“Each translation into one’s respective present implies a history of concepts,” writes Reinhart Koselleck in his mid-eighties programmatic essay on conceptual history.\(^1\) For Koselleck, the difference between the present and the past time itself requires translation as a condition of understanding the past.

Koselleck’s thesis marks a declaration of the broad scope of conceptual history when it is understood not strictly as an academic discipline but in the sense of a broader political and cultural practice. He turns the awareness of the role of conceptual history into a skill required of every translator or interpreter. So far this has yet to be acknowledged in the academic province of translation studies or in the programmatically multi-lingual industries of translation and interpretation, such as the United Nations and especially the European Union.\(^2\)

**Conceptual History as Part of Translations**

Two distinct conclusions can be drawn from the Koselleckian formula. The first one concerns what is denied by the formula, namely an imaginary limit situation of the simultaneous interpretation, for which there is no need for conceptual history. The ideal of simultaneity refers to the possibility that the translatable and the translated appear in the exact same present, *Gegenwart*, or perhaps more exactly in rhetorical terms, in the same audience. The second conclusion is that the linguistic transfers

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2 For the EU’s translation policies see Peter A. Kraus, *Europäische Öffentlichkeit und Sprachpolitik* (Frankfurt/M: Campus, 2004).
over time always require translation, even within the same language, and conceptual history is an indispensable tool of such an inter-temporal translation. The point is that in order to avoid the pitfall of anachronism, we must engage in conceptual history when speaking about the past to a present audience.

To speak of simultaneous interpretation or translation is in itself a simplification, because there remains per definition a temporal gap between presenting a speech and its interpretation or translation. This is also the case when a speaker recites a written text and an interpreter has prepared a translation that she executes in the same rhythm as the speaker presents the original speech. Even in cases such as this, however, the gap remains. It is not the gap between the *elocutio* of the two oral speech acts, but between the acts of writing and translating a text for the purpose of its presentation to an audience.

Moreover, there exists a second sense according to which even spontaneous speeches, for example a speech given in the parliamentary assembly and its nearly simultaneous interpretation for the same assembly in a different language, require conceptual history. This is the simple rhetorical principle according to which every speech must be adapted to the intended audience, and things which are inherently intelligible in one language cannot be assumed to be so in another. I think this principle is also respected amongst well-established multi-lingual parliamentary audiences in which most of the parliamentarians understand each other's languages, as is the case in Switzerland, Belgium, Canada or Finland. In the Finnish *Eduskunta*, some members, particularly from the Swedish People's Party, even have even been known to alternate between Finnish and Swedish in the same speech, using whichever language best expresses what they are trying to say.

In other words, even the short time-interval between a speech and its translation into another language, is still a significant factor. In fact, the quasi-simultaneous inter-lingual translation refers to the one paradigmatic case of speech acts in which conceptual history is needed, whereas the inter-temporal translation within a language refers to a different and equally relevant paradigmatic situation for practicing conceptual history. The point of Koselleck's cryptic formula can thus be seen in the recognition that the inherent link between conceptual history and translation is present in both situations. In more general terms, every cross-contextual linguistic action requires the application of the distinct translation-related resources of conceptual history, regardless of the character of the contexts under thematization.