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The translator as change agent: Translating the talent management discourse into a Slovak manufacturing setting

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In this paper the translator/interpreter is theorised as a central agent and institutional worker, who through acts of translation shapes and influences how a particular discourse, i.e. talent management, is received and interpreted in a Slovak manufacturing company. Talent management as a discourse and practice originates from the US and it is constitutive of HRM strategies about the attraction, development and retaining of key members of staff. Its first articulation was done by McKinsey, a big American consulting company. Thus, the discourse of talent management is imbued with particular economic, and cultural meanings and it is generated and expressed (mainly) in the English language. Drawing on empirical data from interviews with the translator/interpreter and an English-speaking talent management consultant, as well as on evidence taken from translated materials used in the transfer process of the talent management discourse, it is shown that translation from English to Slovak, is imbued with linguistic, cultural and political interventions executed by the translator. The translator therefore is seen as a active agent who not only shapes the knowledge transfer process, but also engages in politically motivated acts of influencing the mindsets of the audience, here a group of senior managers with multiple and diverse national, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Theoretically, the paper draws on neo-institutional theory, in particular the perspective of institutional work as a discursive process, in order to conceptualise the work of the translator as a cultural mediator, a historically aware agent and as a political ally of a senior stakeholder.

Susanne Tietze, PhD, is Professor of Management at Keele Management School, UK. She has degrees in linguistic, management and pedagogy and is committed to an interpretivist approach to knowledge generation and her work is strongly influenced by social constructionist theory. She has applied this approach in a series of funded research projects including the investigation of flexible work, emerging work organisations, gender and international and intercultural communication. Her work also includes theoretical pieces on discourse, language and translation. Currently, she is developing the conceptual basis to align bodies of knowledge from translation studies with those of organization theory and management. She has written and co-edited several books and publishes her work in leading management journals such as Organization Studies; Journal of International Business Studies; Management Learning, Journal of Management Studies.