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Undoing (B)Orders in Academia: Language, Diversity and Cultural Studies

Giulia Pelillo-Hestermeyer*

Abstract

This chapter examines communication practices and the politics of knowledge in academia, combining the perspective of diversity studies with the self-reflexive criticism of Cultural Studies. It refers to contradictory ways in which linguistic diversity, and diversity in general, are handled in academia, with a particular focus upon the Romance studies as part of the *foreign* language studies in Germany. The perspective of (B)Order Studies appears particularly suitable, in this context, for conceptualizing the relationship between diversity and institutions in spatial terms, that is, by emphasizing processes of inclusion and exclusion.

Keywords: language diversity, (b)orders, mobility, politics of knowledge, academia

1. Diversity in Academia: a (B)Order Approach

In speaking of a process of (b)ordering language and culture in academia, I refer to language-ideologies and politics of knowledge which hierarchically order diverse cultural capitals and regulate access to institutional spaces

* Dr. Giulia Pelillo-Hestermeyer
University of Heidelberg
Department of Romance Studies
Seminarstr. 3
D-69117 Heidelberg
Germany
T +49 6221 542755
Giulia.pelillo@urz.uni-heidelberg.de
Web: <https://www.uni-heidelberg.de/rose/personen/pelillo.htm>

Pelillo-Hestermeyer, Giulia, Dr., is a senior lecturer for Cultural Studies in the Department of Romance Studies of the University of Heidelberg (Germany). She studied Italian Studies and History in Rome and completed a Ph.D. in Romance Linguistics at the University of Heidelberg. Her research and teaching focus on linguistic diversity and intersectionality in the context of the transculturalization and mediatization of communication. Giulia is a founding member of the Kulturwissenschaftliche Gesellschaft, where she serves as Co-chair of the “Transcultural Life-Worlds” Section, and Co-editor of the book series “Studien der Kulturwissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft”.

accordingly. In this context, I investigate both the opportunities and obstacles for opening up emancipatory spaces for diversity in academia. How diverse are academic environments themselves? Which ideas of diversity inspire curricula? What role does multilingualism play in education and is this the role it deserves in a world of complex diversities? How can scholars of multilingualism and Cultural Studies contribute to opening up more fluid communicative spaces in teaching-learning activities, and to turning national and disciplinary boundaries into dynamic contact zones? These questions cannot be answered in either universal or conclusive terms. My more modest aim here is to re-consider the politics of knowledge and the negotiation of cultural capitals in academia, in order to open up spaces in which diversity, in its various intersecting forms (linguistic, ethnic, racial, gender etc.), is considered to be the standard, and not the exception, as is still the case in most institutional contexts.

In order to highlight ambiguous ways of handling diversity, and to emphasize the contrast between emancipatory vs. standardizing attitudes, Lisa Gaupp and I distinguish between *doing diversity* and *doing otherness* (cf. Gaupp 2021; Pelillo-Hestermeyer 2021a). These are posed as opposite attitudes at the two poles of a continuum, in which the social construction of difference is performed and negotiated in a variety of contexts: from the artistic to the political, from the scientific to the theatrical, in media and everyday life. In this regard, several studies have demonstrated that representations of diversity, and even policies aiming to promote it, do not necessarily *do diversity*. Blommaert and Verschueren (1998), for example, critically analyze the discursive representation of diversity in Belgium, and highlight an ideology of 'homogeneity' inspiring both the so-called migrant debate and policies aiming at *including* migrants into the national body: the representation, respectively, of cultural homogeneity as the standard modus of the nation, and of migration as abnormal, leads to the assumption that diversity poses limits to tolerance in the name of national unity, and needs, as such, to be managed (cf. Blommaert/Verschueren 1998, p. 117–147). The ambivalence and the potential violence of politics of *inclusion* which eventually aim at levelling differences is stressed also by Sarah Ahmed (2012). She problematizes contradictory ways of handling diversity in institutional contexts and warns against the danger of policing inclusion as a “technology of governance” (Ahmed 2012, p. 163):

[...] not only a way of bringing those who have been recognized as strangers into the nation, but also of making strangers into subjects, those who in being included are also willing to consent to the terms of inclusion – a way others as would-be citizens are asked to submit

to and agree with the task of reproducing the nation (Ahmed 2012, p. 163).

The distinction between *doing diversity* and *doing otherness* aims to emphasize the contradictory ways of handling diversity. On the one hand, increased physical and mediated mobility have brought about a major increase in the visibility of diversity, a process Vertovec (2007) addresses by speaking of *superdiversity*. On the other hand, multiple processes of regulation, normalization, standardization, homogenization, etc. emerge as a reaction to what is perceived as different, as *Other*. These processes produce multiple hierarchizations of cultural traits, and accord to them different value. Some 'mixes' are represented in majority discourses and hegemonic practices as appealing and desirable, whereas others are treated as problematic and challenging (cf. Pelillo-Hestermeyer 2021a). 'Non-native' pronunciation, for example, is associated with a sort of 'exotic' beauty in advertising, but is stigmatized in many everyday contexts. In academia, as discussed in the following section, short-term ('international') mobility is widely promoted, whereas long-term mobility, at least in the context of the Humanities, is limited by a range of normative frameworks which make it difficult for scholars to suitably convert their cultural capital when migrating between different national contexts. In this regard, the framework of (B)Order Studies stimulates a spatial imagination for the thorough exploration of multiple processes which, by selecting and ordering linguistic and cultural resources, limit access to hegemonic spaces. Andreas Reckwitz (2008, p. 302) underlines the polysemy of the German word *Grenze*, whose multiple connotations can be expressed in English only by intertwining the senses of the words *border*, *boundary* and *limit*. *Border* refers to a material and visible spatial demarcation. *Boundary* relates to a symbolic delimitation which brings about distinctions of meaning ('sinnhafte Markierungen und Separierungen'). Meanwhile, *limit* refers instead to normative distinctions generating asymmetries, such as those between *normal* and *allowed* ('dem Normalen und Erlaubten'), between what is *legitimate* and what is an *illegitimate transgression* ('dem Legitimen und der illegitimen Transgression'). More recently, an anthology on Border Studies published in German (cf. Gerst et al. 2021) elaborates further on the polysemy of the word *Grenze* to offer a variety of (b)order perspectives on social, political and cultural processes. Borders are seen as *multidimensional objects* ('multidimensionale Gebilde', cf. Gerst et al. 2021, p. 9) which through material and symbolic practices selectively create barriers and filter access to physical, political and socio-cultural spaces.

In this chapter, I examine socio-symbolic practices and the politics of knowledge which relate to linguistic diversity in the Humanities by adopting a (b)order lens. In doing this I highlight the separation between (*borders*) and the hierarchization of (*orders*) of linguistic capitals (cf. Bourdieu 1982) and contextualize them in a broader societal framework. In particular, I critically discuss two widespread tendencies:

1. The existing gap between post-structuralist turns in researching language and culture and the structuralist paradigm which inspires multiple normative frameworks in which academic activities are embedded (e.g. in terms of curricula, career pathways and department structures);
2. The ongoing hierarchization of linguistic resources and the transformation of *cultural markets* (cf. Bourdieu 1982; García Canclini 2005) resulting from the globalization and commercialization of culture (cf. Blommaert 2010; Krotz 2009). Such processes impact academic structures, for example through the institutionalization of knowledge frameworks which foster disciplinary and national boundaries and filter access to hegemonic spaces.

The multiple and contradictory ways in which the Self and the Other become bordered (e.g. in the sharp conceptual distinction between *native* and *foreign* language) and ordered in academia are, on the one hand, comparable with societal processes of selecting and hierarchizing cultural capitals – after all, academia is embedded in 'the social'. On the other hand, they display specific patterns which are related to the institutionalization of disciplinary knowledge and its problematic effects with respect to hierarchizing diversity.

My thesis is that, in the context of globalization and of neoliberal developments in academia, conflicting tensions complicate the system of norms which have been long preserved by disciplinary and national (b)orders. In the context of tensions between established practices and the developing of recent *trans*-disciplinary and *trans*-national standards, emerging borders and orders regulate the *limits of tolerance* (cf. Blommaert/Verschueren 1998) for deviation from traditional norms. In what follows, I illustrate this process through a critical review of the concept of *foreign* in Foreign Language Studies ('Fremdsprachenphilologien'). Moreover, I reflect on my own experience of mobility over fifteen years of work in Linguistics and Cultural Studies within the institutional framework of Romance Studies in Germany.

This is not to generalize, but rather to offer concrete examples of borders and orders experienced in a specific version of 'Kulturwis-

senschaften'¹. As Stuart Hall has put it, "Autobiography is usually thought of as seizing the authority of authenticity. But in order not to be authoritative, I've got to speak autobiographically" (Hall 1992, p. 277). Reflecting on autobiography should be seen in this context as a version of the self-reflexive critical method described by Ien Ang: "what is at stake in autobiographical discourse is not a question of the subject's authentic 'me', but one of the subject's location in a world through an active interpretation of experiences that one calls one's own in particular, 'worldly' contexts, that is to say, a reflexive positioning of oneself in history and culture" (Ien Ang 2001, p. 23f.).

Moreover, I want to highlight the important role that Cultural Studies can and should play for linguistic analysis, a role which, at least in Germany, has so far not been fully taken up in the Philologies, especially when compared with the widespread pair 'Literary and Cultural Studies' / 'Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaften'.

In the final part of the chapter, I relate this topic to past and ongoing debates concerning the institutionalization of Cultural Studies and, in the Germanophone context, of Kulturwissenschaften. Drawing on Reckwitz's idea of "destabilizing (b)orders" as a key-target to be achieved by Cultural Sociology (cf. Reckwitz 2008, p. 301ff.), I argue that Cultural Studies could also offer the best possible space to "destabilize (b)orders" in other fields, such as Romance Studies, thus promoting more openness to *doing diversity* instead of *doing otherness* in the so-called *Foreign Language Studies*. However, in order to achieve this target, the relationship between diversity, Cultural Studies and institutions should be given serious consideration.

1 I refer here to the plural version *Kulturwissenschaften* as an orientation of existing fields, such as Sociology, Literary Studies, Ethnology, etc., in the Germanophone context. In this specific passage, I refer to this orientation in the institutional framework of Romance Studies. Whenever I refer to the international context, I will use the term Cultural Studies, understood as a transcultural space of contact between *Kulturwissenschaften* and other fields of the study of culture. Whenever I speak of Anglophone Cultural Studies, I refer to the multiple trajectories which developed out of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). I introduce these distinctions here only to identify specific traditions, even though I believe that all these trajectories intertwine (and should intertwine more) each other. This chapter itself should be seen as an effort to question these boundaries.

2. *The foreign in 'Foreign Language Studies' (Fremdsprachenphilologien):
Moving Between (B)Ordered Languages and Disciplines*

The first experience of mobility I would like to discuss is related to my first academic job as a *foreign* language lecturer (Fremdsprachenlektorin). I had just completed my university degree in Italian Studies in Rome and had begun to teach Italian language and Linguistics at the Department of Romance Studies of the University of Heidelberg. Romance Studies are practiced and (b)ordered very differently in Italy and in Germany. In Germany, Romance Studies functions as an umbrella term for the study of Romance languages, literatures and 'cultures' in their historical development from the Middle Ages to the present. In Italy, Romance philology focuses instead on the study of only the Romance medieval literature and languages, including the development of the linguistic structures over time. The idea of a shared cultural space whose borders are defined by the presence of common linguistic roots is, after all, a cultural construction of Romanticism (cf. Anderson 1983/2006, p. 67–82). This is not to deny important connections and cultural exchange within the so-called *Romania*², but to emphasize that its borders are disciplinarily and culturally constructed. In fact, it would be just as reasonable to shift the borders southwards and construct, accordingly, different narratives about language, culture and identity, as the Mediterranean Studies have demonstrated. Iain Chambers and Marta Cariello (2019) as well as Chambers (2012), among others, point to the colonial imagination inspiring the concept of *Southern* Europe, which constructs a cultural border between Europe and Africa. In the context of Romance Studies in Germany, Italian Studies is only one of the possible curricula. The comparative, multilingual orientation which originally inspired the development of Romance Studies is nowadays characterized by what Ruth Wodak, Michael Krzyzanowski and Bernhard Forchtner (2012: 161–162) have called “hegemonic multilingualism”³: the unequal cultural capital granted to each of the Romance languages influences students' choice in the design of their multilingual curricula (if they decide to study more than one philology). Accordingly, French and Spanish are considered to be 'big languages' (große Sprachen), whereas the other ones are called 'little languages' (kleine Sprachen). Furthermore, the broadness

2 Geographic territories in which Romance Languages (in all their varieties, including dialects, regional languages, etc.) are spoken.

3 An unequal distribution of the cultural capital allocated to specific languages, which generates hierarchizations.

of Romance Studies curricula with respect to multilingualism is counter-balanced by a restriction of the disciplinary focus to either Linguistics or Literary Studies⁴ in the study program. Accordingly, in terms of the availability of chairs, the academic market privileges a focus on either Linguistics or Literary Studies *and* on at least one of the 'big languages' in combination with another one.

Because of these disciplinary norms, when scholars migrate from a system in which their respective philological curriculum is the 'local national' one, to the Germanophone Romance Studies in which it becomes 'foreign', they are confronted with a substantial transformation of their cultural capital (cf. Bourdieu 1979).⁵ In my own case, with respect to the academic career track, my cultural capital decreased, since my interdisciplinarity did not make up for the lack of a second Romance philology in my academic curriculum⁶. On the other hand, this lack was compensated by the advantage of being a so-called 'native speaker'⁷, which gave me access to the position of *Fremdsprachenlektorin* (*foreign* language lecturer): an appointment to teach Italian language, Linguistics and culture. From a (b)order perspective, this academic position displays multiple national and disciplinary boundaries with respect to both the contents and the perspective of the expected teaching. First, the *foreign* language perspective is expressed both in the denomination of the pedagogical role (*Fremdsprachenlektor*in*) and in the didactic contents (*Fremdsprachenphilologien*). The *Fremdsprachenlektor*in* is a *native* speaker, whose education has taken place in one of the countries in which the respective language is officially spoken and, because of the 'authenticity' of their linguistic repertoire,

4 Cultural Studies holds an ambivalent position beside these two traditional fields, as will be shown in more detail in section three.

5 Here I refer in particular to long-term mobility and the respective chances of access to academia.

6 The national paradigm also characterizes the Italian curriculum of Italian studies in the context of Modern Philology, which is distinguished from '*foreign* language studies' (*lingue straniere*) and displays an interdisciplinary focus on Italian language and language history (including Latin), literature, history and culture at large (art history, philosophy, theater, media etc.).

7 The concept of *native speaker*, despite being widely used as a descriptive category, is in fact a cultural construction. Among others, it has been widely criticized for idealizing and homogenizing the heterogeneity of linguistic repertoires. Further in this section, the problematic implications of the term with respect to its use in the context of *foreign* language teaching will be addressed more in detail.

can assume a role-model status with respect to the ability to perform a 'standard' language variety⁸.

While the criterion of authenticity is a fundamental prerequisite for a *foreign* language lecturer in academia, a significant boundary distinguishes both the contract (legal status) and the career chances offered by this position from those of 'research-led' (wissenschaftliche) ones: foreign language lecturers are formally only supposed to teach, whereas academics in research-led positions are expected to publish research, raise grant income, and qualify for higher positions. The legal framework consolidates the national and disciplinary boundary by ordering the contracts of foreign language lecturers under the labor law, whereas research-led positions are regulated by law relating to scientific research (*Wissenschaftsrecht*). This is not to say that one of these legal treatments is more convenient *per se*. A comparison between (b)ordering processes related to such legal issues would certainly be instructive, but exceeds both my competence and the scope of this chapter. What I want to stress here, however, is that the ideologies inspiring the concept of *foreign* language (rooted in the projection of cultural boundaries onto specific territorial borders) intertwine with national standards and disciplinary boundaries to eventually differentiate and filter access to academic spaces through both the politics of knowledge and the legal frameworks. In fact, the formal separation between *foreign* language lecturers and research-led staff in terms of contracts and tasks does not necessarily correspond to a differentiation in terms of competences and activities. I did, for example, my PhD and taught Linguistics while being formally employed as a *foreign* language lecturer, and I have known several other colleagues who do research while employed in such a position.

Further implications of the ideology inspiring *foreign* language teaching become apparent when one critically examines the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Developed to integrate

8 From a sociolinguistic perspective, the *standard* language is a culturally constructed model. In fact, *native* speakers perform a wide range of local and regional languages. Yet, from the perspective of the *foreign* language teaching, all these varieties are unified under the mark of authenticity associated with particular phonetic traits. On the racializing potential of models of *native* pronunciation see Chow (2014, p. 1–33). For an historical account concerning the ideology of uniformization which inspired the development of the concept of *standard* in linguistic, juridical and social terms see Bourdieu (1982). Pelillo-Hestermeyer (2021b) deals with transcultural negotiations of the concept of *standard* in the context of globalization and mediatization processes.

and compare different levels of proficiency in different languages, the CEFR systematizes the achievements in the process of learning a language in standardized, linear steps, graded on the progressive scale A1-A2-B1-B2-C1-C2 (Council of Europe). While the CEFR has been praised for emphasizing the communicative approach in teaching programs, thus acknowledging the development of oral and pragmatic competences besides written ones, it has also been criticized for (among other things) not taking the multilingualism of learners into account. The representation of the CEFR on the website of the Council of Europe confirms the validity of this critique:

“The CEFR is based on all these achievements and has developed a description of the process of mastering an *unknown* [my emphasis] language by type of competence and sub-competence, using descriptors for each competence or sub-competence [...]. These descriptors were created without reference to any specific language, which guarantees their relevance and across-the-board applicability” (Council of Europe).

Although linguistic research has widely demonstrated the hybridity of linguistic repertoires, and although both concepts of 'monolingual' and 'native' speaker have been convincingly deconstructed⁹, the majority of textbooks and courses are still developed following the paradigm of a monolingual learner who learns an 'unknown' (i.e. *foreign*) language, and aims to achieve a proficiency as close as possible to that of a *native* speaker.

In order to strengthen plurilingual education and establish linguistic diversity (rather than monolingualism) as the norm, alternative frameworks have been developed. For example, in the Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures (FREPA/CARAP) the descriptors for measuring language proficiency go beyond competencies in a specific language, and include the capacity of learners to use their heterogeneous linguistic and cultural resources to expand their respective repertoires (cf. European Centre for Modern Languages; Schröder-Sura 2020). Moreover, by introducing specific descriptors for *resources*, besides

⁹ Among others, Chow (2014) emphasizes, from a postcolonial perspective, the racializing potential of the concept of native speaker. Herdina/Jessner (2001) and Busch (2012; 2017) express a systematic critique of the ideological assumption that considers monolingualism as the norm and multilingualism as the exception, and formulate implications for, respectively, Psycho- and Sociolinguistics.

those for *competence*, the FREPA/CARAP acknowledges that questions of linguistic inequality¹⁰ play a key-role in learning processes.

So far, however, the adoption of FREPA/CARAP in *foreign* language teaching has been limited (cf. Schröder-Sura 2020, p. 57; Reimann/Michler 2019, p. 19). The CEFR, despite the various critiques leveled against it and the development of alternative frameworks, is still both popular and prevalent. For example, in CVs it is very commonly used as a self-assessment framework to indicate language proficiency.

Despite the growing number of projects focusing on plurilingual didactics in Romance Studies (cf. García García et al. 2020), the challenge to close the gap between, on the one hand, the institutional regulation and imagination of *foreign* language teaching, and, on the other hand, the reality of differentiated, fragmented multilingual repertoires, still needs to be faced on a *case-by-case* basis in teaching-learning contexts. In addition, the further standardization of curricula introduced by the Bologna process does not facilitate individualized didactics. In this context, digitalization could open new spaces for plurilingual education, for example through blended learning activities, which could be, at least in theory, individually (re-)designed.

However, an adequate acknowledgement of diversity in higher education cannot take place only by means of technical or didactic achievements. Instead, it requires a systematic confrontation with ideological and material constraints. Despite the widespread belief that multilingualism is valuable on an individual level, the attitude towards linguistic diversity in education – as well as in society in general – varies widely depending on the languages at stake, thus perpetuating inequalities and hierarchizations in educational environments. For example, because languages spoken by migrants are perceived as a problem, so are the speakers of those languages (cf. Pelillo-Hestermeyer 2014; Pelillo-Hestermeyer 2021b). Several studies recently published in Germany confirm that in teacher training, the topic

10 Blommaert (2010) emphasizes the need for a paradigm-shift in Linguistics, which would pay major attention to linguistic resources and to matters of linguistic inequality: “The crux of the matter is that we need to think of issues such as linguistic inequality as being organized around concrete resources, not around languages in general but specific registers, varieties, genres. And such concrete resources follow the predicament of their users: when the latter are socially mobile, their resources will follow this trajectory; when they are socially marginal, their resources will also be disqualified. In both cases, the challenge is to think of language as a mobile complex of concrete resources” (Blommaert 2010, p. 47).

of migration is typically framed as a challenge and as a problem to be managed (cf. Kropp 2020, p. 159–160; Karakaşoğlu et al. 2017).

In sum, a process of *doing otherness* (cf. Gaupp 2021; Pelillo-Hestermeyer 2021a) is observable behind multiple practices related to the 'foreign' in *foreign* language teaching. The promotion of linguistic diversity becomes bordered, ordered, and limited through various hierarchizations and standardizations, which result from the hegemony of the ideologies developed around the categories of *nation* and *discipline*. National geographical borders are projected into disciplinary boundaries which distinguish and hierarchize national vs. *foreign* languages. The mobility of scholars across borders and disciplinary boundaries is regulated by legal frameworks which strengthen the separation between national and *foreign* curricula, and limit the validity of their qualifications and eventually their career opportunities. Similarly, the most common framework for language teaching reproduces the separation (*borders*) between a national, monolingual standard and the various *foreign* languages. Alternative pluralistic frameworks, which conceive of multilingual repertoires and didactics as *standard*, hold a marginal position at best within the curriculum (*orders*). Consequently, in academic classes the potential of multilingualism, with respect to both the individual learner and the group of learners, is given little if any consideration. The following section discusses further twists on this dynamic from a local perspective.

3. *Foreign Languages in Mediated Spaces: Moving between (b)ordered localities and disciplines*

After completing my PhD, while teaching Linguistics and Cultural Studies at the University of Heidelberg, I started to work at a free¹¹ radio station in Mannheim. This city, despite being only 20 km from Heidelberg, presents a very different picture of social and, consequently, linguistic heterogeneity. A comparison between the websites of the respective administrations is telling in regard to each city's self-image: Heidelberg (City of Heidelberg) emphasizes that its residents are *international* (21 %), young (39 % are under 30 years old) and educated (41 % are university graduates); whereas

11 There is a debate in free/community media about the use of these labels. It is not relevant to the purpose of the present chapter to address this dispute. Here I prefer the term 'free' media, avoiding the implicit essentialization of the term 'community'.

Mannheim (City of Mannheim) boasts that 45.6 % of its residents have a *background of migration* (Migrationshintergrund), the majority of whom (25.8 % against 19.7 %) are holders of a citizenship other than German. The website proudly emphasizes the large range of countries from which Mannheim residents have arrived (“166 of the 193 member states of the UN”, City of Mannheim). Heidelberg's use of the adjective ‘international’ stresses the city's cosmopolitan nature, echoing the positive connotations of diversity discourses. Mannheim's emphasis on a ‘background of migration’ (Migrationshintergrund), on the other hand, evokes a term which in the hegemonic discourse is frequently read as a challenge to social cohesion (cf. Blommaert/Verschueren 1998). In this opposition, a discursive hierarchization of cultural capital operates on implicit assumptions concerning the correspondence between specific paths of migration and respective socio-cultural features¹².

Commuting between Heidelberg and Mannheim, and between the university and the free radio station, was both inspiring and instructive. I was starting to conduct research on linguistic diversity and the radio station would offer me an opportunity to experience what has been addressed as *parallel* (cf. Heller 2006) or *pluralized monolingualism* (cf. Makoni/Pennycook 2007): several shows were grouped under the label *multilingual* because they performed *foreign* languages (i.e. languages *other* than German), although none of them featured multiple languages in the same show. For example, a show in Spanish was classified as multilingual not because it performed Spanish *and*, for example, Portuguese or Arabic, but because it was not in German.¹³ I certainly recognized how important

12 For further examples of this kind of hierarchization in representations of social and linguistic diversity see Pelillo-Hestermeyer (2021b; Pelillo 2014). Pelillo-Hestermeyer/Cismondi (2021) problematize the binary discourse on diversity in the context of scientific management.

13 I am aware that my use of the term ‘language’ here comes close to the sort of essentializing use which I criticize. In reproducing the way in which the term is commonly used I do not intend to express agreement with this definition. As Busch (2012) rightly stresses, “Nobody is monolingual”. Therefore, none of the mentioned radio shows could have been, strictly speaking, monolingual. The definition of such practice as ‘multilingual’ only works by means of juxtaposing specific languages, imagined as single unities. By conceptualizing this kind of multilingualism as *parallel* (cf. Heller 2006), or *pluralized* (cf. Makoni/Pennycook 2007) monolingualism, the monolithic conceptualization of language inspiring this use of the term ‘multilingual’ becomes highlighted. It roots in the essentializing assumption that both the producer and the audience of the media product belong to the same ‘speech community’, a term which has been criticized precisely for the same essentializing assumption (cf. Blommaert 2010; Busch 2012).

it is to be able to access the public sphere in the language(s) one feels comfortable with, especially for members of linguistic minorities. At the same time, I became attracted to the idea of contesting linguistic (b)orders by doing a radio show in multiple languages.¹⁴ Together with a small group of radio makers with experience in media pedagogy, we successfully applied for funding from the *Bildungszentrum Bürgermedien* (a public institution which supports community media) to develop radio courses which, beside disseminating technical and journalistic skills, focused on the translingual¹⁵ design of different kinds of radio genres. The project's title, *Rhein-Neckar Babylon*,¹⁶ emphasized the overcoming of the (b)orders, not only between speakers of different languages (including German), but also between the cities of Heidelberg and Mannheim: as a matter of fact, both cities – which are located in between the rivers Rhine and Neckar – were reached by the broadcast. Symbolically, the project also aimed to contest the ideological hierarchization of languages and speakers by challenging the distinction between *international* residents and residents *with a background of migration*. The training was based on partnered work in which different technical and language skills could be shared and variously negotiated within the team. For example, a speaker of Turkish would work in tandem with someone who is learning Turkish to produce a German-Turkish radio piece. Both languages would be mixed in ways which would be understandable also for people who would not have full proficiency in both languages. Whoever felt 'weaker' with respect to language proficiency could play a stronger role in the team by, for example, contributing technical skills, musical abilities, knowledge of various music

A multilingual public sphere would be, according to this conception of multilingualism, a public space characterized by the juxtaposition of single, *parallel* 'monolingual' spaces (cf. Pelillo-Hestermeyer 2021b; Pelillo 2014).

14 For an analysis of different forms of multilingualism in the context of transnational media cooperation in Mediterranean countries s. Pelillo-Hestermeyer (2018).

15 *Translingual* means in this context that multiple languages were used in the same radio product, thus overcoming the *parallel* (Heller 2006) or *pluralized* (Makoni/Pennycook 2007) multilingualism dominant in public media. The term recalls the idea of *multilingua franca* (cf. Makoni/Pennycook 2007, p. 448), explained in more depth in Pelillo-Hestermeyer (2015; 2018). Moreover, Canagarajah (2016, p. 452) highlights the value of developing "translingual dispositions" in language classes, as a more effective learning strategy than simply acquiring grammatical or communicative skills, insofar as it allows learners to negotiate strategies to expand their linguistic repertoires in a lifelong learning perspective.

16 A more detailed description of the project and its results can be found in Pelillo-Hestermeyer (2015).

traditions, etc. Some of my students from the University of Heidelberg could participate in the project thanks to the recent introduction of the ‘overarching competences’ (übergreifende Kompetenzen) requirement in Bachelor degrees. This allowed them to gain credits for practical activities which would promote the development of professional skills. It is certainly true that these students developed journalistic, media and communicative competences. In particular, international students, who were trying hard to learn German, developed self-confidence in their ability to perform German in a public context.

On the other hand, the conditions that made the project possible and successful also perpetuated aspects of the borders and orders which it aimed to deconstruct. Our funding, for example, was granted in the context of an *integrational* politics that acknowledged the potential of free radio stations to promote social cohesion (cf. Sarcinelli, 2009). The project certainly accomplished that, for example when pensioners cooperated with students, or asylum seekers with local long-term residents. But if the project were to be evaluated only according to the institutional logic which made it possible (that is, the development of professional skills by the students and the ‘integration’ of minorities), its most essential value would be completely overlooked. The project questioned the boundary between social and cultural politics in the promotion of linguistic diversity. It created emancipatory spaces – what Bhabha (2010) calls *third spaces* – in which linguistic resources were not hierarchized in the ways they are in daily life. It problematized the politics of representation which concede *native* pronunciation a far wider space in the public sphere. It deconstructed the boundary between theoretical and practical knowledge which is inscribed in the concept of *discipline*, by rooting translingual radio-making into critical media and discourse studies (cf. Kelly-Holmes/Milani 2011). Crossing the physical border between Heidelberg and Mannheim was symbolically also a political act of contesting and problematizing multiple borders (e.g. regional), boundaries (e.g. socio-cultural, economic and political), and limits (e.g. between academic, media and everyday-life multilingualism). To assess these aspects, I close by relating the experiences described above to the ongoing debate concerning the place of Kulturwissenschaft(en) and Cultural Studies in academia.

4. Conclusions: Destabilizing (B)Orders in Academia

In the book “Blurred Borders. Perspectives of Cultural Sociology” (*Unschärfe Grenzen. Perspektiven der Kulturosoziologie*), Andreas Reckwitz (2008)

pinpoints the practice of “destabilizing borders” as a key-target to be achieved by Cultural Sociology, since borders are both an “inevitable medium and product of cultural processes” (“ein unweigerliches Medium wie Produkt kultureller Prozesse”, Reckwitz 2008, p. 301, my translation). In this regard, he highlights the specific potential of Cultural Sociology in relation to Sociology. Sociology has long considered “systematic cultural instability and the self-destabilizing effect of socio-cultural borders” (“die systematische kulturelle Instabilität und Selbstdestabilisierung von sozial-kulturellen Grenzen”) as “disturbing exceptions” (“störende Ausnahmen”) and, as such, relegated them to the margins of the discipline (cf. Reckwitz 2008, p. 302–303). Cultural Sociology instead has embraced the post-structuralist paradigm which deconstructs the lines of demarcation typical of modernity (e.g. between human and non-human, history and contemporaneity, foreign and local). Thus, Cultural Sociology has participated in the more general *cultural turn*, which conceives of culture, not as something separate from economics, politics, society, etc., but as constitutive of each of them. Accordingly, Reckwitz argues that Cultural Sociology should not be seen as a separate field within Sociology, but rather as a transversal perspective that focuses on destabilizing (b)orders (Grenzdestabilisierungen), and deserving of a more central positioning within Sociology.

Similar to Reckwitz' position with respect to Cultural Sociology, Romance Studies also needs to re-center disciplinary knowledge and practices by acknowledging the *cultural turns* (cf. Bachmann-Medick 2016) and creating an institutional space for Cultural Studies. This issue was raised in the context of the 10th congress of Germanophone French Studies (Frankoromanistentag) in 2016, which focused precisely on *Border relationships. Limits of Relationships. Liaisons frontalières* (Grenzbeziehungen. Beziehungsgrenzen. Liaisons frontalières), where I took part in a panel devoted to “Dialogical Potentials of Cultural Studies Research in the Foreign Language Studies” (Dialogpotenziale kulturwissenschaftlicher Forschung in den Fremdsprachenphilologien). The panel organizers, Jenny Etrich and Marie-Therese Mäder, aimed to critically evaluate the development of Kulturwissenschaften in Romance Studies, from the cultural turn of the 90s to the present. The need for this epistemological discussion emerged, among other reasons, in light of contradictory practices which, while explicitly mentioning Kulturwissenschaften in a growing number of curricula, introductory courses and publications, in fact treat it as a supplement of literary studies. This tendency is reflected by the fact that most university chairs are expressly advertised for *Literary and Cultural Studies* (Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaft) and, if advertised specifically for Kulturwissenschaften, they are assigned to scholars of Literary Studies.

In this respect another contributor to the panel, Dorothee Röseberg, who held one of the few chairs for Romance Cultural Studies until recently, maps a series of problematic developments. She stresses a vagueness in the titles of courses offered in curricula, a widespread co-optation of Kulturwissenschaften by the Literary Studies with respect to both topics and resources, and an ambivalent relationship to so-called *Landeskunde* ('Regional Studies'). *Landeskunde* developed in the 70s and 80s as a third field beside Literary Studies and Linguistics, in order to create a space for the consideration of political and social processes within the Romance Studies (cf. Röseberg 2018, p. 17ff.). Evidently, by addressing Romance cultures as *foreign* cultures, *Landeskunde* is based on the same normative, essentializing ideological framework sketched in section two, which is far from the constructivist approach of Kulturwissenschaften. By confusing both perspectives, for example in teaching activities, the basic assumptions and aims of Kulturwissenschaften become completely reversed. Against this background, Röseberg (2018) stresses the importance of delineating Kulturwissenschaften as a proper field within the Romance Studies, and the *Foreign Language Philologies* in general, by considering it as a *threshold* field ("Schwellenwissenschaft", p. 26). Kulturwissenschaften is accordingly neither a discipline within the Humanities nor within the Social Sciences. It is not a discipline at all. It is located in the space *between* academic disciplines. As a scholar of French Studies, Röseberg calls for a more extensive exchange with French *histoire culturelle* and *études culturelles*. Due to space constraints, I cannot discuss here the great potential of transcultural versions of Kulturwissenschaften, a topic which deserves thorough consideration in the context of its 'destabilizing' role. However, it is worth noting that, despite the different contexts in which Reckwitz and Röseberg, in their respective fields, suggest to re-think the role and epistemological assumptions of Kulturwissenschaften, they both point to its liminal positioning as a vantage point from which to transform established disciplines. Outside the German context, Johan Förnas also refers to international Cultural Studies as a "borderland field" (Förnas 2020, p. 303) which "houses an intricate dialectic of boundaries and transgressions" (Förnas 2020, p. 299). In this context, he stresses the importance of, on the one hand, overcoming disciplinary traditions and commonplace dichotomies by *translating* methodologies and practices; and on the other hand, of defending those borders that need to remain. Such borders demarcate in this context the need to defend committed intellectual autonomy and engagement whenever they are threatened – for example by post-truth politics, climate change denial, authoritarian movements, or anti-elitist conspiracy theories (cf. Förnas 2020, p. 306f.).

The example of the radio project mentioned above demonstrates that extra-academic activities, which may not (yet) be institutionally acknowledged as fulfilling disciplinary requisites, can accomplish the theoretical foundations of Cultural Studies more coherently and rigorously than many disciplinary activities which run under its label. Destabilizing (b)orders would imply, in this context, both to position ourselves *and* to enable the negotiation of more emancipatory spaces for *doing diversity* in academia.

On the other hand, what do we *do* once we have deconstructed (b)orders epistemologically? By addressing this question, Kulturwissenschaften could profit from engaging more extensively with 'Anglophone' Cultural Studies, which have a longer experience of contestation over the relationship between Cultural Studies as a political project and its institutionalized counterparts in academia. Stuart Hall, commenting on the rapid institutionalization of American Cultural Studies, warned about "institutionalization as a moment of profound danger", but also immediately stressed that "dangers are not places you run away from but places that you go towards" (Hall 1992, p. 285). Gil Rodman (2015, p. 79) points to the fact that scholars have produced *interdisciplinary*, rather than *extradisciplinary* or *nondisciplinary* research, as one of the main failures of Cultural Studies as institutionalized in academia. He encourages scholars to move past a "fetishization of theory" (Rodman 2015, p. 173), to look at the academy as only one of the multiple sites for doing Cultural Studies, and to "deprofessionalize" it while protecting its "brand" from misuse (Rodman 2015, p. 160ff.). Similarly, Ien Ang (2006, p. 188) emphasizes the "need to open Cultural Studies up to interventions from outside its own discursive field" (that is, from society at large), and calls this kind of work "cultural research" as a way of distinguishing, but not segregating, it from the theoretical work to be done within Cultural Studies. She exemplifies this by referring to a series of activities conducted at the "Centre for Cultural Research" at the University of Western Sydney, which address a variety of problems, from regional cultural planning with digital technologies to the impact of tourism on residential areas. This work focuses "on a pragmatic, context-specific approach to cultural research and scholarship, which aims to generate productive compromises – negotiations – between the institutional arrangements we find ourselves in and our intellectual and disciplinary commitments" (Ang 2006, p. 192).

Despite the different geneses and histories of their relationship with academia (cf. Wuggenig 1998), both Kulturwissenschaften and Cultural Studies should face the difficult challenge of finding the right balance between theoretical precision and intellectual and political engagement in

a fuller sense. The borders to be challenged are, in this context, of various natures. They run along academic disciplines and national traditions, separate academic practices from real-life contexts, and perpetuate modernist attitudes and norms despite the formal acknowledgment of postcolonial and transcultural research (cf. Canagarajah 2016; Kramsch 2014). The examples in this chapter demonstrate how established politics of knowledge standardize linguistic diversity in ways that hierarchize mobility and cultural capital, and filter access to academic and higher education institutional spaces. While the discourse on diversity too often tends to split questions of access and representativeness (whereby diversity is regarded as an issue of equality politics) from questions of productivity (whereby diversity is regarded as contributing to excellence)¹⁷, the examples discussed above reveal the ideological underpinnings of this distinction. The hegemonic ideology which binarily distinguishes between *foreign* and *native* speakers, sustained by disciplinary knowledge, becomes reified in the lives of a constantly growing number of multilingual speakers who are all but *foreign*.

By critically addressing, rather than reproducing, the ideological boundaries which separate among single *languages* and single *language communities*, and dichotomize the *Self* and the *Other*, academic teaching can challenge widespread ‘ethnicizing boundaries’ (Höfler/Klessmann 2021) and racism, and make space for multiple belongings both in academic environments and in society at large. Blommaert (2010) encourages sociolinguistic scholars, in the context of globalization, to get rid of a vocabulary expressing the ideals of Modernity. This is, epistemologically, right and important. On the other hand, as Ahmed stresses, “to proceed as if the categories do not matter because they should not matter would be to fail to show how the categories continue to ground social existence” (Ahmed 2012, p. 182). In this regard, plenty of work remains to be done at the crossroads between Linguistics and Cultural Studies. In this vein, Tommaso Milani (2019) recalls the project of “undisciplined Applied Linguistics” suggested by Moita Lopes (2006), as a practice which can expand disciplinary analytical focuses and decolonize knowledge frameworks by “making visible those complex inscriptions of privilege/oppression that we carry as a result of our colonial history” (Milani 2019, p. 26). With respect to the *Foreign Language Studies*, engaging in forms of *undisciplined* ‘cultural research’, to recall Ang’s (2006) distinction, would enormously enrich both academic work and many lives in and between communities.

17 Cf. Pelillo-Hestermeyer/Cismondi (2021) for an example of such a binary discourse of diversity in the context of scientific management.

After all, the local contexts in which we work and live offer plain evidence that terms such as 'foreign' or 'native' are anything but innocuous.

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