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TRANSLATION, POLITICS AND CONCEPTUAL CHANGE

Jede Übersetzung in je eigene Gegenwart impliziert eine Begriffsgeschichte", writes Reinhart Koselleck. (1986, 90) With this ambitious thesis, he attributes both a first rank significance to the understanding of the process of conceptual change and suggests that we reconsider the act of translation as a dimension of conceptual history. Koselleck's qualification that we should speak only of translations "into our own present" is only relative, for in a strict sense any translation is a movement in time, a move between the translatable and the translated.

In this essay take up the issue of conceptual changes due to translations. I will first present my reflections on the politics of translations, illustrated with historical examples. I will then present fragments of what I would like to call a political theory of language and translation, based on a Weberian nominalistic perspective. Comments on recent retranslations of Max Weber offer me a representative anecdote (in the sense of Burke 1945) for a preliminary discussion of analysing conceptual changes through translation. At the more concrete level of the politics of translations, I shall elucidate my argument by examining conceptual changes that are present in translations between different languages. For this purpose, I will explore translation strategies and neglected alternatives from the context of

the formation of Finnish political vocabulary during the nineteenth century. Finally, I shall return to the general implications of the politics of conceptual change through translation as a primary source of inspiration.

1. The Omnipresence of Translations

In this essay, I shall speak of 'translation' in a broad and etymologically literal sense. The Latin verb *transferre* can be counted among the expressions, which originally had the concrete spatial meaning of conveying something, but later served as basis for the shift to a more abstract temporal meaning (cf. Koselleck 1972b). We can easily understand how a translation is always a 'transport' or 'transfer' between different contexts. The point of the translation of concepts lies in their selectivity, in the fact that in a transfer between contexts there always is the possibility that something else and unintended creeps into the concept. The intention of translation marks a move that intends to regulate, although by no means always to eliminate, this 'something else'.

My specific point of departure is to insist that a translation between individual speakers is always required, on the simple basis that there are no two human beings that would have exactly the same context when speaking, listening or reading. I consider a 'methodological individualism' of this kind as a condition for understanding the insight that in the use of language the need for translation is omnipresent. Between two individuals there is always an 'existential' distance that renders a spontaneous understanding impossible. Simultaneously, such existential distance indicates the presence of a political dimension in inter-individual relationships, in the sense of both a *Spielraum* for alternative translations as well as a built-in conflict between the users of the 'original' and those using a translation.

From this perspective there cannot be any spontaneous 'linguistic common sense' that would shared by all 'normal human beings'. This point is directed against the reliance on a Habermasian type of 'ideal speech situations' as well as against the tacit ideology of elementary language teaching, both which are based on the assumption of a correspondence between translatable and translated. My

main point is, however, to understand the contingent and controversial, that is, the political dimension in the inter-individual and inter-linguistic relationships of translation which always involves conceptual change. To specify this political dimension, we have to realize that translation does not refer to exceptional situations, but, on the contrary, forms an omnipresent procedure of interpretation of the relation between speakers and audiences in two different contexts.

Translation does not merely signify a relationship between different so-called natural languages but is, in the sense of Koselleck's remark, a general procedure to render intelligible conceptual changes. Translation is no exceptional situation but a rule in our daily linguistic actions.

This does not necessarily imply radical alterations in our linguistic practices, only an inversion of the understanding of what kinds of speech acts we are using when translating. In most cases, translation obviously relies on shared conventions and is quasi-automatic. I simply want to claim that it remains, and we frequently encounter situations in which this automatism does not work and conventions break down. Conceptual changes are actualized in a situation in which we have to stop our linguistic action to reflect on the meaning and point of a concept, but it can also take place as the unintended consequences of linguistic actions. For translation we have to consider both types of situations (cf. Skinner 1996, 7-8).

We can speculate about the various grounds for an internal conceptual history that enables us an inversion of perspective on translation. My source of inspiration is Max Weber's famous article *Die 'Objektivität' sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Forschung* of 1904, in which Weber, above all, defends the perspectivist character of all knowledge in *Kulturwissenschaften*. Behind Weber is the work of Friedrich Nietzsche, and behind this aspect of Nietzsche's perspectivism are the ancient rhetoricians and Sophists, as it has only recently been made clear with the publication of Nietzsche's lectures on ancient rhetoric (in: *Werke* 2/4).

To trace the implications of perspectivism on the omnipresence of translation, I want to insist on three theses. My main nominalistic contention is that all use of language is based on the human acts of naming, not on the 'nature of things'. For example, the entities called

'men' and 'women' are contingent results of certain modes of naming and classifying things, which can always be replaced by others. This means, secondly, that even long-lasting historical consensus about such naming remains contingent, and such established names rather indicate a success in political struggles to exclude alternatives, but one day even such a success may evaporate. Today a growing number of people already experience difficulties in locating themselves through the public and largely 'statistical' categories of men and women, and we can imagine that it will not be long before the universal and unreflected use of that categorical dyad will decline. Thirdly, conceptual changes are omnipresent expressions of the controversiality of concepts, of rhetorical moves in such controversies and of their unanticipated consequences. Just as Tuija Pulkkinen (2002) has recently thematized the conceptual and rhetorical history of the concept 'woman', I think that we have now reached a point at which an allegedly 'anthropological' or 'metahistorical' category (to use Koselleck's (1987) terms, partly to opposed conclusions that he himself has drawn) has been replaced by a historical and political concept.

It is in this sense we can also better understand Koselleck's thesis that every translation, as an act in time, involves a conceptual history of the movement between the translatable and translated. We could even speak, with Koselleck (1972a), of translation as a 'method' of conceptual history, not just as a metaphor, but as a procedure that renders conceptual changes from past to the present as well as the inevitable use of contemporary language in the analysis of such changes intelligible (cf. Koselleck 1983). Indeed, the competent translation presupposes a readiness to regard the translatable as something alien that deserves a paraphrase or an interpretation in order to be intelligible to the present-day audience (cf. also Skinner 1970, 1988). You have to treat a word, a concept or a phrase as something that can be transferred to an audience only through an explication of its point and significance. Hence it is no wonder that Koselleck also uses the Brechtian figure of *Verfremdungseffekt* to redescribe the procedure of conceptual history (cf. Koselleck 1972a).

2. The Politics of Translations

A further political implication of the contingency of translations is that a number of alternative translations for a text, a passage or a concept, can always be provided. None of them is perfect, but each of them indicates a different perspective on the transfer between the concepts as well as on the changing styles or fashions of doing so. All of these aspects are accentuated in the politically and historically controversial translations of concepts.

How do the various alternatives achieve or legitimize a conceptual change through translation? Here we have to shift the discussion from single moves to conventional entities, such as languages. My point is, however, not to apply the linguistic criteria of the formation of 'natural' or 'technical' languages to politics. On the contrary, I want to understand all languages as historical and political entities, of which the so-called natural languages are only one specific type.

A metaphorical use of political languages was mentioned already in the early twentieth century. It seems, however, that it was more systematically introduced by John Pocock in his *Politics, Language and Time* in 1971, and has since become a commonplace. With Anthony Pagden's edition of the book *Languages of Political Theory in Early Modern Europe* (1987), the metaphor has even been taken so seriously that certain languages have been named, as if they would be entities independent of the context and specific problematic of each scholar. I think this leads, already in the book edited by Pagden, to questionable quasi-naturalizations of definite political languages that could also engage us in rather fruitless debates about the borders and separateness of languages.

Moreover, such a quasi-naturalization of languages tends to provide the political languages with a similar status of quasi-autonomous entities rather than the 'natural languages' that we have in everyday use. It is, however, eminently political whether Serbian and Croatian have now become separate languages or remain politically conditioned dialects of Serbo-Croat with either a Latin or Cyrillic orthography. The example shows, however, that even so-called natural languages are political constructions (with linguists acting as part-time politicians).

Speaking of political languages as loosely related but historically relatively distinct theory complexes has an obvious advantage towards the more common use of 'isms'. This can be found also in academic literature, where 'isms' are discussed as if they would be real things instead of historical constructions, mainly of the nineteenth century. 'Liberalism', for example, can be defended with a number of opposed political languages (cf. Leonhard 2001), and it is often more fruitful to replace the isms by more specific political languages, such as contractarianism or evolutionism. This was a difference that provoked politically significant theoretical differences among the 'liberals', the understanding that contractarian 'liberals' and 'socialists' might have more common than with their party colleagues believing in an evolutionist philosophy of history.

We should, however, use political languages and the divisions between them only in thematically and rhetorically specified manners, making different classifications for different purposes. Thus, we must be cautious when speaking about contractarianism, as if there would be a single language from Hobbes to Rawls. There can be cases in which the common assumptions may be thematized critically, but in others the contractual basis of a polity remains of secondary importance, and the variations between types of contracts and the utilization of contractarian arguments may play a contextually highly different role.

Accordingly, I shall treat the so-called natural languages in the manner of political languages and not vice versa. By this move I do not merely intend the elementary insight that 'natural' languages have been politically constructed, some in more explicit forms than others. I would rather underline the fact that the fluid, diffuse, historical and always comparative character of political languages also holds true for the political dimensions of so-called natural languages. In this sense, there is no difference in principle to compare, for example, republican and contractarian languages than to compare the French and German languages.

In the Weberian mode of proceeding, all types of languages, whether 'natural', technical or political, can be considered as specific, although flexible and historically contingent complexes of *Chancen*[1]. All of them contain a limited but complex repertoire of resources for action that consist of a profiled distribution of certain

shares of power. What is easily possible in one language cannot be done so easily in another, whereas there may be some inbound implications favouring certain uses and not favouring others and so on. Such limits change historically and may be altered by political moves.

My next move is to distinguish between different aspects of language. To simplify matters, we can distinguish between the resources in vocabulary, in references to reality and in conceptualization. For the study of conceptual change, the vocabulary as well as the modes to refer to non-linguistic events and processes form a way through which 'natural languages' and 'real history' can intervene in the conceptual discussions, in so far as they are conducted in different political languages. What Koselleck calls *Sache* (1972a), namely, the modes by which the events or processed are referred to and the facticities of the situation are established, I will rename as referential languages, avoiding a recourse to non-linguistic instances. The facticity of the events and processes is, in other words, always mediated by and interpreted through referential languages.

The description of events is never given, but usually not problematic. Hannah Arendt quotes Georges Clemenceau as remarking about future historians' views on the outbreak of World War I: "I know for certain that they will not say Belgium invaded Germany." (Arendt 1968, 239) However, we have to understand that this is just a statement of facticity, and although we do not dispute its validity, the significance and the point of it is always disputable. Or, to put it in terms of speech acts: the strictly locutionary mention of a 'fact' is at the same time only a possibility among the numerous illocutionary modes of *doing* so (cf. Skinner 1971).

I sometimes call sociology a discipline in which 'nothing happens', that is, a discipline in which no names, dates, persons or events are either mentioned at all or referred only in a symptomal manner. More generally, in massive systems of concepts à la Rawls or à la Luhmann, interventions due to the diversity of vernacular languages and to the acuteness of historical events referred to tend to be regarded as disturbances. As opposed to this, conceptual history, as a mode of studying politics, should be keenly interested in names, dates, persons and events. For an understanding of conceptual change, contingent interventions into referred events, proper names of individual agents and the use vernacular languages appear as challenges.

Studying the politics and history of conceptual changes does not mean a study of the competition between a small and finite number of political languages. It forms, rather, a process of mixture, dissolution and formation of such languages, including constant interventions of both the vocabulary of 'natural' languages and of references to the historical events and processes. If we, with Koselleck (1996), understand concepts as 'pivots', around which the language turns, they mark singularizing breaking points in the fluent use of the languages. Actualization of a key concept, such as power, democracy or politics, occurs in a speech act that actualizes a break with the fluent use of language, as an occasion to revise the conceptual horizon or its relations to other linguistic dimensions of the situation.

To sum up, translating refers to a singularizing speech act that is related to a horizon of the concepts. The three levels – 1) the vocabulary of 'natural' languages, 2) the theorizing in political languages, and 3) the modes of referring to the facticities – serve as mediating contextual instances modifying both the conditions and the modes of reconceptualization-by-translation.

It is certainly uncommon to understand translation as an occasion for reconceptualization, using the contextual instances as mediating layers. The 'normal' situation for EU translators, for example, is, rather, to avoid such a reconceptualization. My point is that due to the tacit presence of such contextual instances, unintended conceptual changes are frequently introduced. This is by no means to be avoided at all costs, rather they should be closely analyzed with specific cases and with varying types of conceptual alterations.

3. Translating Max Weber

In a recent issue of *Max Weber Studies* several contributions dealt with the recent retranslations of Weber's *Protestantische Ethik*. The only existing translation of the famous text was done by Talcott Parsons in 1931. It has been known for some time that Parsons' translation is severely misleading and shaped by his own ideological preferences, which at key points were opposed to those of Weber (Cf. for example Kalberg 2001, 47).

Peter Ghosh has gone further and reconsidered the point of translation of classics, such as Weber. Ghosh claims that translation is primarily not a "linguistic act" but "a historical and conceptual act". He consequently insists on the principle that a linguist should not translate a work on German "social and political theory", but that it is the task of an historian. According to Ghosh, "the only properly equipped historian is an historian of ideas, who is familiar not only with Weber's conceptual world, but more or less the entire tradition of German social and political thinking to which Weber has reference". Only by dispensing with an historical *Bildung* can we have any chance "that the full range of meaning attaching to concepts can be revealed and explored". (Ghosh 2001, 60)

Although Ghosh does not speak about conceptual history, he clearly has insight into the general historicity and contextuality of the concepts and the need, to use Quentin Skinner's (1969) old expression, to avoid the "mythology of prolepsis". In addition, Ghosh is also clearly aware of the singular character of Weber's mode of using concepts – which, in my view, causes him to practice a variant of *Begriffsgeschichte avant la lettre* in several respects. (cf. Palonen 2000) Ghosh thus proposes the following procedure for the translation of *Die protestantische Ethik*:

> Thus, in Weber the translation of concepts is more important than the translation of any other word; and any attempt to calibrate a set of translations of Weber's most celebrated work should proceed in the first instance not from the translation of selected passages … but from a sample mapping in English of the conceptual lexicon of the PE. (Ghosh 2001, 61)

Now we can better understand Koselleck's point about the presence of conceptual history in any translation. In order to render intelligible both Weber's contextual horizon and his singularizing speech act in using a certain concept, a comprehensive "lexicon" of Weber's own conceptual map would be required, in the best case one which takes into account both the *Werkgeschichte* of both Weber's *œuvre* and of the writings in question.

Perhaps we could recommend that Weber translators take the indexes of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* as their point of departure

to better understand what were "key concepts" of that time and how Weber's work was related to them. Weber was, however, a post-*Satt elzeit* thinker and has not been analyzed in detail in most of the GG articles, which sometimes tend to miss Weber's singularity as theorist and practitioner of conceptual change (cf. Palonen 2000). A second step would be to write a lexicon of the Weberian *Grundbegriffe*. The glossaries, which are used in new translations (such as Lassman's & Speirs's in *Political Writings* 1994), could be understood as minimal versions of such lexica, attempting to reconstruct Weber's singular conceptual horizon in order to then understand his specific "moves in argument" (Skinner 1988) in the conceptual act of translation. Such lexicready exist for several classics and they are, of course, themselves controversial both in their mode of composition and in their content of interpretations. Such author-specific conceptual lexica could also serve as a critical instance for general conceptual lexica, including the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*.

4. Translation of the Political Vocabulary

After this speculation I now arrive to the translation of concepts dealt within political theories as a move between languages. More specifically, I shall discuss the topic of turning new vernacular languages, such as the Finnish of the 19th century, into written and academic languages, in which both fluent everyday political activity and independent political theorizing became possible.

What differentiates political languages from technical ones is the insight that modern European political languages have largely retained the old Greek or Roman vocabularies for speaking about contemporary political phenomena. The words we use for politics, citizenship, democracy, republic, society, public and private sphere and so on can be traced to either Greek or Roman origins. Of course, there are such concepts as state, representation and parliamentarism, which are of later origin, but it is rather astonishing just how far the ancient vocabularies have been retained, even if they are now used in an entirely different political and conceptual world.

Reinhart Koselleck (1998) has suggested that we can detect a divide between the modern languages in so far as the Romanic languages and the English have retained much more of this ancient vocabulary than the Germanic ones, while the Slavic ones are still farther from the classical political vocabulary. In other words, the vernacularization has added to these languages further instances of revising, intentionally or not, the conceptual commitments bound to the vocabularies. Through such unintended conceptual revisions something of the theoretical commitments and referential connections, which are retained in the 'more ancient' languages, will be lost.

While re garding this geography of language, as Koselleck puts it, as a valuable hypothesis, I think its significance should not be overrated. The remarkable thing is that conceptual horizon shifts have been achieved by retaining the old vocabulary. Koselleck himself has paradigmatically shown this with the formation of *die Geschichte* as a collective singular noun that took place between 1760-1780 (cf. already Koselleck 1967). My own work during the last 20 years has been shaped by the insight that we can hardly speak about the activity of politics before the year 1800 in German, French or English as well. It is a new concept of politics, politics-as-activity, that has been formed, and I have explicated what is done by this conceptualization around a number of different, part competing, part overlapping *topoi*. This process has been obliged to struggle with linguistic remnants of the old vocabularies, for example by using the English noun politics in plural, or the unavailability of a single word for politicking in languages such as French, German or Swedish (Palonen, forthcoming).

The recourse to the 'original' Greek or Roman sense of the concepts would be an impossible claim, neglecting the changed world of references and the corresponding opportunities to reconceptualization. Still, which word has been chosen as a linguistic sign of a concept for the modern European languages is interesting in several respects. Why has for example the word *polites* vanished of the *polit*-vocabulary in favour of *citoyen* in French, *citizen* in English and *Staatsbürger* in German, while otherwise the polit-vocabulary has largely been retained? (cf. Sternberger 1986). This has led, already in the United States of the late 19th century, to the opposition of good citizens to bad politicians (cf. Ostrogorski 1903). I think here a revision of vocabulary would still be possible, and an interest-

ing suggestion is offered by Max Weber with the expression *Gelegenheitspolitiker* (1919, 41), which, in a sense, makes of all citizens politicians, the ones rather occasionally, the others professionally. With the depoliticizing inflation of the citizenship vocabulary, I think the Weberian alternative could be singled out when speaking of anyone acting politically, an alternative open also to those 'displaced persons' who have lost their citizenship.

When translation is understood as a 'conceptual act', as Ghosh says, it leaves space for a number of alternatives strategies or translation styles. Taking the Finnish as an example of a language, for which an academic and political vocabulary was created mainly in the middle decades of the 19th century, I will speculate with the question of which types of translation strategies are available to people to introduce the political concepts into their own vernacular language?

By retaining the distinction between the international vocabulary used in established 'natural' languages, as well as in existing political languages, and the resources of the vernacular languages we can propose at least five ideal typical alternatives:

1) adopting the international word as an untranslated loan-word into the vocabulary. For example *Realpolitik* is used in many languages in this manner, or the French expression *raison d'Etat* in English.

2) adopting the international word but formulating it according to the grammar and pronunciation of the language in question, as for example *politiikka* in Finnish (cf. Palonen 2001).

3) adapting the resources of the vernacular language to the meaning of an international word, for example turning the Italian *lo stato* into *l'Etat* in French, *state* in English, *der Staat* in German, *en stat* in Swedish.

4) adapting the meaning of an international word into the resources of the vernacular language. This is an interesting, although rather anachronistic case, but for example in the older Finnish usage of *valta* (power), there are clearly such tendencies that have then been replaced by conceptions closer to the contemporary academic languages (cf. Hyvärinen 1998, 2003).

5) creating a neologism that would take into account both the concepts in the international vocabulary and the linguistic resources of the vernacular language, such as *valtio* for the state in Finnish (cf. Pulkkinen 2000).

Thus, the result of judging *a posteriori* the political vocabulary as it has been adopted in a language, such as Finnish, is a contingent

combination of all those strategies. Initially, the 'Fennoman' language politicians set up a program to replace the international vocabulary by a 'native' one. Such attempts were not easily realized, and proposals for translations remained successful only in a few cases, such as *valtio* or *kansalainen* for citizenship. In other cases, however, it became increasingly clear that the use of Finnish concepts has been adapted to international political languages. For example a number of neologisms, based on state or government vocabulary were suggested in the nineteenth century in order to replace politics. However, they never gained a wider usage outside programmatic documents, such as dictionaries. Although there was a definite difference in the frequency of the polit-vocabulary between Swedish- and Finnish-speaking Finns around the parliament reform of 1906, the Finnish-speaking Finns have learned to use *politiikka* as well as their Swedish-speaking co-citizens use *politik* (cf. Palonen 2001).

The intentions of the creators of a 'political Finnish' were, to considerable extent, pedagogical. They wanted to render journals capable of reporting on the world events surrounding 1848, and to mediate an already existing sense of the international vocabulary to Finnish readers. To understand themselves as political agents was, of course, not an easy task for the academics, journalists and state officials in the Finnish Grand Duchy, even after the reopening of the Estate Diets in 1863. The creation of Finnish political vocabulary surely was a translation strategy that improved the chances to understand the possibility of a 'citizen' to act politically. Later it was no longer important whether the word used was of Finnish or foreign origin. For example the word *kansan valta* (*people's power*), as Matti Hyvärinen (2003) has illustrated, has recently more or less been replaced by *demokratia*, using the international word in a fashion that is even closer to the ancient Greek than the corresponding word in other modern languages.

Similarly, the downplaying of political controversies is expressed in some of the key political concepts. One of them is the name of the Finnish parliament, *eduskunta* – approximately, *house of representatives*, a term already used for the four-estate Diet after 1863. In writing a conjectural conceptual history, advocated by Terence Ball (2002), I have speculated whether a retranslation would be

possible that could do better justice to the character of the parliament as a deliberative space using speech (including voting) as a medium of contestation and decision. My proposal is *puhekunta* – roughly: house of speakers – that would connect to the etymology of *parlare*, *parler* or parliament, as a specific *locus* of a politics of speech. The Estate Diet was, of course, not such a deliberative space, and in the debates of the Finnish parliament reform committee of 1906 the name of the parliament was not evoked. The phase of creating neologisms for political concepts had already passed. Still, the retention of the old name is an indicator that the new unicameral parliament elected by the universal male and female suffrage, was more considered to "represent" the people than to deliberate and decide about politics.

The vocabulary that was adopted for political concepts in Finnish in the second half of the nineteenth century remained a highly contingent matter. In certain respects, the contextual origins of the specific Finnish translation remain in contemporary Finnish, largely in a harmless manner, but sometimes containing, as I have indicated, questionable depoliticizing tendencies.

My proposal to replace *eduskunta* by *puhekunta* is, of course, mainly a proposal intended to evoke the historical contingencies of the translation policies in Finnish. I hardly harbour the illusion that after our volume *Käsitteet liikkeessä* (Concepts in Motion, as Matti Hyvärinen has translated the title) is published with my postscript on translations (Palonen 2003), that an MP would put forward the corresponding motion to change the name of the Finnish parliament. However, it would be enough if there would be an increasing consciousness in the Finnish politico-academic debates that speaking in a parliament is one of the preeminently political acts. It is my impression that in Finnish political culture the distinction between speaking and doing, between rhetoric and reality, between verbal games and the seriousness of politics has been even harder to overcome than elsewhere. Perhaps this is also the reason why the "rhetorical turn" has, after all, played a prominent role in Finnish political science of the past two decades.

5. Shares of Conceptual Power in Translations

It is not uncommon to consider the concepts used as in a certain sense as 'determined' by the language used. Surely nobody denies the constraining role of language in political thought, action and judgment. Some system theorists or structuralists may even celebrate this as a healthy limit to 'anarchistic' tendencies. Others would rather claim that for this reason we have to get rid of "conceptual thinking", for example in favour of a narrative one (Guaraldo 2001), or distinguishing à la Sartre (1971) between rigid *concepts* and flexible, multi-dimensional and historical *notions*.

There are certainly tendencies to connect concepts with the magic of words, to capture things by "knowing their names" or by giving names that are so suggestive that the phenomena named appear in a thing-like fashion. Such tendencies are especially strong when concepts are connected with a strong normative colour of positive or negative colour. For example, the German Christian Democrats once used the electoral slogan *Freiheit statt Sozialismus*, combining a magical positive value with a magical negative value, thus claiming to obtain mutually exclusive concepts. Something of this magical tendency to refuse to distinguish between the word, the meaning and the normative colour of a concept is still present in normative political theory: for Rawls or Habermas, concepts such as justice, freedom or democracy appear to be valuable "as such", independent of their history and controversies surrounding their interpretation (cf. Palonen 2002a).

The normative project of conceptual history is directed against such essentialist tendencies of speaking about concepts. We could speak about *Entzauberung der Begriffe*, when they are understood as instruments (Weber) or as tools (Wittgenstein) in human activities and in the understanding of these activities. In this sense we can also understand Quentin Skinner's claim to treat concepts from the perspective of their "uses in argument" (1988) or as dimensions in "linguistic action" (1996). Indeed, Koselleck has also subscribed to a nominalistic perspective, in which the formation and reconceptualization of concepts gain over modification through reception (cf. esp. 1983, 1996).

Translations are a good illustration of the case that even minor differences in vocabulary may sometimes be politically significant, whereas in other cases the vocabulary remains subordinated to conceptual debates. In this sense, we can regard conceptual variation and alternative strategies to use them as strategic resources for linguistic action.

My first conclusion is to affirm that concepts can serve well as power shares for political action. They should be interpreted in a strictly nominalistic manner, not bound to fixed 'networks' or 'discourses' but closely connected to politics-as-activity. However, concepts are above all significant in 'theory politics', in that which is considered to be possible, realizable, legitimate and so on, but not in the facticities of actual political decisions and taking responsibility for them.

'Weighing the significance' of instances is hopeless to do in general terms, independent of the situation and constellation. For students of conceptual history, there is no more reason to declare that concepts are 'most important' phenomena than for a pacifist must declare her faith on the superior efficiency of peaceful means over violent ones. When concepts are used as political instruments, the power of concepts does not indicate any idealism, for example regarding World War I as one between Descartes and Kant.

Still, if we wage an attempt to assess the role of concepts as power shares in strictly Weberian terms, we can relate them to two further types of power shares, the number (*Zahl*) of the adherents and the recourse to violent means. Interestingly enough, Max Weber (1917, 1919) considers both of them to be the *ultima ratio* in politics. I think the *ultima ratio* of *Gewaltsamkeit* should be regarded as a limit-situation for politics in a modern state characterized by the monopoly of violence. The *ultima ratio* of the number serves as the specific criterion of a modern parliamentary democracy, in which the monopoly of violence is controlled by a parliament elected by universal suffrage.

The power of concepts, within this Weberian conceptual horizon, does not transcend these criteria marking the limit-situation of the regime. It concerns the question of what is possible within the horizon of accepting these criteria as *ultima ratio* within democratized states. In his polemics against the Prussian tripartite electoral sys-

tem, Weber (1917) regarded as the great advantage of democracy that votes are counted and not weighed. This by no means makes the use of concepts meaningless, but rather increases their role as instruments of legitimating past or future moves in both parliamentary deliberations and electoral campaigns.

Historicity, controversiality and contingency of concepts also indicate resources in the struggle with other kinds of shares of power. It is the power of alterability that characterizes the power of concepts, as opposed to fixed conceptual commitments in 'gallup-democratic' interpretations of the power of numbers. It is the omnipresent possibility to contest any interpretation of a concept concerning the naming, meaning, range of reference or normative colour of a concept that serves as a power share in the political struggle. And it is the contingency of politics-as-activity that always enables us not to regard concepts as definitions that close the situation, but as a complex of chances. The views of a majority have no authority but can at any time be delegitimated in their conceptual commitments that may play a role both in parliamentary deliberations and in the chances of political alteration in next elections.

In the Weberian perspective the rhetorical power of the concepts can thus be, in the first instance, a power-share in the politicking of oppositions, minorities and of competent individual politicians to reduce the simple numerical power of the governmental majority. All of them can use conceptual reflections and revisions as instruments illustrating the weaknesses of the policy of the government, in constructing alternatives to them as well as introduce new questions or new dimensions in the old ones into the political agenda.

Perhaps more interestingly, we could claim, with Weber (1918), that the power of concepts using their historicity and contingency, is a power of politicians subjected to competition in parliaments, elections and parties, as opposed to the bureaucracies (in state, party and business). Bureaucracy is ideally an atemporal order, based on stability and continuity. Its use of the power of concepts tends to be characterized by a reliance on clear and unchanging definitions, which are from time to time replaced by others, but not understood as historical and controversial themselves. As opposed to this, the main advantage of the experience of politicians in parliamentary democracies is the temporality of the regime. This concerns not only the

alternation in government through elections but also the plural temporalities of parliamentary control and procedure (cf. Riescher 1994, for a detailed description of the 19th century British practices cf. Redlich 1905).

Thus, conceptual history is an approach that is poorly understood by bureaucracies, and it is a vain hope to expect it to find its way to the numerous documents of planning and administration, for example at the level of the European Union. Nonetheless, I claim that the temporal condition of politicians is much better than that of the bureaucrats suited to the understanding the contingency, historicity and controversiality of concepts.

Notes

1 In principle, the political treatment can be extended also to 'technical' languages, such as computer programmes. Today we can, for example, explore the majority languages of the PC party, the minority languages of the Mac party, the computer Esperanto of the RTF and the computer Latin of Microsoft Word and other programmes applicable to both PC and Mac parties. Between the majority and minority we can detect an asymmetric conceptual opposition: every Mac computer contains a inter-party translation programme, such as MacLinkPlus, whereas the PC remains monolingual and upholds the (vain) hope of extinguishing the Mac party. The *lingua franca* of Microsoft also allows translations only to the RTF Esperanto, but not to Mac languages (such as Apple Works). In this sense, the PC party tends towards hegemonic monolingualism, whereas the adherents of the Mac languages clearly admit and accept the plurality of languages and the omnipresence of translation.

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