



---

CRITICAL REVIEW

**Susan Bassnett & David Johnston (eds.), *Debates in Translation Studies*. London & New York: Routledge, 2025. Pp. 208. ISBN 9780367612351.**

Alcina Maria Pereira de Sousa

Universidade da Madeira, Portugal

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0019-491X>

In their introduction titled “About now” (pp. 1-12), Susan Bassnett and David Johnston set the moto to the volume comprising twelve chapters, complemented by a user-friendly index, problematizing the future of translation studies and the scope of their contribution “even in some tiny way to shaping it” (p. 2), including its interdisciplinarity and global impact. The broad scope of *Debates in Translation Studies* offers readers, scholars and translators, a glimpse of an ongoing reflection in the fully-fledged global field of study correlating it with “paradigms of progress”, including AI, along with “core issues, like agency, creativity, and constraint” (p. 2).

It extends the dialogue about translation “as a representational practice”, which is claimed to have “changed radically in recent years, due in part to technological developments and in part to the need to train more translators in a world where the global and local co-exist in various states of tension” (p. 2). Overall, thirteen renowned scholars problematize main issues related to methods, strategies and theoretical frameworks in translation studies and practices, with reference to equivalence, fidelity, domestication, foreignization, transediting, globalization, interdisciplinarity, translation ethics, cultural memory, performativity, ecology, opacity, resistance, and cultural reinterpretation in translation studies. Contributors also reflect on the possible manipulation of texts, because of censorship, reorganization and the addition of excerpts which alter the original content and intention of the author of the source text (ST), or even excessive editorial interventions, such as cuts, reorganization and additions. Other issues are related to the following: a focus on the authors’ ST biography over a deeper analysis of the literary work; omission of gender markers in TT, affecting the representation of the author’s identity; biased interpretations which reflect editors’ personal views, distorting aspects of authors’ identity and work; or even faulty recognition of the translators’ work, lessening their contribution in some editions.

---

\* **CONTACT** Alcina Maria Pereira de Sousa Email: [alcina.sousa@staff.uma.pt](mailto:alcina.sousa@staff.uma.pt)

© 2026 The Author(s). Published by *Commentarium: Journal of Humanities Studies*. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.



Bassnett's chapter (pp. 13-26) provides a reflective diachronic perspective on the terminological foundations of translation studies, towards their acknowledgement as a "serious study of translation in theory and practice" (p. 13) indebted to notions of SL-TL / ST-TT and SC-TC across languages and fields of study. It departs from the reference to Holmes (1972) and Venuti (1995, 2019), back in the 1970's, as a "long established practice of using translation as a language teaching tool, along with the training of professional translators, before touching on the question of translation policy, translation criticism, and translation history" (p. 14). These also entail the rather recent outcomes of translation practices among "diasporic communities, border cultures, and transcultural cities" as claimed by Nergaard (2021). The scholar's comprehensive analysis follows the five major claims organized under the subheadings: "Translation studies: The beginnings"; "Changing approaches to disciplines, socio- political Upheavals from 1990 to the Present"; "A long- standing ongoing Debate"; "Beyond the cultural turn"; "The creative translator", finalizing with the problem posing "Where are we now?".

Spacious translations, the second chapter by Italiano (pp. 27-41), brings to the fore the kind of process-oriented stance associated with translation as the "de- and recontextualisation of meaning" (p. 27) indebted to the scholar's proposal of a theoretical-methodological transdisciplinary trans-medial analogy. While critically revisiting translation and toponymics with reference to "Barthes' Tokyo, the Inuit territories in Northern Canada and Sámi communities", it is vindicated that "translating is, above all, a matter of places, a spatial operation, a process of relocation, which transforms both what is translated and the context-space in which the *translandum* is relocated" (p. 39).

Psychological and cultural research clines become intertwined in Deane-Cox's chapter titled "Translation and trauma" (pp. 42-57), addressing ethical, cultural, and emotional issues in the translation of traumatic narratives, who argues for "a nuancing of the 'translation as survival' metaphor" (p. 42). Her chapter examines plural, multi-disciplinary perspectives (p. 54), and interdisciplinary frameworks (departing from the limits advocated by Kansteiner & Weilnböck 2010) towards "the integration of new and cross- cutting thinking" (p. 44) in her discussion of the field translation and trauma. The underlying humanitarian scope stands out in the topics discussed, notably: Ecologies of trauma; Unspeakability; Ethics, Empathy, and Emotionality; Cultural concepts of distress; Disciplinary focal points; Translation as survival.

Bandia extends the research scope to "reparative translation and activism" (pp. 58-74), particularly in the relation of translation with the specific history of peoples and cultures "as redress or reconciliation" (p. 74), in the line of the apology of "trans- representation of non-western thought and tradition in the interest of the plurality of concepts and knowledges of translation". The use of translation is perceived to address historical inequalities and promote social justice, especially in post-colonial contexts.



Bandia's tenets are then forwarded in the chapter by Cronin's "Translational rift: decolonizing the anthropocene" (pp. 75-90), advocating the ecological turn which suggest "the mechanism by which humans undergo" by means of "a dramatic alteration in the material and symbolic relationship" human beings establish with the living systems in terms of: lithic translation; biotranslation; and monotranslation. Cronin discusses the contribution of translation to understanding and responding to global environmental crises.

"Technologies and the future of translation: two perspectives" (pp. 91-105) by Kenny brings to the fore firstly a diachronic perspective of neural machine translation (NMT) and language models (LLMs), followed by the use of generative AI "Machine translation in the newsroom", and "Machine translation and Literature" in the practice and study of translation, as well as their limits and possibilities and ethical and social implications. It is rightly claimed that "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, itself shifting in line with technological change, that will have the greatest bearing on the lives of journalists and literary translators alike" (p. 100).

Sadler's "The intranlation and datafication" (pp. 106-123) turns the focus on to the role of massive data retrieved across domains and fields across time which "has also transformed, and continues to change, the translation industry" (p. 106) albeit perceived as "a major research gap" among translation scholars (p. 107). The illustration of effects of datafication in commercial translation are claimed to bear some gain "from the contribution of translation scholars" yet "many of the issues it raises are closely related to those explored within Translation Studies for many years" (p. 107).

"The anxiety of representation: translation studies in China" (pp. 124-140) by Lisha Xu broadens the scope of understanding translation and cultural representation, from an epistemological stance, particularly the influence of translation on the perception of cultures and identities and the project *Translating and Performing Cultural Extremity*. In the scholar's bearings, it is advocated, on the one hand, that "Translation Studies in China has begun to move beyond merely reproducing the concerns of translation theory from the West to serve instead as an analytical framework for Chinese translation and has begun to contribute to existing international debates" (p. 128), and, on the other, "on the narration of national message through the representation of classical culture, which is central to this policy, that has brought Translation Studies in China into the spotlight of political utility" (p. 130).

In the ninth chapter suggestively titled "The word stuck in the throat" (pp. 141-154), Boyle shares her reflections upon "the act of translation in particular cultural and historical turns as both subjective and collective, as perpetually truncated and full of possibility", drawing on the following practices: her "experience as a translator in the creation of networks and Connections" (p. 141) and the translation proposal of the poem "The Throat on Loan" by Gabriela Mistral contending that "language is being undone to be grown anew — sowed,



nurtured, harvested, in other and unknown lands” (p. 145). All these are indebted to the scholar’s and practitioners’ contentions about translation as a “process of knowledgeable crossing, which can have a Cassandra-like aspect to it” (p. 152).

Maitland’s “The judgement of the translator” (pp. 155-167) revisits Benjamin’s (1997) contentions to argue for a translator’s twofold role, also drawing on a hermeneutic stance, as defended by Ricoeur (2005, 2008), either perceived from the target reader and as a “judge” (p. 162), thereby claiming for readers’ meaning making autonomy while interacting with the target text and their right to compare it with the source text. In other words, “what the translation is doing to us, their readers and judges, and possibly, on what the translational journey has done for the translator” (p. 166).

Following the apology of “layers of agency and meaning” (pp. 168-187), Polezzi provides readers an insightful reflection of “Travel and gender in translation”, identified as “culturally constructed and situated concepts” (p. 168), with reference to Isabelle Eberhardt’s diaries (1887-1904), particularly the French editions, the Italian and English translations. The scholar’s discussion backed up by many examples and comprehensive notes and references entails the illustration of “layers of interpretation and following the links between the transformation of Eberhardt’s figure and the overlapping, at times conflicting agencies involved in the translation and retranslation of travel as well as in the writing and over- writing of gender” (pp. 169-170).

In the last chapter of the extensive volume, Valdeón offers an overview of the relation of news reporting since its outset and the translational practice from the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards in Europe in his text “Translation and news reporting” (pp. 188-200) which he affirms to be different “from other disciplines and professions” (p. 188). Literal translation was primarily associated with these practices to be implying “five different processes, namely transporting, translating, transposing and transediting, and transmitting” (p. 192) in the line of Bauman et al. (2011). The analysis of conceptualisation and application of the translational practice in news production also considers the foreignisation/ domestication dichotomy along with the much controversial issue associated with the fact that “communication and journalism scholars have largely ignored translation in their interrogation of the cultural, economic, ideological, and social aspects of news production, let alone linguistic ones” (p. 198).