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TRANSLATION AS CULTURAL TRANSFER
AND SEMANTIC INTERACTION:
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*Avoiding the Semantic Nominalism of Political Languages:
Translation and Comparative Semantics*

Ideologies, Clifford Geertz once remarked, are cognitive maps “of problematic social reality.”¹ The semantic variations of political and social key concepts in particular contexts represent, like a map, different historical landscapes, based on specific experiences of the past and expectations of the future. Maps imply travel, and travelling in the landscape of ideologies implies contact between speakers, the transfer of interpretative knowledge and hence the semantic transformation of concepts as they are used in arguments. All these elements underline the importance of translational processes for any understanding of semantic change. Every translation involves a conceptual movement between the translatable and the translated, and indeed translation can be described not only as a metaphor, but as a method of semantic analysis. From this perspective, translations have both a diachronic and a synchronic dimension: they stand behind conceptual changes over time, from past past to past present, but they also represent the synchronic export and import of concepts and of their semantic structure between languages and vocabularies, thus reflecting the transfer of hermeneutic knowledge needed to articulate them in discourse.²

A comparative history of concepts brings together both dimensions of translation by stressing the diachronic change over time and the synchronic variations of semantic structures. The former points to translations in one national language community, the other to contact and translation within and between different national languages. If taken together, the

¹ Clifford Geertz, “Ideology as a Cultural System”, in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 220.

² See Jörn Leonhard, “Von der Wortimitation zur semantischen Integration: Übersetzung als Kulturtransfer,” in *Werkstatt Geschichte* 48 (2008): 45–63.

comparison not only focuses on isolated conceptual histories, but also on processes of semantic transfer and interaction as well as on conceptual overlap.

Two hermeneutical problems are involved here, which the semantics of *liberal/liberalism* can help to illustrate. First, many comparative studies still tend to equate the meaning of the ideological semantics of *liberalism* in different countries, as if it meant basically a similar canon of ideas, movements, or parties. They do not take into consideration the distinct contemporary meanings of *liberal* in different historical contexts. The neglect of this semantic aspect results in a trap of semantic nominalism, i.e. the unconsidered transfer of a concept's semantics from the contemporary political language of one country to the political discourse of another. This implicit equation of contemporary meanings in different contexts conceals an important focus of experiences and expectations, in other words the possibility of replacing the category of universal European liberalism with a spectrum of distinct histories of contemporary meanings of *liberal*. This is in contrast to a traditional history of ideas approach which would point to the singular of *European liberalism*, quasi "distilled" from the realm of ideas to which *liberalism* could be applied *avant la lettre*, i.e. before the concept actually existed in contemporary political discourse.³ Yet the semantics of political concepts are not the same in different countries. Different contexts point to the problem of how distinct experiences of the past and past expectations of the future were translated into distinct political and social discourses, and how that process was stimulated by the import, export, and translation of foreign concepts and their semantic fields. In other words, it is not possible to sum up the meaning of French *libéralisme*, German *Liberalismus*, Italian *liberalismo* and English *liberalism* in a universal concept of *European Liberalism*. Behind linguistically "equal" or "similar" words lie essentially different experiences, interests and expectations.

Second, there is what may be called a translational circle. The results of a comparative semantic analysis need to be re-translated into a language. Theoretically a researcher in such a situation would need a meta-language in order to avoid this problem of *Rückübersetzung*, such as a meta-theory

³ See Jörn Leonhard, *Liberalismus. Zur historischen Semantik eines europäischen Deutungsmusters* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2001), 47, 66, 83; Leonhard, "From European Liberalism to the Languages of Liberalisms: The Semantics of *Liberalism* in European Comparison," in *Redescriptions. Yearbook of Political Thought and Conceptual History* 8 (2004): 17–51.

which in other comparative analyses serves as a *tertium comparationis*, for example modernization theories in social history. However for comparative semantics, there is no such meta-language. Since there is no easy solution to this problem, the historian needs at least to be aware of it.⁴

Against this background, this paper seeks to illustrate the importance of translational processes for comparative semantic analyses in two parts: first, two ideal-type models are presented, which have been developed on the basis of the semantics of *liberal/liberalism* in European comparison, one focusing on the semantic transformation of concepts, the other concentrating on translation as a selective export and import of interpretative knowledge. Second, some exemplary elements of the translational processes that influenced the emergence of *liberal* as a political key concept in early nineteenth Europe are analyzed in order to illustrate the importance of translations for semantic change.

Differentiating the Sattelzeit: Stage-Models of Semantic Transformation and Translation

On the basis of such a comparative analysis of semantics it is also possible to differentiate Reinhart Koselleck's concept of the saddle epoch (*Sattelzeit*).⁵ According to this model a universal semantic change, based on processes like the democratization of concepts, took place between 1750 and 1850 and resulted in modern concepts in political and social vocabulary. In this paper, however, it is argued that only comparison allows identifying the specific rhythms of conceptual change and thus the

⁴ See Reinhart Koselleck, Ulrike Spree and Willibald Steinmetz, "Drei bürgerliche Welten. Zur vergleichenden Semantik der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft in Deutschland, England und Frankreich," in *Bürger in der Gesellschaft der Neuzeit*, ed. H.-J. Puhle (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 199), 14–58, esp. 22. See in addition Javiér Fernández Sebastián and Juan Francisco Fuentes, "Conceptual History, Memory, and Identity: An Interview with Reinhart Koselleck," in *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 2 (2006): 111–112; *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies. Dictionnaire des intraduisibles*, ed. Barbara Cassin (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2004).

⁵ Reinhart Koselleck, "Richtlinien für das Lexikon politisch-sozialer Begriffe der Neuzeit," *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 9 (1967): 81–99; Koselleck, "Einleitung," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, eds. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze and Reinhart Koselleck, Vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1972), xiii–xxvii. For a general overview on the perception of *Begriffsgeschichte* see Willibald Steinmetz, "Vierzig Jahre Begriffsgeschichte—The State of the Art," in *Sprache—Kognition—Kultur. Sprache zwischen mentaler Struktur und kultureller Prägung*, ed. Heidrun Kämper and Ludwig M. Eichinger (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 174–97.

life-cycle of concepts in different countries. There was no single period in which European vocabularies became modern, but rather particular paths with different connections, relations and overlapping between the semantics of key political concepts. Both models try to take these premises into consideration. The first describes the diachronic transformation of a concept's semantics, consisting of four stages. Its function is to identify the moment when translations can actually influence conceptual change and semantic transformation.

1. The pre-political stage of semantics: In the case of *liberal*, this is the stadium dominated by the pre-1789 uses of *liberal* or *liberality* in the different contexts. As in the case of Immanuel Kant's "*Liberalität der Denkungsart*"⁶ or Sieyès' "*éducation libérale*"⁷ of the Third Estate in France the concepts reflected an enlightened educational ideal without a fixed political or social meaning.
2. A fermentation of traditional and new semantic elements, caused by new political, social and cultural experiences, newly articulated interests and new expectations. Pre-political and politicized meanings were now beginning to overlap. This process started with the invention of the *idées liberals* in France in 1799 and their subsequent translation into *liberale Ideen* in Germany and *idee liberali* in Italy,⁸ but also with the emergence of *liberales* and *serviles* as party names in Spain and the export of this nomenclature to other European countries.
3. The politicization of concepts as controversial through changing connotations of traditional concepts and the development of new concepts: In this phase, speakers attempted to structure the semantic field by canonic definitions and semantic clarity, relying on a number of key experiences and expectations. This is the stadium in which the import of concepts such as the French *idées liberals* created a framework for the articulation of new experiences and stimulated conceptual debates, thereby testing the semantic field.
4. The ideological polarization and development of bipolar or multi-polar semantic structures: The focus was now on an antagonistic structure of

⁶ Immanuel Kant, "Kritik der Urtheilskraft, 1. Theil: Kritik der ästhetischen Urtheilskraft," in Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königlich Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, vol. V (Berlin: Reimer, 1913), 268.

⁷ Emmanuel Sieyès, "Qu'est-ce que le tiers état? (1789), précédé de l'Essai sur les privilèges." *Édition critique avec une introduction par Edme Champion* (Paris: Société L'histoire de la Revolution Francaise, 1888), 42.

⁸ See for example, Paolo Vergani, *Le Idee Liberali. Ultimo rifugio dei nemici della religione e del trono* 3rd ed. (Torino: Pietro Giuseppe Pic, 1821).

semantics, resulting in a wider field of political and social nomenclatures and their use in arguments. In the case of liberal, the semantic field became defined by symmetric counter-concepts such as *radical*, *conservative*, or later *socialist*.

Translation processes between national languages played a fundamental role in the second and third stages, when the semantic structure of a concept is still relatively fluid and open. In this phase the transfer of concepts and their translation served as a stimulating catalyst for politicized discourses. A very good illustration of this constellation is Rolf Reichardt's reconstruction of a virtual library of French-German translations between 1770 and 1815, a quantitative analysis which documents the importance of translations in the politicization of German concepts and discourses through the translation of French texts. It also underlines the growing importance of journal and newspaper articles in this context, especially during the 1790s:

Fig. 1: A Franco-German Library of Translations, 1770–1815⁹

⁹ Figure after Rolf E. Reichardt, *Das Blut der Freiheit. Französische Revolution und demokratische Kultur* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1998), 292.

Conceptual translations presuppose a cultural transfer of concepts that have gained at least a certain degree of universal meaning, before they can be integrated into national discourses. That was the case with the French political connotation of *libéral* and the Bonapartist *idées libérales* after 1799 in particular. The export of *libéral* and its translation became a dominating feature in early nineteenth century German and Italian political discourses. The following figure shows the number of monographs containing *liberal* in the main or sub-title between 1801 and 1880 in European comparison. Again, the quantitative analysis underlines the pioneering role of France as a laboratory of political and social language in the early nineteenth century. The export of French concepts and semantic fields to other continental societies was a dominating feature before 1830, especially with regard to the German and Italian states.

Following from this quantitative analysis, the second model tries to identify different stages in the translation between national languages and vocabularies, thereby differentiating various functions of the translational process:

Fig. 2: Monographs containing "liberal" in title/subtitle in European comparison, 1801–1880¹⁰

¹⁰ Leonhard, *Liberalismus*, 573.

1. Imitative translation of characteristic French expressions or texts taken from newspaper articles, essays, or entries from contemporary dictionaries: This type of translation usually reflected the direct impact of foreign impressions on a speaker, for instance a German writer travelling to revolutionary Paris and reading political journals there. In this early stadium, there was a characteristic lack of differentiating commentaries which could relate foreign concepts and their semantics directly to the speaker's own political or social context. German Jacobins travelling to Paris translated *principes libéraux* as *liberale Prinzipien*, but focused on the contemporary French context, not on the possibility of applying the concept to the German political situation.¹¹
2. Adaptive translation: On the basis of imported foreign concepts, selected semantic elements were applied to a different social and political context. In this phase, the selection of semantics was directed by the specific experiences, interests and expectations of the perceiving speakers. Although it still reflected the foreign origins, the concept's original connotation changed. The French *idées libérales* were not only imitated by *liberale Ideen* or *idee liberali* but the translation was applied to the political experiences and constitutional as well as national expectations in Germany and Italy.
3. Discursive integration: In this phase, concepts and their semantic structures, which were now applied to the different political and social contexts of the importing society, were integrated into a society's discourse. This is documented by the emergence of encyclopedic entries of *liberale Ideen*, for instance in the Brockhaus edition of 1817, without any reference to its French origin but with particular references to the German political and constitutional context.¹²

Many objections against evolutionary types and organic patterns of this sort can also be directed against both models. Their primary function, however, is to provide a heuristic instrument in the analysis of a particular concept. What is intended here as well is a stimulus for a broader debate about ways to differentiate Koselleck's paradigm of a *Sattelzeit* between 1750 and 1850. From that perspective, we may also ask whether parts of

¹¹ See for example Konrad Ferdinand Oelsner's letter dated 10th May 1797, quoted in Klaus Deinet, *Konrad Engelbert Oelsner und die Französische Revolution. Geschichtserfahrung und Geschichtsdeutung eines deutschen Girondisten* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1981), 285.

¹² [F.A. Brockhaus], *Allgemeine deutsche Real-Encyclopädie für die gebildeten Stände. Conversations-Lexicon*, Vol. v, 4th edn. (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1817), 674–75.

these models can be applied to other processes of conceptual change. The aim should be to overcome isolated national histories of concepts by a focus on cultural transfer and semantic interaction between political languages, an entangled history which reflects the synchronic variations of the past.¹³

Universalization and National Application: Translating liberal in Early 19th-Century Europe

The importance of translational processes for conceptual change can be illustrated by the comparative semantics of *liberal* in the early nineteenth century. On the European continent, Napoleonic expansionism led to a direct confrontation with the French *idées libérales* as Napoleon's programmatic formula of the results of 1789. In his Proclamation of the 18th Brumaire 1799, justifying the coup d'état, Bonaparte's *idées libérales* originally stood for a defensive strategy to safeguard the revolution's legacy by ending both political instability and social anarchy: "*Les idées conservatrices, tutélaires, libérales, sont rentrées dans leurs droits par la dispersion des factieux qui opprimaient les conseils, et qui, pour être devenus les plus odieux des hommes, n'ont pas cessé d'être les plus méprisables.*"¹⁴ Napoleon's invention of the *idées libérales* became part of his short-lived but influential imperial ideology. As the "*héro des idées liberals*" he proclaimed to be both the only legitimate heir of 1789 and the only *garant* of the revolution's positive achievements, as incarnated by the *Code Civil* and the idea of the nation's sovereignty.¹⁵ By referring to the imperial understanding of the *idées libérales*, Napoleon thus claimed to fulfill the revolution's original and legitimate objects. On the other hand, turning the transpersonal principle of the *idées libérales* against Napoleon's military despotism after 1810 integrated the opposition of the *libéraux* around Benjamin Constant and Madame de Staël.¹⁶ This explained why the *idées libérales* could

¹³ See Steinmetz, "Begriffsgeschichte," 175–77.

¹⁴ "Proclamation du général en chef Bonaparte." Le 19 brumaire, 11 heures du soir, in *Le Diplomate. Numéro xvi, Tridi 23 Brumaire, an VIII de la République française* [13th November 1799]; see also P.J.B. Buchez and P.C. Roux, *Histoire parlementaire de la Révolution française ou journal des assemblées nationales depuis 1789 jusqu'en 1815*, Vol. xxxviii (Paris: Paulin, 1838) 257.

¹⁵ [Bourrienne], *Mémoires de M. de Bourrienne, ministre d'état; sur Napoléon, le directoire, le consulat, l'empire et la restauration*, Vol. iii (Paris: Ladvocat, 1829) 28.

¹⁶ See Xavier Martin, "Libéral/Illibéral. Sur l'emploi de ces mots dans les *Travaux préparatoires du Code civil* (1801–1804)," in *Dictionnaire des Usages socio-politiques (1770–1815)*, vol. ii: *Notions-concepts* (Paris: INALF, 1987), 45–53.

survive the Emperor's defeat in 1815. By means of discursive export and penetration, by 1815 the *idées libérales* had become a universal concept for continental authors. In Germany and Italy it was possible to distance them from the Napoleonic origin and use them to articulate new constitutional, social and national expectations.

Whereas the English denomination of parties had originated in the seventeenth century and immunized English political discourse against continental imports, which meant that *liberal* was only slowly and reluctantly integrated into an already existing political nomenclature, in Germany the semantic import of *liberal* coined by the French Revolution and Napoleon was essential. In the member states of the Confederation of the Rhine a new language policy was directed by the French authorities, through which the *idées libérales* and the *constitution libérale* found their way to German journals and newspapers. The *idées libérales*, first formulated by Bonaparte in his Proclamation of the 18th Brumaire 1799, and after 1815 translated into *liberale Ideen* now indicated the overall demand for both national unity and constitutional progress in Germany. German authors looked at French debates, but their translation changed from a mere imitation of the concept to its application to the particular German situation. An excellent example in this context is Johann Christoph von Aretin's adaptive translation of a contemporary French article on *Les idées libérales* published in 1814.¹⁷ In his translation, Aretin applied the French concept to his own German background and the political and national situation of the German states at the end of the Napoleonic Wars.¹⁸ He gave particular attention to the constitution as the incarnation of a new balance between monarchy and people. But whereas the French text spoke of "*civilisation*" as the main criterion behind liberty, Aretin used the German "*Bildung*" which had a much more socially exclusive meaning. Also, the concept of "*nation*" had very different connotations in France and Germany at that time. Whereas French semantics oscillated between the nation's revolutionary sovereignty and the nation as represented by the constitutional monarch, the German expectation was to establish a constitutional nation-state which by 1815 already existed in France:

¹⁷ "Les Idées liberals," in *Le Nouvelliste Français ou Recueil Choisi de Mémoires No. xii* (Pesth: 1815), 273–82.

¹⁸ [Johann Christoph Freiherr von Aretin], "Was heißt Liberal? Zum Theil mit Benützung eines französischen Aufsatzes in dem *Nouvelliste français*," in *Neue Allemannia* 1 (1816): 163–75.

“Eine Verfassung ist liberal, wenn sie der Nation nicht nur alle Gattungen von Freiheit gewährt, deren ihr Bildungsstand fähig ist, sondern auch die Freiheit unter den Schutz der edlen und großmächtigen Gesinnungen stellt. Wesentliche Bestandtheile einer solchen Verfassung sind daher gegenseitiges Zutrauen der Regierung und der Regierten, ehrenvolle Auszeichnung des Verdienstes und des Talents, Wohlwollen gegen alle Menschen ohne Unterschied des Standes und des Bekenntnisses”.

“Une constitution libérale non-seulement donne à une nation tous les genres de liberté que son état de civilisation admet, mais elle met encore la liberté sous la sauvegarde des sentiments nobles et généreux. La confiance mutuelle du gouvernement et du peuple, les égards dus au talent et à la vertu, la bienveillance envers les nations étrangères, font parties de toute constitution libérale”.¹⁹

Similarly different connotations lie behind the concept of *gouvernement/Regierung*. Whereas the French author explicitly acknowledged the existence of an institutionalized opposition in parliament, Aretin could only focus on public opinion as a source of political legitimacy and an instrument with which to counterbalance the dangers of despotic rule. Here the different constitutional developments and experiences in both societies became apparent:

“Eins der ersten Kennzeichen einer liberalen Regierung ist, daß sie öffentliche Verhandlungen über die den Staat und das Volk zunächst angehenden Gegenstände gestattet. Mit der Verhandlung wird auch der Widerspruch zugelassen. Jede liberale Regierung erlaubt also die Kritik ihrer Verfügungen: ja sie wünscht sie sogar, einmahl weil die freie Discussion allein dem Volke seine politische Freiheit beweist, und dann, weil sie die Regierung von dem Zustand der Volksstimmung unterrichtet, und ihr Gelegenheit giebt, jene ungeheure moralische Kraft, genannt öffentliche Meinung, zu leiten und in Bewegung zu bringen; ein Vortheil, den der Despotismus gänzlich entbehrt”.

“Un des premiers caractères d'un gouvernement libéral, c'est de provoquer une discussion publique sur toutes les questions qui intéressent l'État et la nation. Mais admettre la discussion, c'est admettre la contradiction; or la contradiction habituelle, en fait de politique, est ce qu'on nomme opposition. Tout gouvernement libéral admet donc une opposition; il y a plus, il la désire, d'abord parce que l'existence bien manifeste d'une opposition peut seule constater l'existence de la liberté politique, ensuite parce que les débats entre les ministres et l'opposition signalent les erreurs où les premiers ont pu tomber, éclairent le gouvernement sur la situation de l'esprit public, et fournissent l'occasion de diriger, d'exciter et de mettre en mouvement l'opinion, cette force morale incalculable dont le despotisme se prive lui-même”.²⁰

¹⁹ Aretin, “Liberal”, 170; “Les Idées libérales”, 278–79.

²⁰ Aretin, “Liberal”, 171; “Les Idées libérales”, 279–80.

The import of the new concept also provoked resistance, reflecting the change from politicization to ideological polarization: For Metternich and the German Confederation this concept could only denote a revolutionary direction. Public confidence in the “*Liberalität der Regierung*,”²¹ the government’s liberality, for instance during the Prussian reform era or in the South German constitutional states of Baden, Württemberg and Bavaria, became more and more disillusioned after the reactionary change in the political atmosphere following the murder of August von Kotzebue and the Carlsbad Decrees in 1819/20. When it became clear that there would be no further constitutional progress and no parliaments in the single German states, *liberal* changed into an opposition-label, thus defining the progressive and backward forces in society. Now the use of the term reflected the deepening gap between state and society, for which there was no equivalent in the history of the English concept *liberal*. At the end of the 1820s, *liberalism* in Germany signified an uncontested belief in the progress of reason while the restorative governments represented backwardness and out-dated forces in history. The *liberal party* stood for a *movement party* (*Bewegungspartei*)—a symbol of natural progress in history.²²

Translations from French to German in that period meant an ongoing, implicit confrontation with France. In contrast to the optimistic self-estimation of what *liberal* should stand for, early definitions of *liberal/liberalism* in Germany reflected a specific uncertainty about the political and social implications of a concrete program. According to most contemporaries “*wahrer Liberalismus*,” true liberalism had to be defended against radical forces in the tradition of the French revolutionary terror.²³ At least until the French July Revolution of 1830 the history of *liberal* in Germany was at the same time a history of interpreting the French Revolution and its consequences in the German states. In Britain on the other hand the delayed and reluctant import of the new concept pointed back to the experiences of the seventeenth century and the existence of pre-modern party names, at least until the early 1830s. In the British case one is confronted with a complex translation from *Whig* to *liberal*.²⁴ From

²¹ “Über Völkerbestimmung”, in *Allemannia* 7 (1816), 51–52.

²² See for example Theodor Mundt, *Moderne Lebenswirren* (Leipzig: Reichenbach, 1834), 33.

²³ See Wilhelm Traugott Krug, *Der falsche Liberalismus unserer Zeit. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Liberalismus und eine Mahnung für künftige Volksvertreter* (Leipzig 1832).

²⁴ Leonhard, “‘True English Guelphs and Gibelines’: Zum historischen Bedeutungs- und Funktionswandel von *whig* und *tory* im englischen Politikdiskurs seit dem 17. Jahrhundert”, in *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 83 (2002): 175–213.

this point of view, the history of *liberal* also stood for the different duration of distinct *Ancien régimes*, reflecting different *Sattelzeiten*. In France, Germany and Italy, this was directly or indirectly marked by the period between 1789 and 1815, whereas Britain's *Ancien régime* only came to an end in the course of the 1830s.

France was not the only birthplace of the new concept: Again it was through a complex process of translations that Spanish *liberales* influenced the modernization of other European vocabularies. The political meaning of *liberal* as a party denomination originated from the first Spanish constitution of 1812. The adherents of this new constitution called themselves *liberales* and spoke of their opponents who supported the principles of absolute monarchy as *serviles*.²⁵ It was with regard to the political situation in Spain that the new political adjective *liberal* found its way into the English political vocabulary. The British example illustrates the limits of translations and the factors that shelter a political discourse against conceptual export from outside. The British import of the Spanish concept was a negative semantic adaptation. In 1816 Lord Castlereagh thought of a purely revolutionary party in the tradition of the French Jacobins when he spoke of the Spanish *liberales*, although their origin had been the fight against French occupation during Napoleon's reign.²⁶ Until 1818/19, English authors made use of the new political concept *liberal* very often in the foreign spelling to describe the domestic political situation of continental countries, thereby underlining the un-English origin of the new political concept. But when speaking of British politics, authors continued to refer to the historical party names *Whig* and *Tory* or *radical* which had originated from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The British example illustrated an imitative, not an adaptive translation, which postponed discursive integration for a long time. The continental context dominated the meaning of *liberal* when being used in English political texts until the period after 1815. Only very reluctantly did *liberal* appear after 1815, indicating a changing tone in British politics. In 1816 Robert Southey spoke for the first time of the "*British 'liberales'*," thus mixing the Spanish spelling of the party name with an application to the English political scene and stigmatizing a political opponent by the use

²⁵ See Juan Francisco Fuentes and Javier Fernández Sebastián, "Liberalismo," in *Diccionario político y social del siglo XIX español*, ed. Javier Fernández Sebastián and Juan Francisco Fuentes (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2002), 413–28.

²⁶ "Speech of 15th February 1816," in *The Parliamentary Debates from the Year 1803 to the Present Time*, First Series, vol. 37 (London: T.C. Hansard, 1820), 602.

of the continental adjective.²⁷ For many Tory authors, *liberal* served as a negative label with which they could relate their opponents to the revolutionary experiments in France, Spain, Italy or Greece. To them, *liberal* represented Jacobin terror and Napoleonic despotism under the guise of an apparently progressive label. Thus, in the British case, the import of *libéral* or *liberales* for a long time meant a confrontation with continental revolutionary experiences, provoking discursive resistance.

Only reluctantly the un-English connotation of *liberal* was overcome, making the semantic application of the new concept to English politics possible. An important catalyst for the integration of *liberal* into the English political vocabulary was the founding of Leigh Hunt's Journal *The Liberal, or Verse and Prose from the South* in 1822, a short-lived but influential literary journal of the Byron-circle which contained articles by Byron and Shelley, often in a critical if not opposing tone, dealing not just with the political developments in the South of Europe but also criticizing the politics of George III and Lord Castlereagh. Its title already anticipated its program: The South of Europe with its revolutionary movements for national independence and political liberty, such as in Greece, constituted the background. Yet in the preface of the first edition Leigh Hunt also pointed to the traditional meaning of *liberal* in the context of classical education, thus relating the political implications to the ideal of Roman and Greek literature as the framework of humanity and political liberty.²⁸ It is significant that in the course of the public controversy about the new journal the opponents reacted to its title by publishing a satirical antidote: *The Illiberal, or Verse and Prose from the North*.²⁹

The end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815 marked the end of internal political abstinence in British politics. The blockade of any open and public debate about reform, which had been defended until 1815 with reference to the necessary concentration of the national forces in the fight against France, was lifted. This shift of political attention from foreign affairs to domestic problems provided a fertile ground for the semantic transformation of *liberal* from an apparently un-English adjective with revolutionary

²⁷ *The Life and Times of Henry, Lord Brougham*, vol. 2 (London: William Blackwood, 1871), 325.

²⁸ [Leigh Hunt], "Preface," in *The Liberal, or Verse and Prose from the South*, Vol. 1 (London: John Hunt, 1822), viii–ix.

²⁹ [William Gifford] *The Illiberal! Verse and Prose from the North!! Dedicated to My Lord Byron in the South!! To be continued occasionally!! As a supplement to each number of 'The Liberal'* (London 1822).

and continental implications into an integral concept of the English political language, especially for the reform-oriented Whigs inside and outside parliament. This included a new context in which the foreign concept's translation helped to develop a new framework for discourses of political reform. The changing atmosphere of public opinion, now considered an important factor in the nation's political life, was reflected by the slow adaptation of the imported concept *liberal*. A quotation from Robert Peel's letter to John Wilson Croker in 1820 marks this moment of the semantic process: "Do not you think that the tone of England—of that great compound of folly, weakness, prejudice, wrong feeling, right feeling, obstinacy, and newspaper paragraphs, which is called public opinion—is more liberal—to use an odious but intelligible phrase, than the policy of the Government? Do not you think that there is a feeling, becoming daily more general and more confined—that is independent of the pressure of taxation, or any immediate cause—in favour of some undefined change in the mode of governing the country?"³⁰

In 1827, Henry Brougham, a leading member of the moderate Whigs among the Edinburgh Reviewers, reflected on the "*State of parties*" since the beginning of the 1820s. He made extensive use of *liberal* to denote a new principle in British politics. Behind the progress of *liberal opinions* he identified a new concept of foreign policy, advocating national independence abroad and opposing the restorative objects of the Holy Alliance. Already before the transformation of the traditional party names *Whig* and *Tory* into *Liberal* and *Conservative*—a long-term semantic process which was not completed until the 1840s—Brougham concluded that the main ideological antagonism in British politics could no longer be expressed by traditional political labels. These party names had either originated from the seventeenth century and thus reflected the factions of the Civil War (*Court* versus *Country*), the political antagonists of the Glorious Revolution (*Whig* versus *Tory*) or they indicated the aspirations of the Stuarts (*Loyalist* versus *Jacobin*) during the eighteenth century or, pointing to the continent, the new party names coined in the course of the French Revolution: "A new casting also of political sects has taken place; the distinctions, and almost the names, of Loyalist and Jacobin, Whig and Tory, Court and Country Faction, are fast wearing away. Two

³⁰ Letter of Robert Peel to John Wilson Crocker, 23rd March 1820, in *The Correspondence and Diaries of the Late Right Honourable John Wilson Crocker*, Vol. 1, ed. Lewis J. Jennings (London: John Murray, 1884) 155–56.

great divisions of the community will, in all likelihood, soon be far more generally known; the Liberal and the Illiberal, who will divide, but we may be sure most unequally, the suffrages of the Nation."³¹ Unlike most continental party names, which originated from the post-1789 period, *liberal* as a post-revolutionary concept in Britain can only be interpreted with regard to the ideological polarization since the absolutist experiments of the seventeenth century, pointing to a distinct British *Sattelzeit*. This distinct genealogy was reproduced in subsequent pre-modern party-names which did not have any equivalents in continental discourses.

Conclusion: Translation as Cultural Transfer and Semantic Interaction

The French stimulus of the *idées libérales* was fundamental to the development of new political and social concepts in Germany and Italy in the 1820s and early 1830s. In addition, the intensified debates about the French *Charte Constitutionnelle* of 1814 as a *constitution libérale* and the polarization between *ultra* and *libéraux* popularized these new concepts well beyond France. Translations of the French import in Germany and Italy changed from imitation through application and adaption to discursive integration.

In contrast to Germany or Italy, where the direct import of the *idées libérales* resulted in translations and direct applications of the French concept to identify and formulate the demands for national unity and constitutional reforms after 1815, the confrontation with the new concept in Britain took a different path. For a long period, the new political adjective was used with reference to the Spanish *liberales* or the French *libéraux*, to describe the political situation in continental countries. Only after 1815 the Tories' use of *liberal* as a derogatory label for their political opponents and the Philhellene movement contributed to a wider diffusion of *liberal*. However, for a long time *liberal* retained an un-English tone because it represented political movements and groups in countries other than Britain. Only after 1820, when the reform oriented Whigs of the *Edinburgh Review* accepted the new concept as a term with which to label their own position and political strategy, *liberal* for the first time became a positive and progressive semantic indicator in English political language, replacing

³¹ [Henry Brougham], "State of Parties," in *Edinburgh Review* 46 (1827): 431.

the traditional semantic oppositions between *Court/Country*, *Whig/Tory* and *Jacobin/Loyalist*.

A focus on comparison and transfer makes the different *Sattelzeiten* of European concepts and vocabularies more visible, reflecting distinct rhythms and cycles of past experiences and expectations as they were stimulated and catalyzed by the export and import of foreign concepts. These experiences and expectations could not be translated easily, but rather led to complex confrontations with otherness. Translations reflected processes of selective perception stimulating cultural transfers and allowing the articulation of new political and social premises. To the historian, translations serve as a seismographic indicator of how past contemporaries articulated their past pasts and their past futures. Friedrich Nietzsche once stated that a concept which contained in itself a whole history, evaded definition—"only that which has no history is definable."³² However, history necessarily implies translation, whether diachronic or synchronic. The historian, who starts travelling in the landscapes of past experiences and expectations, is well advised to remember that as a traveler he will be dependent on translations. Hermeneutic dictionaries must be part of his vade-mecum, if he does not want to become lost in translation. Travelling implies contact and confrontation, comparison and change of perspectives. Uncertainty leads to questions not asked before.

³² Friedrich Nietzsche, "Zur Genealogie der Moral, Zweite Abhandlung: 'Schuld,' 'schlechtes Gewissen,' Verwandtes," *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, Vol. V, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (1967; Munich: DTV, 1993), 317.