

The Ethics and Exigency of Translation Magnified by the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has turned the task of translation into an exigency. This exigency emanates from the demand of the other to be recognized as a being capable of autonomous agency suspended for the meantime by linguistic difference. Responding to this urgency turns translation into an ethical act where respect and solidarity are merged as its constitutive dimension. Thus, a new appraisal of translation is issued forth showing its value from the experience of crisis.

Keywords: COVID-19 Pandemic, Translation, Recognition, Respect, Solidarity

Introduction

This paper appraises the task of translation in the face of crisis as magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic. It answers why there is a need for translation during crisis and what is the ethical source of this exigency. The first part articulates translation as a need when information communication is indispensable amidst linguistic diversity to help people make informed decisions and act autonomously in response to crisis. Some individuals and groups responding to this call in the current situation of the world are mentioned. The particular

area of crisis translation is introduced as the work wherein these cited activities of translation in this pandemic may be categorized. The second part traces this exigency of translation to the recognitive need emanating from the other in order to enunciate the ethical dimension of translation in times of crisis. Axel Honneth's concept of invisibility is employed to catapult recognition as the fundamental source of the exigency which translation fulfils as an ethical response. Crisis translation is thus anchored in the joint values of respect and solidarity which are ushered herein as fundamentally occasioned by translation. The conclusion and some recommendations are put forth in the remainder of the paper. The paper hopes to amplify the value of translation that cultural workers do in service to the society in times of crisis often lying in invisibility.

Translation, Crisis, and the COVID-19 Pandemic

Prior to the outbreak of the Novel Corona Virus (COVID-19) into a pandemic, the need for translation has already been perceived as indispensable in times of crises. The deficit in translation itself appears to be one of the main reasons why impending catastrophes do not attain to the semantic level of "crisis" in the consciousness of people prior to its occurrence. A concerted response to avert, counteract or reduce the risk that disasters could bring about is therefore suspended. Climate change for example is a familiar environmental concern widely taught in schools and constantly pushed by advocates for global attention and collective response. But up to this point climate change doesn't seem to have yet a sense of urgency to most people which should spark them to act. Sheila Jasanoff similarly suggests this in her study on consensus-building amidst the tension between climate science and diverse cultural knowledge systems. The reality of climate change may have attained objectivity through internal consensus among scientists, but the "convergence of scientists' understanding of the facts is not the

same thing as public assent to those understandings.”¹ Jasanoff calls attention to the cultural contexts of interpretation wherein trust and credibility of scientific truths are sifted by the public. She refers to these as “civic epistemologies” or the “publicly accepted and procedurally sanctioned ways of testing and absorbing the epistemic basis for decision making.”² The differences in these modes of knowing show up in times of conflicts or disagreements that prolong the making of global environmental policies for immediate, collective, knowledge-based action for response. Jasanoff advocates therefore “stronger processes of *mediation* and *translation* woven into the processes of knowledge making itself”³ (Italics mine). For her, this meant an interpenetration of knowledge and values where scientific truths are cascaded with consideration of differences in cultural reception through its integration into their civic epistemologies.

In another study, Matthew Hunt et al. report that the Haiti Earthquake in 2010 and the Rohingya refugee crisis are two examples that crystallized the need for translation during humanitarian crises. This time the sense of urgency is evident because of the immediate effect of the disaster on individuals. In the aftermath of the Earthquake in Haiti, “thousands of Creole- and French-speaking volunteers—predominantly Haitian nationals and members of the Haitian diaspora—translated incoming SMS messages and telephone calls, which were then relayed to groups on the ground providing assistance and integrated into crowd-sourced live maps, which provided close to real-time information about the location of injured persons and infrastructure damage.”⁴ Information and communication

¹ Sheila Jasanoff, “Cosmopolitan Knowledge: Climate Change and Global Civic Epistemology” in *The Oxford Handbook of Climate Change and Society* Edited by John S. Dryzek, Richard B. Norgaard, and David Schlosberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 2, DOI:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199566600.003.0009.

² *Ibid.*, 5.

³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴ Matthew Hunt et al., “Ethics at the Intersection of Crisis Translation and Humanitarian Innovation” *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs* 1(3) (2019), 24, <http://dx.doi.org/10.7227/JHA.022>.

technology (ICT) was applied to facilitate the flow of needed information and relief efforts, and translation played the important part of transcending the language barriers. The linguistic barrier of the Rohingya refugees likewise showed the indispensable role of translation during humanitarian crises. The Rohingya are one of the many ethnic minorities in Myanmar who, before their exodus to Bangladesh in August 2017, have already been fleeing from the country to escape communal violence or alleged abuses by the security forces.⁵ According to Translators Without Borders (TWB), though access to information has improved as a result of reaching out to the communities, “language barriers and low access to media still leave many Rohingya refugees without the critical and life-saving information they need to claim their rights, get the support they need, and make informed choices for themselves.”⁶ The more pressing challenge to communication is that Rohingya is the only spoken language that all refugees understand and prefer. Hence the first two recommendations ushered in for humanitarian agencies is to “use Rohingya as the spoken language of communication with refugees” and “to invest in formal training for field workers and interpreters in the Rohingya language and interpretation.”⁷ Both refer to the task of translation which TWB suggests should be carried out by select persons in the community itself who would be further trained for translation as they would foremost be to exhibit proficiency in their own language.

Where the exigency of translation is unquestionably urgent in times of crisis, Hunt et al. specify the work as “crisis translation.” They define first crisis as “an event, or series of events, that is non-routine, poses a significant threat and

⁵ “Myanmar Rohingya: What you need to know about the crisis,” *BBC News*, 23 January 2020 (Accessed April 18, 2020), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41566561>.

⁶ TWB, “The Language Lesson: What We’ve Learned about Communicating with Rohingya Refugees” November 2018 (Accessed April 18, 2020), 4, https://translatorswithoutborders.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/TWB_Bangladesh_Comprehension_Study_Nov2018.pdf.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

requires a response to mitigate the harm.”⁸ As the above examples have shown, the response to crisis meets certain challenges of communication and coordination particularly where language diversity comes in. They thus define crisis translation as “the act of transferring meaning and cultural encodings from one language/cultural system to another, in written, oral or signed modes, before, during or after a crisis.”⁹ Crisis translation is mostly called for in humanitarian crises which include “situations of large-scale social disruption and elevated risks for health and well-being due to armed conflict, disaster or epidemic, and where population needs far exceed local capacities.”¹⁰ In these instances where lives are at stake and information communication is urgently needed amidst language barriers translation, as Federici and O’Brien have accurately designated, performs the function of “risk reduction.” Translation does not only save lives but reduce property damages and losses as well.¹¹

The COVID-19 pandemic has only magnified the need for translation which has been responded to by citizens in various parts of the world. Independent initiatives in translating information regarding the crisis and measures to prevent infection and contain the virus are being done by people for their own localities. In the mountainous Tibetan regions of western Sichuan Province, in China for example, Yu Lha reports the efforts to translate public health information from Mandarin or Amdo Tibetan to the four Gyalrongic languages (rTa’u, Minyak, rGyalrong, and Khroskyabs) spoken in their region.¹²

⁸ Hunt et al., “Ethics at the Intersection of Crisis Translation and Humanitarian Innovation,” 25.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Federico M. Federici and Sharon O’Brien, “Translation as Risk Reduction” in *Translation in Cascading Crises* (London: Routledge, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429341052>.

¹² Yu Lha, “Fighting the coronavirus in local languages,” *Language on the Move*, 17 February 2020 (Accessed April 15, 2020), <https://www.languageonthemove.com/fighting-the-coronavirus-in-local-languages/?fbclid=IwAR09iOgFwZH-zxDdih6hdiAP--KFrV39dB6SqmLXaKa9znjd3xcgh2MFkeM>.

Organized by village leaders, the translations are showcased in educational videos that visually and orally explain information and circulated through social media platforms. The translations are specifically valuable to monolingual elders, as they are most vulnerable to virus infection. It raised the people's awareness and, knowing the crisis through their own language amplified the seriousness of the event. Aside from the information they get, the locals also gained discoveries about the variations in the languages spoken in the proximity of their locality. Some express their confidence in their language "in being up to date" and no longer being excluded. Yu Lha exclaims, "translation brings recognition and respect for our languages."

The maximization of the benefits of translation amidst this pandemic has shown to be practically enhanced and facilitated by technology. Sudesna Roy Chowdhury, who is recently featured in Channel News Asia, developed overnight a translation portal for medical frontliners who conduct consultation with migrant Bengali patients in Singapore.¹³ Her input of Bengali translations of relevant phrases and terms used in emergency such as checking on a patient's history and symptoms that could be easily accessible on mobile phones helped communicate with patients efficiently to get the needed information about their condition especially in the absence of interpreters and translators. Considering the volume of patients and the logistically unfeasible alternative to look for interpreters at this time, the website with its essential translations enable medical practitioners to identify more quickly the serious cases that need attention from the low-risk ones. The website is continuously being upgraded with more Bengali volunteers offering their translations, and more importantly, the website is being translated to seven other languages.

In the Philippines, information regarding the pandemic is translated in the different languages of Philippine regions by

¹³ Christy Yip, "Your website will save lives': NUS graduate builds translation portal for medical teams treating migrant workers" (Accessed April 17, 2020) <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/cnainsider/COVID-19-nus-medical-graduate-bengali-translators-workers-12650406>.

local government units and local media, then disseminated to people via local radio and television as well as social media platforms. But a number of citizens have taken up the initiative of translating specific health information, government advisories and measures to combat the pandemic into the language of their own localities. One of them is Victor Dennis Nierva who maintains, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Facebook page *Magbikol Kita*¹⁴ originally featuring educative segments in Bikol language. In the outbreak of the virus he shifted immediately to “crisis translation” and has been posting every day since the twelfth of March various translated information related to the pandemic in Bikol Central, one of the popular languages in the region. *Magbikol Kita* is one of the proponent translators recognized by Language Warriors PH, a public Facebook group initiated by the University of the Philippines Department of Linguistics organized to connect and bring together individuals and community translators across the Philippines who are currently working on the translation of materials relating to COVID-19.¹⁵ It keeps a repository of translated materials and infographics in different Philippine languages that could be accessed at will by anyone who may need them for dissemination, and serves as a hub where requests for translation from medical institutions and other agencies engaged in responding to the crisis could be outsourced. In its April 9 summary it has maintained 68 languages, dialects and sociolects translated on the domains of physical health and miscellaneous information, mental health, news and current affairs, and community-specific information by 95 proponents and translators from all over the country.

Considering the necessity of scientifically objective, and accurate information about the virus and the measures to prevent the risk of infection organized by governing bodies that should be cascaded to people in the face of language barriers, translation plays no minor role in fighting this pandemic. The

¹⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/magbikolkita/>

¹⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/LanguageWarriorsPH/>

examples above of individuals and communities responding to the exigency of translation in the midst of crisis magnify an ethical responsibility towards others that is realized in the very act of translation itself in this times. As Hunt et al. insist, language translation is an ethical obligation during humanitarian crises¹⁶ based on its potential benefits provided to the people and risks evaded. But the ethical value of translation, they say, must not be weighed purely “in terms of efficiency or cost, as it is an important means of upholding the dignity of individuals and communities impacted by crises.”¹⁷ They point out respect and solidarity as constitutive values that justify the ethical dimension of crisis translation. In the next part I will examine and amplify these two values and argue that translation, as magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic, is an exigency emanating from a recognitive demand of the “other” where urgency and difference become determining conditions.

Recognition as the Ethical Ground for (Crisis) Translation

Translation becomes an exigency in times of crises when life-saving information needs to be disseminated amidst linguistic barriers among people. Crisis accentuates information as a basic need at face value with food, water, shelter, and medical care.¹⁸ The communication of information however is more complex than it appears for it must be networked in difference, in the medium of diverse languages. And it is this fact which makes translation an exigency of recognition. Adequate translation, Hunt et al. rightly describes, “demonstrates respect for linguistic minority populations caught up in crisis” and “respects people’s autonomy and promotes informed decision-

¹⁶ Hunt et al., “Ethics at the Intersection of Crisis Translation and Humanitarian Innovation,” 26.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Faine Greenwood et al., *The Signal Code: A Human Rights Approach to Information during Crisis*, (2017) (Accessed April 25, 2020), 6, https://hhi.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/publications/signalcode_final.pdf.

making.”¹⁹ Translation in other words is an act of openness to difference and an affirmation of the other’s capacity for autonomous agency in critical times. The exigency of translation therefore emanates from the other’s “vital need”²⁰ for recognition that awaits response. And it follows that the act of translation becomes the most concrete expression of response to the other’s demand where information, instruction and communication are indispensable in an urgent situation. “Recognition in its elementary form represents an expressive gesture of affirmation.”²¹ The description of translation as a recognitive response may be appropriately illustrated as a reversal of invisibility. In Axel Honneth’s critical theory “invisibility” is a metaphorical description of “a kind of social state of affairs”²² wherein the other is actually, literally seen, but is publicly made instead to “feel themselves not to be perceived.”²³ In other words, recognition is withheld from the other which is what constitutes, for Honneth, a moral disrespect. On the contrary, “the expression of recognition represents the ‘allegory’ of moral action”²⁴

A closer examination of this concept of invisibility will zoom in the moral dimension of recognition, and consequently the moral dimension of translation in this peculiar times. The physical visibility of persons enables us to have an elementary cognizance of the other as somebody with identifiable characteristics and therefore as an individual. But in invisibility these features are “seen through” and the other is deliberately deprived of being accorded value. Unlike cognizing which is a non-public act, recognizing relies upon expressive acts that

¹⁹ Hunt et al., “Ethics at the Intersection of Crisis Translation and Humanitarian Innovation,” 26.

²⁰ Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* Edited by Amy Gutmann (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 26.

²¹ Axel Honneth and Avishai Margalit, “Invisibility: On the Epistemology of Recognition,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 75 (2001), 120.

²² *Ibid.*, 112.

²³ *Ibid.*, 113.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 118.

“make clear publicly to the person in question that she has been accorded social approval, or possesses social validity, in the role of a specific social type.”²⁵ Affiliation to a different linguistic community is part of the social distinction of a person. To respond then to the exigency of translation is to recognize the linguistic difference in which the other “belongs or attaches himself with.”²⁶ Not to translate a necessary information, despite one’s capability to do so, to the other’s language which conditions its intelligibility, and where he could exercise his own self-determination would be tantamount to non-recognition—a deliberate act of depriving the other to exercise an informed decision making.

Once translation is understood as a gesture of recognition its character as an obligation comes into full view. The obligation is assumed when one makes a gesture of recognition where the other is made aware that he is conferred with due respect. Honneth draws from Kant to signify respect as “the representation of a worth that infringes upon my self-love.”²⁷ To allow oneself to be obligated means that one affirms the other’s moral authority over the self, and that he would guard his action from the dictates of his egocentric impulses. “A decentering takes place in the recognizing subject”²⁸ in bestowing worth to the other subject. “What occurs in recognition is rather the expressive (and consequently publicly accessible) demonstration of an assessment of worth that accrues to the intelligibility of persons.”²⁹ In another Kantian stroke, Honneth ascribes to “worth” the “further aspect of what it means for human beings to lead their lives in rational self-

²⁵ Ibid., 119.

²⁶ This kind of recognition may also be called “difference-respect.” See Bart van Leeuwen, “A Formal Recognition of Social Attachments: Expanding Axel Honneth’s Theory of Recognition” *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 50(2) (2007), 180-205, DOI: 10.1080/00201740701239897.

²⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* Edited and translated by Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 31.

²⁸ Honneth and Margalit, “Invisibility: On the Epistemology of Recognition,” 122.

²⁹ Ibid., 124.

determination.”³⁰ The moral grammar of recognition is so adequately captured by translation in times of crisis in allowing the language of the other encode the information needed for them to make an informed decision. Translation occasions the other’s being able to act and determine themselves in an agentive way in trying circumstances.

The autonomy of man before the overwhelming force of nature was something that Kant himself has earlier perceived and esteemed. For Kant, man’s experience of the sublime is occasioned by the experience of the power of nature. The might that nature shows in disasters as well as the resistance of the human spirit not to be crushed despite its overpowering force is strongly and jointly tendered in this quote:

Bold, overhanging, as it were threatening cliffs, thunder clouds towering up into the heavens, bringing with them flashes of lightning and crashes of thunder, volcanoes with their all-destroying violence, hurricanes with the devastation they leave behind, the boundless ocean set into a rage, a lofty waterfall on a mighty river, etc., make our capacity to resist into an insignificant trifle in comparison with their power. But the sight of them only becomes all the more attractive the more fearful it is, as long as we find ourselves in safety, and we gladly call these objects sublime because they elevate the strength of our soul above its usual level, and allow us to discover within ourselves a capacity for resistance of quite another kind, which gives us the courage to measure ourselves against the apparent all-powerfulness of nature.³¹

Isak Winkel Holm considers Kant’s theory of the sublime as one of the earlier sources of “disaster discourse”³² in

³⁰ Ibid., 122.

³¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement* Translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 144-145.

³² Or “the ensemble of cultural forms—cognitive schemata, scientific concepts, narrative plots, metaphorical images, rhetorical questions, and other devices ... that

modernity. In his convincing interpretation, “Kant’s theory of the sublime is a theory of disaster resilience. A human being’s ‘capacity for resistance,’ that is, its resilience, is sublime. When confronted by the obstacles of nature, we have a ‘power of the mind to soar above certain obstacles,’ thanks to our ‘unmistakeable and inextinguishable idea of morality.’”³³ Sublimity for Kant “is not contained in anything in nature, but only in our mind, insofar as we can become conscious of being superior to nature within us and thus also to nature outside us (insofar as it influences us).”³⁴ In other words, the truly sublime is man’s capacity for autonomy especially in the most difficult of times. Translation which helps the other exercise his own judgment and act according to his understanding is allowing the other to be autonomous, or in the context of Holm’s reading, resilient. The recognition conferred by the translator to the other is an act of respect “for the idea of humanity in our subject,”³⁵ our capacity for reason—every “human being’s capacity for morality.”³⁶ Meaning to say, that which the translator enables in the other to function and the act of respect by the translator itself as a translator are both sublime.

The metaphor of invisibility which has already been explained as being negated by translation may anchor as well what Hunt et al. cite as risks when adequate translation is not provided—that of discrimination and exclusion. This they say is contrary to solidarity which, in the language of humanitarian response, covers “the importance of consultation, shared suffering and other connections which require the sort of communication that translation and interpretation allow.”³⁷

determines how we think and talk about disaster vulnerability and resilience.” Isak Winkel Holm, “Earthquake in Haiti: Kleist and the Birth of Modern Disaster Discourse” *New German Critique* 115 39:1 (2012), 52.

³³ *Ibid.*, 59.

³⁴ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, 147.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 141.

³⁶ Holm, “Earthquake in Haiti: Kleist and the Birth of Modern Disaster Discourse,” 59.

³⁷ Hunt et al., “Ethics at the Intersection of Crisis Translation and Humanitarian Innovation,” 26.

Aside from respect which has already been highlighted above, solidarity is another feature of recognition which translation occasions. In the moral grammar of recognition, solidarity is achieved when subjects are esteemed in their particularity as being capable of contributing to the society. This is basically a recognition of people's abilities and capacities that translation serves. Translation provides leeway for people to engage in their own manner that is, through the language that they understand the most.

Charles Briggs accounts a mysterious epidemic that struck a small community in Venezuela where it took a year for medical specialists to diagnose because of their denial of the indigenous language's capacity to articulate an objective and medically relevant narrative of patients' condition. The case exemplifies an instance of the failure of recognition of people's linguistic difference. "One language, Spanish, was cast as the voice of science, medicine, and modernity, just as Warao (the indigenous language) seemed to doctors, epidemiologists, health officials, and journalists as only suitable for conveying ignorance and superstition."³⁸ This is a clear case showing that "health and language-related inequities are fatally entangled."³⁹ Translation could have levelled out the inequities and the epidemic contained more immediately but it was suspended precisely because of a prior withholding of recognition of the indigenous people's abilities inscribed in their language and their capacity for autonomy.

The problem could be identified in the same source which Roger Bayod perceives in a different study. He writes, "discrimination among the indigenous peoples in whatever forms happens because of a lack of recognition or misrecognition of their way of life."⁴⁰ In his field research and correspondence with the Manobos Indigenous People in

³⁸ Charles L. Briggs, "Language, Justice, and Rabies," in *Language and Social Justice in Practice* Edited by Netta Avineri et al. (New York: Routledge, 2019), 114.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁴⁰ Roger Bayod, "Developing and Indigenous Ethics: On Recognition and Social Justice" *Eubios Journal of Asian and International Bioethics* 29(1) (January 2019), 9.

Mindanao, the non-recognition of the indigenous view on health again surfaces in contrast to popular western science and medical practices. Bayod articulates the indigenous ethics of the Manobos in their practices of traditional healing and a peculiar system of justice called *pangayaw*. Both of these are traced in their “concept of land and in their struggle to keep their ancestral lands intact and sacred.”⁴¹ Disaster resilience is also integrated into the intimate relationship which they have with the land embodied in their knowledge and skills “which have kept them intact for so many years.”⁴²

This relationship with the land is what Noel Ramiscal has cited as the basis of indigenous rights to the land. There is a common sense among indigenous peoples in the world, of having a “historical continuity” with the land: “At the core of indigenous beliefs and value systems is the sentient and spiritual affinity with the land”⁴³ which colonisation later deterritorialized, converting indigenous rights into legal terms legitimated by power. There appears then a relation between the displacement of indigenous peoples from their land and the continuing disappearance of their native language, both brought about by disrespect and misrecognition. Citing the example of the Aboriginal peoples in Northern Australia, Ramiscal reports that linguistic diversity is “both the manifestation of an indigenous people’s identity with their land and an expression of their differences from other indigenous groups.”⁴⁴

As a recognitive act, translation does not only affirm people’s belongingness to a particular linguistic community but affirms as well their latent contributions to the society. These contributions however should not be weighed on singular measures alone such as economic profitability for it is most likely that indigenous ways of life is antithesis to capitalist standard systems. In the fight for climate justice for example,

⁴¹ Ibid., 10.

⁴² Ibid., 12.

⁴³ Noel G. Ramiscal, “Indigenous Philosophy and the Quest for Indigenous Self-determination” *Philosophia* 14(2), (2013), 217.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

this is the reason why, as Christopher Ryan Maboloc has pointed out, “indigenous peoples and communities have been reduced into helpless moral patients.”⁴⁵ Their “local wisdom has not been utilized in fighting climate change, although their communities are good models for the harmonized relation between human beings and nature”⁴⁶ precisely because of its dissonance with the interests of the politics of dominant voices in climate debates. “The way forward,” Maboloc continues, “is to dismantle the grip of corporate interests in climate discussions”⁴⁷ which “will require recognizing local culture and ways of life that pay respect to nature.”⁴⁸ This is a truly radical battle cry for resistance against the reifying capitalist system that is if radical means returning to the ground in a quite literal manner. As Kalamaoka’aina Niheu’s admonition to all indigenous peoples of the world: “find your roots! Dig them deep.”⁴⁹ She meant reclamation of the indigenous wisdom and indigenous science that promote autonomy and sovereignty without exploiting the land. In other words, to return to an ethics of the land and I would say, a return to the language of the land as well.

What these examples show is that autonomy despite of linguistic diversity could be exercised by people. And translation not only enables people to act autonomously but empowers their language as well. In this time of pandemic translation is truly valuable for people who speak low resource languages. But translating itself allows for the language to increase its semantic resources in widening the reach of its referential objects and vocabulary. In a different light, as the examples above have also shown, the identification of a “low resource language” may even be a pretext for the invisibility suffered by languages that are not

⁴⁵ Christopher Ryan Maboloc, “Liberal Environmentalism and Global Climate Justice” *Eubios Journal of Asian and International Bioethics* 30(3) (March 2020), 54

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 55.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 56.

⁴⁹ Kalamaoka’aina Niheu, “Indigenous Resistance in an Era of Climate Change Crisis” *Radical History Review* 133 (January 2019), 126, DOI10.1215/01636545-7160101.

used in the mainstream but is actually rich in connotative significations within its own epistemic universe. Translation in this case promotes solidarity for it recognizes and opens those resources to wider public accessibility and social worth. In this sense, translation tears down the barriers between autonomy and solidarity. While people are enabled to exercise their free agency they are also at the same time secured with inclusivity. As Honneth puts it more accurately:

The more those who are affected by a problem are involved in the search for solutions to that problem, the more such historical experiments will lead to better and more stable solutions. Wherever barriers to communication are removed, the ability of the community to perceive as many of the currently hidden potentials for solving a problem productively will grow.⁵⁰

Linguistic diversity is a barrier that makes communication of life-saving information difficult to disseminate in times of crises. And translation presents itself as the way to transcend this barrier which enables persons to make informed decisions, to socially cooperate and suggest intelligent solutions to certain problems arising from their distinct situations.

Conclusion and Some Recommendations

This paper turned the spotlight on the act of translation being done today by mostly citizen translators who responded to the need of their fellowman for intelligibility of basic information that would enable them to cope with this pandemic. Translation in times of crises is established as an ethical response to the recognitive need of the other for respect in his latent capacity for autonomous agency suspended for the meantime by linguistic difference. The esteem accorded to the

⁵⁰ Axel Honneth, *The Idea of Socialism towards a Renewal*. Translated by Joseph Ganahl (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), 62.

language of the other in enabling him to act autonomously occasions furthermore their active participation to the collective response of the society to alleviate crisis. This gives them leeway to suggest as well possible and intelligent solutions to certain concerns arising from their peculiar situations which may also be beneficial for others beyond their locality. Respect and solidarity thus are acts of recognition both carried out in translation. In assisting the other to act autonomously through the intelligibility proffered by translation, an opportunity to learn from the other, from the “wisdom of strangers,”⁵¹ is at the same time opened up. For example, as the scientific knowledge about the virus and the specific measures to fight and contain the pandemic are translated to local languages, the act of translation itself may also be the chance to learn fundamental local insights concerning health and well-being. In the Bikol language for example, while the term *marahay* could refer to physical health, it could also signify a multiple of other meanings such as fine weather, functionality and usefulness, financial stability, harmonious relationship with others and virtue.⁵² What is interesting is that all the aforementioned seem to be anchored in the common element of equilibrium. While disaster resilience is important perhaps it is more fundamental to return to the basic sense of well-being where ethical actions, with respect to equilibrium, spring and help reduce disasters to a minimum.

Considering the value and ethical dimension of translation magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic articulated in this paper, it is perhaps due time to further the integration of the studies on translation, language and culture into the area of disaster risk reduction and communication, and other related sciences. This paper have theoretically situated such endeavour in the framework of recognition which the author deems to

⁵¹ Jasanoff, “Cosmopolitan Knowledge: Climate Change and Global Civic Epistemology,” 9.

⁵² Rodel M. Cajot, “The Bikolano Ethics of *Marahay* and *Maraot*,” *Hingowa The Holy Rosary Seminary Journal* 4/2 (2001), 78.

capture most adequately the task of translation in critical situations amidst cultural, social and linguistic differences. An empirical study of the impact of translated works during this pandemic to local societies is a potent research that could be undertaken for future references. The nature of translation in times of crises, which includes the standards and elements of an adequate translation would be worth studying in the technical aspect. Research on local terms and concepts related to crises such as epidemics and other disasters, resilience and coping mechanisms could provide a warehouse of references for future translations that could be retrieved at will as needs arise. The use of technological innovations such as Machine Translation (MT)⁵³ and Translation Memory are also very promising tools for translating in immediate cases, as well as in storing and retrieving data more quickly. But the limits and boundaries of technology must remain in the background considering the dynamically and socio-culturally based context of translation. These trajectories for research and recommendations for future translations however may still be anchored on the fundamental confidence in the autonomy of persons, in their capacities, and in the affirmation of their language.

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⁵³ Or "the automatic translation of one language into another by a computer." Sharon O'Brien, "Translation Technology and Disaster Management" in *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Technology*, Edited by Minako O'Hagan (New York: Routledge, 2020), 310.

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