

## Book Review

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*Translation Studies and Information Technology – New Pathways for Researchers, Teachers and Professionals*, Edited by Daniel Dejica, Carlo Eugeni, Anca Dejica-Carțiș, Translation Studies Series. Timișoara, Editura Politehnica, 2020, 212 pp., ISBN 978-606-35-0351-1

It has already become a truism that the computer revolution and its corollary, the digital age, have affected most aspects of our professional lives. Translation practice is no exception to that. The marriage between Translation (in the widest sense of the term) and Information Technology may not have started out as a match made in heaven but, as the present times indicate, it is an enduring relationship that has taken the entire translation field to the proverbial next level. Whilst translation is a time-honored endeavor that dates back to antiquity and serves very specific purposes, technology in and for translation is substantially younger and, in the grander scheme things, looks like a form of exaptation, or like a serendipitous outcome of the digital age that we are living in. *Translation Studies and Information Technology* (TSIT, hereafter) makes up for this gap by foregrounding the essential role that technology, one of the affordances of the modern era, plays in many aspects of translation work.

Theoretical and empirical studies undertaken nowadays in the field of translation and interpreting are publicized widely and at a brisk pace; they most often illustrate a line of approach or methodology (e.g., prescriptive vs descriptive, language-centered vs culture-orientated) and seem to take on an increasingly interdisciplinary turn. They allow for as many in-depth views of the complexities associated with translation. In the case of TSIT, this complexity becomes even more apparent owing to the different “voices” that this volume brings together: they belong to an assortment of Romanian and international authors—academics and practitioners, applied linguists and IT specialists, seasoned and junior researchers—who report on their work conducted from various disciplinary and methodological vantage points. And while their papers draw on translation theories and practice that originate from different cultural and professional settings, the aim

of the book is prospective, as its subtitle suggests. In other words, it taps into the existing knowledge pool in order to shine a light on the possible developments and directions in translation studies and pedagogy, as well as in the actual translation work. As the editors themselves profess in their introductory word (p. 7), TSIT aims to allow the readers to share in the authors' experience and expertise, while also giving them an opportunity to reflect on a variety of topical issues in the discipline.

Overall, the scope of this book is wide enough to cover multiple angles: intra and interlingual translation, literary and specialized renditions of texts, translation and interpreting (inasmuch as they can be fully separated nowadays), translation as both process and product, translation as a profession and the translator as a professional.

In terms of its structural organization, the book includes seventeen contributions roughly equally distributed across three thematic sections envisioned by the editors—Daniel Dejica, Carlo Eugeni, and Anca Dejica-Carțiș—as Pathways for researchers (Part I), for teachers (Part II), and for professionals (Part III).

Part I, **Pathways for Researchers**, opens with a topic related to intralingual translation and Human-Computer Interactions. Specifically, in *Human-Computer Interaction in Diamesic Translation*, Carlo Eugeni brings to the fore the pivotal role that technology plays in diamesic translation (DT). It bears noting here that DT is associated with (and, indeed, made necessary by) diamesic (or channel-related) variation in any natural language. Therefore, adding to Coșeriu's (2000) representation of language structure (or “functional language” manifest in synchrony) as the sum of four types of variation (i.e., diachronic, diaphasic, diastratic, and diatopic), diamesic variation is a parameter that is all the more relevant today, given the availability of communication tools afforded us by Information and Communication Technology. Equally relevant, then, is DT since, whether inter- or intralingual, translation itself is quite often diamesic. However, as we find, DT is a type of translation that has so far received only a modicum of attention from translation theorists worldwide. For this reason, Eugeni begins the discussion with some useful background information

on DT, narrowing it down to a brief overview of the technologies promoting Human-Computer Interaction, particularly those designed for live subtitling, the main focus of his article. Against this theoretical backdrop, the author uses empirical data and illustrative examples extracted from an investigation aimed at finding the optimal solution to a practical and very pressing matter: improving interlingual communication at INTERSTENO meetings. As soon as the less versed but eager reader (such as myself) gets used to the acronyms referring to the wealth of electronic tools and translation services available, it becomes increasingly interesting to see how DT (e.g., from spoken to written text) works in interlingual live subtitling taking place in a context where accuracy and clarity are the top priorities. The view held here is that translation without the aid of technology is not only inconceivable, but downright impossible (p. 19). However, as Eugeni's analysis conclusively proves, in the process of translation the computer cannot be entirely left to its own devices (pun intended).

This is also the underlying idea in the article *Verbatim vs. Edited Live Parliamentary Subtitling*. As Alice Pagano notes from the outset, no matter how much one relies on dedicated software to generate live intralingual subtitles, there will always be elements of spoken language e.g., false starts, self-corrections, hypotaxis, and non-essential verbal fluff, that speech recognition programs fail to decode successfully. Hence, for the intralingual translation task required in the formal context described by Pagano, the edited text—the result of the combined skills of the respeaker and the live editor—leads to a higher quality output in terms of accuracy, speed of delivery, and clarity of message.

Much in the spirit of the relatively recent strand of research in Translator Studies (e.g., Chesterman 2009, Imre 2020), in *The Multidimensional Translator: Roles and Responsibilities*, Daniel Dejica and Anca Dejica-Cărțiș bring the translator into the spotlight. Their article is in many ways scene setting, a reason for which it might have been better placed at the beginning of Part I; in it, the authors consider how the digital age has raised the bar of expectations for a profession that originally required language skills alone. Indeed, just like in the realm

of lexicography, electronic tools did not make the translator's work easier; they made it more complex and demanding in terms of the skills and abilities that a professional who operates in "multidimensional translation scenarios" (p. 54) is expected to possess nowadays. This last idea carries over into the next article, *The Evolution of Translation Technology to the Detriment of the Professional Freelance Translator* by Attila Imre. As the author himself explains, while the specialist literature typically extols the benefits of technology for translation work, he sets out to shift the focus of attention to a side effect of machine translation in the XX<sup>th</sup> century and of its XXI<sup>st</sup> century offshoots: the gradual erosion of the professional status of the translator. The argument here is that, on the one hand, the pressure to acquire a whole array of skills and competencies that fall outside the remit of translation proper e.g., "cultural understanding, IT-skills, decision-making, communication, language and project management", "domain competence", and "image, audio and video processing" (pp. 60, 61), has led to translators spreading themselves too thin; this inevitably impacts the quality of their output. On the other hand, failure to possess as wide a range as possible of such skills and competencies lowers the employability of professional freelance translators. While the argument posited here is valid and the discussion of the evolution of *memoQ* is illustrative in this regard, it may not be immediately apparent why this is a problem affecting (or afflicting, rather) freelancers only. In fact, the contrast drawn in this article is between individual self-employed translators who have little recourse but to strive to become skilled all-rounders if they want to stay in business, versus teams of full-time translators where the division of labor between team members relieves much of the work pressure and yields better results. The message to take from here is that translation nowadays is an increasingly less solitary activity – a consistent trend in so many other aspects of human activity.

Approaching the matter from the teacher's perspective, in her article *An Approach to The Translator's Competence in the Digital Era*, Mihaela Cozma draws on her experience with translation students in order to highlight the change in the outlook of young trainees on what

constitutes a good translator. To this end, Cozma uses quantitative and qualitative data derived from a survey administered to novice translators at her home university. Interestingly enough, the data collected show that, without dismissing the benefits of technology in the process of translation, the respondents in this survey did not seem to regard technological and digital literacy as essential components in the overall translation competence.

In *AI in Translation: Friend or Foe?* Carmen Ardelean debates on whether technology in translation will remain an increasingly sophisticated tool (i.e., a friend) or will gradually take over, replacing the translators themselves. To this end, she expatiates on the evolution of Machine Translation from its infancy up to the Neural Machine Translation stage, with its host of challenges and benefits that technology has brought in its wake. In spite of that, the debate ends in a tie and the title question goes largely unanswered. However, sifting through the facts and arguments laid out for the reader to decide, it seems that, in the final analysis, the translation professionals that Artificial Intelligence may pose a threat to are the “digital immigrants – translators from the 1970s or 1980s generations” (p. 80), who may feel less inclined to swim with the new. While this may be true, the author surely does not intend to point an accusatory finger at AI when she claims that “[c]ertain clients are already requesting translations based mainly not on accuracy, but rather on a general understanding of the topic at hand” (p. 87) – a task that often requires no human agency.

Part II, **Pathways for Teachers**, provides the reader with useful insights into the role that technology and associated methodologies play in various aspects of translator training. The discussions in this section are all the more relevant since, despite their increasing numbers and degree of sophistication, the translation tools are still not fully integrated with the translator training programs, and nor are the teaching methods well-adjusted enough to exploit their capabilities to the fullest.

To this end, in *Bits of Translator's Power*, Titela Vilceanu undertakes an assessment of the benefits of offline and online CAT tools

for translation work, highlighting the main features that define the best of them. In a similar vein, in *Access Tomorrow: Online Translation Environments*, Diana Oțăt reports on an experiment aimed at testing a specific translation software used in the context of an interactive translation project conducted in a specially designed web-based environment. Technology and full online instruction is the topic that Ioana Cornea and Andrew Tucker approach in their paper, *Educating Legal Translators in Virtual Environments*. Using the case study of a training program delivered at Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, the authors describe the nuts and bolts of setting up such a program, from curriculum and task design all the way to its implementation, delivery and management. In *On the Role of Raising the Metacognitive Awareness of Born-Digital Translation Trainees*, Loredana Pungă discusses experimental data aimed at finding a possible correlation between metacognitive self-reflection awareness and quality in translation. The working assumption here is that metacognition strategies used by trainees in the process of translation may be the remedial step to take in order to stave off translation error. Two papers in this section approach matters from the point of view of acquisition: in *Training Intercultural and Technological Mediation in the Digital Era*, Hamaoui considers the role of technology in the development of intercultural awareness with translation students, and in *The Language of Education in the Digital Era*, Stoian and Șimon argue for the acquisition of education-related terminology in translation classes, suggesting activities, technology and internet based resources geared towards achieving this goal.

Part III, **Pathways for Professionals**, begins with three articles devoted to subtitling. *Audio Subtitles or Spoken Subtitles/Captions* by Pilar Orero et al. surveys the status quo in audio subtitling and its relation with other translation services currently in use e.g., audio description, dubbing, voice-over, etc. Drawing on facts, statistical data and the international practice in the field, the authors take a closer look at the position, advantages, and challenges of audio subtitling used in different contexts, where accessibility is of essence.

In a similar vein, in *Validation of Easy-to-Read Subtitles* Rocío Bernabé et al. tackle the issue of accessibility – specifically, readability and comprehension. The authors report interesting findings resulting from an experiment aimed at testing the effectiveness of subtitling methods used for the benefit of groups with special needs: people with auditory impairment and people with reading or learning difficulties. The investigation targeted both editorial and non-editorial features i.e., the use of potentially problematic vocabulary items and idiomatic expressions and, respectively, the type and size of fonts, use of colors, length of on-screen text, etc. The data collected from the target groups indicated that, in subtitles created in keeping with Easy-to-Read European guidelines, both types of features contribute towards enhancing comprehension, while also boosting viewer enjoyment.

Interlingual translation via film subtitling is the topic of *Translation Challenges: Subtitling “Denial” into Romanian*. Drawing on her decades-long experience in the field, Marcela Alina Fărcașiu uses a specific work instance i.e., creating Romanian subtitles for “Denial”, in order to highlight some problems she encountered when translating this film – itself the result of intersemiotic (from book to movie) translation. A reminder of how complex and demanding this line of work can be, the case study described here concludes with a few pointers on how to deal with some of these constraints.

Interlingual translation is also the focus of discussion in *Translating German Online Economic Texts*. Starting from a brief overview of the characteristic features of business German, Anca Dejica-Carțîș goes on to diagnose a number of mistranslations identified in the Romanian version of German language texts available online. She attributes these errors to the misuse of different translation strategies, arguing that raising the trainees’ awareness of such professional faux pas is likely to benefit their performance in the workplace.

This book section concludes with *Romanian Electronic Corpora* by Daniela Gheltofán, an overview of various corpora of the Romanian language compiled over the years, which, as the author points out, are useful tools for translators.

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Overall, despite the occasional typos and phrasing errors (most notably, “the Dead [sic!] and Hard-of-Hearing” on page 165), the readers of this book will come away with an increased understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing the field of translation today. The bottom line is that technology has brought about a shift in the translation paradigm and, like any systemic change, it cannot be entirely good or completely bad. It becomes clear, then, that technology in translation is a two-way street: it provides humans with support but compels them to acquire a very different set of skills. The capabilities and the ever-increasing degree of sophistication of translation tools may seem to forebode the demise of human, professional translation. This is hardly the case (see, for example, Ordorica 2020): it is the human translator who can capture the intricacies associated with translation in specific contexts like the ones mentioned on page 19 of this volume; equally true is the fact that, in other contexts, time and cost-related considerations make Machine Translation more desirable, and the translator, superfluous (see p. 87, this book). Whatever the case, translation without technology is a thing of the past. One cannot escape it and, as they say, what cannot be avoided must be welcomed.

Considering the diversity of issues held up to view, I believe that this book’s readability could have been augmented by the addition of a brief overview prefacing each of the three main parts instead of the one included in the editors’ Introduction. Similarly, for reference purposes, short abstracts of each paper would have been helpful for both readers and librarians.

### References

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