

Book review: Bassnett, S., & Johnston, D. (Eds.). (2025). *Debates in translation studies*. Routledge

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The field of Translation Studies, having decisively shifted from its former status as a mere sub-branch of comparative literature or linguistics to a dynamic, interdisciplinary sphere in its own right, is inherently defined by contention and evolution. From the seminal *cultural turn* heralded by Bassnett and Lefevere (1998), which reframed translation as an act of cultural negotiation rather than mere linguistic transfer, to the rigorous ethical debates surrounding power, ideology, and postcolonial identity explored by scholars like Venuti (2019) and Spivak (2003), the discipline thrives on a vibrant clash of perspectives.

It is precisely within this fertile ground of intellectual discord that *Debates in translation studies* finds its vital purpose. This volume is not merely welcome but essential, offering a timely and structured cartography of the key ideological battlegrounds that currently shape the field. Written by leading translation specialists, this anthology of papers under the compelling title affords a fascinating insight into some of the most contentious issues within Translation Studies. The selection of articles addresses shifting viewpoints and emergent themes about translation against the backdrop of quickened socio, cultural, and technological changes.

Grounded in the complexities of contemporary communication, the twelve studies in this collection stimulate discussion on the current profiles of Translation Studies. It encourages critical thinking on how debates within Translation Studies might contribute to shaping the future even “in some tiny way” (p. 1). As such, it provokes further debates on the future perspectives of Translation Studies.

One of the coeditors’ opening piece “How new are today’s debates about Translation?” lays the conceptual framework of the volume. Susan Bassnett traces the development of Translation Studies across time and space to make academic debate fit comfortably within paradigms of progress. She claims that although Translation Studies is now recognized as a global field of study, there are still core layers of unresolved disagreement about what it means to think in terms that may be considered *translational*, and more importantly, what it means to think of the discipline as an interdiscipline.

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In “Spacious translations”, Federico Italiano draws an analogy between translation, which is a process of de- and recontextualisation of meaning, and a map, which is a form of organisation, regulation and representation of space. He argues that for this analogy to work, the recontextualisation taking place with the translation process should have a spatial dimension. He further sketches out two modes of translational maps: the map as a translation device and the map as a translation site.

Chapter 3, titled “Translation and trauma”, attempts to confront the broader paradigmatic challenges that investigations into trauma can bring. By identifying and untangling how trauma and translation are tied together and operate on different levels, Sharon Deane-Cox hopes to underscore the importance of positioning ourselves, our research, and our translation practices in self-reflexive ways.

The following two chapters “Reparative translation and activism” and “The translational rift: Decolonising the anthropocene” attack the mainstream theories or discourses in the field of Translation Studies which were mainly Eurocentric or even white supremacist in nature. In the former, Paul Bandia draws on the historical concept of reparation which seeks to redress the inequities and power differentials resulting from the condition of colonisation and/or enslavement. In the latter, Michael Cronin claims that the importance of translation lies in its understanding of a phenomenon that is at the heart of our current ecological predicament. One of the present and future tasks for Translation Studies is to explore through biosemiotic theories of translation the multiple affinities between humans and other creatures or species that inhabit the planet.

Both Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 question the central role of technology in driving societal changes and the host of problems it poses for Translation Studies. In “Technologies and the future of translation: Two perspectives”, Dorothy Kenny scrutinizes reactions to the breakthrough of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in multilingual news production and literary translation. She does not attempt to predict how state-of-the-art translation technologies will develop, but to get a snapshot of how these technologies are being received in neural machine translation and large language models, two very different areas that are nonetheless subject to similar existential threats. In “The inTranslation and datafication”, Neil Sadler begins with a brief overview of datafication as a phenomenon and its development. Then he discusses three key ideas identified in the existing literature on datafication in terms of their implications for translation as a practice, industry and profession. While Dorothy Kenny contends that ultimately it is not the technology alone that shapes the future; rather it is the way in which it is accommodated by the socio-cultural, legal, and economic context that will have the greatest bearing on the lives of journalists and literary translators alike, Neil Sadler posits that datafication does not reduce the importance of human interpretation. Instead, the theory of datafication has much to gain from the contribution of translation scholars because many of the issues it raises are closely related to those explored within Translation Studies for many years.

“The anxiety of representation: Translation studies in China” by Lisha Xu offers a glimpse of the long tradition of Chinese thinking about translation. Her essay dwells on one of the central questions emerging from the political imperative to tell the China story today. She wonders how Translation Studies as an emerging national discipline might deal with the anxiety of representation, so that a story told *well* might also be considered *truthful* in terms of providing the basis of mutual understanding.

Catherine Boyle’s contribution, titled “The word stuck in the throat”, examines how a type of blockage of communication can be managed alongside a deluge of attempts to create continuity and promise for the future. Using her theatrical experience, she illustrates through the metaphor of the throat what informs a changing relationship with translation as well as how translation intervenes in and changes the receiving language. She believes that translation and Translation Studies articulate a familiar space, albeit in a new situation.

In Chapter 10, titled “The judgement of the translator”, Sarah Maitland raises the question: *Who are we judging when we judge translation, and why*. She advocates for acknowledging the translator’s authorial voice, since a translation is the outcome of the translator’s thought process, conscious choices, and the product of politics, and it should be evaluated as such.

Loredana Polezzi is well-known for her research on the affinities between travel writing and translation. In her essay titled “Travel and gender in Translation: The strange case of Isabelle Eberhardt”, she aims to explore the potential of a layered approach to the production of cultural representations through a particularly complex case study in the intersection of travel, gender, and translation – that is, travel diaries.

The final chapter “Translation and news reporting” by Roberto A. Valdeón considers the conceptualisation and application of the translational practice in news production. It discusses the relationship between journalism and translation as well as the gradual estrangement between the two practices. It problematises this situation by highlighting the divergent views of translation held by researchers in translation and journalism studies, which not only illustrate the different approaches to the translational practice but also point to rather inflexible views of what constitutes translation. He believes that this conceptualization is often incompatible with the definition of the practice of translation in other disciplines and professions.

As Susan Bassnett rightfully says, “where is the study and practice of translation today is a question that invites a complex answer” (p. 24). With an emphasis on challenging orthodoxies at both the macroscopic and microscopic level, this volume uncovers thought-provoking dimensions that require in-depth exploration.

First, this volume makes a potent and persuasive call for studying translation as an inter-disciplinary undertaking. It cautions us to rethink the ways in which we perceive translation or, more accurately, the ways in which translation is perceived outside our academic discipline, as this will impact any interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary

academic dialogue. To avoid repeating the calls for interdisciplinarity with little success, some of the chapters (Chapters 2-4 and 12) attempt to carve out clear and productive paths to align translation with adjacent disciplines and point towards real opportunities for collaborative research across disciplinary boundaries

Second, it draws attention to the dynamic nature of Translation Studies and raises legitimate concerns about what counts as Translation Studies in the digital age. These nuanced reflections demonstrate a keen awareness, for example, of how embracing technological advances can change our construal of translation, and how integrating the *technological turn* into Translation Studies allows us to reconfigure our field of inquiry (Chapters 6 and 7; see also, [Kenny, 2022](#); [Littau, 2016](#)). While not detracting from the traditional focus of Translation Studies, these inspiring yet unsettling discussions expose the insufficiency of traditional notions and shed light on the consequent academic and professional implications.

Most significantly, these debates, as a product of their time, not only mirror disciplinary development but also relate to broader trends in the humanities and social sciences. For example, Michael Cronin (Chapter 5) teases out the relationship between ecology and translation and illuminates the role of translation in building a richer and sustainable future. Travel writing and translation (Chapter 11) also falls within this paradigm, which typifies the need to integrate Translation Studies into the wider ecosystem of humanities to produce truly insightful knowledge.

To make it more reader-friendly, particularly to a less specialised audience, I would suggest that some important concepts and technical terms in the volume be clarified or given extra annotation. For example, it might be a good idea to explain the “ethnocentric violence of translation” (p. 18), “extended mind theory” (p. 44), “epistemic violence” (p. 48), “elemental translation” (p. 86), (translation into and out of) “low-resource languages and high-resource languages” (p. 93), among others, as they might pose comprehension challenges for those who have not read the original study. Also, to make the volume more coherent and systematic, the editors could have standardized the format rather than give the contributors free rein in terms of the chapter layout.

Despite these suggestions for improvement, I would certainly applaud the editors for bringing out a range of themes and joining the different strands together. These open, up-to-date accounts are sure to provide valuable guidance for both emerging and veteran scholars working in the field of Translation Studies and help them to navigate the inevitability of change in the modern era. Even interdisciplinary researchers — such as those working at the crossroads of linguistics, cultural studies, or digital humanities — will appreciate how the volume frames translation as a central, unifying practice across these domains, offering fresh insights to enrich their own cross-disciplinary inquiries.

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