

## Translation: A Meeting Point for Interdisciplinary Enquiry

A Review Article by

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***China and its Others: Knowledge Transfer through Translation, 1829-2010***

*Edited by* James St. André and Peng Hsiao-yen

Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012. 316 pp.

ISBN: 9789042034310.

***Knowledge Translation in Context: Indigenous, Policy, and Community Settings***

*Edited by* Elizabeth M. Banister, Bonnie J. Leadbeater, and E. Anne Marshall

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011. 216 pp.

ISBN: 9781442641792.

***Translation and Cultural Identity: Selected Essays on Translation and Transcultural Communication***

*Edited by* Micaela Muñoz-Calvo and Carmen Buesa-Gómez

Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010. 186 pp.

ISBN: 9781443819893.

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In recent years, translation has become a meeting point for interdisciplinary enquiry. Scholars in a number of disciplines (including Chinese studies, communication, comparative literature, education, English philology, German, intellectual history, linguistics, nursing, psychology, public administration, sociology, Taiwanese and English studies, and translation studies) have come to see translation as a key practice to understand intercultural communication.

*China and Its Others: Knowledge Transfer through Translation, 1829-2010* (St. André & Hsiao-yen, 2012), *Knowledge Translation in Context: Indigenous, Policy, and Community Settings* (Banister, Leadbeater & Marshall, 2011), and *Translation and Cultural Identity: Selected Essays on Translation and Transcultural Communication* (Muñoz-Calvo & Buesa-Gómez, 2010) are representative of this interdisciplinary interest in translation. In these collections of articles, scholars from different geographical contexts (Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, England, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Spain, Taiwan, and United States) examine identity and knowledge transfer issues through the various lenses of translation. For them,

“translation” is not only the transfer of messages from one language to another; it becomes an ideological tool for cross-cultural communication, a re-creation of an aesthetic endeavour in another language, the transfer of a culture-bound discourse, a social phenomenon, an inter-semiotic process, and a bridge between knowing and doing.

These books provide the much needed ground for integrating non-Western thought about translation (Tymoczko, 2006), and concur with translation studies scholars that translation is a wide concept which includes other cultural practices such as selecting, rewriting, assembling, structuring and producing new cultural items (Gentzler & Tymoczko, 2002). The role of cultural agents who act as translators or “knowledge brokers” is another meeting point between the authors of these papers. Agency and context, translation as a process and as a product, and social intervention serve as connecting threads for these reflections, which join a growing body of sociologically oriented research in translation studies (Wolf & Fukari, 2007).

### **Translation: A Culture-Bound Discursive Practice**

In a Western context in which English has clearly become a *lingua franca*, Micaela Muñoz-Calvo’s and Carmen Buesa-Gómez’s (2010) *Translation and Cultural Identity: Selected Essays on Translation and Transcultural Communication* explores how different cultural contexts can affect translation, and vice-versa. While translation can “make compatible the strengthening of our own culture with the sharing and learning of other cultures” (Muñoz-Calvo & Buesa-Gómez, 2010: 5), César Santoyo’s study on self-translation shows that when translating their own works into another language, some authors resort to adaptation rather than to literal translation in order to better represent an aesthetic project. In other words, translation does not necessarily lead to “strengthening” and “sharing” culture. It can also hinder the transfer of information as it is shown in Rosa Rabadán’s article on cultural elements translated from English into Spanish, as well as in Raquel Merino-Álvarez’s study of censored theatre translations during Franco’s regime in Spain. The unavoidable losses caused by translation processes and the translator’s need to decide what to leave in or out of the target text are related to the assumption that discourse is language and context-bound and that any transfer will void its cultural specificity. This is a gloomy view of cultural transfer. It stems out of traditional dichotomies that inform translation studies’ myths such as loyalty and betrayal as well as gains and losses. In other words, translation can be represented as a threat to cultural identity only because shifts and changes are perceived as losses.

However, there is a more complex view of context which acknowledges its multilayered and multicultural dimensions. As argued by José Lambert (in Muñoz-Calvo & Buesa-Gómez, 2010), translation practices are not necessarily limited to the dichotomy between source and target language; rather, he insists, such practices stem, more often than not, from intermediary languages. Christina Schäffner’s article on news translation indicates that, although “mostly implicit and invisible” (in Muñoz-Calvo & Buesa-Gómez, 2010: 108), translations can be produced in a multilingual milieu of conflicting ideologies.

This complexity is also brought to the fore in the articles included in *China and Its Others: Knowledge Transfer through Translation, 1829-2010*. In his introduction, James St. André elaborates on the relevance of Japanese as a “pivot language” used to translate literature and science into Chinese in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century-China (St. André, in St. André & Hsiao-yen, 2012). Translation processes occur in multilingual and multicultural contexts. It is necessary to go beyond the dichotomies traditionally used to conceptualize translations. Pivot languages and

other intermediary bodies, including cultural institutions and publishing houses, constitute a filter that plays an important role in cultural transfer. The interaction of Russian, Japanese, Chinese, English, and German in Republican China, for example, pushes the researcher beyond source/target languages and reveals translation as a discursive practice used for building identities and producing knowledge. Multilayered contexts also include multiple codes. In other words, translation happens not only between languages and cultures, but also between different sign systems. Pei-Yin Lin's reading of the filmic "retelling" of the tale *Sayon's Bell* highlights the inter-semiotic facet of translation in the context of colonial Taiwan (Lin, in St. André & Hsiao-yen, 2012).

Moreover, acknowledging the complexity of cultural transfer calls into question the paradigm whereby the nation-state is used as a framework for reflecting on translation and cultural identity. Alternative ways of tackling knowledge transfer issues are needed to address the way representations are produced. Translation does not happen only between nations and languages; it can also play an important role bridging the gap between different social groups within the same national space. Interdisciplinary interest in translation has brought forward the need to look at these discursive practices as intra-linguistic translation, and to include it in translations studies research.

These are the translational practices tackled in *Knowledge Translation in Context: Indigenous, Policy, and Community Settings* (Banister, Leadbeater & Marshall, 2011). Here "knowledge translation" is used as an umbrella term encompassing different discursive practices that bridge the gap between the production and use of knowledge. Among them, dissemination, transference, synthesis, exchange and application of knowledge are carefully explored in community, policy, and indigenous settings. The rationale for this approach is that transferring knowledge is a two-way process that goes from the community of users to the researchers and policymakers and vice versa.

Referring to the findings of several projects undertaken in collaboration with non-profit organizations (e.g. Prostitutes Empowerment, Education and Resource Society, Child and Family Counselling Association, the Victoria Native Friendship Centre, the Victoria Youth Empowerment Society, and the Victoria Youth Clinic), as well as with professional science organizations (e.g. Society for Research and Child Development), and community-service agencies, the authors suggest that knowledge translation is one way of bridging the gap between different cultures and systems of values. This has proven particularly important in Aboriginal research contexts, "given the long and difficult history of colonization and appropriation of traditional knowledge" (Marshall & Genette, in Banister, Leadbeater & Marshall, 2011: 46).

For a decolonizing knowledge translation to be achieved, directionality and language aspects must be paramount. Building on the work of the Cree scholar Willie Ermine (2005, 2006), Smylie underscores the need to take into account the way knowledge is "developed, synthesized, and applied within Indigenous communities" (Smylie, in Banister, Leadbeater & Marshall, 2011: 188). In other words, knowledge translation does not involve Western ways of knowing being imposed on Indigenous populations; rather, it is based on the idea that knowledge is co-generated and integrates oral history and practices such as storytelling in an inclusive narrative.

Among the challenges that knowledge translators face when working in Indigenous settings, language and directionality are crucial. Directionality is front and centre in the Māori contribution (Barnes, Henwood, Kerr, McManus & McCreanor, in Banister, Leadbeater & Marshall, 2011). For the authors, objectivity and neutrality are ideological values that are not

necessarily compatible with Māori research principles. Therefore the notion of knowledge translation as the integration of Western knowledge in Aboriginal communities is challenged. Research and knowledge translation are considered to be a “shared journey” between the researcher and the community (Ibid). Moreover, the authors identify a different direction for knowledge translation: instead of prioritizing the relationship between Western and Aboriginal ways of knowing, they seek to relate different “local” ways of articulating knowledge.

Language issues challenge knowledge translation in Indigenous contexts because reintegrating oral history and storytelling requires inter-linguistic translation. The researchers’ knowledge of Indigenous languages and their understanding of traditional practices are no less important for repositioning Indigenous knowledge at the centre of the community, and for balancing power differentials.

The examination of contextual aspects of knowledge transfer and translation opens up the real possibility of cultural dialogue within academia. Indeed, the contributions presented in these volumes bring to mind Harish Trivedi’s invitation to fight ethnocentrism by letting the “Other”, a former object of study, express her or himself in her or his own terms (Trivedi, 2006). In order for this to occur, we must recognize that translation processes are initiated by cultural agents. Translation thus leads to social intervention.

### **Translators: Cultural Agents and Knowledge Brokers**

Contextual considerations reveal the cultural specificities that must be taken into account both when studying translation processes and when translating knowledge. They are also important because they shed light on the social interaction motivated by translation practices. In other words, contexts allow us to see cultural agents in action. “Agency” has been a concern for translation scholars since the sociological turn in the late 90s (Wolf & Fukari, 2007: 13).

Regarding the translator as a social agent has led to revise previous characterizations of the translator’s role in the social space. The task of the translator is no longer restricted to producing a target text. The term “agent of translation” has been coined to include publishing houses, editors, government institutions, journals and patrons in the translation process (Bandia & Milton, 2009).

Translators are agents of social transformation, who use their special discursive skills to bridge between cultures, re-create an aesthetic project, or disseminate and produce knowledge. They are regarded as “gate-keepers” and “knowledge brokers,” who have the power for reinforcing or modifying cultural representations. This special position in the social space has led Anthony Pym to state that translators constitute an “interculture” of their own. According to Pym, their professional skills are essentially intercultural because they rely on the fact that “there is a line to be crossed and that something is to go from one culture to another” (Pym, 2002: 2).

Pursuing an aesthetic project in translation is one of the forms of agency analyzed by Julio-César Santoyo (in Muñoz-Calvo & Buesa-Gómez, 2010) in his paper on self-translation, as well as in Cosima Bruno and Yang Xiaobin’s contributions to *China and its Others* (in St. André & Hsiao-yen, 2012). Whereas the self-translator rewrites her or his own work in order to re-create an aesthetic project for a foreign audience, the interplay of the verbal and the visual in Chinese poetry challenges its perceptual and semiotic functions when translated to other languages. According to Bruno, for the aesthetic attributes of the poems to be kept, the translator must rebuild the reciprocity between text and interpreter (Bruno, in St. André & Hsiao-yen, 2012).

The translator's literary intervention is also apparent in paratextual materials. Te-hsing Shan's "thick translation" retranslation of *Gulliver's Travels* provides the reader with "two prefaces, a critical introduction, a chronology, a list of names of characters and places in the book, a note on the Chinese annotated edition and references" (Shan in St. André & Hsiao-yen, 2012: 289).

Poetic and literary translations are never deprived of a political effect. The poems of post-Mao Chinese poets, for example, use Western literary influence to challenge and disrupt "the intellectual paradigm that sanctifies the West as the authoritative Father" (Xiaobin, in St. André & Hsiao-yen, 2012: 241). Translation is thus an ideological tool to write and create back. Translators are active members of political movements and take part in the creation and dissemination of cultural representations.

Whether it is about translating news in contemporary Europe (Shäffner, in Muñoz-Calvo & Buesa-Gómez, 2010), disseminating research findings in order to decriminalize cannabis in Australia (Lenton, in Banister, Leadbeater & Marshall, 2011), censoring theatre translations under Franco's regime (Álvarez, in Muñoz-Calvo & Buesa-Gómez, 2010), declaring a "war on neologisms" in Republican China (Huang, in St. André & Hsiao-yen, 2012) or publishing a pseudo-translation that reinforces predominant representations of Chinese culture among British readers (St. André, in St. André & Hsiao-yen, 2012), translators' discursive skills serve social and political agendas.

The role of translators as "knowledge brokers" or disseminators of knowledge and ideas makes it necessary to locate them in liminal spaces. Their intervention is manifest in the repertoires of available translated works, and in the specialized terminologies that they coin in order to develop philosophical and scientific arguments. Knowledge translators fulfil a fundamental role in mobilizing the epistemic principles of a community. In his study of the translations of ethics in China, Joyce C. H. Liu (in St. André & Hsiao-yen, 2012) probes into the Chinese conceptualization of the opposition between the subject and the State during the late Qing dynasty. In this context, Wang Guowei's translations of utilitarianism and moral evolution activated the transformation, both of a foreign *logos* and of a Chinese way of conceiving the relationships between the individual and the State. In the same vein, Peng Hsiao-yen discusses the construction of psychological discourse in literature and science. The concepts of "neurasthenia" and "love", for example, are coined by translators, who are described as "self-conscious actors who find in the intermediary or interstitial space a site for a creative transformation" (in St. André & Hsiao-yen, 2012: 124).

Knowledge translators or knowledge brokers also play an important part in "linking community agencies with researchers and facilitating their interaction" (Benoit, Casey, Jansson, Phillips & Burns, in Banister, Leadbeater & Marshall, 2011: 27). The task of knowledge brokers is essential for making research findings relevant to potential users. In a policy making setting, they negotiate between researchers' goals and political agendas. In a community setting, they negotiate between vulnerable populations and research findings that can improve their life conditions. In Indigenous settings, they contribute to co-generate knowledge and to relocate Indigenous ways of knowing in a central position. By translating the needs of communities and the way in which research findings can address those needs, knowledge translators fulfil a fundamental social role: they bring about social cohesion.

Knowledge translators and cultural agents' tasks have an implicit component of accountability towards the social groups within which they live and work. As Translation Studies scholar Gideon Toury stated it, translators' practices are shaped by social norms (1995: 62). This

means that knowledge translators are closely linked to their social spaces and that their tasks are context sensitive. The conflict that Māori researchers experience with traditional research values such as objectivity and neutrality illustrates accurately their need to engage in knowledge translation practices which are respectful of their identity as members of the Māori community. As argued by these authors, doing research according to Western standard requirements “we could still be academic researchers, but it is unlikely that we could call ourselves Māori researchers” (Barnes, Henwood, Kerr, McManus & McCreanor, in Banister, Leadbeater & Marshall, 2011: 177).

## Conclusion

Literary approaches to translation have taught us that translation is also a metaphor for a new literary creation. The interdisciplinary perspective, presented in these books, teaches us that this metaphor is not merely a rhetorical device, but a real possibility for opening up spaces of intercultural negotiation. Rethinking translation practices in context does not mean adopting a deterministic view, whereby context determines entirely a reading, an interpretation, and a practice. As shown in these discussions, contexts are multi-layered and multi-linguistic spaces. Every context is thus a site for multiple readings, interpretations, and practices. This multiplicity is what makes translation necessary.

Here translation is considered to be a complex discursive practice. As Lambert argues “‘translation’ is always a combination of several kinds (traditions) of verbal communication” (in Muñoz-Calvo & Buesa-Gómez, 2010: 33). In other words, instead of being limited to an inter-linguistic operation, translation is viewed as a discursive practice, which calls for the special skills of translators. If literary approaches to translation taught us that, through their writings, translators bring about literary creations, we can learn from the combination of disciplinary approaches included in these books that translators are also agents of social transformation. Making research relevant to societies, opening up a space for other world views to represent themselves in “their own terms”, and calling for accountability in our research practices are thus the tasks translators and translation scholars are called to fulfil in our complex and multicultural world.

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