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Accounting for the politics of language in the sociology of IR

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With its 2009 report on the state of the discipline of International Relations (IR), the *Teaching, Research, and International Policy (TRIP) Project* of the Institute for the Theory and Practice of International Relations aimed to tackle directly Ole Wæver's claim that IR 'is and has been an American social science' (Wæver 1998: 687). Driven by the question of whether or not one could see national variations in the way scholars think about the discipline, and if one could agree on the existence of a single IR discipline, the TRIP project engaged in an ambitious ten-country survey about 'the state of the discipline' (Jordan *et al.* 2009). The choice of the ten countries surveyed then (Australia, Canada, Ireland, Israel, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Singapore, South Africa, United Kingdom, and the United States) reflects an obvious yet unmentioned selection criteria: these countries use English as the main language of scientific communication.[1] If no consensus could be reached as to whether IR was an American discipline *per se*, there could at least be an implicit consensus that to be considered and acknowledged — and thus evaluated, measured, and assessed — the discipline(s) of IR had to be Anglophone by definition. This presumption also underpinned Stephen Walt's recent commentary on the persistent dominance of Anglo-Saxon scholarship in IR. 'I'm still struck', he admitted, 'by the relative dearth of "big thinking" on global affairs from people outside the trans-Atlantic axis, including continental Europe. And by "big thinking" I mean ideas and arguments that immediately trigger debates that cross national boundaries, and become key elements in a global conversation' (Walt 2011).

I suggest that the impacts on knowledge production of this imperative to write in English in order to be *acknowledged* as 'doing IR' have been understudied in their theoretical, material, and emotional implications. This

explicitly reflexivist take on language as an everyday social practice integral to knowledge production assumes a connection 'between knowledge and lived social practice rather than between knowledge and the sphere of cultural values' (Jackson 2011: 178) and seeks to question the underlying assumptions and hierarchies which ground specific practices in order to foster change. And though some authors have identified practice in different ways, like being first and foremost concerned with the 'non-representational' (e.g. Pouliot 2010) or on almost automatic technocratic practices (e.g. Huysmans 2006), I follow McMillan (this Forum) in considering the practice of having recourse to English 'as the activity itself'.[2] A turn to postcolonial theory, I suggest, would prove a useful place to start in seeking to account for the political and emotional components tied to a politics of language in the discipline, politics which goes beyond the mere acknowledgement of English as a practical *lingua franca* that enables communications beyond frontiers or as an imperialist language that simply threatens intellectual diversity (Ives 2006: 121−22).

Turning to the work of postcolonial scholar Walter D. Mignolo and drawing on the specific example of French-Canadian IR scholarship, this contribution aims to highlight some of the complexities of the relationship between language and knowledge production that should be accounted for in sociological studies. Whereas the issue of the use of English in the discipline has been at least minimally discussed in its material and/or practical components (access to journals, translation of key works, publication possibilities, etc.), the political and emotional components to it have been mostly eschewed. Yet, it is impossible to distinguish the recourse of English(es) from the political, historical, and economic contexts of its use (Pennycook 1994: 295). 'Just learn/publish/work' in English, as many would have it, is seldom 'just' about 'learning/publishing/ working' in English. For many non-native speakers, it often entails negotiating political stances and identities, intellectual credit and recognition, as well as emotional dimensions in their own work.

Discussions about the dominance of English in IR or, even more broadly, of English as a scientific global language, are usually caught up in an apparently unsolvable either/or dilemma. As Peter Ives summarises, this dichotomous position on the role of 'global English' somewhat mirrors divergences in the development of European political philosophy, with the liberal English tradition epitomised by John Locke favouring English as a useful vehicle for the transmission of ideas opposing republicanism, as opposed to German Romanticism, which links language to identity, power, belonging and *Weltanschauung* (Ives 2006: 125). As such, the recourse to global English is sometimes depicted as a reasonable communicative ground for ensuring political stability: 'The more the lingua franca spreads', suggests Philippe van Parijs, 'the less unrealistic the prospect of creating the linguistic preconditions for a European and worldwide institutional order that will make such a choice less costly [is] (*sic.*)' (van Parijs

2010: 27). Van Parij's passionate advocacy to turn the world into one *demos* sharing a common language (van Parijs 2004: 118) in order to enhance political participation while tackling issues of distributive and redistributive justice pertaining to language inequalities is met by equally strong resistance. Alastair Pennycook notably examined the cultural politics of English as an international language and critically highlighted the close connection between English and colonialism usually ignored in larger debates about the use or non-use of English in given communities. His critique insists that the problem 'lies partly in concentrating on the imposition or non-imposition of a language as if it were an object disconnected to all the other political and cultural forces around it' (Pennycook 1994: 74).

This fact is striking, as many commentators have so far pointed out how the use, reliance and/or knowledge of English proved crucial for various national IR communities. Talking about the increasing openness of the Spanish IR community, Caterina García Segura notes for example that the successful research collaboration and publications of Spanish scholars in other languages can be attributed to an awareness of opening up to the Anglophone community, 'since an effort in the opposite direction — coming from the English-speaking IR community — is not likely to happen' (García Segura 2006: 111, 120). Institutional trends in the United States confirm this observation. Indeed, despite an increased international mobility of scholars, American political science programmes increasingly cut their language training requirements in favour of methods requirements. The result is that only three of the top 20 graduate programmes in political science currently require all students to demonstrate proficiency in a foreign language (Agarwala and Teitelbaum 2010: 290–91). Finally, though some scholars have noted the inadequacy of concepts such as sovereignty and anarchy to talk about IR in Africa (e.g. Dunn and Shaw 2001), the importation of non-Anglophone (end especially non-Western) concepts to reflect on international politics is still scant (for a step in this direction, see Ling 2010, who proposes a reimagining of world politics through the Confucian concept of *tianxia*).

By focusing on language as disciplinary practice, we can simultaneously address its role inside (and *as*) knowledge-practices and knowledge-complexes that are proper to a sociology of the discipline. While Duncan Bell concedes that the distinction between the two is more heuristic than effective in reality, I find his definition useful to examine various facets that a sociology of the discipline examines and which cannot be distinguished from language and language politics:

Knowledge-practices are articulations of thinking, and of claims to valid knowledge, encompassing (indeed demarcating) both 'empirical' and 'theoretical' domains. This includes theories, arguments, conceptual schemes, specialized vocabularies, political ideologies and policy prescriptions, as well as

the numerous ways in which knowledge is constructed and validated, expertise assigned and intellectual legitimacy distributed. Knowledge-complexes are the ecologies — institutions, networks, organizational structures, or 'assemblages' of all of these — in which knowledge is fertilized, rendered intelligible and disseminated. (Bell 2009: 12)

A look at the work of Walter Mignolo might constitute a good starting point to see how language could be studied and integrated into a study of the knowledge-practices and knowledge-complexes that characterise the discipline in ways that go beyond the idea of national communities. Rather than insisting on a static conception of a geopolitics of knowledge where knowledge and (self-)consciousness are determined by national/territorial linguistic belonging, Mignolo proposes the concept of 'border gnosis'. As he explains, 'Border gnoseology is a critical reflection on knowledge production from both the interior border of the modern/colonial world system (imperial conflicts, hegemonic languages, directionality of translations, etc.) and its exterior borders (imperial conflicts with cultures being colonized, as well as the subsequent stages of independence or decolonization)' (Mignolo 2000: 11). Because border gnosis is the result of specific historical processes, it is naturally connected to territory, though in no way determined by it. If we consider the increased mobility of non-English native speaker scholars who get to evolve, think and write in a second/third/fourth language, and the variety of settings where languages is experienced in the discipline (conferences, publications, governmental research funding, etc.), it becomes possible to identify many instances of border gnosis and come up with various disciplinary maps that illustrate a much more complex geopolitics of knowledge than can be accounted for by the idea of 'national community'.

  Mignolo also points out that addressing the issue of language and contesting the colonial hierarchy between what he calls scientific languages (by which he means English, French and German) and cultural languages (all other languages(!)) has much deeper consequences than simply promoting linguistic diversity. 'Insofar as linguistic maps are attached not only to literary geographies but also to the production and distribution of knowledge', he notes, 'changing linguistic cartographies implies a reordering of epistemology' (*ibid.*: 24). Mignolo's theoretical endeavour is of particular interest here because it addresses not only the issue of the use of global English and colonialism, but also situates other languages in relation to their potential intellectual symbolic attraction. In that sense, though German IR scholarship remains marginalised in IR intellectual production, it still retains a symbolic 'scientific' quality that makes it acceptable knowledge (as opposed to, say, scholarship written in Hindi), even if only accessible through translation. Even more, because of their location in Europe, many German IR scholars have

easy access to Anglophone IR markets, be it in terms of books, journals, or institutions that constitute the nervous system of the discipline. Power relations inside the discipline, even if restricted to the use of language, are thus multi-faceted and simply cannot be analysed apart from other relations of coloniality and postcoloniality. Being attuned to the symbolic intellectual attractiveness of certain languages rather than others enables us to account for some scientific production that cannot be acknowledged and accounted for in the discipline of IR, but it also helps us understand and assess some of the everyday practices of IR scholars who navigate between various cultural and linguistic settings.

Border gnosis, language, discipline: the case of French-Canadian IR scholarship

The concept of border gnosis forces us to examine how 'just learning/ publishing/working' in English may not have the same emotional and political resonance, or concrete material implications, for all IR scholars whose first language is not English. A brief examination of the case of French-Canadian IR scholarship[3] illustrates well, I believe, how a sociology of the discipline could benefit from Mignolo's postcolonial approach to studying language inside (and as) knowledge-complexes and knowledge-practices. Indeed, it is not enough simply to identify the recourse to English as one of the most important hegemonic disciplinary practices. Rather than introducing yet another 'heroic narrative' about the achievements of 'an exotic' non-US community, as Büger remarks in this Forum, this example highlights how the recourse to English *as a practice* needs to be analysed in a holistic fashion, yet also examined at local levels to see how its use (or non-use) is embedded in different political, material, emotional, and symbolic webs.

Despite the fact that French is one of the two official national languages in Canada, French-Canadian IR scholarship is largely ignored in disciplinary assessments of 'Canadian IR'. The bulk of French-Canadian IR scholarship is produced in the province of Quebec, but some Francophone IR scholars are based in Ontario, especially at the University of Ottawa, and in New-Brunswick, notably at the University of Moncton. By default, and this has been notably the case with the TRIP survey, which was only translated for Francophone universities to assess the state of Canadian IR in 2011, the Canadian national community of IR is assumed to be Anglophone by default. When it is not plainly ignored by researchers, this body of work is usually assumed to:

(1) follow the intellectual developments and traditions of the French (from France) IR production (Giesen 2006);

(2) be subsumed in the broader national Canadian IR community distinct from the American one (Neufeld and Healy 2001; Porter 2001; Lipson *et al.* 2007);

(3) be so different from Anglo-Canadian IR production in its theories and content that it should be studied apart from it (Nossal 2000).[4]

These three potential directions of inquiry produce different accounts, yet end up erasing the specificities of this community — and the crucial role language politics play to explain its standing and its intellectual orientations. If only due to its geographical location, the French-Canadian IR intellectual production is attuned to its local intellectual and linguistic contexts while being turned, through its networked existence, towards the Anglo-American IR production sphere which dominates and defines the discipline. Indeed, few French-Canadian scholars are able to publish in French IR journals like *Politique étrangère*, notably for lack of access to the privileged networks that can guarantee one a publication (other aspects, such as a variations in French academic writing styles, and less engagement with French IR literature on the French-Canadians' part, could also be factored in). Finally, the fact that some Francophone African IR scholarship such as the work of Achille Mbembre (Blouin-Genest and Grondin 2010) only had its breakthrough in Francophone circles once it became translated and diffused in English, also points to the necessity and complexity of a border gnoseology attuned to various issues/levels of postcoloniality. We should thus keep in mind that language in itself is not necessarily a natural 'networking tool' for an intellectual community or the guarantor of a shared intellectual baggage.

The case of the French-Canadian IR community is also revealing because it produces a border knowledge that cannot be neatly categorised in one of the simple dichotomous terms of centre/periphery or coloniser/colonised, and this even if we limit the analysis to language: arguments can and have been made in both directions.[5] As such, it provides a good example of Mignolo's call to see border gnosis as encompassing many relations of power that do not flow unidirectionally. We have to consider the fact that, for instance, French-Canadian IR is a community: (1) evolving in a country where French is officially a *national* language, thus benefitting from institutional and financial support to sustain its research; (2) using a traditionally *imperial* knowledge language (French); (3) evolving at the periphery of Anglophone IR production and producing its own body of works, while still being able to move to its centre; and (4) whose intellectual production cannot be dissociated from the complex broader cultural and political history of the survival of a Francophone presence in North America, often epitomised with the province of Quebec's sovereignty claims. In that sense, the French-Canadian IR community displays many relations of imperialism while at the same time being involved in the

production of a border language and border knowledge, to use Mignolo's terminology.

Finally, the case of French-Canadian IR scholarship illustrates the very complexity of Mignolo's call for a border gnoseology that would assess the role of language knowledge production from both the various interior and exterior borders of modern/colonial relationships. In contradistinction with the German IR community, for example, where the decision to produce scholarship in German is not necessarily tied to a *political* stance, language is never a neutral question in Canada. For many French-Canadians scholars, presenting their work in English is a more or less involuntary political move when meeting at the Canadian Political Science Association (which also bears the French name Association canadienne de science politique), for example. The Association is officially bilingual and one can decide whether to present work in French or English. Yet, for many, the conundrum goes as follow: on the one hand, should one write the paper and present in French, not only will less people attend the talk, but later on, the French publication (most likely in *Études internationales*, the sole French-Canadian IR journal, or a book chapter in an edited volume) possibly resulting from it will not be considered to have the same weight as if it were published in a major Anglophone journal. On the other hand, should one write the paper and present in English, one actively participates in the diminution and marginalisation of Francophone IR work and directly contributes to the very situation being deplored as a problem, namely the limited possibilities of working in one's mother tongue in one's own country where it is recognised as such, and the lack of available Francophone IR resources to use in French IR courses.

Conversely, at the 2010 annual meeting of the Société québécoise de science politique, which took place in Quebec City, heated discussions went about the future of Francophone political science. Amidst debates, a French (from France) scholar remarked: would not all problems be resolved if Francophone political science departments simply followed the example of Turkish universities and Scandinavian ones by offering Ph.D. IR programmes in English to be more competitive on the IR world market? His intervention was followed by a brief silence, but all following responses highlighted in one way or another the fact that in Turkey and Scandinavian countries, the relationship to English is different; it is not *political*. Were Spanish or Mandarin to be the dominant language of IR, then it would be different. Whether such anxieties on the part of Francophones, along with the conclusion that the relationship to English is apolitical in Turkey and Scandinavia, are actually warranted remain to be examined, but the strong reaction suggests that if a sociology of IR is to become attuned to practices, it cannot move along without examining the multilayered relationships of power found in politics of languages. As a result, whereas the fact that 'Scandinavian scholars have

been socialized in the image of US and particularly UK scholarly norms and standard operating procedures' (Jørgensen and Knudsen 2006: 5) has generally been heralded as a symbol of academic success, those norms bear an *emotional* and *political* resonance in a French-Canadian context that cannot make them a straightforward model to imitate — this despite the fact that both intellectual communities acknowledge that 'success in IR' and the discipline itself are dependent on an English breakthrough on their part. As such, French-Canadian IR researchers can and do teach in French, but often contribute very little to the French academic production, as 'their training, their research agendas, and their tendency to publish in English-language journals all place them firmly within a Western core of IR. In this sense, the colonialism of Western IR as a discipline has been even more expansive and total than the legacies of British imperialism and later American (neo) colonialism. Indeed, some would argue that this is more properly a form of academic dependence' (Cox and Nossal 2009: 289).

Studies published in the 1980s showed then that a majority of French-Canadian social scientists saw publishing in French as a moral and/or a social responsibility, and that they experienced difficulties in 'conciliating their conception of science with their national cultural membership' (Gingras 1984: 291–92, my translation). Knowing this, one should wonder how this experience of border gnosis affected the substance or orientation of the work produced by Francophone scholars in Canada then. Any generalisations done here without proper studies will inevitably raise many objections and run the risk of caricature, but I believe certain trends can be briefly noted. For instance, French-Canadian IR literature — also written by non-native French-speaking scholars such as Alex Macleod and Dan O'Meara (2010) — generally ignores quantitative studies of IR and tend to be sensitive to international law and history in its study of the international (as evidenced in several articles published in *Études internationales*, the sole French-Canadian journal devoted to IR). Late French scholars like Raymond Aron, Pierre Bourdieu, and Michel Foucault are also well integrated into the study of IR, and their inclusion in IR, though by no means systematic, is certainly not perceived as 'radical', as it is in mainstream Anglophone circles. As for scholars evolving in the Canadian context and whose first language is French, the experience of border gnosis certainly leads to different strategies, and it would be interesting to conduct interviews to see how different scholars experience border gnosis and situate their research and their research practices as a result of it. What can certainly be extrapolated here is that when these scholars pursue their work in English, one likely finds a tendency to favour qualitative research and (minimally) reflexive approaches, such as constructivism (e.g. the work of Vincent Pouliot, Frédéric Mérand), poststructuralism (e.g. the work of David Grondin, Jean-François Thibault), feminism (e.g. the work of Claire Turenne-Sjolander,

Anne-Marie D'Aoust), and neo-Marxism (e.g. the work of Frédérick-Guillaume Dufour, Thierry Lapointe). I would also point out an interesting new trend: the development of close partnerships between many French-Canadian and French scholars working on critical security studies. Effectively, the so-called 'Paris School' of security studies, which has had a strong presence in various Anglophone networks (such as the c.a.s.e collective and the International Political Sociology ISA section), has indeed drawn many French-Canadian scholars to collaborate with their French counterparts. Oddly enough, though, this meeting point is done first and foremost in English and in Anglophone settings such as the ISA, and through a common use, *in English*, of the work of major French theorists like Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu.

Linguistic dilemmas

The French-Canadian IR community expresses itself in a border language and has developed a border knowledge that reflects that, but since it still benefits from a privileged position in its access to knowledge (both geographically and symbolically), it is certainly not half as marginalised as other communities are — even inside Canada, as testified by the virtual silence as to what IR entails for First Nations, for example. Some of these linguistics dilemmas are of course not limited to the French-Canadian IR community. Nicole Deitelhoff and Klaus Dieter Wolf recently pointed out that many German scholars are now less inclined to write German monographs than they used to, as one article published in a good American IR journal surveyed in the *Social-Science-Citation-Index* database is now evaluated as having a higher value than a German monograph (Deitelhoff and Wolf 2009: 469). Similarly, a recent account of the development of IR in Israel points to similar parallels about language and knowledge production, but would lead to a different account of border gnosis: 'We teach in Hebrew and assign reading material in English to our students. For professional advancement, we are obliged to publish in English at the top overseas journal in North America and Europe. …The result is a wide gap and even a marked disjuncture between the requirements of teaching and those of research' (Kacowicz 2009: 200).

The political relationship to language and its impact on knowledge-practices and knowledge-complexes vary from one context to another. A disciplinary sociology should precisely be attuned to these variations, as the relationship to language takes many forms, but it is neither one of an apolitical communication process nor one of total domination. As the case of French-Canadian IR highlights, it is clearly not sufficient to say that non-Anglophone IR communities are 'peripheries' or 'semi-peripheries' in relation to an Anglo-American centre: various layers of power and dominations must by distinguished. As IR

research follows the general trend in social sciences in greater international collaboration, issues of dependency and autonomy need to be problematised as well: though more and more non-Anglophone scholars gain greater visibility in top (Anglophone) journals through such collaborative works, it does not necessary translate into increased autonomy (Gingras and Mosbah-Natanson 2010: 153).

Notes

1 This idea of 'main' rather than 'sole' language is crucial since there is indeed an intellectual IR production in languages other than English in some of the aforementioned countries. For 2011–2012, the TRIP team decided for the first time to translate the survey in other languages, so it will be interesting to see the results of this translation exercise.
2 For an excellent critical overview contrasting the uses of the term 'practices' in IR, see Büger and Gadinger (2007).
3 I am referring here to IR works produced/published in French in Canada, not to IR scholars whose mother tongue is French.
4 New exciting research on the state of Francophone IR literature in Canada focused on foreign policy might nuance these positions though. See Cornut and Roussel (2011a, b).
5 For a discussion on the (ir)relevance of postcolonial theory to the case of French-Canadians (and Québécois, more precisely), see notably Schwartzwald (2005) and Cardinal *et al.* (1999).

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Beyond geography and social structure: disciplinary sociologies of power in international relations

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Throughout their relatively brief history, studies examining the academic International Relations (IR) discipline have manifested an abiding concern with power and its uneven 'distribution'. In this, of course, they mirror the object of their analysis. The same might also be said of the approach they