



Translation and Time: Exploring the Temporal Dimension of Cross-cultural Transfer

Presentation Details
<p>Title of Paper:</p> <p><i>When and where does it get better? Localisation and Temporality in LGBTQ+ Online Activism</i></p>
<p>Abstract:</p> <p>This paper focuses on the circulation across lingua-cultures of contemporary stories of individual and societal change. In particular, I examine the translation of narratives of “self-improvement” and their inscription in meta-narratives of “human progress.” As I will argue, as part of these processes of translation, the charged temporal tropes of “modern” and “backward” can be complicated and rewritten. I draw on the localisation of a “progressive” North American online campaign into Italian: the “It Gets Better” project was initially devised by “out” journalist Dan Savage in response to a spate of LGBT teen suicides in the United States. In the US version, the stories follow a particular master-plot. Determined to “make it better,” an adult LGBT individual overcomes the hardships of their teenage years and lives a happy “out” adult life. The website explains that “the Project is developing resources and effecting change in ways that are tailored to local language, culture and need.” What this framing conceals is that the tailoring of an English-language, U.S.-based project for non-Anglophone audiences entails a process of translation. By contrast, I suggest that localised narratives that survivors of homophobic bullying construct are entrenched in transnational and translational processes of identity formation. I argue that the progressive temporality encouraged by the campaign format is displaced and rearranged in the localised version, often disavowing the message of the original campaign. By interrogating “time” and “change” as travelling stories, I hope to reveal the semantic instability of such concepts, as well as argue for an approach to translation as a cultural practice that makes and unmakes temporal construction and attendant ideas of “future.”</p>
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