Chapter 14

Code-Switching, or Why a Metacode Is Good to Have

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The notion of translation as introduced by Michel Serres and applied by most contributors to this volume is one way of avoiding the old controversy about reality - the question if there is one reality or many equivalent realities. It assumes, in effect, an endless number of realities - shifting seamlessly along the time and space dimension. To take an example, fish specialists know that “the same” fish is never the same in different waters. Thus although the interlocutors agree to use the term “cod” for a creature that can be described by a common set of certain traits, everybody knows that the actual fish is different, and also that if an actual object-fish is displaced, it will change accordingly.

Not everybody is prepared to accept such a solution, as the constant accusations against politicians for their double-talk indicate. The argument that the building as talked about on Thursday in the city council became translated into a tunnel in a press conference on Friday does not convince. In other words, there are political necessities for and obstacles to smooth translation and translations are often contested. There are at least two fields of practice where this is evident: management and anthropology. As most of the contributions in this book deal with the former, I will concentrate on the latter, assuming that it offers reflection useful for all kinds of field studies, including management studies.¹

One or Many Realities?

One can begin by asking relatively simple and easily answerable questions. Under what conditions do different interlocutors draw on the one reality argument? Under what conditions do they stress that there are many realities? When, where and by whom is an appeal to one reality problematized by interpreting this appeal to “naked reality” as an expression of the inter-

¹ The argument of this chapter is taken from my monograph on translations in the global organizational field of development cooperation, which focuses on the construction of objectivity criteria; see Rottenburg, 2002.
ests and the culture of the appellant? Conversely, when, where and by whom is an appeal to one reality questioned, by arguing that there are multiple realities? And when, finally, is the argument that there are many realities attributed to cultural delusion - by making reference to the universal reality on which all human representations are based?

Each of these questions can be answered to everyone's satisfaction, but not together and at the same time. They cannot be reduced to a common denominator, and they cannot be applied to themselves. What is denied in one operation is taken for granted in questioning just that operation. To establish their own critique, commentators are obliged to draw on arguments they denied their opponent. Approaching this dilemma from a different angle will allow asking more precise questions that have a better chance at being answered fruitfully.

The assumption of one describable reality presupposes in turn one metacode in which this reality can be described without distorting it. The assumption of the existence of such a metacode means that all other existing codes must be cultural codes (in the language of this book, one could say that it assumes existence of a global code, which at no place is a local code2). The assumption of one describable reality could not be maintained without differentiating between the one universal metacode and many particular cultural codes, since different cultural codes are each a basis for their own version of reality. Those, on the other hand, who argue that there are many realities are also reduced to drawing on a single metacode in order to formulate their argument of many realities, thus undermining their own argument. Does this mean that there must be one reality?

Instead of trying to resolve this paradox or letting oneself be paralyzed by it (Luhmann, 1991), my suggestion is to explore how and under what conditions a shift between metacode and cultural codes takes place in practice. I will not find an answer to the question of existence of one or many realities, but we may find an answer to the question of why the assumption of one reality is sometimes necessary in order to permit many realities to exist.

Representational vs. Performative Idiom

The critics of the idea of a representational idiom, who wish to replace it with the notion of a performative idiom, are paradoxical in that they need to draw on a code of representation in order to make the switch (Fish, 1989: 467; Luhmann, 1991). Otherwise, it is impossible to argue that the performative idiom is better than the idiom of representation. This is not to say that the other side is in better shape. The claim that a statement can be ver-

2 Those who reject such an assumption point out that the “global code” is, in fact, a local code at such places as Brussels or the United Nations building.
ified as to be a correct or incorrect representation of reality assumes pre-
conditions that vary culturally and historically and cannot be easily consol-
idated (Daston, 2001).

Before any statement can be verified, it must first be recognized as a state-
ment, meaning that it must be communicable. Communicability means that
a statement must be formulated in a recognizable code, which has its own
rules. These rules set limits on a statement, which are independent of the ref-
erent of that statement. (English grammar does not change with the topic of
a sentence). At the same time, the only way a communicable statement can
draw attention to itself is by its partial lack of plausibility, i.e. by its lack of
conformity. This is because a self-evident statement does not provide any
information (for the difference between information and meaning, see Eco,
1989), and there will be no incentive to pay attention to such a statement or
to challenge it.

These two cultural preconditions of the verifiability of a statement – its
communicability and its lack of self-evidence – in turn have preconditions.
The parties arguing about the validity of a statement need to agree at least
on which areas of epistemology are pertinent to the controversy. Otherwise
they would not even be able to initiate the dispute, as their arguments will
never coincide. They must additionally share the ontological conviction that
they are arguing about the same thing, which they both consider in princi-
ple to be within reach.

In brief, when two or more parties argue about the definition of a prob-
lem and its solution, they need to agree on, and limit themselves to, state-
ments that they can verify. This means that they must agree – conditionally
– on truth criteria and on definitions of reality, and these must be considered
valid – in principle – for the purpose and the duration of their co-operation.

But even here the two parties mentioned above develop two different lines
of argument as to how such an elementary ontological and epistemological
common ground can exist. The first line of argument – that of the represen-
tation party – is based on a certain form of limited scepticism. The debate
about the validity of statements is reduced to comparing the various repre-
sentations of the one (and only) external reality. Under these conditions, the
chances of coming to an acceptable conclusion are considerable; one only
has to continue prodding until the reality reveals itself, thus ending the argu-
ment. But a certain degree of scepticism is still needed at this point, as it is
possible that this might not be the reality, but an intermediary revealing
itself. In other words, the representation of a reality might actually be but a
performance by an intermediary, which does not exist beyond the inter-
mediary itself. (Think of various optical illusions that can be produced by
optical instruments.) Despite this ever present sceptical caution, the repre-
sentation party does not lose hope that eventually truth will prevail.

This line of argument rests on the conviction that statements are scientif-
ically valid when they are absolutely free of all influence of the speaker and the context. In this sense, the modern scientific ideal is of an aperspectival objectivity that chronicles the naked truth from a “view from nowhere” (Nagel, 1986/1992). Robert Merton described in 1945 the social embeddedness of this conviction as resulting from the emerging type of society:

With increasing social conflict, differences in the values, attitudes and modes of thought of groups develop to the point where the orientation which these groups previously had in common is overshadowed by incompatible differences. Not only do there develop distinct universes of discourse, but the existence of any one universe challenges the validity and legitimacy of the others. The co-existence of these conflicting perspectives and interpretations within the same society leads to an active and reciprocal distrust between groups. Within a context of distrust one no longer inquires into the content of beliefs and assertions to determine whether they are valid or not, one no longer confronts the assertions with relevant evidence, but introduces an entirely new question: how does it happen that these views are maintained? (1945/1968: 511).

Sociology of science is authorised to answer this question; it is exempt from the general distrust in that it claims aperspectival objectivity for itself. But sociologists of science can only maintain this authority for as long as they deny all other parties the capacity for such objectivity – otherwise one is back to the beginning.

The other line of argument – that of performative production of realities – is not satisfied with this limited form of scepticism and rejects the assumption of even a remote possibility of an aperspectival objectivity. It pleads instead for an unlimited scepticism. In the text cited below, Merton, standing somewhat in between these two parties, has provided a taste of what happens when various pretenders to “aperspectival objectivity” give up their more ambitious goals and switch to the performative idiom.

What these schemes of analysis have in common is the practice of discounting the face value of statements, beliefs, and idea-systems by re-examining them within a new context which supplies the “real meaning”. Statements ordinarily viewed in terms of their manifest content are debunked ... by relating this content to the attributes of the speaker or of the society in which he lives. The professional iconoclast, the trained debunker, the ideological analyst and their respective systems of thought thrive in a society where large groups of people have already become alienated from common values; where separate universes of discourse are linked with reciprocal distrust (1945/1968: 512-13).

If the professional iconoclasts and debunkers - people like Merton - are drawn into the general feeling of distrust, and begin to doubt the claims of aperspectival objectivity themselves, that is, when the issue of objectivity is
turned reflexively on itself, all safe foundations are lost. Answering the already difficult question of how to distinguish between good and less good descriptions of the world has become dramatically more demanding. In the section of this chapter entitled “The bazaar” I will try to show that while this question remains demanding on an epistemological level, there is a mundane practice that permits a convincing pragmatist solution.

Merton’s prescription for avoiding the maelstrom of unlimited scepticism was to (sometimes ironically) clothe his own revelations in the rhetoric of aperspectival objectivity, while remaining well aware of its social provenience. More recent proponents of such generalised scepticism have turned more radical, and argue that if a discourse aspires to the label “scientific”, it must not take for granted that which it desires to explain – be it God or reality. From the point of view of such agnostics, the “realists” among scientists are not really scientists because they, like religious believers, take for granted what they want to explain – and thus move in tautological circles (Bloor, 1976/1991).

These contrasting views (with Merton standing in-between) can be presented in another way. The first stance of limited scepticism drawing on aperspectival objectivity is a “science of error.” It “enlightens” people by showing how differing worldviews are culturally shaped (“local”) and therefore erroneous. The second stance, that of the agnostic’s unlimited scepticism, is a “science of truth” insofar as it prefers to deal with knowledge that is considered valid – not only in popular understanding but also according to current scientific opinion.

Post-Mertonian social constructivism, for instance, assumes that objective knowledge about reality, understood as an interpretation and analysis of reality uninfluenced by the instruments of observation or analysis, is in principle impossible, and therefore not worth considering as an ideal. Consequently, the so-called “errors” are much less interesting study objects than what modern humanity touts as the “truths” based on science. Investigative attention is shifted from the usual suspects – the losers of modernity and the deviants – to the central institutions of modernity that determine its norms.

This shift is specified by the new sociology of knowledge’s principle of symmetry. The principle of symmetry demands that truth and error, losers and winners, fictions and facts be treated equally. The shift consists in the contrast to the traditional sociology of knowledge where if one were to examine, for example, the argument that the world is flat, it would be unthinkable to even consider the possibility that the world may have been flat some time ago. And yet Earth has become a “blue planet” because that is what it looks like from the Moon (Sachs, 1994). The reason why this is so has been found to lie in the unique nature of the atmosphere. But the atmosphere is millions of years older than our present-day image of the blue
planet. Thus the question arises of whether the Earth in the future might not take on completely different forms and characteristics that will make its current perception seem as naïve as the flat world arguments of the past.

The new social constructivism asks how it is possible that humanity can time and again agree on interpretations of reality as objective and true, despite the fact that history suggests that they will invariably change. One way of answering this question is excluded, though: namely that reality will reveal itself in its finally true shape. Truth is something that needs to be patiently fashioned and defended.

There is something else which becomes clear in the example of the blue planet, and it is this point I want to engage with in this chapter. Wolfgang Sachs traces down to minute detail that which he calls a socio-technical construction of the image, but he treats the history of the scientific and technical, military and political developments that has contributed to the existence of the contemporary image of the blue planet as an external reality – which he wants to describe truthfully and correctly.

It is at this point that the epistemological complications examined here enter the equation. For somebody interested more in the argument than the object of that argument, somebody interested in showing how an object is constructed, the characteristics of the product of that construction have to be bracketed. But the problem will re-emerge on another level. The process of construction, if it is to be described and analysed at all, can only be described as an element of an external reality. It is possible to say that one is interested in the process of the construction of a new car concept without being interested in the actual car thus produced, but this process will be described in a way analogous to the technical description of an assembly process (see e.g. Bragd, 2002). Social constructivist analysis cannot avoid legitimising itself by claiming an accurate description of an external reality, a description that can be verified by comparing it to reality, that is, the reality of the reality production. The problem remains, but it has been shifted.

An important impulse for this shift can be found in anthropology, even if the credit for this impulse has long been relinquished to others.

The Anthropological Shifts

Due to its particular position, anthropology deals with this epistemological problem as if it were an empirical problem. Since the beginning of the 20th century, anthropology has faced the challenge of analysing and describing foreign cultures so as to shield them against the allegation of being irrational.3

3 The question whether this challenge is rooted in colonial expansion interested in the construction of rational subjects, who were no longer to be exterminated but ruled and exploited, is irrelevant to the logic of the rehabilitation of supposedly irrational savages.
When anthropology set for itself the challenge to translate alien and apparently irrational reality models into its own language and thus explain them – i.e. to transform alienity into alterity – it set these reality models into the context of their cultural situation. A leading position in this translation project was taken by British social anthropology, drawing on the work of Emile Durkheim. Viewed in the context of their thus constructed socio-cultural situation, even the most baffling practices and perceptions seemed plausible and reasonable, in that they contributed to the maintenance of social order. The peoples in question, however, considered their convictions rational for wholly other reasons – namely, because they corresponded to the world as it is. They hence found themselves being no less the subject of denunciation than if they were directly accused of irrationality or superstition.

In anthropology, the epistemological justification paradox presented in the previous section becomes a translation paradox (Rottenburg, 2003). The Platonian cave metaphor has found, since Johann Gottfried Herder, a particular form there. Assuming (with Herder) that there can be such a thing as an objective description of a foreign culture, free of a culturally conditioned frame of reference, and also assuming (again with Herder) that cultures while being epistemologically different are all equally legitimate, one finds oneself in a quandary. Where does such a description come from, if it is free of cultural influence? From what position is it possible to judge whether cultures are equal or not? In which code is a judgment of such equality to be formulated? Four ways of answering these questions can be discerned within relativist anthropology.

Within the first position, known as cultural relativism, it seems reasonable to exclude the researchers from such relativism. Anthropologists move from one cultural cave to another and peer in. They observe the residents of the respective cave see their own shadows as realities independent of the observer. To describe these observations, the anthropologists use a metacode into which all the cultural codes or cave languages can be translated without deficit. In other words, anthropologists explain the worldviews and meaningful narratives of foreign cultures by demonstrating how these views and narratives relate to their respective economic, social and political context.

When anthropologists working within this paradigm stress in their prologues and epilogues that they describe foreign worldviews “from within”, that they are interested in the rehabilitation of these foreign worldviews, warning bells should ring. Such attempts at rehabilitation lead unavoidably to the conclusion “Were I sitting in that cave, I too would consider my shadow an autonomous agent.” The implication in this statement is thus that the speaker finds him/herself outside the cave and considers him/herself alone in that position. This form of rehabilitation is bought at the price of a radical denunciation: while the people living with the worldview and narratives are...
assumed to be unaware that they are captured in their own semantics and social structure, the lonely and marginal anthropologist knows that. Culture, from this point of view, proves to be a collective mistake made by others. A particularly adamant proponent of this position was Ernest Gellner (1992/1995).

To avoid this trap, a second, more radical version, an epistemic relativism is proposed. It assumes that anthropologists do not have a status of neutral observers and are not wizards of a metacode. Statements made outside the cultural frame of reference are thus avoided on principle. This means that the anthropological observers find themselves in the same epistemological situation as the residents of the cave, and have the same competencies to reflect on the illusionary nature of their worldviews. The resulting analyses and descriptions are not principally different; they are only less pretentious. Through external observation one does not see more; one merely sees something different from the people living “within” the studied semantic system. Clifford Geertz represents this approach, and he draws on the sociology of Max Weber and the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer (Geertz, 1983/1993).

Ethnographies claiming this perspective are remarkable less for their explanations of “local” versions of the world in terms of “objective conditions” than for their desire to give a voice to these versions, which are heard outside the local context. A great deal of value is placed on conserving the heterogeneity and the polyphony of the foreign culture even at the expense of the consistency of its description. Nevertheless, in the end this approach leaves the initial question unanswered. If it were only an issue of providing the Other with an opportunity to represent themselves in their own voice, the question of one or many realities would not be a problem. Yet, it was exactly this that was impossible in the first place. This approach thus plays down the challenge of alienity in that it conceals the translation of alienity into alterity.

A third version attacks the denunciating effect of the cave metaphor more consistently. As in the second version, it is assumed that the cave dwellers and their anthropological observers inevitably find themselves in the same epistemological situation, and have the same competencies to reflect on the illusionary nature of their perception. But the third version goes further to include the observation that the cave dwellers are also in a position to gaze back into their observer’s own cave.

The view into the cave of the Other is helpful mainly because it in turn gives access to the view of the Other onto the Self (called le regard éloigné by Lévi-Strauss, 1983/1993; see also Malinowski, 1937). The genuine goal of anthropological study becomes the examination of the Self through the Other. The validity of anthropological analysis in this third version is measured not in terms of agreement with a foreign reality but in terms of how
well it manages to describe one's own model of reality and decentre it. In terms of Walter Benjamin's translation theory, this is an attempt at shifting and expanding one's own language through the language of the Other, instead of holding fast to its own coincidental historical position (Benjamin, 1977).

In the fourth version, scholars interested in studying the evolution of notions of reality are advised to replace the cave metaphor with that of the bazaar (Rorty, 1991).4 The bazaar metaphor suggests a constant debate between various models of meaning and reality. Actors are no “cultural dupes”; they are competent enough to anticipate the expectations of others, to recognise these expected expectations as such, and to reflect on them. Most importantly, though, the actors are able to avoid negotiations over matters which would deviate from their purpose at hand. The observers cannot position themselves outside the bazaar and its negotiations; they are always, whether they like it or not, implicated in them. Their descriptions and analyses are never neutral or harmless; they invariably result in feedback and are themselves the result of power-laden bazaar negotiations.

Among the various bazaars, one can distinguish those that are comparatively homogenous or “cold”. These are bazaars where most things occur with relatively little friction, where little needs to be negotiated, because the given rules and fundamental assumptions are rarely questioned. The cultural Other is usually not familiar with many of the implicit, unquestioned rules and fundamental assumptions, and her behaviour can easily become a breaching experiment (a process the ethnomethodologists also call “garfinkeling”). Professional Others can thus reveal the rules and the related tensions and debates concealed below the surface by the concerned actors who have an interest to ensure the undisturbed running of things. At the same time, the observers will become aware of their own fundamental assumptions, whose contingency they will now be able to recognise.

Even more revealing are heterogeneous or “hot” bazaars where different forms of knowledge or different principles, ensuing for instance out of a crisis, are openly debated, with the purpose of making collaboration possible. An agreement on exactly how to manage a crisis or to initiate eventual collaboration can only be reached when a common platform has been agreed upon. The negotiation of a common platform – i.e. shared procedures of evidence – assumes that at least a minimum of commonality already exists. In a bazaar that which is to be achieved needs always to be there in some rudimentary form if the negotiations are even to begin.

4 Peter Galison operates within science studies with the same metaphorical shift under the name of “trading zone”; see Galison, 1997, esp. Chapter 9 “The trading zone: coordinating action and belief”, pp. 781–844. Anselm Strauss’ “arena” concept captures the same point (as in arenas of negotiation); for the most explicit formulation of this concept see Clarke, 1991.
This means that the translation paradox is not solved through bazaar negotiations, yet it is effectively avoided (or, in Luhmannian terminology, processed) by insinuating sufficient commonality. Anthropologists working within this framework as professional Others have a good chance to realize that their own translation paradox is not unique, but constitutes a daily routine of all bazaar actors, and they may now observe how others work to process it. The central interest of an investigation of this type is thus how procedures of evidence are agreed upon in heterogeneous bazars.

The four anthropological models sketched here are in reality not this clearly separable. The differences are more a matter of different foci and priorities set by various authors, epochs and schools. It is also possible to describe the work of anthropology in other terms and bundle the approaches differently. The classification presented here intended merely to recapitulate the introductory dilemma in new terms: Is it possible and advisable to avoid the controversy of the one or of the many realities by investigating the shifts between metacode and cultural code or, between idiom of representation and idiom of performance?

At the Bazaar

In bazaar negotiations it must, firstly, be clear whether one starts with or without old debts and other obligations and what exactly is part of the deal. All those aspects of the exchange of goods and of the relations of the actors which may lead to undesired complications when articulated must be bracketed. Secondly, to have a bazaar transaction it is necessary to find a scale of comparison for those things that are to be exchanged. The communicative ideal of the bazaar is the minimization of factors and information to the absolutely necessary (or, formulated in other terms, the maximization of externalities to be kept out of the deal; Rottenburg et al., 2000). The extreme case of this minimization strategy is what is known in anthropology as silent trade. After one party deposits its goods (say, salt) at a known spot and withdraws, the second party approaches to deposit as much of its own goods (say, wheat) beside the original submission. The first party then returns to pick up the traded goods, assuming it is happy with the offer made; if not, they are left there indicating that the second party needs to add to its offer. If the trade is successful, it can be repeated in the future; if not, it can easily be discontinued.5

At a bazaar where the issue is not that of trading goods but of co-operation under heterogeneous conditions, the same basic mechanism is at work,

5 Max Weber uses the silent exchange to make another point: it is strangers who exchange goods and thereby develop an interest to develop a sufficient level of trust, and hence the principle of honesty is the best policy (Weber, 1922/1972: 383).
in many complex variations. One prominent example is development cooperation. The negotiation technique “goal-oriented project planning” (gopp) has been developed for this field in an explicit recognition of the problem of heterogeneity. Two pictures will help to explain the logic of this concept. In the first, a group of administrators, engineers, managers and financial experts is “gopping” in a Tanzanian town in 1996, to define the presuppositions, goals and procedures for a development project. In the background a panel can be seen, on which inscribed pieces of paper have been pasted. The second picture shows two hydro engineers, a consultant and an anthropologist. A notebook computer is in the middle, with Microsoft Excel on the screen.
In such situations, all information that is not absolutely necessary and thus may cause interference is excluded so that a negotiation can take place. Those pieces of information that form the basis of the negotiations are presented in a standardised form, which has been agreed upon in advance. My claim here is that the so-called ultimate justifications for the truth of statements (Letztbegründungen), i.e. criteria for differentiating reality from fiction, have been replaced by formalized procedures of evidence (Porter, 1992; 1995; this point was already made by Heidegger 1938/2003: 84). In this way, pragmatic progress with respect to concrete co-operation is possible. All statements made in the course of the negotiations are recognised as relating to reality. This means that the claim that a statement is founded in reality can never be questioned on principle, without breaking the negotiations. Arguments about individual errors or deceptions can only be carried out on the basis of this provisional construction, justified only insofar as they might be seen as leading to an agreement about the intended co-operation.

A metacode is therefore required for this purpose, of a kind which claims to be removed from the particularist cultural codes, and to have a direct contact with outer reality. Like the trading language of the bazaar, the metacode must be able to communicate all necessary information, and exclude all unnecessary and potentially interfering knowledge.

The pragmatic and provisional agreement represented in the metacode thus shifts attention from the question of correspondence between individual statements to outer reality, to the question of correspondence of the statements to one another (Anschlussfähigkeit). The problem of external reference is pushed into the background in favour of the coherence criterion and hence the question of transversal reference. In other words, the procedure receives priority over the matter being discussed. The actors need, at least for the duration of the negotiations, to avoid making the preference of the transversal reference over the external reference an issue. The negotiation proceeds under the assumption that the metacode is valid because it is anchored in an external reality, and therefore transcends all particular frames of reference. Such goal-oriented negotiations are possible at all only on the condition of the concealment of the actual dependency of the metacode on the bazaar as a frame of reference, and the procedural rules valid within that frame. Otherwise, the only possibility would be to conclude that the debated matters can be seen differently from each respective point of view and any decision can look arbitrary and therefore illegitimate.

Court procedures are a particularly obvious example of this process. One argues in court about the truth, but the rules by which it is argued are agreed upon before, to allow an ordered argument. This begins with the indictment: if it cannot be formulated in proper legal terms, the prosecution will draw

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6 On the coherence theory of truth see e.g. Davidson, 1986/1992.
attention away from the actual facts to other facts which can be translated into the legal procedure (an action which often goes against common sense). This process continues in the verification of the evidence; the immediate veracity of the evidence is not as important as the formal criteria of its validity as evidence.

My argument can be illustrated in a four-field scheme (adopted and reinterpreted from Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky, 1982) showing the pragmatic iteration process that facilitates cooperation under conditions of heterogeneity.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Certain</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consensus on Goals</td>
<td>4 Problem: Technical</td>
<td>2 Problem: Information</td>
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<tr>
<td>and Means</td>
<td>Solution: Calculation</td>
<td>Solution: Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>Complete</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>3 Problem: Disagreement</td>
<td>1 Problem: Knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Solution: Negotiation</td>
<td>Solution: Move to Field 2</td>
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The first photo above shows a “gopp” discussion, which should be located in Douglas and Wildavsky’s Field 3, where the knowledge about a given situation is certain but the goals and the means by which to achieve them are contested.

The table does not depict a necessary order of operations; it is an iteration process in which any field can be used as the starting point. As soon as a problem emerges, a search process is initiated, which can ideally be separated into four steps that are taken repeatedly. Negotiations in fact rarely begin in Field 1. Some negotiations might be drawn back into Field 1, though. Here it is uncertain what kind of situation one is in, what is its purpose, can it be achieved at all, who the affected parties are, who is legitimized to speak for them, how these affected parties see the situation, and what they want. It is even uncertain how to acquire the knowledge necessary for clarifying the situation. If the negotiations in Field 1 are to have any chance at all, the actors must move together into Field 2. In Douglas and Wildavsky’s terms, this means that the actors need to improve and substantiate these elementary questions. In my terms, the consensus necessary for the move into Field 2 is achieved primarily by bracketing those dimensions that would challenge a common definition of what it is all about, i.e. by agreeing on a provisional definition of the common ground (a form of bluffing). This agreement is inspired more by the envisaged goal than by deep convictions about the “reality out there”. Already here, in this provisional agreement, earlier power relations play a decisive role. Yet at the same time the imitation of
seemingly successful models taking place here attributes power to these models that they did not have before.

In Field 2 a consensus must be reached on a perspectival, objective facts, which may lead to making the right decisions. This is facilitated by choosing procedures and instruments that carry the weight of being the best models available for the purpose at hand. These models and artifacts are utilized as boundary objects that are able to link heterogeneous fields because they are functional in several fields independently of the diverging basic assumptions in these fields (Star and Griesemer, 1989; Fujimura, 1992).

But the actors must move on to Field 3 if they intend to realize a concrete cooperation, because the verified scientific knowledge of Field 2 does not necessarily include evaluative and prescriptive information. As also Douglas and Wildavsky would agree, no definite formula for how to proceed emerges out of the objective description of a series of facts. It is at this point that my argument will differ from theirs, as I will explain later. In any case, in Field 3 the parties to the negotiation need to come to an agreement as to goals, and how these are best to be achieved based on acquired objective knowledge. The gopp discussants in the first photo are in the process of agreeing on how to best organize an urban water supply system.

Once a prescriptive agreement has been reached in Field 3 through consensus – in this case via a gopp procedure – the only remaining problem is to calculate the technical aspects of the intended cooperation. In the table this is signified by the move to Field 4. The planned cooperation is conducted and controlled on the basis of the agreed resolution. The activities represented in the second photo with the notebook in the middle can be located in Field 4. The figures in this scene know what they want, and are aware of their respective capabilities; they only need to calculate how they can best realize their goals.

The four-field scheme is built on two axes: differentiation of knowledge on the horizontal axis and consensus on the vertical one. This distinction corresponds to the difference between facts and values, or between what is true and what is good. In more abstract terms, the key difference here is between a denotative language game and an evaluative or a prescriptive language game (Lyotard, 1979/1986). In the course of this process of differentiation, the denotative language game comes to be understood as an event outside of society, which is only consensual (in Field 2) to the degree that it appears to be founded on the facts supposedly valid for all participants. From this perspective, i.e. the one taken by Douglas and Wildavsky, society, and with it the problem of coming to an agreement about goals and means, only becomes an issue in Field 3, at which time the application of neutral objective knowledge becomes value-laden.

This distinction is not convincing, though. Science, at least in unsettled, hot areas, historically does not seem to be converging on a single, increas-
ingly valid version of reality. On the contrary, more conflicting versions of reality are constantly being produced. The growing numbers of answers being found do not seem to be reducing the numbers of questions being asked. There is no such thing as scientific expertise that could not be subject to a counterargument. The initial question is shifted from “how does one prove the objectivity of a statement?” to an unfathomable “how does one prove the proof?”

The work in Field 2 and the shift to Field 3 are, from this point of view, not activities taking place outside of society. They are activities that cannot draw on a neutral objectivity because they are interwoven, already in Field 2, with values and interpretations that depend on a chosen point of view. And the other way around, the problem of disagreements in terms of ideas about goals and means in Field 3 cannot be reduced to “evaluative” and “prescriptive” aspects. Every actor can draw, based on their ideas about goals and means, on other “denotative” statements from Field 2 to make their own ideas about these goals and means appear more realistic.

According to my thesis, the Douglas and Wildavsky table is nevertheless accurate, although in a sense other than that intended by the authors. The four-field scheme helps to see how and why the parties to a negotiation under conditions of heterogeneity need to pragmatically restrict themselves to a limited number of questions, to agree on a procedure, and to represent all that they do to achieve cooperation as founded in objective reality. They are aware that they are operating within an endless iteration process that they can bring to a stop only by avoiding fundamental questions relating to Fields 1 and 2 once they have moved back and forth several times. A persistent revisiting of Field 1 would result in an infinite loop in which the actors remain unable - at least for a time - to come to a denotative solution in Field 2, and an evaluative solution in Field 3. Without the determinations in Fields 2 and 3, arriving at Field 4 would never occur, and hence the intended cooperation would not materialize. Aside from the use of force, the only way to avoid an infinite loop is the staging of the selection of a chosen path as an event based on facts that are grounded in reality. It has been mentioned above that this selection is guided by the goal at hand, and that power and imitation play an important role here.

The assumption of a single reality with its metacode has a second, equally indispensable function, besides that of enabling cooperation under heterogeneous conditions. The participants in a bazaar negotiation are usually not acting in their own or only in their own name. They are representatives of collective actors to whom they are accountable, and in arguing their positions, they have to refer to generally agreed upon procedures. These procedures are again the result of similar negotiations.

From the perspective chosen here, the assumption of a single and attainable reality with its respective metacode is a political and juristic necessity.
A set of rules, the elementary principle of which is the key differentiation between denotative and evaluative language games, is necessary to remove from negotiation processes any sense of arbitrariness or ambiguity. But to ensure that this set of rules does not itself become a central instrument of hegemony, it is politically rational to keep these petitions to a single reality what they initially were - provisional agreements necessary within the limits of a particular framework, used to enable cooperation under conditions of heterogeneity. The uncertainty that results from such an assumption is insurmountable and simply has to be endured. The only consolation one can find is among epistemological and moral equals whom one meets in the evening, after leaving the bazaar, "in the club" (Rorty, 1991: 209). But the greatest comfort you get in the sort of club we are talking about here - the comfort that Rorty does not like to stress, although he is well aware of it (Rorty, 1991: 207) - is the particular kind of confirmation of one's superiority: a superiority that is not based in the belief of being in possession of ultimate truth but in the belief that one can self-reflectively relativize one's convictions after a bazaar experience.

Self-reflective questioning means nothing less than shifting back from the object of the negotiations to one's own frame of reference as an outside observer. The result is a constant switching back and forth between a meta-code with theoretical pretensions to correspondence with reality and a meta-code with theoretical pretensions to coherence with the cultural frame of the negotiations. Compared to aspirations of solving once and for all the justification paradox of objective statements through an absolute differentiation between reality and fiction, a code-switch seems a more reasonable alternative.
References

# Table of Contents

1. **Translation Is a Vehicle, Imitation its Motor, and Fashion Sits at the Wheel**  
   Barbara Czarniawska, Göteborg University and Guje Sevón, Stockholm School of Economics, Sweden .......................... 7

## PART I
WHAT IS TRAVELING?  
NAMES, PRACTICES, OBJECTS, AND PEOPLE

2. **Cultural Alchemy: Translating the Experience Economy into Scandinavian**  
   Orvar Löfgren, Lund University, Sweden ..................................... 15

3. **The Namesake: On Best Value and Other Reformmarks**  
   Rolf Solli, Göteborg University, Sweden, Peter Demediuk and Robert Sims, Victoria University, Australia 30

4. **Isomorphism, Isopraxism, and Isonymism: Complementary or Competing Processes?**  
   Gudbjörg Erlingsdóttir, Lund University and Kajsa Lindberg, Göteborg University, Sweden ......................... 47

5. **Lost and Found in the Translation of Strategic Plans and Websites**  
   Hokyu Hwang and David Suarez, Stanford University, USA ...... 71

6. **Environment’s Many Faces: On Organizing and Translating Objects in Stockholm**  
   Petra Adolfsson, Göteborg University, Sweden ............................. 94

7. **From “Nature” to “Economy” and “Culture”: How Stockfish Travels and Constructs an Action Net**  
   Tor Korneliussen, Bodø Graduate School of Business, Norway and Fabrizio Panozzo, University of Venice, Italy ...................... 106
PART II
HOW DO IDEAS TRAVEL
AND HOW DO THEY LAND?

8. Fashion in Organizing
   Barbara Czarniawska, Göteborg University, Sweden .......... 129

9. Something New, Something Old, Something Borrowed:
   The Cross-National Translation of the “Family Friendly
   Organization” in Israel
   Michal Frenkel, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel ...... 147

10. Articulating Agendas and Traveling Principles in
    the Layering of New Strands of Academic Freedom in
    Contemporary Singapore
    Kris Olds, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA ............... 167

    Education
    Tina Hedmo, Kerstin Sahlin-Andersson and
    Linda Wedlin, Uppsala University, Sweden ...................... 190

12. Globalizing Webs: Translation of Public Sector
    e-Modernization
    Hans Krause Hansen and Dorte Salskov-Iversen,
    Copenhagen Business School, Denmark .......................... 213

13. Close Encounters: The Circulation and Reception of
    Managerial Practices in the San Francisco Bay Area
    Nonprofit Community
    Walter W. Powell, Denise L. Gammal, and
    Caroline Simard, Stanford University, USA ...................... 233

14. Code-Switching, or Why a Metacode Is Good to Have
    Richard Rottenburg, Martin-Luther-University, Germany ....... 259

References .................................................................................. 275

About the Authors ........................................................................ 294