

KNOWLEDGE CREATION AND LEARNING IN TRANSLATING A NOVEL INTO A FILM

Eduard Bonet^a
Catalina Pons^b
Alfons Sauquet^c
Elena Bou^c

^{a,b,c,d}ESADE, Spain
^a bonet@esade.edu
^b pons@esade.edu
^c sauquet@esade.edu
^d bou@esade.edu

Session B-3

Abstract

This paper studies the metaphor of translations in knowledge creation and learning from the point of view of the acts of knowing that they require and that involve interpretations and creation of meanings. It focuses on how narratives convey knowledge from people to people and it develops these subjects in an empirical study on translating a novel into a film. This case shows the creative aspects of translations manifested in the clashing interpretations of the film director and the scriptwriter and it emphasizes the limitations of sharing tacit knowledge and meanings that led to suspend the project of making the film.

Keywords: knowledge creation, corporate learning, film making, narratives, translations, creation of meanings, bundles of knowledge, problems on tacit knowledge, epistemology, hermeneutics and literary criticism.

**The fifth European Conference on
Organisational Knowledge, Learning and Capabilities (OKLC)
2 – 3 April 2004
Innsbruck, Austria**

OKLC2004@uibk.ac.at

**KNOWLEDGE CREATION AND LEARNING IN
TRANSLATING A NOVEL INTO A FILM**

Eduard Bonet, bonet@esade.edu

Catalina Pons, pons@esade.edu

Alfons Sauquet, sauquet@esade.edu

Elena Bou, bou@esade.edu

**Avenida Pedralbes, 60-62
08034 Barcelona (Spain)
Phone: +34 93 280 61 62**

Academic contribution presented to the track on

ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

KNOWLEDGE CREATION AND LEARNING IN TRANSLATING A NOVEL INTO A FILM

Eduard Bonet, bonet@esade.edu
Catalina Pons, pons@esade.edu
Alfons Sauquet, sauquet@esade.edu
Elena Bou, bou@esade.edu

ABSTRACT

Can the activity of writing a novel or making a film be considered as a process that produces knowledge?; can the operations of creating meanings in art or business be conceptualised as forms of knowledge creation? Maybe to accept these views would extend the notion of knowledge beyond its reasonable limits. It is clear, however, that, on the one hand, to carry on these activities requires knowledge creation and learning, and that, on the other hand, a novel or a film has many characteristics of narrative knowledge and, similarly, meanings constitute important dimensions of our knowledge of the world. For these reasons, studies on making films can unveil many aspects of organizational knowledge, learning and communication.

As an author of the paper, Catalina Pons, is a partner and a close creative collaborator of the leading Spanish film director Bigas Luna, we had an extraordinary opportunity for analysing the following stages of a project: Bigas Luna undertook the activity of making a film based on the French novel *Neige (Snow)* by Maxence Ferminé. He explained the reasons of his decision; convinced a producer; wrote a short narrative about the story, and meanings of the film; and handed it out to the scriptwriter, who presented a first draft of the script. Afterwards, they were involved in many discussions and rewritings, dealing especially with meanings and ending with the interruption, perhaps temporary, of the project.

For our case study we had first-hand materials, we were direct observers of some meetings, and we made deep interviews. The research was based on the following views: an approach to knowledge creation grounded on the use of the metaphor of translating texts into other texts and texts into images; the hermeneutical idea that translation involves interpretation; a focus on some ways in which tacit knowledge travels from a person to another; and an emphasis on the difficulties and problems of this transfer, which can contribute to breaking down a project.

The metaphor of translation seems quite appropriate for comparing, different texts involved in the process from the novel to the script and, potentially, from the script to the film. Its use also tries to avoid current mechanical analogies for knowledge creation, as it is emphasised in B. Czarniawska and G. Sévon (eds.) *Translation Organizational Change* (1996) and in B. Czarniawska *A tale of Three Cities* (1992). Another important aim is to get rid of the following contradictory ideas, diffused by Nonaka and Takeuchi in *The Knowledge Creating Company* (1995) and criticised by H. Tsoukas in "Do We Really Understand Tacit Knowledge?", in M. Easterby-Smith and M. Lyles (eds.) *Handbook of Organizational Learning and Knowledge* (2000): Some popular theories are based on the concept of tacit knowledge that in Polanyi's definition cannot be made explicit and they claim that a form of knowledge creation consists on converting tacit into explicit knowledge.

Our conceptual framework is based on the interplay between knowledge and knowing, studied by Cook and Brown in "Building Epistemologies: The Generative Dance

between Organizational Knowledge and Organizational Knowing”, in *Organizational Science* (1999, vol. 10.) with the metaphor of the generative dance. Their basic ideas can be developed using other metaphors. Our research group, for instance in Bou, E. et al. “Exploring the Dynamics of Knowledge in Practice” develops them with the metaphor “bundles of knowledge”, which include tacit and explicit knowledge. In the present paper the basic metaphor is translation, which involves bundles of knowledge.

On the problems about how tacit knowledge travels from a person to another, we will take into account the ideas that David Schön presented in *Educating the Reflexive Practitioner*, where he mentioned Plato’s *Meno*. On the subject on how bundles of knowledge travel, we will introduce the following views: In our case study, translations include reading, translating and writing; and these operations involve interpretation. So we will apply the hermeneutical and phenomenological principles that interpretation depends on the previous life experience, knowledge, meanings, expectations and interests of the interpreter, which evolve in the hermeneutical circle.

The novel *Neige* allows many readings and can be translated into many films. The remarks of Bigas Luna, written on a copy of the book, give important information about his reading. For instance, the extreme whiteness of the French girl called Neige is his main inspiring idea. Comparing his short narrative of the film with the novel, we find that some parts of the novel disappear, and some aspects are emphasised or underemphasized. For instance, the process of Yuko for learning how to write *haiku* poems disappears in the translation. We will emphasise that the central problem of this translation is that the narrative cannot give a full account of Bigas Luna’s vision and meanings of the film, because it is a visual story in his mind. When he presented the narrative, he explained many ideas, but the general vision cannot be made explicit.

The first draft of the script revealed that the scriptwriter has not developed the vision of the director, and was not giving to the story the meaning intended by him. In the dialogues between them, Bigas Luna tried to make clear his vision, using expressions like “you do not love Neige or Kuro”. New versions of the script did not fit with the director’s vision. They make explicit that the director was looking for an innovative romantic story, and the scriptwriter was aiming at a violent film. Even if they were aware of these differences, their readings of the novel made difficult their collaboration, to the point that the project was interrupted.

We think that this case of knowledge creation and learning is atypical in organizational knowledge and learning. We claim, however, that it reveals important aspects that are involved in any kinds of processes. The film director had a large freedom for interpreting the novel and translating it into a film and we do not have this liberty in other situations. However the influence of previous knowledge, meanings, expectations and interests of the receiver of knowledge always influence his or her reception.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Fermine M. (1999), *Neige*. Arlea. Paris.
- Czarniaswka, B, Sevon, G (eds.) (1996). *Translating Organizational Change*. The Gruyter, Berlin
- Czarniawska, B. (2002). *A Tale of Three cities*. Oxford University Press, New York
- Tsoukas, H. (2002). “Do we Really Understand Tacit Knowledge?” in M. Easterby and M. Lyler (eds.). *Handbook of Organizational Learning and Knowledge*. Blackwell.

- Cook, S. and Brown, J.S. (1999). "Bridging Epistemologies: The Generative Dance between Organizational Knowledge and Organizational Knowing" in *Organizational Science*, vol. 10, n° 4, pag 381-400
- Schön, *Educating the Reflexive Practitioner*
- Sauquet, A., Bonet, E. (2003). *Learning in Organizations: Schools of Thought and Current Challenges* (in press)
- Bou, E., Sauquet, A, Bonet, E. (2003). *Exploring the Dynamics of Knowledge in Practice: Comparing Bundles of Knowledge of Novices and Experts* (submitted paper).