

Blumczynski, Piotr. (2023). *Experiencing Translationality: Material and Metaphorical Journeys*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 222, €46.99 (paperback), ISBN 9781032465456; €150.00 (hardback), ISBN 9781032459875; €39.94 (eBook), ISBN 9781003382201. DOI: 10.4324/9781003382201.

Undoubtedly, the world of sports has provided rich material for reflection for researchers in Translation Studies, as the presence of translation in this field is particularly prominent. From specialised sports terminology to the localisation of sports-related digital platforms and the multilingual social media of international athletes, the spectrum is both extensive and compelling, covering diverse scholarly interests. Nevertheless, since the vast majority of published research on this particular intersection of fields focuses on interlingual translation, broader questions arise about whether it is possible to go beyond the purely textual and linguistic aspects in the context of sports translation. For instance, might the transfer of elite football players across clubs and national borders be viewed as translational movements? Could the souvenirs purchased in official team shops after stadium visits be seen as objects of translation? And what about Messi's worn boots or the racket with which Djokovic won one of his championships when handed over to fans? Could these elements be examined through the lens of translation? Piotr Blumczynski, a professor at Queen's University Belfast, would likely answer all these rhetorical questions in the affirmative, had he addressed the topic of sports in his recent book *Experiencing Translationality: Material and Metaphorical Journeys*, the subject of this review.

Published in 2023, this book builds on the path set by Blumczynski's (2016) earlier work, *Ubiquitous Translation*, and stands out as one of the most compelling contributions to our field in recent years, advocating for a progressive broadening of Translation Studies in the line of other works, including Bassnett and Johnston's (2019) or Marais' (2019). Throughout an introduction and five chapters, the author uses a wide range of examples — at first glance, unrelated — to show how the body, material objects, sensory experience, and personal engagement can all be explored within the framework of Translation Studies.

This book encourages reflection and invites readers to reconsider what translation and translationality — "what makes translation a translation" (4) — can encompass. Blumczynski's ideas have resonated widely among researchers, leading to numerous reviews and review articles (see Bennett, 2024; Kuźniak, 2023; Marais, 2023; Valler, 2024, among others) and inspiring several scholars, notably África Vidal Claramonte (2025) in her volume *Translation and Objects: Rewriting Migrancy and Displacement through the Materiality of Art*. In this review I argue that *Experiencing Translationality* can also be meaningfully applied to research on translation and sports, revealing the relevance of translation and transnationality in unexpected contexts, such as the international transfers of athletes or the 'relics' treasured by sports fans.

As the title suggests and the introduction makes clear, the concept at the heart of Blumczynski's book is 'translationality', defined as "the experience of connecting with another reality across temporal and spatial distance through material, sensory mediation" (6). His exploration of this phenomenon builds on prior work in Translation Studies, particularly by Douglas Robinson (2017), who conceived it as "the constant emergingness of everything, through embodied, situated, performative interaction"

(p. x). Years before *Experiencing Translationality* appeared, Kobus Marais (2019) had also argued that translationality must occupy a central place in Translation Studies: “We need to be able to study the translationality of all and any phenomena. However, a theory limited to language will not provide that to us” (p. 43).

For Blumczynski, translationality is a deeply experiential concept, one that evokes a vivid — almost physical — sense of connection with another time, place, object, or even person(s). It is a holistic experience, involving different senses — sight, sound, smell, and touch. Throughout the book, the author draws on a rich array of examples, often surprising in their diversity, to reflect on this concept and to invite readers along on a fascinating journey that begins in fourth-century Constantinople and ends in his own home in Belfast.

In his view, translationality acts as a kind of beacon, revealing instances of translation in practices that, on the surface, seem far removed from the conventional tasks of interlingual translation, or ‘translation proper,’ as Roman Jakobson (1971 [1959]) termed it. While Jakobson’s ideas have largely shaped the trajectory of contemporary Translation Studies, the author argues that we must recognize that “linguistic and textual ‘translations’ are metaphorically modelled on material translations” (3).

Blumczynski aims to move beyond the confines of ‘translation proper,’ reminding us that our contemporary understanding of translation practices has its roots in the movement of revered individuals’ bodies — such as saints or martyrs — to sites of both physical and symbolic significance, as well as in the practice of transferring bishops between ecclesiastical posts. As he observes in the introduction, examining translations that involve human bodies offers fresh insight into concepts frequently associated with translation, including authority, power, patronage, authenticity, among others.

The opening chapter, “What does translation do?”, builds on the introduction and lays out the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological foundations for exploring translationality. Blumczynski begins with a concise overview of recent scholarship within Translation Studies, demonstrating that — despite years of expanding the boundaries of our discipline — a persistent “linguistic bias” (5) still shapes much of it.

Methodologically, the author adopts a semasiological approach to trace the historical and contemporary meanings of the word ‘translation,’ arguing that the notion of ‘corporeal transfers’ and ‘material journeys’ offers a more historically accurate and theoretically robust focal point than that enabled by the concept of ‘interlingual translation.’ In this chapter, he explores the interplay between metaphor and translation, emphasising the need to consider translation primarily as a material process. He outlines the key theoretical and methodological tenets of his approach — including semiotic experience, the entanglement of matter and meaning, and distributed agency — while highlighting that “body and experience are key elements of the argument” (26).

Rather than restricting himself to rigid definitions, Blumczynski proposes reflecting on the question “What does translation do?”, closely aligned with Sara Ahmed’s (2014



[2004]) inquiry in her acclaimed book *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, where she asked, “What do emotions do?” (p. 191). Questions framed in this way shift the focus toward the effects and consequences of these phenomena, while also acknowledging their inherently elusive nature. Interestingly, both lines of inquiry converge on a similar insight: translation and emotion are fundamentally experiences of contact. According to Blumczynski, translationality involves an experience of connecting, while, as Ahmed (2014 [2004]) notes, “emotions are a matter of how we come into contact with objects and others” (p. 208). It is therefore unsurprising that emotions emerge repeatedly throughout Blumczynski’s book. Clearly, translation and emotion can be considered to be closely intertwined, a connection that warrants further exploration within Translation Studies.

In Chapter 2, “Squaring the circle: episcopal translations”, Blumczynski examines one specific definition of translation: the frequent transfers of bishops from one ecclesiastical post to another. To guide the reader through this historical journey, he delves into ecclesiastical history, tracing how such transfers have occurred from the fourth century to the present day. His analysis of numerous sources reveals that these movements were highly contentious — often condemned by Church councils yet consistently enacted. Far from being simple decisions, episcopal translations were actions that occurred “across a multifarious network of influences and relationships” (78), shaped by a complex web of ambitions, authorities, and power across communities, from centres to peripheries. At times, these transfers even served as instruments of manipulation, creating opportunities for corruption, opportunism, and strategic alliances.

Reading this chapter, it was hard not to draw contemporary parallels with the transfer of elite athletes between teams. These movements — accompanied by financial negotiations, power plays, ceremonial fanfare, and the profound impact on the teams involved — echo the dynamics of episcopal translations. A clear example is Cristiano Ronaldo’s recent debut with Al-Nassr, marked by a lavish ceremony in his honour.

The third chapter, “Holy bones: Translations of relics”, extends the material exploration of translation within a religious context. Blumczynski focuses on the ancient and medieval practice of translating the bodies of venerated individuals or their relics — “something left behind that continues to bear witness to the extraordinary, supernatural, and miraculous character of the person it was once a part of” (87) — into sites of both physical and symbolic elevation. The chapter explores the ceremonies and meanings surrounding these translations, showing how “dynamics of patronage, subordination and dependence” (115) shaped the process, while providing opportunities for social intervention, peace-making, and communal improvement. Through the lens of translationality, these bones are imbued with life, echoing Bella Brodzki’s (2007) reflections on translation and memory in her book *Can These Bones Live?: Translation, Survival, and Cultural Memory*.

Blumczynski begins with antiquity, examining the translation of the relics of numerous saints — such as that of St. Nicholas’s remains — before tracing the practice through to the present day and secular contexts. For instance, he analyses examples in Poland, including the translation of the bodies of Adam Mickiewicz and Lech Kaczyński. In the



realm of sports, comparable rituals are evident: Argentina celebrates the return of certain 'relics' connected to Diego Maradona with state-sponsored ceremonies. Likewise, the burial, and sometimes relocation, of famous athletes — such as Ferenc Puskás in St. Stephen's Basilica in Budapest or Eusébio da Silva Ferreira in Lisbon's National Pantheon — illustrates the ongoing symbolic power of such acts. This chapter, therefore, opens up a rich field for reflection.

In Chapter 4, "From gift shops to the custom shop: Translationality for sale", Blumczynski extends the discussion to explore how the material concept of translation operates in contemporary contexts. He considers the distinctions between 'relics' and 'replicas', focusing on the commercial dimension of translationality and examining the workings of modern museums, gallery gift shops, and marketing strategies for selling objects such as guitar replicas. Central to his argument is the acknowledgement of a sense of connection, which depends on cultivating "a certain kind of psychosomatic sensitivity" (144); without this, translationality — and, thus, translation itself — cannot occur.

According to the author, sacred places and objects — 'sacred' not only in the religious sense — should function like a time machine, transporting the observer to another moment or place. In this light, souvenirs conceived as constructed relics fail as gifts: they only generate emotional resonance and carry an 'aura,' in the Benjaminian sense of the term (Benjamin 2007 [1935]), for those who were actually present and lived the original experience. The role of metaphysical connection is crucial: in the context of sports, a souvenir purchased at the Olympic Games in the host city can carry translational potential, much like a racket used by Djokovic or Nadal in a match. In contrast, the rackets they simply endorse lack translationality, because these rackets do not provide a direct, experiential connection to the athlete.

In the final chapter, "The experience of translationality", Blumczynski brings together the key ideas of his work to explore personal experiences of translationality — this time within the intimate setting of his own home. He demonstrates how profoundly personal the sense of connection with other realities and moments in time can be, illustrating it with a printer's tray and a collection of guitars. Similarly, we can look around our own spaces and discover objects that function as our personal relics — items that evoke emotion, transport us to the past, or reconnect us with childhood memories or with our passions. In the context of sports, this might take the form of a FIFA Panini World Cup sticker album, recalling the stories of how each sticker was obtained, or an old racket with which one learned to play, each object carrying its own translational resonance.

Above all, Blumczynski's book not only underscores the importance of expanding our understanding of translation — so that we can observe it in unexpected contexts and deepen our comprehension of such a complex process — but also captivates readers with its inspiring clarity. It encourages us to lift our gaze, look sideways, and experience translationality in the world that surrounds us.

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