

INTRODUCTION

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The papers collected here under the topic “Translation Networks” emerge from a particularly active research network of the International Comparative Literature Association, the Committee on Translation. Though the Committee is young (it first met in 2013-14), it has consistently gathered once and sometimes twice each year as a collaborating group of faculty, independent scholars, and graduate students. In the process, it has produced a number of excellent research papers. A selection of them appears here. The unusual energy of this group arises in part from the interactions among its members, evident in annual meetings as well as in online “conversations.” But it may also, perhaps largely, be explained by the growing centrality of translation and interpreting studies not only in academic fields such as comparative literature, world literature and translation studies but also in our globalizing world where business and politics as well as literature constantly cross linguistic borders. Translation, though still too often invisible, has nonetheless become increasingly essential in a variety of fields over the past century. Reflection on its various actions, its purposes, and its multiple effects is important for ethical, political as well as practical reasons.

The papers in this special issue on “Translation Networks” were first presented in two linked seminars held at the ACLA meeting in Utrecht in summer 2017. As suggested in our initial call for papers, the seminars sought to explore regularly perceived relationships among languages, cultures and texts across geographic and temporal



divides. They were also meant to spark scholarly reflections on less frequently discussed networks —those engaging publishers, editors, educators, scholars, reviewers, activists, governments, and other agents as these relate to the work of translation. As Mona Baker notes, one of the consequences of globalization has surely been the blurring of boundaries separating “the work of translation from that of editors, publishers, and literary agents.” Prize committees, advertising agencies, political activist movements, big business and even nation states must be added to the list. As a couple of these papers suggest, it is also clear that the effects of such networks are not always limited to the contemporary era.

The essays that follow reveal the work of translation in several contexts and languages. But they cohere in their keen awareness that translations never arise as isolated texts created by isolated individuals. There is always a larger social context —and this has its effects. The articles presented here deal with the pragmatics of translation in social networks that are primarily interpersonal, or structural, or (perhaps most often) both. Translation occurs, that is, in contexts created by personal relationships, but also by institutions and concrete geographic proximities, by social, political, and professional communities. The papers therefore take up practical questions around acts of translation and interpreting in a variety of social and institutional settings: How do literary translators and publishers get their translations read? How can activist translators most effectively serve? How do translation educators teach students about the economic realities of the translation industry? And how have translators inspired readers to confront economic or cultural exploitation?

The topic “Translation Networks” asks us to inquire into the interpersonal, geographic, digital, and visually encoded semiotic structures that enable moments of translation to become sites of contact —and of transformation. Problems and potentials of the



online translation economy are discussed at some length in several papers (specifically, those of Assumpta Camps, Marlene Esplin, Spencer Hawkins, and J. Scott Miller). Yet translation networks exist in other forms as well. All seven essays in the volume share insights into the ways in which translation outcomes reflect power relations that play a role in both interpersonal and broader structural networks, whether these networks are mediated by technology, visual aesthetics, economic demands, historically situated educational structures, utopian politics, direct literary relations, or some combination of these.

Such reflections are far-reaching and can end by subverting some of the more traditional assumptions about translation. It is not simply that translation appears as more complex, more multi-modal, or more socially embedded than we usually describe it to be. That is true and important. But it is also the case that awareness of translation’s firm embeddedness within different cultural networks and particular readerships can alter the generally assumed hierarchy between source text and translation. At times, the relationship becomes distinctly more horizontal. At other times, the hierarchy can seem to be inverted. Translation can, that is, be part of a literary dialogue or exchange, a largely interpersonal (but also political and economic) network in which power belongs as much to the translator as to the source. In other geo-linguistic and historical situations, dominated by other networks, translation can be part of a concerted effort to change, to influence a target culture rather than to reproduce with exactitude a previous text, image, or word. In yet other contexts, the effective use of image, paratexts, or multi-modal technology itself gives weight, depth, and indeed power, to the translation. Such observations may begin to undermine an assumed hierarchy as they expand our understanding of translation in a global context. But they also suggest further reflections: Who has the power to decide what makes a “good” translation? Might criteria change with historical and



cultural contexts and the particular networks in which, through which, the translation is produced? Where is the translator positioned in these various networks? And how might we describe her power?

Reflecting on translation networks and their effects elicits various theoretical frameworks. Some are economic in emphasis, others political, literary, ethnographic or sociological. Marx and Bourdieu are frequently cited. Exciting new methodologies are also developing through and beyond the well-known theories, and they also leave their marks on the essays to follow.

Opening this journal issue is a paper that shows how web technology creates new opportunities for translators to intervene in conflict zones. Assumpta Camps writes about Tlaxcala, a network of activist translators, and Babels, a network focused on bringing non-professional, activist interpreters into war zones. She cites Moira Inghilleri’s call for greater attention to the knowledge created by the very act of translation and interpreting in zones of asymmetrical power, as well as to the work of Mona Baker and Michaela Wolf. She draws attention to projects that reveal the variety of methods by which activists stand at an important interface: able to produce knowledge about conflict situations while also attempting to intervene.

If interpreters’ work has traditionally been neglected within Translation Studies, so has intersemiotic translation. While the former is the focus of Inghilleri’s recent *Interpreting Justice* (Routledge 2012), the notion of inter-semiotic translation has been with us at least since Roman Jakobson’s 1959 essay on “Linguistic Aspects of Translation.” Angela Kölling shows the pertinence of intersemiotic translation to understanding the translation problems raised by metaphor in those “tournaments of value,” book fairs. Though metaphor is traditionally defined as an image put into words, Kölling shifts the discussion to understand how “multi-modal metaphors” might act quite differently in print advertising and in venues such as the Leipzig Book Fair.



Drawing on the work of Charles Forceville among other contemporary theorists, she takes the reader into the book market itself, analyzing the role of multi-modal metaphor, translation, and the translator within it.

Not only can visual information constitute a kind of reverse ekphrasis, but the nodes around literary translations themselves are often visual in form. Behnam Fomeshi’s paper draws attention to visual images, this time as paratexts in order to show how representational images can matter to the reception of poetic works in foreign contexts. In the Iranian publication context, publishers selected images of Walt Whitman that would make the U.S. American poet legible in the familiar iconography of beloved Persian poets and Sufi mysticism. Choosing images of Whitman as old and wise, touched with light and framed with traditional colors, has made the poet seem familiar. Yet as Fomeshi notes, translations of the poetry nonetheless introduce Iranian readers to a number of less familiar themes.

Interactions between translators and authors constitute a site of interpersonal connections that require closer attention. Isabel Gómez outlines a model of translation as a reciprocal gift economy with a striking example: Mexican poet José Emilio Pacheco translates poems by a number of U.S. and Western Hemisphere poets, many of whom had previously translated his own work. She draws on Peter Sloterdijk’s suggestion that gifts might be motivated by *thymos* (Plato’s term for the ideal soldier’s passion to enforce just laws) as opposed to Plato’s *eros*, and the subsequent psychoanalytic category associated with lack. As Gómez argues, re-positioning translation in these terms redirects focus from the often-critiqued uni-directionality associated with translation to a practice more responsive to networks of literary exchange and the different levels of power and ethical commitment they entail. In Pacheco’s subtle and ironic translations, he balances gratitude and gift giving with, at least once, a counter gift



of rage, set in poetic form, in which power differences are clearly addressed.

Marlene Esplin critically reviews the Internet-mediated economy of new literary translations. While *Amazon Crossing* clearly offers the greatest opportunity for the circulation of new translations, *Asymptote* as well as *Words without Borders* provide platforms much more likely to focus on the position of the translator as mediating figure. Esplin joins Susan Bernofsky in questioning the potential of Amazon’s enterprise to enhance the visibility of translation, and to represent the variety of foreign language work. Echoing Schleiermacher’s desire for translations that challenge the reader to leave their comfort zones of familiar-sounding language, Esplin ends with the warning against the Amazon series that “the imprint does not require readers to ‘cross’ so much as to simply consume.”

Though localization is most frequently associated with Internet marketing, J. Scott Miller shows that strategies of localization have existed over the course of translation history, and should not be seen as something specific to contemporary software. Examples include the demand for fluency and the erasure of European cultural references in early Japanese translations of Poe as well as of other “Great Books” from the European, U.S. and Chinese traditions. The recent staging of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* in NYC and meant to evoke Trump provides a contemporary U.S. example. All might be called “adaptations”, a form of translation not usually valued by academia today. Offering a set of questions as well as examples, Miller asks us to rethink the role of adaptations in European literary history as well as in our contemporary discussions of translation and localization. One thing is clear, both adaptation and localization tend to “sell” more successfully in the target cultures.

Bringing the field of international relations to translation studies, Sinkwan Cheng confirms a related notion: “For IR, a good translation proves its merits not so much by being *faithful* to the



source text as by being *successful*, that is, by successfully establishing the country’s desired relations with the nation of the source language.” Agency and not fidelity, translator not author count in the translations performed in IR. Through theoretical references to Koselleck’s *Begriffsgeschichte* and several examples, Cheng argues that language and translation take major roles in *effecting* international relations. She cites the Western media’s use of “jihad” instead of “Holy War” to refer to Islamic terrorist efforts post-9/11; with the source word left untranslated, it can belong to a fully distanced and reprehensible Other. She explores at greater length China’s long history of “mistranslating” European and U.S. terms in order to assert its own identity and agency. A telling example is the “unfaithful” translation of the “Olympic Games,” (Ολυμπιακοί Αγώνες in the Greek) by the Chinese *Yundonghui*, meaning “athletic events,” tapping first into a Chinese history of healthy (non-agonistic) physical activity, later into desired notions of “building relations” and “friendship.”

Academia itself is of course one of the sites through which translation networks pass. In light of the expansion of Translation Studies curricula in the United States, Spencer Hawkins outlines some long-term historical forces shaping the field —as well as some contemporary economic ones. After showing that multilingualism has always been a cornerstone of interdisciplinary work in the United States, Hawkins looks at the need for economic critiques of the precarious translation economy. This economic focus would require translation curricula to engage critically with the online training materials on translation networking sites like ProZ and SmartCAT. This will complicate, but ultimately complete the work being done in the culturally focused approaches of translation studies.

The volume concludes with a paper that shows how translation choices have at times enhanced the utopian aspirations of socialist thought. Zhen Zhang’s paper looks at Chinese Soviet political activist Hu Feng’s literary translations as offering a particularly



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utopian socialist language, one careful to translate Marxist meaning through attention to proletarian voices. Zhang writes, “It is my task to show how this novel orchestrates an epistemic change towards a new subjectivity of proletarian being the host-master, not a guest-slave, of the society.” Here we see that Hu Feng’s choice of novel during his years as a student in Japan, as well as his distinctive use of Marxist language and style reveal his international sentiments and produce a persuasive organ of his activism.

Whether translations begin through poetic dialogue, through historically varied practices of “localization,” through political efforts in transnational contexts, or simply through effective business decisions, texts make their ways across and into cultures and languages in a variety of ways, and through distinctly different translation networks. As these papers suggest, our awareness of these cultural and historical connections can bring essential insights to the field of translation studies.

