

**Almanna, Ali and Juliane House (eds) (2023). *Translation Politicised and Politics Translated*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 234 pp., € 59.30 (softcover). ISBN: 978-1-80079-446-7 (paperback); 978-1-80079-447-4 (e-book).**

In the globalised society, translation can be viewed as a social discursive practice (Nguyen 2022), which is becoming increasingly prominent in fostering communication and dialogue in multicultural and multilingual environments. Translation is also a medium and mechanism for expressing the translator's ideological stance and conveying political information across socio-cultural and language divides. The volume *Translation Politicised and Politics Translated*, edited by Ali Almanna and Juliane House, seeks to shed light on how translators explicitly or implicitly interpolate their cultural background, beliefs and values into the resulting text, thus overtly or covertly intervening to promote a certain theme or narrative. It presents a comprehensive overview of different ways in which the two terms "politics" and "translation" interact. Overall, the volume makes a valuable addition to the current literature on translation and politics.

This volume consists of ten chapters, written by a total of fifteen named authors in this field, covering a wide range of topics. It begins with a chapter by Said Faiq, who discusses the importance of establishing intercultural encounters between different communities through translation and explores the concept of 'axiology' in relation to translation. This notion that can be related to the value, worth and ethics of translation explains why certain texts are imported through translation even if they do not meet the preferences of the target culture. However, the author believes that this axiological value is not fully observable in certain cases of translation, such as translation from English or French by some established Arab authors into Arabic, because "it simply does not stimulate intercultural innovation or encounters and it does not effectively contribute positively (or even negatively) to indigenous traditions and identities" (7). In other words, in certain cases translation follows the axiology of original texts, while the language of the translation is just an axiological carrier. It is concluded that, even though it can be an excellent medium of intercultural encounters, translation does not always satisfy a parallel axiology.

The following three chapters seem to share certain common grounds, such as an interest in deeply ideological phenomena such as translatorial censorship (Chapter 2), multiple translatorship and contextual voices (Chapter 3), and agency, censorship and self-translation (Chapter 4). Mohammed Farghal in Chapter 2 discusses the different manifestations of translatorial censorship between English and Arabic, revealing how a translation can comprehensively censor the discourse and/or cultural

specificity of the target text (TT) by way of offering atmospheres and/or worldviews drastically diverging from those in the source text (ST). Translatorial censorship “has the ideology of the ST as its target by making ideological moves, that is, manipulating content in translated rather than authored materials” (21). The study indicates that translatorial censorship as the result of ideological intervention is a basic component of translation activity, in which translation agents (e.g. the translator, commissioner, evaluator, editor) may intervene to twist the content of the ST in various ways, for instance to align the TT with the expectations of the receiving culture and the dominant ideology. This chapter stresses that, on the one hand, translation can be approached as a transferring activity based on a ST considered to be sacred, in which case the translator functions as a mere mediator; on the other hand, translation can be considered as a creative activity defined by the purpose of the translation, in which case translators play their role as free agents. Thus, it is argued that, to some extent, translation is a social activity in which the ST and the TT constitute an ideological space where several agents converge.

In Chapter 3, Alya’ Al-Rubai’i explores how the speaker’s identity was decided by translators when a variety of dialogues in Quranic narratives were re-narrated into English. She selected eight Quran translators from different backgrounds, nationalities and religions to study multiple translatorship and contextual voices. ‘Multiple translatorship,’ as coined by Jansen and Wegener (2013), refers to “the multiple ways in which the translator’s agency is intertwined with that of other parties in the process of bringing the translation into the world” (1). ‘Contextual voices’ are related to “the sociological translation/process and hence to the multiple agents that produce, promote and write about translations” (Greenall 2017: 22). Both phenomena affect the translator’s decision-making process by introducing different ideologies, thereby conditioning the final product. The analysis in the chapter shows that the eight translators analysed employed various strategies that marked clear instances of intervention in the TT, while the commentators who interpreted the text led to a secondary intervention in the TT. By incorporating the notions of ‘multiple translatorship’ and ‘contextual voices’ into the definition of translation, the author expands our understanding of the social dimension of translation.

Ma. Carmen África Vidal Claramonte in Chapter 4 uses Rosario Ferré’s case to explore agency, censorship and self-translation, emphasising that language reflects the identity of its speakers. The motif of agency in translation refers to “the intervention (in forms such as resistance, activism and identity construction) generated by power relations in historical and social contexts” (111). Self-translation makes the reader conscious of the author/translator’s ideology and of the asymmetries of power underlying

each act of translation. Ferré is a clear example of how language, especially that used in translation, can become an important political weapon in our global society. Accordingly, self-translation highlights asymmetries of power between languages and identities, and thus can be understood as a means of examining history, as well as a means of reflecting on different approaches to reality.

Chapter 5, Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 deal with national issues, though sometimes only partially, centred on case-studies related to Palestinian, Chinese, and Thai culture, respectively. Mahmoud Alhirthany, in Chapter 5, examines the cultural and socio-political backdrop of the translation into English of Palestinian resistance literature, taking the translation of Ghassan Kanafani's masterpiece as an example. His works have gained considerable influence on the Arab literature and culture, and the translations into English have secured him a place in the literary landscape of the English-speaking world. However, as studies exploring the sociopolitical contexts of his English-translated works are rare or indeed non-existent, the author draws on Bourdieu's (1993) sociology (especially the concepts of 'capital', 'field', and 'habitus') to analyse these translations into English. 'Capital' enables translators, as social actors, "to exercise power within social networks and mobilise resources towards their objectives in society" (91). 'Field' refers to "a state of the power relations among the agents or institutions engaged in the struggle" (73), and provides the researcher of translation with a broader view into these relations from different perspectives. 'Habitus' functions as "a scaffolding on which mediators and/or translators stand to realise capital within the field of translation" (90). In this vein, these notions used in the chapter help to understand to what extent and how literary translations can exert ideological power in certain socio-political contexts.

Chapter 6, by Yangyang Long, explores how China was translated as the Other by two major European figures, Marco Polo and Matteo Ricci. The author shows that these two 'translators' "put the Other [China] at the mercy of the Self [the West]" (125), in that they "provide potent means of enacting dominance over the Other in European master discourses" (125). The findings indicate that translating China as an ideologically menacing Other is to enable European readers to accept and consume the translated works, thereby "enacting the politics at play in European master discourses" (111) and achieving self-continuity in ideology. It is argued, however, that this ideological framework of "China versus Europe" in translations leads to the perpetuation of false preconceptions. In this sense, translation is shown as a discursive reconstruction of a linguistic, cultural and ideological Self and Other, which is sometimes carried out somehow erroneously.

Chapter 7, by Narongdej Phanthaphoommee, Koraya Techawongstien and Phrae Chittiphalangsri, examines translations that emerged as part of a human rights movement initiative. On 16 October 2020, a peaceful pro-democracy People's Movement rally took place in Thailand; volunteer translators gathered online and translated a declaration condemning the government's reaction related to this event into 52 languages. The analysis of the translations of Thai Free Youth supporters help to elaborate the concepts of 'group translation' and 'collaborative translation'. However, it also shows that quality control is a flaw of this type of crowdsourced volunteer translation, as the project is executed by unidentified translators and its leaders may not be proficient in all languages. The scope of translation is broadened when embracing such concepts as "volunteerism," "political activism," and "democratic representation" (154). This chapter shows that political translation for social change can convey the people's ideological tendencies, demonstrate their capability to spontaneously generate multilingual responses, and reveal the translators' ethical motivations.

Interpreting in political contexts certainly deserves more attention from the academic community, and this topic is addressed in Chapter 8 and Chapter 9. Chapter 8 is more general. Chonglong Gu and Fei Gao discuss the various benefits of a mixed-methods corpus-based CDA approach for investigating issues related to power and ideology in interpreter-mediated encounters. Through a detailed literature review, the authors point out that corpus-based studies in interpreting have tended to be carried out in a few major central regions, such as Europe and East Asia. They also point out that this corpus-based method has some limitations and may not necessarily explain the underlying reasons behind certain discursive choices, such as those linked to ideological aspects. It is argued that, framed within the broader context of digital humanities and interdisciplinary research, corpus-based CDA needs to engage more with "other paralinguistic and extralinguistic elements, and be combined with other approaches and methods" (176) in order to gain a deeper understanding of the interpreters' ideological mediation, the possible motivations behind certain choices and their broader influence on discourse. Therefore, a mixed-methods corpus-based CDA approach can assist in analysing how power and ideology are generated and regenerated in and through interpreting.

In Chapter 9, Elena Aguirre Fernández Bravo and Silvia Pelegrín Marugán discuss interpreting practices based on women's political discourses, including speeches by Kamala Harris and Michelle Obama, two Democrat, racialised public speakers. The authors examine whether these two spokespersons have followed a rhetorical pattern that can be considered representative of feminine-style rhetoric (Campbell, 1989), and at the same

time, how interpreters took measures to replicate the power dynamics stemming from a particular feminine-style rhetoric in the target language. It is concluded that, for interpreters, the greatest challenge is to empower the audience “with the same illocutionary force that is rooted in the source speech” (202).

The last chapter, the only one on audiovisual translation, is co-authored by Huabin Wang and Jia Zhang, who discuss how the English-Chinese subtitling of song lyrics in a case study contributes to communicating culturally-vested ideology to the Chinese community as target audience. Subtitling is a type of cultural adaptation or rewriting through which the target audience in different contexts can obtain culturally acceptable information, although this adaptation or rewriting is not always reasonable. In this regard, the authors conclude that through this communication practice target text producers (audiovisual translators or editors) adjust their translation products based on the underlying cultural ideologies in the target-text community. Language is a factor that links different cultures (Cheng *et al.* 2015). The culturally embedded ideology behind subtitling includes “the local customs, beliefs and values, which guide or even control the audiovisual translators under the context” (214). The study stresses that audiovisual translation has moved from addressing purely technical matters to exploring cultural phenomena and that scholars in this field are gradually becoming interested in dealing with the complex and subtle nuances of culture and ideology.

This high-quality book offers fresh insights into the relationship between translation and politics, and extends previous literature. One significant asset of the volume is that it yields valuable perspectives on conceptual and empirical frameworks for understanding “translation politicised” and “politics translated”. This helps readers to better understand the complexity of translation in different political and ideological backgrounds, as well as the increasing politicisation of translation. Another remarkable strength is that the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods warrants strong and generalisable results. More specifically, the corpus-based methods used provide quantitative, scientific results related to translation and interpreting, thus laying the foundation for further research on translation politicised and politics translated. Additionally, the specific cases analysed offer interesting descriptions, interpretations and explanations for translation politicised and politics translated, enabling readers to clearly understand the relationship between translation and politics. Overall, the novelty of this book lies in its interweaving of theoretical insight, methodological analysis, analytical perspective and practical implication. As such, it can not only support the works of scholars and practitioners but

also benefit the training of students, especially those receiving specific instruction on translation and politics.

Although this book tries to capture a panoramic view of current studies on translation politicised and politics translated, certain aspects leave some room for further exploration. Arranging chapters in a volume is a real challenge. Aside from the geographical areas or language combinations covered, this volume is also organised according to an analytical structure. However, such an analytical structure is not sufficiently clear to demonstrate the two tendencies of “translation politicised” and “politics translated” announced in the title. The volume would be more structured if chapters were divided into two main parts (“translation politicised” and “politics translated”), and then subdivided into sections related to major subfields of translation (e.g. translatorial censorship, multiple translatorship, self-translation, interpreting, audiovisual translation) or several genres (e.g. human rights declaration, feminine political discourse, religious text, literary narrative), as “genres impact the translator’s decision-making process” (Biel 2018: 156). In addition, the collected cases involve a limited number of languages, among them Arabic and Thai. A broader perspective could be obtained if cutting-edge findings on translation and politics from other countries and languages were incorporated. In this sense, based on the analysis of the above cases, a more comprehensive discussion may be continued from the perspective of more contexts, which may enhance the universality and applicability of research findings. The more the contexts analysed, the more attention people can pay to potential interactions of meanings, viewpoints and political values. As van Dijk (1998) contends in the field of discourse analysis, the examination of relevant contextual elements is considered to be key, because contextual elements are closely related to discourse production and understanding. These additional aspects point to some research directions that could push forward the study of translation and politics in the foreseeable future.

Despite the minor quibbles, the book is quite thought-provoking as it affords an opportunity to look at translation as a highly complex activity that involves the participation of different agents with different backgrounds, orientations, ideologies, competencies, goals and purposes. The roles and significance of translation in promoting both linguistic and cultural diversity, and equality, are varied, as they depend on the complex interactions between many variables and factors in different contexts (Martín Ruano 2020). As such, by drawing on disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives, this book can serve as an illuminating guide for scholars, practitioners, teachers and students who have a keen interest in the fields of translation and politics as a whole.

## References

- **Biel, Łucja** (2018). "Genre analysis and translation." Kirsten Malmkjær (ed.) (2018). *The Routledge Handbook of Translation Studies and Linguistics*. London: Routledge, 151-164.
- **Bourdieu, Pierre** (1993). *Sociology in Question*. London: Sage.
- **Campbell, Karlyn Kohrs** (1989). *Man Cannot Speak for Her*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- **Cheng, Le, Mingyu Gong and Jian Li** (2017). "Conceptualizing cultural discrepancies in legal translation: A case-based study." *Semiotica* 216, 131-149. DOI: 10.1515/sem-2015-0083
- **Greenall, Annjo K.** (2017). "The Scandinavian singer-translator's multisemiotic voice as performance." Cecilia Alvstad, Annjo K. Greenall, Hanne Jansen and Kristiina Taivalkoski-Shilov (eds) (2017). *Textual and Contextual Voices of Translation*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 22-37.
- **Jansen, Hanne and Anna Wegener** (2013). "Introduction: Multiple Translatorship." Hanne Janesen and Anna Wegener (eds) (2013). *Authorial and Editorial Voices in Translation 1 - Collaborative Relationships between Authors, Translators, and Performers*. Montreal: Éditions québécoises de l'œuvre, 1-39.
- **Martín Ruano, M. Rosario** (2020). "Translation vis-à-vis democratic deficit in the digital era: Policies, practices and possibilities of institutional translation in increasingly diverse societies." *The International Journal of Translation and Interpreting Research* 12(2), 48-62. DOI: 10.12807/ti.11222.2020.a05
- **Nguyen, Nguyen** (2022). "Scoping out emerging communities of practice of translation in development work in Vietnam: Empirical evidence from the perspective of translation studies." *Journal of Specialised Translation* 37, 116-138. [https://www.jostrans.org/issue37/art\\_nyugen.pdf](https://www.jostrans.org/issue37/art_nyugen.pdf)
- **Van Dijk, Teun A.** (1998). *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. London: Sage.

## Acknowledgement

This work was supported by the major project of the National Social Science Foundation of China under Grant 20ZDA062 and the key project of the Zhejiang Law Society under Grant 2023ZA04.

**Le Cheng**

**Zhejiang University, Hangzhou**

Corresponding author

E-mail address: [chengle163@hotmail.com](mailto:chengle163@hotmail.com)

**Ming Xu**

**Zhejiang University, Hangzhou**

E-mail address: [xuming0833@foxmail.com](mailto:xuming0833@foxmail.com)