



## Book Review

**Monzó-Nebot, E. & Lomeña-Galiano, M. (Eds) (2024). *Toward inclusion and social justice in institutional translation and interpreting: Revealing hidden practices of exclusion*. Routledge. ISBN 9781032394763**

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Institutional translation and interpreting is a relatively new field of study compared with other domains such as conference interpreting or literary translation. Although this type of translation and interpreting has been around for as long as there have been professional translators and interpreters working for national governments and international bodies, the earliest literature on the concept was published in the second decade of this century (e.g. Koskinen, 2014). More recently, Prieto Ramos (2021, p. 1) stated that the scope of this type of translation and interpreting is “public institutions and administrations at the regional, national and international levels, including legislative bodies, court settings and certified translation for official purposes more broadly”. The editors of the volume being reviewed here, Esther Monzó-Nebot and María Lomeña-Galeano, produced another book on the subject titled *Critical approaches to institutional translation and interpreting: Challenging epistemologies*, in which they define institutional translation and interpreting as that which is “delivered in or for specific organizations and institutional social systems, spanning national, supranational, and international organizations as well as financial markets, universities, and national courts” (Monzó-Nebot and Lomeña-Galeano, 2024, n.p.).

This new contribution to the literature analyzes the central role of institutional translators and interpreters “in the dissemination of the symbolic authority intrinsically tied to languages” (p. 1). The editors note in their introduction that in providing translation and interpreting (TI) services, practitioners “may take on the adaptable nature of Protean figures, capable of assuming various forms and postures, or they may adopt the rigid stance of Procrustes, who moulds and gives shape without regard for individual nuances,” rendering them “arbiters of global and local cultural and linguistic orders” (p. 1). In selecting the articles that comprise the book, the editors seek to examine how linguistic communities’ access to such services is “mediated by existing social structures and imbalances of power” (p. 2), which condition their ability to participate fully in society and often marginalize them by silencing their voices, excluding them from decision-making, and denying the worth of their

identities for the sake of cultural assimilation. The book focuses on both institutions and individuals to explore ways in which TI can “contribute to non-domination and non-oppression” and the potential of TI practitioners to “disrupt and recalibrate prevailing power dynamics” (p. 13).

The eleven chapters of the book are divided into three sections. Following the introduction and overview by the editors, Section I is titled “Revealing oppression in and through translation and interpreting,” and the articles contained therein address underexplored biases in various contexts where institutional TI is known to take place. Furthermore, they look at the way oppressive social systems can be supported or challenged as translators and interpreters exercise their agency. Chapter 2 reports on the many ways in which immigration systems in the United States, far from honoring the basic human rights of those who depend on them, do not even follow the laws that supposedly govern them. The authors offer a “typology of overt and hidden forms of deterrence through lack of linguistic access” (pp. 35-36) and conclude that the agencies responsible for overseeing immigration and asylum procedures deny due process by erecting barriers, whether overt or covert, to language access. Chapter 3 offers a similar view of Italian asylum procedures, noting that the interpreters employed are not professionally qualified and have not undergone proper vetting. Moreover, the use of English, French and Spanish as vehicular languages, the failure to establish a video record of the proceedings, and reliance on written forms mean that there is no assurance of mutual understanding among interlocutors and no quality control. Chapter 4 analyzes strategies deployed by conference interpreters when faced with xenophobic discourse, noting that they frequently tone down extremist rhetoric, though the practice varies from one language booth to another.

Section II, “Revealing and debunking myths,” looks at collective illusions about the power of language and translators’ and interpreters’ status and roles, and at how these myths affect the interlocutors’ expectations and behavior. Chapter 5 is about efforts to implement gender-fair language in an international intergovernmental organization and how they are perceived by different stakeholders. The authors highlight the agency of institutional translators by demonstrating that they can either proactively embrace the program, respond in a sort of passive-aggressive manner, or simply acquiesce to the directives without expressing any opinion. Chapter 6 emphasizes the need for client education by public service interpreters to counteract misconceptions of their role. It analyzes a project to train interpreters to perform this education, in contrast to the development of a “paraprofessional service” of untrained bilinguals to mediate interactions that fails to draw on the experience and insight of professional interpreters. The authors also point out that there may be a risk that existing entities such as universities, agencies and professional associations, may resort to “archaic protectionism” (p. 140) to protect their legitimacy. A myth debunked in Chapter 7 is that TI practitioners in international organizations are either “invisible or superhumanly flawless” (p. 154), an illusion that denies their humanity and undermines their mental health. The authors take a broader perspective and look at them as individuals rather than focusing only on their positions and specializations, considering their basic human needs. The common work-related hazards faced by both translators and interpreters, particularly burnout resulting from the suppression of their own thoughts and feelings, are explored alongside the differences in the risks they encounter due to the distinct nature of their tasks.

Section III is called “Revealing translation and interpreting in institutional spaces,” and it provides insight into areas that have been neglected relative to

other types of TI. Chapter 8 shows that signed language conference interpreters face a number of barriers to recognition as equals in the organizations where they work, most particularly because neither International Sign nor national signed languages have any official status but rather are designated non-official languages. Signed-language interpreters, unlike their spoken-language colleagues, do not undergo an accreditation test, and there is no monitoring of their performance to guarantee quality. In Chapter 9, TI services in Belgian prisons are examined, and though high-ranking prison officials said in interviews that language services were adequate and there were no violations of prisoners' language or human rights, lower-ranking personnel had quite a different story to tell. The authors conclude that, while there is legislation requiring that prisoners' language needs be met, it is inadequate and is often not enforced (similar to the findings reported by the authors of Chapters 2 and 3 in this volume). Chapter 10 offers a more positive view of the status and working conditions of TI staff, in contrast to the gloomy picture painted in the preceding chapters. It reports on a study based on questionnaires and interviews with translators and interpreters in the Language Interpreting Office of the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, asking them about the resources available to them, their workflow and workload, and their self-concept. The author concludes that this office can serve as a model for other institutions in terms of the "cooperation, transparency, multiloyalty, and ecology" reported by the practitioners, "and of values like agency, reciprocal trust, and status at TI workplaces" (p. 247).

In the final chapter of the book, "Taking stock and chartering [sic] the territories of international translation and interpreting," the editors reiterate that the institutions examined throughout the book "operate translation and interpreting in ways that ensure the marginalization of specific communities and individuals" (p. 253). However, they contrast this rather pessimistic view of institutional TI with the observation that translators and interpreters also have "transformative power" (p. 256).

It is clear from the various authors' examinations of translation and interpreting services in a wide variety of institutions that practitioners face many obstacles to performing their tasks at an optimum level. This volume could be regarded as a call to action, not only for the institutions themselves to pay proper attention to redressing these inadequacies, but also for further research into the contrast between stated objectives and actual outcomes, stakeholders' attitudes towards the delivery (and deliverers) of these services, and possible solutions to the problems and challenges identified.

## References

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