Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Translation and its discontents: key concepts in English and German history education

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ABSTRACT

Key terms and concepts are crucial tools in teaching and learning in the disciplines. Different linguistic traditions approach such tools in diverse ways. This paper offers an initial contribution by a monolingual Anglophone history educator in dialogue with German history educators. It presents three different scenarios for the potential of translation between German and Anglophone research communities. In the case of *Geschichtsbewußtsein* or 'historical consciousness', the Anglophone field has already been enriched by the introduction of a new concept over the past decade. In the case of the fundamental group of concepts – 'source', 'evidence', 'trace' and 'account' – the Anglophone field is shown to be in surprising disarray, but clarification is within reach. German history education researchers may have a similar need; if so, perhaps they can benefit from the English language discussion. In the third case, that of *Triftigkeit* or 'plausibility', the German field is poised, again to make a significant contribution to a gaping hole in the theory, research and practice of Anglophone history education.

Introduction: the problem of German–Anglophone translation in history education

US academic historical practices (the Anglophone tradition that has most influenced my own understanding of the discipline) started in Germany.[1] As the US profession was taking shape in the late 19th century, Göttingen, Berlin and other German universities offered graduate training in history unavailable in the USA, and thus many, if not most, of those who became leading historians in the USA had studied in Germany. Pre-eminent among the German historians was Leopold von Ranke, whose name was 'constantly invoked as inspirational model by turn-of-the-century US historians' and who became the first honorary member of the new American Historical Association (Novick, 1988, p. 26 and Chapter 1, *passim*).

And yet from the outset, according to Iggers (1962, p. 18), 'the image of Ranke which predominated in America was fundamentally different from that in Germany':

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> Unable to understand the philosophic context of Ranke's historical thought, American historians detached Ranke's critical analysis of documents, which they understood and which suited their need to give history scientific respectability, from his idealistic philosophy, which was alien to them. They transplanted [only] the critical method and the seminar into the intellectual setting of late nineteenth-century America … (Iggers, 1962, p. 18)

In Germany, meanwhile, almost all of the 'voluminous literature' on Ranke from the 1880s onwards dealt 'with Ranke as a historical theorist rather than as a writer of history' (Iggers, 1962, p. 27). Americans were interested in his method; Germans in his theory.

Novick and Iggers point to problems that are still with us in a new form in the early 21st century. Perhaps not Anglophone historians, but certainly Anglophone history educators like myself, continue to look to German history didactics to provide insights into aspects of history education that have been more theoretically elaborated in Germany. But like the early 20th-century US students of Ranke, we are transplanting ideas into alien soil, and in so doing nurturing new, hybrid organisms. If we learn anything from Iggers' treatment of Ranke, it is that today's Anglophone history educators wishing to harvest the fruits of German intellectual labour need to pay attention to the cultural and philosophical landscape in which it grew, even as we adapt them to the English-speaking cultural context. On the other hand, there are bound to be mutations, possibly constructive ones, in the process of transplanting.

I am perhaps an odd person to be carrying this message, in that I don't read German. But I may at least be able to point to areas where those with the requisite linguistic and cultural tools should be looking. In this paper, I will examine three cases in each of which the process of Anglophone dialogue with German history education colleagues works somewhat differently. The first concept, 'historical consciousness', (*Geschichtsbewußtsein*) is pervasive in both German history didactics literature and official curricula, but has only recently begun to circulate in Anglophone history education. The second case involves a fundamental group of terms in English – 'source', 'evidence', 'trace', and 'account' – shown to be in surprising disarray. Here, the paper does not look to the German field for clarification, but offers a way forward in English that may have helpful transatlantic implications. In the third case, the German concept of *Triftigkeit* is introduced for the first time, I believe, to Anglophone history educators. Taken together, the three cases exemplify a variety of ways that intercultural translation and dialogue can enhance conceptual clarity and broaden the scope of the field.

Key concepts I: historical consciousness

Nowhere is the problem of translation more apparent than in the usage of the term 'historical consciousness' in English language history education literature. I credit myself for bringing it into the North American discussion early in the first decade of this century, to the extent that it is in circulation at all. Of course, in the pages of *History and Theory*, German and European scholars had written in English about historical consciousness. But the articles in that journal had concerned historiography, not history education. Even Jörn Rüsen, who was deeply interested in history didactics, had not addressed historical consciousness as a problem of history education in any widely distributed journal. Among US historians generally, the term had little or no theoretical elaboration. When Gutman (1987), the influential US labour historian, wrote of 'Historical Consciousness in Contemporary America', it was solely a lament about the gap between the insights of new labour and social historians of the 70s and 80s, and the way most Americans understood their past, with no discussion of the concept or theories about it.

In the mid-1990s, I was invited to participate in a symposium of a research group organized by Rüsen in Bielefeld, Germany on the 'Structure, Logic and Function of Historical Consciousness', where I began to see the conceptual power of the term (Straub, 2005[2]). In 2001, I convened a symposium in Vancouver, Canada entitled 'Theorizing Historical Consciousness', where Rüsen himself had an opportunity to confront Canadian, British and US history educators about the uses of the term. Among many productive debates, was the confrontation between him and British history educator Peter Lee.

The strength of the extensive British research and writing on history education in the 80s and 90s lay in its empirical analysis of students' abilities to work with 'second order' or 'metahistorical' thinking concepts, such as evidence, accounts and explanation. Its theoretical models and empirical explorations addressed the question of *progression* in young people's understanding to more powerful, disciplinary concepts. What it left largely unexplored were young people's uses of the past, their 'sense-making'. Rüsen's 'disciplinary matrix' addressed this gap directly, providing a scheme for thinking about the dialectical relationship between historians' disciplinary practices and the uses – traditional, exemplary, critical or genetic (to use Rüsen's typology) – for which people in the larger culture looked to the past for orientation in the present (Rüsen, 2004). This link was particularly important in North America, where many jurisdictions subsumed the school subject of history under 'social studies'. Proponents of 'social studies' as a school subject attacked a purported 'history for its own sake' as being educationally irrelevant. A rationale for history education centred on 'historical consciousness' provides the response.

On the other hand, Lee countered that Rüsen's typology failed to distinguish between young people advancing through stages of historical consciousness and their mastering more powerful levels of historical thinking concepts such as evidence and accounts (Lee, 2004, pp. 140–143). The theoretical and empirical relationships between these two kinds of student progression would have to await the HiTCH Project in Germany, and, on a smaller scale, Duquette's (2011) works in Quebec (Körber, 2011).

A second problem in working with German 'historical consciousness' in an Anglophone educational setting is well known and much discussed and perhaps more fundamental: the Eurocentrism built into the term. All educational prescription is informed by values; to what extent are the values embedded in Rüsen's levels of 'historical consciousness' specifically European, and to what extent can they be interpreted as universal human values?

This problem arises from the definition of historical consciousness as quintessentially 'modern' consciousness, arising in the wake of the European revolutions of the late 18th-century when the possibility opened up of remaking societies through the exercise of collective action and scientific innovation (Gadamer, 1987). In this way, 'historical consciousness' is an achievement of cultures – or individuals – who comprehend the historicity of their own circumstances, the mutability of their identities and the contingency of their traditions. Historical consciousness in these terms is the antithesis of cultural tribalism and religious fundamentalism, and a reasonable goal for history education in liberal democracies. And yet, in the postcolonial, postmodern era, the imperative of a cosmopolitan historical consciousness must make room for dialogue across cultural difference. In Canada, as elsewhere, this takes shape most sharply as recognition of aboriginal people, or 'First Nations', whose articulations of time and memory take a radically different form. Rüsen (2002) himself confronts this problem for historiography in his edited collection, *Western Historical Thinking:*

An Intercultural Debate. But Anglophone history educators have not yet responded to this challenge head-on (see, e.g. Seixas, 2012).

Key concepts II: source/evidence/trace/account

As opposed to 'historical consciousness' which does not have a rich Anglophone tradition, 'source', 'evidence' and 'account' do. Nevertheless, the meanings they convey are inconsistent and even contradictory. Sorting out their current uses by history educators in the English language will help lay the groundwork for a comparison and analytical translation to the German-language setting. In the end, I propose stipulations that might contribute to a more consistent and clear English lexicon for doing history.

The Schools Council History Project Contribution

The founding of the British Schools Council History Project (SCHP) in 1972 was a seminal moment in Anglophone history pedagogy. SCHP aimed to introduce students to history as a distinct 'form of knowledge'. The Project did not offer a clear definition of the nature of historical inquiry, but rather identified a 'series of concepts crucial to the historical enterprise' (Shemilt, 1980, p. 7). 'Evidence' is one among these concepts. In neither the SCHP Evaluation Report (1980) nor his subsequent article, 'Adolescent ideas about evidence and methodology in history', (1987) did Denis Shemilt stop to define the term. We can suppose that Shemilt assumed that its meaning would be widely understood. Moreover, in the latter piece, he used 'evidence', 'historical sources' and 'primary sources' interchangeably (and without explanation), sowing the seeds of confusion for a generation of history educators. If 'primary sources' need to be distinguished from 'secondary sources', then readers might well presume that 'sources' and 'historical sources' are more inclusive terms. Yet, when used alone, they generally are taken (as Shemilt wrote them) to mean 'primary sources.'

Elsewhere, others associated with the SCHP have taken care to distinguish between 'evidence' and 'source' – assuming, like Shemilt, that both refer only to 'primary sources'. A source becomes evidence when we consider it in relation to a question, account or particular historical claim (Ashby, 2011, p. 139). This piece of the confusion is relatively straightforward.

The far more consequential distinction lies in the difference between material that is produced *contemporary to the time* under study (what I have been calling 'primary sources') and *retrospective* accounts intended to narrate or explain from a position later than the time that is under study. It seems to me that 'primary' and 'secondary' provide in English a simple way to communicate this distinction. Moreover, they are common parlance in North American history education. But note that the term 'accounts' unavoidably enters the discussion at this point. We will return to this below.

Sam Wineburg's contribution

The confusion between 'source' and 'primary source' was not clarified in Sam Wineburg's (1991) seminal US article, 'On the reading of historical texts: Notes on the breach between school and academy'. In this piece, Wineburg introduced another competing term, 'historical texts', and in doing so further muddied the distinction between retrospective and contemporary texts. His study involved high school students and historians reading a range of

documents including primary sources, a textbook and a work of historical fiction. While the historians were able to use the former to reason about the event in question, the school students relied most heavily on an uncritical reading of the textbook.

In Wineburg's brilliant analysis of what the historians did (and the students didn't do), he focuses on the primary sources. This analysis constitutes the greatest contribution of the article for North American audiences. What is most important to the historians is 'not what the text *says* but what it *does*'. The historian comprehends '*subtext*, a text of hidden and latent meanings'; and further, the text as a 'rhetorical artifact and the text as a human artifact' (Wineburg, 1991, p. 498). These are key strategies that historians use to approach primary sources. But we generally read secondary accounts quite differently.

Indeed, if we were to approach secondary accounts with these modes of analysis, we would quickly run into problems. Wineburg (1991, p. 500) says 'texts come not to convey information, to tell stories, or even to set the record straight'. This is an important caution for the reading of primary sources. But it is entirely wrong for secondary accounts. Because they promise to 'convey information' and 'tell stories' is *exactly* why we read new textbooks; because they promise to 'set the record straight' is *precisely* why we read new historians. This is not to say that we should read textbooks or history journals uncritically, but we generally do not expect to read them historically, as we do primary sources.

Alignment of the purposes of text and reader

This contrast leads us directly to a consideration of the degree of alignment of the intentions or purposes for which various texts were *written* (or artifacts created) with the purposes for which we are *reading* (or interpreting) them. The history textbook and journal article were written for school students and other historians, respectively. The purposes of writer and reader are aligned. In picking up a secondary source, readers assume they are so.

In the case of the primary source, the authors' purposes and questions are most often entirely different from those of the reader. In 1950, the South African Government passed the Population Registration Act in order to legally segregate the population by race. The historian retrospectively uses that declaration in order to understand the implementation of apartheid, and the ideologies and institutions of the time. The stark differences in purpose between the writers of the Act and its readers 65 years later, rather than being limiting, are actually generative. The distance creates the conditions and possibilities for analysis.

This should all be straightforward. What is surprising then, is the pervasive commission of errors by North American professional development writers, educators in general and history education researchers specifically, in relation to these problems.

The special problem of 'accounts'

Some of the problem lies in the term, 'account'. North American Anglophones might learn something from the clarity of the British on this term. British research growing out of the Schools Council History Project and, later, the CHATA Project, used 'accounts' in only one way: to refer to the work of those in the present writing about the past, retrospectively (see e.g. Lee, 2004, 2014; Lee & Ashby, 2000; Lee & Shemilt, 2003). Writing in that tradition, Chapman (2011b, p. 172) provides a field bifurcated between:

(1) Fragmentary traces of the past (in the form of relics and reports); and

(2) Contemporary constructions of the past shaped by present concerns and purposes [i.e. accounts].

His use of 'traces' and 'accounts' as the fundamental organizing concepts is extremely helpful. Contrast his clarity about accounts with recent US educators' writing: Nokes (2013, p. 21) defines primary sources as 'first hand accounts'. VanSledright (2013, p. 37) uses the term 'accounts' synonymously with 'residue' from the past. While these might seem like incidental slips, they have important implications for how educators explain the analysis of primary sources.

Some 'residue', or 'traces' from the past do have the structure and purpose of an account: that is, they describe or explain through pictures or words in a narrative form, intending to report either for contemporary or future readers. The existence of primary accounts makes problematic the use of the term 'accounts' to mean 'secondary sources'. Far more damaging, however, is the assumption (seemingly here made by Nokes and VanSledright and repeated elsewhere) that all primary sources should be treated as accounts, i.e. descriptions or explanations of events created by participants or witnesses to the events.

Most traces do not come to us in the form of accounts, and certainly not in the form of accounts that are intended to answer the questions that we, *qua* historians, are asking. Armour from feudal England, machinery from the Industrial Revolution and recruitment posters from First World War are traces of the past. None are descriptions or explanations or, as Nokes would have it, 'first hand accounts'. Nor are textual traces such as love letters, declarations of war, or income tax filings *accounts* of gender, international or class relations.

The consequences of confusion

Writers like VanSledright and Nokes understand that many primary sources (or traces) are not accounts, but they show little concern about the consequences of writing as if they all were. These include, most importantly, the deployment of either control for 'bias' or 'reliability' as criteria for the selection of useful primary sources. We rightfully demand adequate reliability of accounts as a means to know whether they can be trusted to convey the information that we are seeking from them. But reliability is only an appropriate criterion for historical sources when the source's author is addressing the *same question* that the historian is trying to answer. While this may happen with reports and testimony, most often it is not the case. Most primary sources are generated in the course of daily activities, *not* in order to describe or explain daily activities to posterity.[3]

We can see how this works in a recent guide for history teachers. The first steps in the widely used IREAD protocol for reading primary sources are as follows:

> Identify the author's argument in response to the historical question. Which side is the author on? How would the author respond to the historical question?' (Monte-Sano, De La Paz, & Felton, 2014a, p. 180, see also 2014b.)

These assume what is generally not the case, that the author of the primary source had a position, or even could have comprehended the historical question being asked. Would Johannes Vermeer take a position for or against historian Timothy Brook's (2008) argument that the 17th century was the 'dawn of globalization'? Which 18th-century source considered Janet Polasky's (2015) thesis that the American Revolution should be viewed in the

larger context of the 'Atlantic World' rather than an 'exceptional' historical event? Which of Thomas Laqueur's (2003) many sources could respond to his hypothesis that the history of masturbation is best understood as divided into three distinct periods since the early 18th century? The historians' questions are not those of their sources.

We can look at this problem from the other end, in pedagogical terms. Our sources in Nazi Germany might have confronted the question, 'how are we going to get rid of Jews and Poles and free up more land for Germans?' While students today should understand how Nazis thought about this question, it would not be a sensible classroom inquiry. 'Which of the women in Salem are possessed by the devil and what should we do with those who are?': we would not ask students to take a position on this question, nor should we ask them to seek reliable evidence of witch sightings among the sources that survive from 17th-century Massachusetts Bay Colony. Of course, there are counter examples where debates from the past resonate today (should Truman have dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima?), but these do not offer a general template for reading primary sources. Students of history need to understand how historical figures thought about the problems they confronted and to use sources to make hypotheses about that thought. But those people's problems are not today's inquiry questions. To suggest otherwise reflects a basic epistemological error.

Traces: a way forward

Perhaps wider use of the term 'trace', rather than 'primary source', would assist in clarifying this problem for teachers and students. An extreme example of the primary source as trace illustrates clearly why they cannot be assumed to be accounts. A hunter comes across tracks in the snow. He notes their shape (from which he infers 'deer'), which direction they are headed, how far apart they are (inferring speed) and how crisply defined they are (inferring how long ago, given the thawing temperature, they were made). The tracks (traces) give him information about what was happening in the not so distant past. They were created at that time, and he is interpreting them in the present. Yet the tracks are not a description of an event; they are not a 'first hand account'. Consequently, it makes no sense to ask whether the deer (or the deer's tracks) are 'reliable' or 'biased'. This is the nature of traces of the past, when read as evidence.

Written texts as traces of the past, as historians read them, are similar. To quote Wineburg (1991, p. 498) again, 'what is important … is not what the text *says* but what it *does*'. The following excerpt from a parliamentary speech in 1885 by Canada's first prime minister, John A. Macdonald, provides a clear example:

> The Chinese are foreigners. If they come to this country, after three years' residence, they may, if they choose, be naturalized. But still we know that when the Chinaman comes here he intends to return to his own country; he does not bring his family with him; he is a stranger, a sojourner in a strange land, for his own purposes for a while; he has no common interest with us, and while he gives us his labor and is paid for it, and is valuable, the same as a threshing machine or any other agricultural implement which we may borrow from the United States on hire and return it to the owner on the south side of the line; a Chinaman gives us his labor and gets his money, but that money does not fructify in Canada; he does not invest it here, but takes it with him and returns to China; and if he cannot, his executors or his friends send his body back to the flowery land. But he has no British instincts or British feelings or aspirations, and therefore ought not to have a vote. (Canada. Parliament. House of Commons, May 4, 1885, p. 1582)

Macdonald's speech is in the form of an argument against expanding suffrage. But asking either how 'biased' or how 'reliable' John A. Macdonald or his speech is would be entirely the wrong question. It would only be appropriate if we, as historians, were asking the question that Macdonald was addressing: whether it was a good move to bar Chinese Canadian suffrage, which is not the historian's question at all. Rather, we need to know about the context, infer his purposes, decode his language and understand his subtexts. John A. Macdonald was not witnessing; he was acting.

People's activities generate all kinds of texts (and objects, etc.). But those devoted to reporting events to some unknown future readers are relatively rare, and usually of less use. As Bloch (1953, pp. 63–64) put it, 'even when most anxious to bear witness, that which the text tells us expressly has ceased to be the primary object of our attention today … we are … successful in knowing far more of the past than the past itself had thought good to tell us'.

Megill (2007, p. 25) appears to agree with this use of 'trace' but then adds more confusion on 'source'. The key distinction, he argues, 'one that no self-respecting historian can avoid making' is between 'traces and sources'.

> A trace is anything remaining from the past that was not made with the intention of revealing the past to us, but simply emerged as part of normal life. A source, on the other hand, is anything that was intended by its creator to stand as an account of events. This second category of evidence … we might also call 'testimony' … (Megill, 2007, p. 25)

The idea of distinguishing between these two is potentially helpful, but the language in English is not, given the multiple common usages of 'source' that violate this distinction (including all 'primary' and 'secondary' texts that might be used in constructing a history; or exclusively and comprehensively, 'primary' texts). Megill (2007, p. 221, FN 20), in turn, cites a translation of Droysen's *Grundrisse der Historik* (1893) as distinguishing between traces (*Überreste*) and sources (*Quellen*).

How did North American history educators get into this tangle? Perhaps the answer belongs in the realm of social studies and its offshoot, media studies, with their emphasis on detecting bias, a language that is easily conveyed and easily misapplied within history. In any case, what is needed is a clear set of definitions of the most basic vocabulary for history education with boundaries and overlaps clearly spelled out. As a start, following from what has been said above, we might stipulate:

Primary sources or *traces* are all items created at the period under study, which, if meeting criteria of utility or relevance for addressing a particular question, become evidence. Under this large category are some specialized subcategories which have to do with its creators' intentions and (loosely) their structure. The boundaries among these involve some overlap.

Primary accounts have the intention of telling the story of what happened, including testimony, journals. These may be subject to the additional criterion of reliability, depending upon the historian's use.

Records also have the intention of recording information about what happened or is happening. They differ in that they may not be narrative in form (e.g. tax records). The researcher may be interested in reliability here, as well.

Relics are non-textual traces. Here, reliability is not an issue. Authenticity is a concern, as are the inevitable changes that occur over time.

Visual representations, such as photographs, drawings and paintings, have aspects of the three categories above, and, only for that reason, have their own designation.

Key concepts III: some further thoughts on secondary accounts and Rüsen's 'Triftigkeiten'

In common English language, an account is a description or explanation, generally in the form of a narrative or argument. It thus refers both to the purpose (intention) and the structure of the text. Defined thus, a historian or history student might read accounts that were constructed contemporary to the time under study (primary) or retrospectively (secondary). Here, I will consider only those constructed retrospectively. Concerns with clarity suggest that they should be called *secondary accounts*.

Chapman (2011a, 2011b) uses 'interpretation' interchangeably with 'accounts.' Very helpfully, he enumerates four intellectual and pedagogical challenges. Only if students have successfully tackled the first three, will they be in a position to be successful with the fourth:

(1) Understand what historical interpretations are

(2) Understand why interpretations differ

(3) Understand how historical interpretations differ

(4) Evaluate different interpretations of the past

Lee (2004, p. 154) and colleagues in the CHATA project analysed interviews and students' responses to written tasks to define a six-stage scheme of progression in students' success in meeting these challenges At the lowest level, accounts are simply 'given'. That is, students do not recognize the gap between 'the past' and the historical account of the past. At this level, students do not understand what interpretations are, and therefore have no way of explaining why they would differ. At an intermediate levels, students understand that authors have a role in creating accounts, but attribute differences in terms of their access to information, bias or distortion. At the most sophisticated level, students understand accounts as 'theory-like structures that should be assessed relative to their purposes, the questions they ask and the criteria and concepts that they presuppose' (Chapman, 2011b, p. 188). Chapman draws from a wealth of empirical research basically confirming Lee's scheme.

While this body of research represents a huge accomplishment in mapping students' understanding of Chapman's first three challenges, its lack of attention to students' evaluation of competing or inconsistent accounts is notable. Perhaps this is not surprising: even senior historians had difficulty articulating how they managed this challenge in the midst of the postmodernist wave of the 1990s. In 1992, William Cronon (subsequently president of the American Historical Association) juxtaposed numerous accounts of the American West in the 1930s – the environmental catastrophe of the 'dustbowl' – written over the five decades since the events. Observing the radical differences in interpretation, he asked, 'If our choice of narratives reflects only our power to impose our preferred version of reality on a past that cannot resist us, then what is left of history?' (Cronon, 1992, p. 1371).[4] He proposed three criteria. The accounts cannot contravene 'known facts'. They must make 'ecological sense' (how natural systems work). And, they must be accepted by the community of scholars. Less precisely, but more eloquently, he ended by articulating a fourth, moral dimension to the criteria:

> … narratives remain our chief moral compass in the world. Because we use them to motivate and explain our actions, the stories we tell change the way we act in the world … The end of

these human stories creates their unity, the telos against which we judge the efficacy, wisdom, and morality of human actions. (Cronon, 1992, p. 1375)

Here is where Anglophone history educators might turn to the Germans for help. Rüsen's '*Trifigkeit*' or plausibility offers a clear and communicable set of criteria for evaluating accounts, not unrelated to Cronon's, but perhaps more powerful (Körber, 2015). I will only briefly point out how Cronon's ideas map onto them and suggest how they could help Anglophone history educators move to the next step in teaching and assessing students' understandings of secondary accounts:

Empirical plausibility

This corresponds roughly to Cronon's 'known facts', that is, that the account cannot contradict widely accepted facts. It is an improvement, however, in that it acknowledges the contestability of many factual claims. Thus, an account enhances its 'empirical plausibility' through the explicit listing of sources, increasing the number of sources and providing analysis of the sources' relevance and utility. Empirical plausibility in Anglophone educational settings has already been well explored, particularly in the work of Wineburg and his students. For example, in her study of students' historical writing, Monte-Sano (2010, p. 548) provides detailed lists of indicators for factual and interpretive accuracy, persuasiveness of evidence, sourcing of evidence, corroboration of evidence and contextualization of evidence.

Normative plausibility

This corresponds roughly to Cronon's 'community of scholars', in that it looks to the audience or readership for recognition and acceptance of the norms and values underlying the account. Again, this is an improvement upon Cronon, in that it moves beyond 'scholars' to check for normative acceptability among various levels and sizes of audience – the wider the group to whom the account is normatively plausible, the better. Of course, where potential audiences maintain deeply divided normative commitments, it may be less helpful.

Normative plausibility is poorly mapped territory in English-speaking history education. Anglophone teachers and curriculum specialists are less likely to accept explicit treatment of moral or ethical values in history education than any other aspect of historical thinking (Seixas & Ercikan, 2011). Nor do we have practicable guideposts for the articulation of values within historical narratives. Gibson (2014, pp. 180–184) provides an array of codes, derived from analysis of student work on a task-seeking ethical judgements about a historical event, which could contribute to further work on normative plausibility. These include consideration of whether students offer 'explicit ethical judgments that a historical action was justified', 'general principles of ethics, fairness or human rights' or responses to 'injustices of the past'. Coffin (2006, pp.139–166) also provides a complex taxonomy of textual moves comprising responses, judgments and assessments of past events. Its very complexity may limit its uptake in educational settings. In a recent Delphi study to define 'core practices for teaching history', with 26 expert US history educators, Fogo (2014, pp. 177–178) found almost no interest in teaching the ethical dimension of history or history as orientation in time.

Narrative plausibility

This appears (in Körber's (2015) text) to be a combination of Cronon's 'ecological sense' and the sensibility embedded in the stories of human action, with settings, beginnings, middles and endings, conveying a narrative moral.[5] Narrative plausibility is likewise, largely uncharted territory in English and poses huge challenges. The complex assessment exercise outlined in Körber and Meyer-Hamme (2015) offers a taste of what may be involved: asking students to consider the elements of a narrative and to identify its meaning or conclusion.[6]

Refinement and research is needed in order to render these three categories of plausibility of secondary accounts helpful in guiding Anglophone history educators, but, taken together, with further development, they offer to fill a surprising and important gap.

Conclusion

German- and English-speaking history educators come from different traditions and have different strengths. Germans have been strong in theory and, in particular, exploration of the relationship infelicitously translated from Nietzsche as, 'the uses and disadvantages of history for life', and reflected in the concept of historical consciousness. The English-speaking field, starting with the SCHP, has been empirically robust.

These three cases exemplify three different scenarios for the potential of translation between German and Anglophone research communities. In the case of *Geschichtsbewußtsein* or 'historical consciousness', the Anglophone field has been enriched by the introduction of a new concept. In the case of the group of concepts – source, evidence, trace, and account – the Anglophone field is in need of clarification, but such clarification is within reach. German researchers may have a similar need; if so, perhaps they can benefit from the English language discussion. In the third case, *Triftigkeit*, the German field is poised, again to make a significant contribution to a gaping hole in the theory, research and practice of Anglophone history education.

Intercultural dialogue promises, thus, to enhance the conceptual clarity, enrich the conceptual scope, strengthen the empirical research agenda, and, hopefully, thereby, improve the utility of the research field for practitioners in schools, museums and other sites of history education.

Notes

1. This paper was originally written for the conference, 'Geschichtsdidaktik empirisch 15' in Basel, Switzerland, 3–4 September 2015. The author gratefully acknowledges the invitations of Béatrice Ziegler and Monika Waldis Weber to participate in a session on 'translation'. The paper was written as part of a dialogue with Andreas Körber. Without these three scholars, I would not have been able to frame the paper as it now appears, nor would I have encountered the term 'Triftigkeit'.
2. The German volume edited by Jürgen Straub and published in 1997, finally appeared in English translation in 2005.
3. Elsewhere Nokes (2013, p. 78), explains this distinction very clearly.
4. Cronon's puzzle was echoed in pedagogical terms in my own 'Schweigen! Die Kinder! Or, does postmodern history have a place in the schools?' (2000).
5. Körber promises a fourth, 'theoretical plausibility,' for which we will have to wait.
6. The distinction between normative and narrative plausibility is not yet clear enough in English. Narrative plausibility may be related to the second-order concept of 'significance' in English, but this will probably confuse rather than clarify.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

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