disentangled from practices in a meaningful way. This separation fits the project of nation-building. It makes sense in settings where a dead ‘language’ such as Latin, shorn of present-day extra-textual practices, is taught and translated. It also facilitates the comparative study of ‘languages’. But for our purposes, the term is a mixed blessing. Yes, the term ‘language’ is a useful and sometimes unavoidable shortcut for those who want to explore the added richness of *inter-linguistic* social sciences. But the point of such an exploration is not to learn about ‘languages’. It is instead to better attune to wider realities of which ‘languages’ are just a part. To the worlds, the practices in which the social, the material and the semiotic intertwine.

A second term that is both useful and problematic is *translation*, a contested focus across a whole range of disciplines.<sup>26</sup> The texts in this monograph often use this term when they allude to inter-linguistic travel. This makes it possible to say that the Dutch word ‘lekker’ *translates* into English as ‘tasty’ – or, depending on circumstances, as ‘nice’ or ‘good’ or ‘delicious’.<sup>27</sup> It also helps with the detection of the *mistranslations* and *untranslatables* that form the focal point of the contributions to this monograph. For translators, words that are difficult to *translate* tend to take the form of obstacles in need of taming.<sup>28</sup> By contrast, in this monograph we use such frictions as sources of inspiration.<sup>29</sup> Terms such as *translation*, *mistranslation* and *untranslatable* help to underscore this, but at the same time carry awkward agendas. For instance, they imply

that what is at stake is the interplay between ‘languages’, and that the challenge (impossible to meet) is to replace the elements of one linguistic system with those of another. As a part of this, as we just rehearsed, they disentangle what is being said in the realities studied from what is being done. But there is more. Translating ‘words’ also detaches texts from their contexts. And this is a problem because texts are never simply about the concern they address or the object to which they may be referring. They are also located in a particular place and time: they are linguistically, geographically and historically situated. And in academia they are located within disciplinary debates and, whether explicitly or not, are in conversation with a corpus of work written by others. This means that however adroitly words and sentences are translated, their original contexts are lost, left behind. After translation texts arrive in another set of debates, and in a different historical moment.

In the social sciences, for instance, the French texts that became influential in the social sciences beyond France in the 1970s and 1980s may have been *about* the subject, discourse, habitus, or actor-networks, but they were at the same time a response *to* other authors who were mostly active in Paris. When Foucault wrote he was revolting against Sartre. When Bourdieu wrote he was in the business of disproving Foucault. When Latour wrote he was fighting Bourdieu. But when these authors were translated from French into German, their texts entered another arena. They were made to support, attack or otherwise relate to the work of scholars such as Habermas, Luhmann, or Beck and they were made to respond to academic concerns quite unlike those that had originally inspired them in France.<sup>30</sup> And the same was true when the French was translated into English. The Foucault of the US was never quite the same as the Foucault of the UK, and in neither case were these the Foucault that circulated in French. But, and this is crucial: *none of this was Foucault’s own problem*. Give or take a few lectures in Berkeley, Foucault worked in France. He wrote in French. To a large extent he was able to focus on the audience that attended his weekly lectures in the *Collège de France*. And while his translators may have struggled with the connotations crucial terms might have for their new audiences, they also had an original French text to work with. It was their primary task to minimise its betrayals.<sup>31</sup>

The situation is quite different for authors who write in English whilst otherwise living in another tongue. Here, there is no ‘original’ to which one might try to be faithful. Rather than starting off in (say) Danish, they are writing directly in English from the beginning. Hence, the term *translation* does not really catch what is at stake. Instead, in order to get published such authors need to engage with debates conducted in English rather than in their own tongue. Indeed, in the Scandinavian countries or the Netherlands where much academic work is done in English, ‘local’ debates have been seriously eroded. The socio-material conditions on which they used to depend – journals, publishers, classes in which texts in the local language are read – have dwindled or, in some cases, disappeared. Writing in English, then, is not so much a matter of *translating* terms but of *attuning* from the outset to English terms. And this is not just a linguistic issue because to be publishable texts also need to align with current, English-language debates. This means that if a ‘foreign’ author seeks to convey something difficult to express in English terms, the question is not simply how to *translate* her own terms. It is also how to convince others – readers, editors, reviewers, publishers – of the *pertinence* of those

concerns. If concerns are not already being addressed in English-language social science, it tends to be difficult to get them across.

This is an issue with many layers, because articulating and demonstrating the pertinence of what is written does not begin with the writing itself, but much earlier. This means that it does not just hinge on linguistic skills but also on whether it is possible to secure the financial and institutional support necessary to do research in the first place. This task, however, is again linguistically biased, for often grant applications have to be written in English so that they are amenable to 'international' peer review, while, as we noted above, the quality of one's earlier work is bound to be judged with the use of (English-language oriented) ISI or ISI metrics. Overall, then, being 'international' rests on being able to craft and sustain arguments that, somehow or other, speak to English-language academic colleagues. This means that the concern that we seek to address in this monograph is not just, or not even necessarily, about gaps between *languages* and the limits of *translation*. It is also that all kinds of *issues* or *concerns* that present themselves to academics for whom English is a second or third language simply fall outside of the scope of 'international' academic life. In this monograph we do not offer institutional solutions to this problem. However, the authors assembled here do provide contributions that are pertinent in a range of different ways. They demonstrate that intellectually speaking there is much to be gained from opening up conferences, journals, book series, grant-giving bodies and university curricula to issues that have salience in *other terms* even if they do not immediately fit with *English* agendas.

The third term that is both problematic and relevant to our concerns is *equivocation*. This term is central to a particular way of doing anthropology that does not hunt for what human beings have in common, but instead explores differences between the realities they live with. Differences, one might say, that are simultaneously social, cultural, material and linguistic and that, as they are all-encompassing, may be called ontological.<sup>32</sup> *Equivocation*, then, is a term for talking about gaps and clashes between *words* that belong to different *worlds*. Usually the focus is on the equivocation between the words/worlds of Western-language anthropologists on the one hand, and the indigenous subjects described in their anthropological studies on the other. The argument is that *we* anthropologists should not squeeze *their* realities into *our* grids but hold back in our attempts at translation. Instead, it is more respectful, informative and worthwhile to attend to the gaps and the clashes. Bracketing off and suspending *our* common sense makes it possible, at least to some extent, to get a sense of *their* reality, their ontology. If we can manage this, it will lead to surprises that give *us* cause for thought; and at the same time it will make us modest when it comes to claiming authority over or about *them*. In short, the argument is that rather than being downplayed, equivocations should be foregrounded. Rather than being ignored, they should be controlled and cared for.<sup>33</sup>

Unsurprisingly, this insistence on the otherness of *other terms* is a source of inspiration for many of the contributors to this monograph edition. They do not rush to translate their terms, but attentively explore the relevant *equivocations*. However, once again this is a term that has its limits. This is because, as we have seen, it was designed for a context in which academics, *we*, write about the practices of other people, *them*, and seek to respect the differences between *their* realities and *ours*. This is the situation in which many anthropologists find themselves, but it is not where we start out here. Yes, the

contributors to this monograph have done fieldwork in languages other than English – in Hungarian, Chinese, Dutch, Russian, Japanese, Spanish, Arabic, Brazilian Portuguese, Sámi – and yes, they write about that fieldwork in English. But while in a few cases one co-author has English as a first tongue, for most it is their second or third. This means that our authors are not a comfortable part of *us*, but since they write in English, neither are they simply *them*. Here *we* are also *them* working hard to *pass* as *we*. This double position is crucial for it shifts the locus of equivocation. Instead of grappling with the gaps between *them* and *us*, *they/we* are being torn from within. The implication is that authors may need to erase a part of their own *otherness* – even in the present volume.<sup>34</sup> This predicament may hurt, indeed it often does, but it also has its rewards. If these tensions are accepted, explored and celebrated, if they are controlled and cared for, they become occasions for learning.<sup>35</sup> For when *their* terms may be used by *us*, this means that ‘other terms’ shift in status. From figurations being analysed, they become tools that allow for analysis. From topics of investigation, they become instruments that help investigation. No longer confined to ‘the field’ they also become part of ‘method’.<sup>36</sup>

So *language*, *translation* and *equivocation* all help to outline the concern that this monograph seeks to address, but none of them quite fits. Here is another try. Our argument might be that while *native speakers* have the advantage of child-learned English, *non-native speakers* are able to draw interesting lessons from their first language. Is this a good way of putting it? Interestingly, in the expression *native speaker of English* the term *native* has shifted. It no longer designates people living in places invaded by European explorers, and neither does it carry pejorative undertones. But *native* still evokes natality and therefore suggests that people are *born* with and have ‘innate access’ to their language.<sup>37</sup> Hence, people for whom English is their *native language* seem to have – and often claim – special authority over this language as if this came to them by birthright. This authority is linked to the projects of nationalism we touched on above.<sup>38</sup> It also assumes that English is internally consistent and coherent rather than a shifting babble of creative acts of speaking, signing and writing.<sup>39</sup> But if English is the language in which ‘international’ academic life is to be conducted, then these assumptions all need to be undone. Authority over this language – or rather this set of ‘languages’ – cannot remain in the hands of those who happened to learn to talk in one of its versions when they were children. Others may also speak *in* it. Just as important, they may also speak *about* it. *They may add to it and interfere with it*. Such is Chinua Achebe’s point in the epigraph with which we started this Introduction for the related issue of English in novels.<sup>40</sup>

Yes, the absorption of *other terms* into the imperialist language carries dangers. It may lead to imperialist appropriation. In the history of English this has often happened – think, for instance of how academics writing in English ran away with the Maori term *hau*.<sup>41</sup> But the best remedy against this, or it seems to us, is not purification. We do not suggest that languages should close themselves off in their own nativist corners. Instead, those concerned should have the confidence to speak up and call out when their/our words are being abused. Which depends on them/us being granted a say – in English. And on offering a warm welcome to *other terms*. To words and ways of wording that allow the articulation of events not so easily said and done in English. For the *voicing* of concerns that might otherwise elude *our* attention.

## On other terms

Like its articles, the title of this monograph is in English. But if we try to translate ‘On Other Terms’ into the other languages of our authors the phrase rapidly becomes multi-valent. So as a first brief exemplification of what can be learned by attending to what transforms in translation, we start the volume with a collectively written note. It presents the stories behind the multi-lingual title variants printed on the cover.

What the other texts in this publication have in common is that they introduce one or more non-English words that help them to address pertinent issues, related to current events or concerns.<sup>42</sup> Hence, you may read these texts in two ways. Each explores some aspect or other of what it takes to make space for multi-linguistic academic writing. But each also talks about a particular extra-textual concern that their non-English words of choice readily articulate. Hence, they are concerned with the *saudade* of migrants or wayfarers; the possibility of *búskomor* politics beyond optimism; the *raza* of prize bulls and modest cows – and so on. You may not yet know what these words stand for or evoke – but that is the whole point. Reading on will satisfy your curiosity. Below, for a first sense and overview, are some introductions. They follow the order in which the chapters appear. There is no grand theoretical rationale for this order. Instead, we have carefully crafted a juxtaposition of texts in which each colours those that follow and feeds back into those that preceded it. We start with a text which will warm you to our topic. And we end with one which warns against a romantic trust in *other terms*. And in between these, you find explorations of terms to do with landscapes, common property, balancing, politics, cattle, cleaning, knowing and burning. Burning indeed.

Bruno Magalhães is concerned with those who cross borders – and in particular the border between Venezuela and Brazil – and with the Brazilian-Portuguese term *saudade*. This term evokes sadness and missing. Border crossers may miss their home, their family and friends, their schooling. But sometimes, and crucially, *saudade* is not about missing anything in particular, but just about missing, overall. This vagueness is used by those on the move to shield themselves from power and its abuses and to make space for their wandering hopes. Against this background, Magalhães muses on the bias towards conceptual precision that runs through both policymaking and academic social science. Each wants to pin things down. Are people who cross the border ‘migrants’ or ‘refugees’? And where do they want to settle themselves? In this place or that? Siding with people who wander, Magalhães offers an impassioned defence of imprecision and of vagueness. (English-language) social science, he says, would do well to foster multiple and messy arts of living, rather than trying to collapse the world into fixed categories.

Solveig Joks, Liv Østmo and John Law are also invested in fluid ways of knowing, this time in the context of colonial struggles about landscape terms and practices in northern Scandinavia. The indigenous Sámi term *meahcit* points to practical and productive taskscapes (Ingold’s term) for hunting, fishing, or gathering berries. *Meahcit* take the form of uncertain and unfolding relations between lively and morally sensible human and non-human beings; they do not divide between nature and culture. But *meahcci* (the singular of *meahcit*) is mistranslated by the dominant colonial states as (terms close to) ‘wilderness’, reflecting an agricultural logic that puts wildernesses in contrast to land that is ‘cultivated’. The relationality lost along the way also emerges in the relatively

verb-oriented character of the (North) Sámi language. And it speaks from the material character of Sámi knowing, which is less about centring knowledge in documents and rooms, and more about talk unfolding in practical settings. The authors argue that Sámi ways of talking and living lands and relations offer a resource for an English-language social science that is itself struggling to articulate situated and relational ways of knowing.

Liubov Chernysheva and Olga Sezneva are concerned about ‘the commons’. Or rather, they are concerned with things held in common that in English-language social science are called ‘commons’. But is this term, with its specific English history, always adequate? Among its alternatives is the Russian word *общее*, *obshcheye*, that grows out of quite different realities. To exemplify these, Chernysheva and Sezneva take us to several forms of ‘communal’ housing in post-Soviet St. Petersburg. There, they describe different ways of sharing spaces such as corridors and kitchens. Sometimes positively appreciated, sometimes leading to fierce disputes, *obshcheye* takes different material forms in different circumstances. The term is also related in varied ways to other terms for things communal which may be either negative or positive depending on the circumstances. In short, *obshcheye* is a term in tension. In a conclusion not unlike that of Magalhães, the authors ask: how important is it to seek coherence in academic linguistic repertoires? Non-coherence may well be more true, subtle and versatile.

Wen yuan Lin seeks to move beyond the limits of English language social science critique. He starts out with the paradox that if we critique critique, we remain within the existing war-like structure of academic criticism. So how to escape this logic of antagonism? Lin takes us to a Taiwanese practitioner of Chinese medicine, Dr Hsu, who successfully intervened in the SARS epidemic. Dr Hsu did not fight the virus, but sought to restore imbalances in the flows of energy in and through the body reflected in SARS. As a part of this he sought to determine *shi* (shì, 勢), a term evoking propensity to change. Working with each particular body’s *shi* allowed Dr Hsu to nudge the flows of energy in that body back into balance. Similarly, rather than attacking Western forms of biomedical reasoning he sought to rebalance the relations between these and Chinese medicine by publishing statistically valid papers in English-language biomedical journals. Taking these lessons on board, Lin suggests that *shi*-inflected reasoning might also help to rework disturbing imbalances in the social sciences. It could move these away from their English domination and preoccupation with antagonistic versions of critique.

Endre Dányi’s article is a meditation on how to respond intellectually and politically to the erosion of liberal democratic politics, and like Lin, is a reflection on the limits of critique. When the institutions of liberal democracy were working, they harboured internal differences which suggested the possibility of positive transformations. This allowed scholars to infuse their analysis with pragmatist optimism. But when populism takes over and parliamentary institutions are eroded, as has happened in Hungary, this no longer works. Seeking a way out, Dányi explores a novel, a film and an exhibition that exemplify *búskomorság*. Like ‘melancholy’ this word alludes to a mood that is sad and sombre. But while melancholy is a personal affliction, *búskomorság* is collective and political. It is about recognising the hopelessness of the situation and yet not despairing. It is about acknowledging that things are in ruins and yet carrying on. Allowing for a fragmented form of critique, *búskomor* politics is a politics of working in the cracks.

Marisol de la Cadena and Santiago Martínez Medina write about cow-making practices and words on farms and in cattle markets in Colombia. *Res* is (something like) an unremarkable ‘common bovine’ (the English plural might be ‘cattle’) fit for milking or the slaughterhouse. Its parents’ pedigree – and that is stretching the word – is most likely known only by its owner. An *ejemplar*, by contrast, exemplifies a breed with a long, written pedigree detailing its genealogy. Both have *raza*, but for an *ejemplar*, *raza* can be translated as ‘breed’, while the *raza* of *res* is a shifting label to describe cows that are ‘mixed’ in ways that differ from one context to the next. A ‘breed’ is a cow or bull backed up by sufficient documentation. Hence, while all *animales tienen raza*, not all have breed. What makes the translation of *raza* really tricky is that this word applies not just to animals but also to people. The dislocation is stark: English does not talk of ‘breeds’ of people, and biologists have officially given up on human ‘races’. One of the issues that this mismatch throws into relief is that in much of Latin America ‘race’ has less to do with fixed attributes like skin colour (elites may be white locally, and their skin may look ‘brown’ to Euro-American eyes) than with documented lineage or the paperwork of university degrees.

Annemarie Mol underscores the way that words have resonances that elude translation. Since she studies *schoon* in the Netherlands she writes about *clean* in English. But what to do, she wonders, with the way *schoon* is marked by ironic commentary in Dutch popular culture? And how to bring one’s field sites to life in English without first learning what particular words mean for English-language audiences by doing similar fieldwork in English – but then again in how many versions of English should that be? It is far from obvious how to make ethnography work if author and readers do not find similar things remarkable and take similar things for granted. Mol goes on to claim that theories to do with *clean* – notably the anthropological mantra that ‘dirt is matter out of place’ – are informed by the English language. In Dutch this idea would never have arisen, as *vies*, the most prominent antonym of *schoon*, is never spatial but always visceral. And while *schoon* may have to do with hygiene, or have moral overtones, quite like the French *propre*, it has also an aesthetic ring to it, that sounds even stronger in the German *schön*. This leads Mol to wonder if rather than striving after the purification of their conceptual apparatus, academics might not care more about making this *schoon* in the sense of beautiful.

Lili Lai and Judith Farquhar challenge Western epistemology by presenting three ethnographic moments in the practice of Chinese minority medicines. The herbalists they follow work with knowledge of local herbs and their preparation; but also of diet; and of both living family and ancestors. But they insist that there is much they do not know. In this context, the authors meditate on the Chinese term *zhi*, 知, and discard its usual translation as ‘knowledge’ in favour of ‘knowing’. They do this because Western ‘knowledge’ is infused with dreams of domination, while in the *zhi* of the herbalists ‘knowing’ and ‘not knowing’ are woven into ethical but uncertain processes in which practitioners cultivate the self in order to come near to things. These ‘things’ are not external objects waiting to be known, but contexted and emergent manifestations or expressions of patterning, *li* 理, running simultaneously through the practitioner and the world. The term *li* is often but unhelpfully translated as ‘principle’, but ‘texture’ makes more sense – *li* also translates as ‘grain’ as in the grain of wood. This does not exist in and of itself, but

expresses itself, momentarily, in situated practices, where not-knowing is as important as knowing. The authors' final message is that if social science were to work in this way then other worlds would await it.

Amade M'charek takes us to what many Europeans might think of as 'irregular' or 'undocumented' migrants. She does this by travelling to southern Tunisia, and to the Arabic term *harraga* (الحرافة). A literal translation into English would be 'those who burn'. The metaphorical translation 'undocumented migrants' misses the point because *harraga* is not a group of people but the *activity* of moving out of the Maghreb in defiance of rules and regulations. It is about *burning borders*, traversing them, while keeping links to the people and places from where one came. Those who engage in *harraga* are crafting connections to *expand* the spaces in which they live. As M'charek explores these connections, she draws out the colonial and postcolonial links between southern Tunisia and France. So, for instance, it is trivially easy for salt, extracted under exploitative conditions, to move across the Mediterranean. Doctors and IT experts are also welcome in Europe. But not so those who lack the appropriate diplomas: the EU expects the Tunisian authorities to police the boundaries and stop travellers short. All of which reverberates in an artwork by Mohsen Lihidheb, an artist who resists *harraga* because it is an expression of neo-colonial relations that drain Tunisia and erode it.

Like the rest of us, Shiaki Kondo and Heather Swanson are concerned with the narrowing of English-language social science, but they also warn that non-English words may carry unwelcome political baggage. The Japanese 鮭鱒論 (*sake masu ron*, or 'salmon trout theory') is a case in point. It arose in Japanese anthropology to understand how people in the North of Japan (including the indigenous Ainu of Hokkaido) but also people on the North American Pacific coast interacted materially and spiritually with salmon. This was contrasted with the growing of rice in Southern Japan that was more precarious, and therefore praised as more artful, more generative of creativity – and altogether more 'Japanese'. Kondo and Swanson therefore warn against the colonial and racist stains that were built into *sake masu ron*. At the same time they do not want to simply discard the term. Instead, they wonder how to salvage it as a potentially good phrase for thinking of regions that are not so much given by spatial proximity, but rather emerge from environmentally facilitated multispecies ways of living. This, then, is their question: how to import promising terms into English without losing sight of their complex and often problematic origins?

The spectrum of terms and topics assembled here is wide, but at the same time these are just a few examples. Once the doors to *other terms* are opened, many more will follow. Sceptics may complain that this will turn social science into a *cacophony*. But such are the fears of those who stand to lose their privileges; privileges, in this case, to do with the reality that *their* terms rule. In a wider sense, there is no need to worry that all meaning will be drowned in an excess of words: authors will continue to attune their text to their readers. They don't, after all, want their message to be lost in the noise. What will change, however, is the timbre or the tone of how we coordinate and relate to one another; the rules of the academic game will start to shift. As a number of our authors indicate, moving between linguistic repertoires means giving up on the idea that *words to think with* should be stabilised into univocal *concepts* – whether or not the language is English. For solid concepts may seem to promise reassurance, but their apparent clarity is as

misleading as it is stifling. How to best engage in a wider, less provincial conversation? Instead of avoiding multivocality, we might want to seek out terms that offer intellectual inspiration or suggest evocative forms of resistance. Instead of seeking to define our words, we might do better to exemplify them. But if we do this then we will need to explore words in practice; in their material-semiotic networks, discourses, assemblages or rhizomes. And instead of translating everything that is foreign into English, we might give some space to *other terms*, so that they are able to say, name, and evoke what they *hope* to say, name, or evoke. This is the quest of the contributions to this volume. Taken together, they seek to encourage and contribute to a new kind of ‘international’.

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## Notes

1. For an analysis that uses lifts as a case for how people manage to shun others, see Hirschauer (2005).
2. For discussion of *faire faire* we thank Antoine Hennion; and for a further linguistic analysis see Kokutani (2005, p. 209).
3. Even though it was very quickly translated into English. See Callon (1986). And for early discussion of the misunderstandings that arose from this translation see the contributions to *Actor Network Theory and After* (Law & Hassard, 1999).
4. This also means that while transsexuality is possible in English – a man may become a woman or vice versa – intersexuality runs up hard against the assumptions embedded in the English language. See Hirschauer (2017).
5. Oyèwùmí (1997). For a range of rich and detailed analyses of how languages ‘do’ gender, see the contributions to Hellinger and Motschenbacher (2015).
6. See, for instance, Haraway (1989).
7. Descarries (2014).
8. Hirschauer and Mol (1995) and Mol (2015).
9. This loss is a specific example of a more general phenomenon in which ‘small languages’ are shaped and arguably impoverished in interaction with their larger neighbours. See, for instance, Asad (1986, p. 158), who argues that Arabic became more like European languages in the nineteenth century, and Joks, Østmo and Law in the present volume for examples of how Sámi has been shaped by the languages of its dominant Scandinavian national languages.
10. For discussion of the plurality of Englishes, see, for instance, Pennycook (2017).
11. See Arnold (2017) and de Lima Costa and Alvarez (2014).
12. For this analysis and the use of the term *normalisation*, see Canguilhem (1966).
13. Traditionally, linguistics prioritised the analysis of spoken language; but in state formations the particular formations and impositions of ways of writing are crucially relevant as well. See the contributions to Weth and Juffermans (2018).
14. See Makoni and Pennycook (2007).
15. See François Cusset (2008). Hamel (2013) suggests that in the natural sciences French holds its own in publications and teaching, but not in its distribution or reception.
16. Translations from English into other languages are far more numerous than translations from other languages into English. For discussion and statistics, see Heilbron (1999) and Ronen et al. (2014).

17. For further discussion, see Ammon (2012).
18. These numbers come from Ammon (2012, p. 339). For further discussion see Lillis and Curry (2010) and de Lima Costa and Alvarez (2014) and for the natural sciences, Gordin (2017). The larger context of linguistic 'globalisation' is that on some estimates only 10% or less of languages are 'safe'. See Ostler (1999).
19. On the difficulties of publishing in the multiply-disadvantaged circumstances of the University of Jaffna during the Sri Lankan civil war, see Canagarajah (1996).
20. This is a long-standing debate in a wide range of literatures. For a classic reference see Benjamin (1997), Asad's forcible intervention in the context of colonialism (1986), and for recent discussion in anthropology, see Viveiros de Castro (1998).
21. See also Tsu (2010).
22. This comes with a risk of linguistic determinism – even among those who recognise the historic malleability of languages. This risk threatens the otherwise truly stimulating studies of Anna Wierzbicka, who provides in-depth analyses of the obsession of 'English' with accuracy, proof and empiricism, concerns that started to seep into it at the time of the scientific revolution. See e.g. Wierzbicka (2006, 2010).
23. For prominent examples, see Becker (1995) and Pennycook (2010).
24. Pennycook (2017).
25. This mistrust of the idea that scientific research means studying another explanatory plane arose in various intellectual fields at more or less the same time. For actor-network arguments against 'depth' see Callon and Latour (1981) and Latour (1986). For a similar argument in language studies, see Pennycook (2010). There are obvious intellectual ancestors, notably Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953).
26. These include linguistics; literary studies; translation studies; biblical studies; parts of cultural studies; parts of postcolonialism; parts of cultural anthropology; parts of indigenous studies; the extensive literatures on teaching English as a foreign language; and the many language- and region-specific historical and cultural studies.
27. For the case of 'lekker' pursued along 'language trails' (in the Netherlands and beyond), see Mol (2014).
28. There are many versions of and positions with respect to this argument, but the straightforward observation is that translators typically find that the richness of one language rubs up against inadequate vocabularies in another. Linguists talk of 'exuberance' and 'deficiency' (Becker, 1984), while anthropologists may discover epistemological (Hanks & Severi, 2014) or ontological difference (Viveiros de Castro, 2004).
29. For an inspiring set of examples of thinking with untranslatables for philosophy texts see the many contributions to Cassin (2014).
30. For an analysis of Bourdieu in which translation is explored as a shift between different local debates, see Bourdieu (2002).
31. Most theories of translation assume there is indeed an original that can (even if maybe it should not) be betrayed in the 'target language' of the translation, and there is a long history which takes it for granted that perfect translation is impossible, and proceeds to debate the merits of different forms of betrayal. For a recent anthropological summary see Hanks and Severi (2014). As a part of this, notions of 'original' and in particular of original 'authorship' have been questioned in a movement that argues that translation is also a creative process. See Venuti (1998).
32. Viveiros de Castro (2004, 2015).
33. That equivocations may be hard to control but still deserve to be cared for is argued in Yates-Doerr (2019).
34. See, for instance, Law and Lin (2017).

35. As it happens, Viveiros de Castro moves between Portuguese, French and English, and *passes* time and again, so it would be interesting to hear him comment on what the three intellectual traditions he straddles afford him.
36. For earlier explorations of what it is to import field terms into analysis, see Van de Port and Mol (2015) and Mann and Mol (2019). The argument that field terms may be used as analytics owes much to the work of Marilyn Strathern, see e.g. Strathern (1991).
37. For this argument see Tsu (2010) who also pithily suggests that '[n]ative speaker is to language what color has been to race' (p. 197).
38. These extend beyond English. See, for instance, the discussions by Chow (2014) and especially Tsu (2010) in the context of nation-building, power and the multiple forms of Chinese.
39. See Becker (1995) on the creativity of what he calls languaging; Chow (2014, fn 19), who writes of languaging that it is a process that 'combines attunement to context, storing and retrieving memories, and communication'; Hanks and Severi (2014), who argue that language works through self-interpretation which means that translation is ubiquitous; and Spivak (1993/2000), who warns that subjugated others are not homogeneous.
40. Achebe (1965).
41. For an analysis of the appropriation of the Maori idea of 'hau' into gift theory, see Stewart (2017). And for debate on the use of the term HAU for the journal of that name, Mahi Tahi (2018).
42. Our focus is on what non-English words may do in academic settings. For a great collection of transpositions and transformations of words from one setting to another *outside* academia, see the contributions to Gluck and Tsing (2009).

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Annemarie Mol is a Professor of Anthropology of the Body in the University of Amsterdam. She wrote about the coordination of different enactments of an allegedly single disease in hospital practice; theorised *care* as intertwined with, rather than opposed to, technology; explored how our theoretical tropes change if, instead of continuing to celebrate human thinking, we foreground human eating; and is currently embarking on an enquiry into *clean* as a *good*. All the while she reflectively attends to words and styles of writing.