

Introduction: Translating Environmental Humanities

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In the age of globalization, the number of studies on the environment conducted in different languages has grown exponentially. Originating within different cultures and spanning disciplines remote from one another, environmental studies are bringing together in a fruitful alliance philologists, linguists, historians, philosophers, educators, fine arts scholars, scientists, resource economists, cultural studies researchers, and authors or creators reflecting upon the relationship between human beings and nature. History has demonstrated the crucial role which translation plays in fostering such interdisciplinary collaboration, by establishing links between different languages and cultures: the origins of the most important cultural traditions in the Western world lie in the reception of Greco-Roman writings, as Robinson has shown (Robinson).

Etymologically, to translate (“traducir” in Spanish) comes from the Latin verb *traducere*, which means “to move from one place to another.” *Traducere* is made up of the prefix “*trans*,” meaning “from one place to another” and the verb “*ducere*,” meaning “guide,” or “lead.” “Translation” can then be understood as a vehicle of communication between different languages and systems, seeking, in this case, to articulate complementary perspectives on environmental topics.

Translation can occur in several ways: translating within the same language (“intralingual translation” or “rewording”); translating from one language to another (“interlingual translation” or “translation proper”); and translating from words to non-verbal systems (e.g. a poem into music, Jakobson) or from non-verbal signs (e.g. animal sounds or movements) into verbal language (“interspecies translation,” Plumwood).

These three types of transferring information from one place to another are everyday activities. In the case of the first (intralingual translation), images, forms of speech, modes of knowledge, styles and registers within our own language are adapted to the perceptual and linguistic conventions of those living in other places. This is a constant, involuntary act, drawing on culture, traditions and knowledge external to the text. Thus, the arid landscape of Southern Europe is ordinary to its inhabitants, but appears exotic to visitors coming from Northern Europe; the same happens if we think about the deserts of Texas and the frozen landscapes of Alaska and those who visit rather than inhabit them. What is commonplace becomes novel, and vice versa. The same happens when we translate images into text, when oral traditions are brought to the page, when discourses in the vernacular (colloquial language) are transferred into scientific (formal) language, or when we attempt to “translate” or “interpret” the languages of other species, for example rendering the sounds or movements of animals or plants in words.

Translating from one language to another (interlingual translation, the second type) implies a process of transferring written texts from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL), carried out by a translator in a specific socio-cultural context. Translation cannot occur in a vacuum. The notion of unmediated and transparent translation, which derives from the Western concept of reality and representation, and can be traced back to classical Greek and Roman writings (Kelly, Robinson), is a fallacy. Translation is a communicative act, and as such it requires a) a speaker or translator who transports the message produced by the author, b) a message which reproduces the original or source text (ST) by producing a translated text (Target text or TT), and c) a recipient of the translated text.

Some questions may be raised at this point: what does the reader of a translated text know about the original text or its author? And, on the other hand, what does an author of a text know about its translation and new readers? Does the reader of a target text imagine, for instance, the same landscape as the reader of the original text?

As for the message, translation is never a mere transfer of words from one language to another. “I render not word-for-word but sense for sense,” St Jerome described his Bible translation strategy (quoted in Robinson 25), an approach that can still be seen today. The distinction between form and content has been a commonplace in the history of western translation theory over two thousand years, as also that between two ways of translating: “literal” and “free.” Its origin is to be found in two of the most-quoted authorities in translation theory, the Roman writer and philosopher Cicero and St Jerome. As Hatim and Munday (11) point out, in Classical times it was normal for translators working from Greek to provide a literal, word-for-word “translation,” which would serve as an aid to the Latin reader who, it could be assumed, was reasonably acquainted with the Greek source language. Cicero, describing his own translation of Greek orators in 46 BC, emphasized that he did not follow the literal “word-for-word” approach, but, as an orator, “sought to preserve the general style and force of the language” (quoted in Robinson 364). This strategy was also adopted by St Jerome.

A translated text (TT) is not necessarily an exact reproduction of what is contained in the original language text (ST). Anyone who has attempted a translation or has compared an original language text with its translation will have realized that the aforementioned assumption—a TT is a reproduction of a ST—often turns out to be an idealized view of translation. Even in scientific texts, despite the desired objectivity, the translation of certain terms is conditioned by the cultural framework and the scientific paradigm in which the translator carries out his/her work. In spite of all this, translation is practiced on a daily basis, and readers tend to trust in translated texts.

As for the recipients of translations, what do readers of the TT know about the translator, the architect of this linguistic transfer? Has the translator tried to give the text the same function, or to produce the same effect in its new context? Or, considering it from another angle, has he tried to adapt the translated text to its new environment? Has the translator made himself visible, or has he remained invisible? Has he sought out collaboration with the author? Has he put his own ethical principles before those of the author of the original text? Has he tried to reach out to the new culture, or has he chosen

to remain devoted to the original text? Ultimately, since there is no such thing as an ‘innocent’ translation, how has the translator intervened in the text?

Lawrence Venuti speaks of “domestication” and “foreignization,” (*The Scandals* n.p.), Susan Levine of the “translator-collaborator” (n.p.), Loffredo and Perteghella see translation as an activity which is closely related to creative writing (n.p.), Maria Tymoczko calls attention to the influence of ideologies on the translator in the translated text (writing on the “stance and positionality of the translator,” n.p.), and Carol Maier speaks of the conscious intervention of the translator as an ethical agent who contributes to social change (describing the translator as an “intervenient being,” n.p.), while Hu Gengshen introduces the term “eco-translatology,” providing the following definition:

Eco-Translatology: An Ecological Approach to Translation Studies. Eco-translatology is viewed as an ecological approach to Translation Studies with an interdisciplinary orientation. In the light of the affinity and isomorphism between translational ecosystems and natural ecosystems, Eco-translatology regards the scene of translation as a holistic translational eco-system, and focuses on the relationship between the translator and the translational eco-environment. (Hu, *Perspectives* 289)

As Hu emphasizes, with the rapid modernization of society and development of the world economy, the word “ecology” has gained global attention, And ecology has already been combined with other subjects, e.g. in ecological aesthetics, ecological politics, ecophilosophy, ecological economics and ecolinguistics. It is only natural that scholars should approach translation activities from the angle of ecology.

Ecotranslatology applies the principles of adaptation and selection from Darwin’s evolutionary theory to Translation Studies. Hu proposes a theory of translation in which adaptation and selection are key elements that guide the translator’s choices. His theory provides a new interpretation of the nature, process and standards of translation. Translation is a language activity, language is a part of culture, culture is a result of human activity, and human activity is part of the natural world. There is therefore a meaningful chain:

Translation → language → culture → human activity → natural world

This chain can be reversed:

Natural world → human activity → culture → language → translation

Recognition of the interconnection between the different spheres is important because it explains why principles applicable in the natural world are also pertinent to studies in the humanities, including translation. Each translator makes different adaptations and selections, which are determined by the restrictions of his or her translational eco-environment. Many different versions/translations are thus possible. There is no inherent superiority or inferiority among the translations carried out in different translational eco-environments. The sole criterion for assessing a TT must be whether the translation adapts the ST successfully to its new translational eco-environment. If it is adapted, it will survive; otherwise, it will be eliminated. So, the goal is achieving successful translations by making adaptive selections and selective adaptations.

Neither the importance of translation in general nor its significance for environmental studies should be underestimated. Human societies are slowly being transformed from industrial into ecological civilizations. In key documents, discussion of “landscape,” or “the environment,” and “ecology” is commonplace, but there is rarely any reference to questions relating to the transfer of these concepts from one area of study to another or from one language to another, or any comment on addition or loss of meaning. The connotations of these words can however shift from one discipline to another, from one area of study to another, and certainly from one language to another.

A few classic examples may illustrate the complexity of the issue. Yi-Fu Tuan has a four page chapter on “wilderness” in his book *Topophilia* (1974), in which he uses the term “wilderness” thirty-four times. The Spanish translation of the chapter uses thirteen different words to translate “wilderness,” indicating the lack of a direct equivalent. The concept, with all its denotations and connotations, does not exist in Spanish (Valero Garcés, “Reflexiones” n.p.). A second example can be found in the title of Antonio Machado’s classic literary work, *Campos de Castilla*. It has been translated as *Lands of Castile and Other Poems* (2002), *The Landscape of Castile: Poems by Antonio Machado* (2004), and (in a bilingual edition) *Fields of Castile/Campos de Castilla* (2007). Three translations, three different terms: “lands,” “landscape,” and “fields,” each with specific connotations. “Fields” is the most literal, but even then, this choice may not suggest to many non-Spanish readers the small irregular patches of “pardo,” which characterize Castile. In Castile, “pardo” also designates the colour of greyish brown parched dirt, a colour which has no adequate translation into other languages (Valero Garcés, “Walden” 545-555).

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak provides an example of the translator’s consciousness of active selection and adaptation in a note in her preface to Mahasweta Devi’s *Imaginary Maps*. Explaining her relationship with the author and using about the term “authorized translation,” she concludes:

Sijit Mukherjee has also complained – and this is particularly important for us readers who are looking for Eastern local flavour or Indian endorsement – that the English of my translation is not “sufficiently accessible to readers in this country [India]” (19). This may be indeed true, but may not be sufficient grounds for complaint. I am aware the English of my translations belongs more to the rootless American-based academic prose than the more subcontinental idiom of my youth. This is an interesting question, unique to India: should Indian texts be translated into the English of the subcontinent? I think Sijit Mukherjee is begging rather than considering this question. (Spivak xxiii)

J. M. Coetzee comments similarly in an essay on his translation into English of a Dutch poem by Gerrit Achterberg:

It is in the nature of the literary work to present its translator with problems for which the perfect solution is impossible [...] There is never enough closeness between languages for formal features of a work to be mapped across from one language to another without shift of value [...] Something must be “lost;” that is, features embodying certain complexes of values must be replaced with features embodying different complexes of values in the target language. At such moments the translator chooses in accordance with his [sic] conception of the whole – there is no way of simply translating the words. These choices are based, literally, on preconceptions, pre-judgement, prejudice. (Coetzee and Attwell 20)

Examples from disciplines other than Translation Studies can also be found. Lynch remarks that a landscape shapes and influences the development and use of the words used to describe it. For example, some cultures have developed extensive vocabularies to describe variations of rain, snow or wind, while others lack a precise vocabulary to describe processes that may not occur frequently in the geographic region of their use.

Terry Tempest Williams writes in *Red. Passion and Patience in the Desert*: "The relationship between language and landscape is a marriage of sound and form, an oral geography, a sensual topography, what draws us to place and keeps us there. Where we live is the center of how we speak" (136).

In their article "Greenpeace Greenspeak: A Transcultural Discourse Analysis", Heinz, Cheng and Inuzuka (16-36) examine the construction of environmental issues on Greenpeace web pages in China, Japan and Germany. After presenting and analyzing numerous readings they conclude that the environment is conceptualized in varying, inconsistent and overlapping ways on these web pages and illustrate the discursive weight of implicit social and natural hierarchies:

The Japanese term environment [*kankyo*] is more frequently used than the term nature [*shizen*], which connotes wild nature. Given that most Japanese people lead urban lives now, the concept *kankyo* may be closer to their personal life experience than the notion of *shizen*. The Japanese sites appear to invoke guilt as a major motivation for mobilizing action. In contrast, the concept of nature created on the Chinese sites invokes the notion of unspoiled, pure state of nature. An emotional appeal to protect unspoiled nature is also a strong aspect of the German discourse. (31)

The authors thus show that the Greenpeace web pages in Germany, Japan and China attempt to localize global environmental issues, by tapping into the linguistics and cultural registers of their local constituencies. They add: "Although Greenpeace is a global organization working on global issues, varying approaches to environmental activism and protection are transported, sometimes distorted, and more often offered in seemingly unproblematic parallel existence" (33). This leads them to the conclusion that the localized nature of environmental discourses does not necessarily lead to more effective activism or increase the ecolinguistic repertoire. They also criticize contemporary environmental activists' discourse because—in their own words—"it reflects an "Epicurean vision of non-deterministic reasoning, and rarely acknowledges the primary role of perception and sensation in understanding ourselves beyond our corporal boundaries" (34). The authors suggest the incorporation of older discourses about humans and their place in nature to relieve what they call some of the "21st-century myopia" that affects, paradoxically, the "new" discourses of global activism, and they argue that environmental activists should "work harder, discursively, to point to the real differences among such experiences, especially when environmental discourse and activism rely strongly on the internet" (34). To this we would add "if they rely on translation."

At this point, to refer to the concept of ideology as seen in Translation Studies seems pertinent. For Hatim and Mason, ideology encompasses "the tacit assumptions, beliefs and value systems which are shared collectively by social groups" (144). They make a distinction between "the ideology of translating" and "the translation of ideology." Whereas the former refers to the basic orientation chosen by the translator

operating within a social and cultural context, in the translation of ideology they examine the extent of mediation supplied by a translator of sensitive texts. “Mediation” is defined as “the extent to which translators intervene in the transfer process, feeding their own knowledge and beliefs into processing the text” (Hatim and Mason 147).

These issues have been tackled in the articles that compose this special issue on translating environmental texts. In spite of their different focuses and conceptual premises, the essays presented here share a common purpose. They are written in different languages both to exemplify the importance of translation and also to expose the reader to other languages and conceptions of the world.

The collection starts with a contribution by Francisco Páez de la Cadena Tortosa. In “La *conversio* de Agustín en las *Confesiones* traducida por Petrarca como una *imitatio* humanista” (“Augustine’s *conversio* in the *Confessions* translated by Petrarch as a humanist *imitatio*”), Páez de la Cadena analyses Petrarch’s famous letter to Dionigi da Borgo recounting his ascent of Mont Ventoux in 1336. The letter is included in the collection *Familiarum rerum libri*, and has often been considered the beginning of a new look at nature as landscape, which marked the end of the medieval period and the emergence of the Renaissance. Páez de la Cadena argues that Petrarch’s experience can be understood as a “triple translation” of Augustine’s *Confessions*, not as a mere replica. The triple translation is seen in the transposition of a literary model in the ST to a highly personal situation, in the emulation of the spiritual journey of the original while reinterpreting its stages and consequences, and in the creation of a phenomenological text that can be understood as an empirical appropriation of nature, against the backdrop of Augustine’s text. His main conclusion is that the letter constitutes a humanist *imitatio*: while it is a true vehicle for the meaning and spirit of Petrarch’s experience, it simultaneously reveals itself as a narrative “translation” of Augustine’s text.

The second essay, “Landscapes in Translation: Traveling the Occupied Palestinian territories and Israel with Raja Shehadeh and David Grossman” by Charles Zerner, investigates the translation of raw terrain and territory (rocks, streams, canyons, packs of wild dogs and clusters of cyclamen) into two parallel, contrapuntal, and mutually referential forms of textualized landscape: Israeli nature, landscape, and travel in Grossman’s *To the End of the Land* and Palestinian landscape as figured in Raja Shehadeh’s *Palestinian Walks: Forays into a Vanishing Landscape*. The author examines Shehadeh’s and Grossman’s translations of the same topoi: olive groves, paths in woods, wildlife, wildflowers, wild dogs and their behaviour, streams, footpaths, memorials, walls, and checkpoints. It investigates how topographical facts on the map and on the ground are differentially translated, transformed and moved into distinctive national natures and moving landscapes. Two main issues call for our attention: first, the cultural and psychological scars of Israeli and Palestinian historical relations over land, boundaries, and political control are saturated in landscape descriptions and narratives of “walking the land.” And secondly, the analysis of the way Shehadeh’s and Grossman’s *personal histories* of “the situation” have interfered with, influenced, been carried over and translated into these landscapes and travel narratives.

The third essay, written in Spanish by the Chinese Yu Zeng, with the title “La naturaleza y Zen en la traducción de los poemas de Han Shan” (“Nature and Zen in the Translation of Han Shan's Poems”) takes us to a new universe of metaphors and spiritual experiences. *Zen*, which was founded by Bodhidharma in the late 5th century, is one of the ten principal schools of Chinese Buddhism. Yu Zeng analyses some of the poems by Hanshan, one of the most famous Chinese poets in the Tang dynasty. Hanshan withdrew from the lay world to Mount Tiantai, lived there as a hermit and wrote approximately three hundred poems. Most of these are concerned with his understanding of Zen spiritual development. Through description of the environment and use of natural images that serve as metaphors of the spiritual way, Hanshan's poems produce an artistic rendering of Zen. They fuse religion with literary aesthetics, introducing elements of cultural and linguistic distance in the translation process. Yu Zeng investigates the possibility of reproducing not only the content but also the spirit of the poem in the target language.

Isabel Duran and Katia Peruzzo take us back to an example of interlingual translation with their essay in Italian, “I testi turistici sulle aree naturali protette in italiano e spagnolo: un compito semplice per il traduttore?” (“Translating Spanish-Italian protected natural areas: an easy task?”). Their main objective is to identify mistranslations in Spanish-Italian environmental texts and improve communication between these two languages by allowing source and target text recipients to share the same reality. In the process of translating between two languages as close as Italian and Spanish, translators frequently come across terms which seem at first glance to be perfect translation equivalents, but which can lead to misunderstandings. The authors analyze a corpus of Spanish and Italian texts (both ST and TT) dealing with protected natural areas, with the aim of providing a systematic description of the differences and similarities at conceptual and lexical level in the environmental domain. Their description is based on a series of questions concerning the type of area protected, the (national, regional, local) institutions designating such areas, the limitations of use of the protected areas, the relevance and consequences of their level of protection, and so forth. By answering such questions, the authors detect the peculiarities of these culturally-embedded terms. Then they analyze the strategies of domestication and foreignisation (Venuti, *The Scandals* n.p.) adopted by the translators, and the effect produced in the target audience.

In his essay “The Meanings of Landscape: Historical Development, Cultural Frames, Linguistic Variation, and Antonyms,” Werner Bigell and Cheng Chang call attention to a fundamental element in the activity of translating and a key area in Translation Studies: terminology. They concentrate on the term “landscape” and the “new” meanings given to it in the last few decades, as “landscape” has widened its meaning from vista to area of activity. The semantic shift can also be seen in the two antonyms of landscape, anti-landscape and non-landscape. Noting that different languages give expression to different conceptions of landscape, and taking as a reference point the medieval northern European understanding of landscape as territory, they seek to demonstrate that different academic fields generate different

assumptions about landscape, especially when it comes to the question of how landscape influences culture.

In “Del lago a la montaña: La traducción del sentido trágico unamuniano a través del valor simbólico del paisaje cultural” (“From the Lake into the Mountain: Translating the Unamunian Tragic Sense across the Symbolic Value of the Cultural Landscape”), Manuel de la Cruz Recio analyses three translations into German of the Spanish philosopher Unamuno’s novel *San Manuel Bueno, mártir* (1933), focusing on the interpretation of nature in an existential and cultural sense. This analysis is preceded by an exhaustive study of the symbolic value of the natural elements in *San Manuel Bueno, mártir*. In this novel, Unamuno’s existential contradiction is expressed through the intra-history of the characters and depiction of the cultural landscape, and the village of Valverde de Lucerna.

Before translating, de la Cruz Recio raises questions such as: how does the translator-reader identify and reproduce the symbolic value of nature at different moments in history? And: what kind of historical and cultural connotations do elements like a lake or a mountain have in Spanish and German culture? This novel reflects the human paradox of believing or not, in the consciousness of the Unamunian historical “self” that emerges throughout an indirect narrative, in which the symbolism of nature and the constraints of the civilized world are in constant opposition. Elements in the novel possessing symbolic value include the scenery at the lake of Sanabria (in the village of San Martín de Castañeda), the ruined convent of Bernardos’ and the mountain (Peña del Buitre). These represent the most profound and intimate aspect of Unamunian consciousness, typical of Generación del 98’s Spain, and they present a challenge for the translator.

Conclusion

What this collection of essays shows is that there can be little doubt as to the importance, delicacy and complexity of the translator’s profession, and the types of competence required by those who work between languages and cultures. It takes us from reflection on the transfer of concepts or environmental metaphors and their implications, via review of the differences between the images generated by different cultures, analysis of the translation of humanistic texts about nature and the environment and the tensions and difficulties generated when translating, to comparison of translations of scientific and humanistic discourse related to environment. Research on these issues may be of value in enhancing professional awareness of the role of translation in the development of the environmental humanities.

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