

Translating and Interpreting Justice in a Postmonolingual Age

Edited by

Esther Monzó-Nebot

Universitat Jaume I, Spain

&

Juan Jiménez-Salcedo

Universidad Pablo de Olavide, Spain

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Chapter 1

Introduction.

Translation and postmonolingualism

Esther Monzó-Nebot & Juan Jiménez-Salcedo

The evolution of our world has resulted in diverse social and political communities whose will to grow stronger together has nourished a shared culturally diverse present. International organizations and international cooperation have developed at a healthy pace over the last century and have brought about the most complex system of global organization to ever inhabit the planet. However, current demographic flows caused by political upheavals, war conflicts, climate change, and the demolition of boundaries in the labor market have increased the tempo of demographic changes at an unprecedented rate and have at times overwhelmed the capacity of international organizations and domestic systems to develop efficient social policies and to empower modern citizens to deal with an increasing diversity. Evidence-based approaches and strategies to refocus, streamline, repair and rebuild community policies are required to successfully cater to diversity in sustainable ways. Our social spaces have become a meeting point of a myriad of languages and cultures, whose diversity is only expected to increase (Cornelius and Rosenblum 2005), and personal histories of mobility and diaspora have multiplied, invigorating the complexities of both our identities and our possibilities.

These social changes have been mirrored by academic efforts to describe and explain the intricacy of current social and personal experiences. One of the tools developed to describe our present contexts is postmonolingualism. Based on Gogolin's ideas on multilingualism (1994), Yildiz coined the term in 2012 to defy the urge to cast unified linguistic systems onto identities that develop in liminal cultural spaces. Having just one mother tongue is no longer the norm. Feeling, thinking, and interacting following the logic of one culture can no longer be reasonably expected. And yet the impact of monolingualism on individuals' lives (Gogolin 2009) and cultural production and dissemination (Yildiz 2012) lingers on establishing *normality* – in a Foucaultian sense (see Foucault 1975) – as the only acceptable choice. For centuries, languages had

been the backbones of political spaces and creative subjectivities. Languages are still used to identify cultures, grant nationalities and define the limits of authority. However, the 21st century is being defined by a normal coexistence of diverse languages, cultures and identities in shared physical and online spaces. Since the times where Sennett defined a city as a site where “strangers are likely to meet” (1978, p. 39), our experience with strangeness has only increased. Step by step, we are keeping up with an empirical world that urges us to challenge a monolingual spirit hindering our social, political, cultural, moral, and personal evolutions. Postmonolingualism allows us to question the moral and social authority derived from any particular language, nation, religion, cultural values, abilities, gender, or sexual orientation. A postmonolingual world thus demands key concepts such as justice, equality, freedom and democracy to be reexamined.

Coming from minoritized identities in an assimilationist State, the editors of this volume saw in postmonolingualism a tool for challenging heteronomous boundaries and authority policies. The Translation and Postmonolingualism (TRAP) research group, established at Universitat Jaume I, Spain, has taken upon the task of revealing monolingual paradigms in all areas of society and contesting their drive for normalization, from global to local societal efforts. In partnership with Linguapax International, TRAP acts as a hub for developing descriptive approaches, identifying actionable issues and providing policy recommendations to address the needs of our new complexities for diverse and super-diverse societies (Vertovec 2007) to thrive in a global environment striving for political recognition and contesting the populist majoritarianism (Grigoriadis 2018) that endangers the progress of just and plural societies.

Diversity is enshrined in a number of international instruments, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNGA 2015) or the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO 2001), as a value to be protected. Yet, the means to achieve mutual understanding in diverse populations and the sustainability of such understanding are overwhelmingly lacking in the formulation of the policy instruments leading international efforts. TRAP works on the conviction that recognition at a global level requires hard evidence of the traps posited by the monolingual design of policies impacting social cooperation, of the efficiencies of postmonolingualism in ensuring prosper intergroup relations and of the returns of proactive translation and interpreting policies in achieving sustainable diversity. Translation and interpreting are necessary means to ensure inclusive dialogue, enhance intercultural and intergroup understanding, inspire respect for difference, raise awareness as to the requirements of political recognition for all identities and lead the way towards effective social justice.

Justice is indeed a value at the core of this book and of TRAP's work. From differing perspectives, the contributions collected in this volume oppose majority as the source of legitimacy and see political recognition as the basis of any system truthfully concerned with democracy (Beetham 2017). Against the background of increasingly diverse societies, the path towards equal representation is by no means led by an easy track and needs to be firmly grounded in awareness and negotiation of differences. This negotiation is at the base of contractualist views on justice, which see justice as fairness and underscore the role of institutions in positive distribution to correct morally arbitrary inequalities (Rawls 1971), that is, the privilege with which specific genders, languages, religions, capacities, ethnic or family origins are born and allowed to develop in society. Social justice is thus understood as an institutionally led active process of reenfranchisement and, within this framework, translation and interpreting are processes ensuring that all individuals can first have a real option to participate in the political life to negotiate the social contract they will be bound by and, second, exercise their rights on equality with others without sacrificing their differences. It is translation and interpreting that can advance communication of and within diversity, by affording voices in languages that can be heard where they need to reach, but also by lending and investing in understanding between identities so that monolingual paradigms can be overwritten and diversity can be sustained.

As a defining feature of identity¹ and the vehicle for the naturalization of narratives constructing identities and intergroup relations, language is a cornerstone for our work. TRAP focuses on achieving social and political impact by creating knowledge on current contexts of diversity and on the problems derived from and created by monolingual approaches to social organization. Addressing the different situations of verbal and sign languages and exploring the possibilities of verbal and non-verbal linguistic uses, TRAP develops postmonolingual approaches and solutions to improve intergroup and intercultural relations emphasizing the merits of multicultural understanding in different settings.

Among such settings, educational institutions are at the basis of developing a sustainable understanding for future generations. TRAP's research in this area focuses on developing plurilingual competence in elementary and secondary school students through the integration of migrants' languages into school activities. The exposition to and explicitation of linguistic diversity contributes to the development of positive attitudes towards global and

¹ See Stokes (2017), where language is reported by a majority of citizens as the most prominent criterion in accepting immigrants.

multicultural environments and the active countering of intolerant narratives (and the myths and symbols enshrined in those narratives) by the students, who nurture positive views on diversity. The components of global (OECD 2016) and intercultural (Hammer 2015) competence are thus developed in youngsters within the framework of a postmonolingual society (Marzà and Ríos 2016).

A second area of research in the work of TRAP focuses on court and police settings. The processes where cognitive biases are activated in interaction are analyzed against the background of power imbalances that impact the ability of individuals to participate in communicative encounters. From the roles defined by deontological codes and uncritically accepted (by interpreters, police mediators or social workers) to the confirmation bias (Wason 1960; 1968) that discards information which may challenge intergroup and intercultural prejudices, or the impact of intragroup affinity and intergroup hostility on governance, communicative tools (including the explicitation of cultural knowledge and uses of nonverbal language) are exploited to level the ground and improve intergroup and intercultural understanding in mediated situations for interpreters, translators, educators, social workers, law-enforcement and judicial agents, especially focusing on minoritized languages and disprivileged groups (Monzó-Nebot and Jiménez-Salcedo 2017).

Following the first formulations of postmonolingualism, a third strand of research focuses on the translation of literary and audiovisual products where conflicts among monolingualisms are fictionalized and made visible, and where translators show a tendency to normalize, simplify and misrepresent identities (Molines Galarza 2017). The interaction between dominant and minoritized languages in literature relating multilingual experiences in Nazi concentration camps or the creation of new languages to allow identities to resist the disciplines marked by hegemonic sociocultural systems are brought in focus to disentangle the components of the postmonolingual condition.

This volume collects contributions from authors who conduct research within those areas and that encourage us to enjoy our postmonolingual condition while critically examining the restraints imposed by monolingualism. The present book is an attempt to offer a compendium of views on the theoretical approaches and practical applications of postmonolingual policies in modern societies. The contents are structured in two parts. The first four chapters develop four different conceptual approaches to postmonolingualism as a tool to manage social diversity. Those first four chapters share a process-oriented approach to ethically responding to social demands through translation and interpreting. The second part comprises three chapters where practical solutions implemented in

multicultural contexts are examined from a postmonolingual mindset. Policies and efforts to foster social justice in postmonolingual societies through translation and interpreting are critically scrutinized, weaknesses and strengths are identified the lessons learned are further suggested as the basis for new initiatives that can enhance our experience of diversity.

After this introduction, translation and interpreting are contextualized in the times marked by diverse societies. In the first chapter, Esther Monzó-Nebot (“Translators and interpreters as agents of diversity. Managing myths and pursuing justice in postmonolingual societies”) highlights how a proactive translation and interpreting policy can enrich intergroup understanding and foster the principles of democracy and social justice. The dominant policies on intergroup relations and ideas of social justice are examined against the background of modern diverse societies and the need for modern humans to face and understand difference. The psychosocial factors affecting intergroup relations and the need for translators and interpreters to develop a metacognitive awareness of biases and a critical stance on intergroup conflict are presented as crucial in understanding and managing otherness in intergroup communication. Monzó-Nebot’s discussion of justice, diversity and translation highlights contributions that conceive of social justice as a process where the right of all identities to decide on our common future serves as the basis for understanding our differences.

Rosario Martín Ruano (“Unveiling and redressing inequality dynamics in legal and institutional translation: from symbolic violence to symbolic recognition”) focuses on a particularly influencing context, that of international and regional institutions and their impact on defining relations among languages and peoples. Martín Ruano stresses the asymmetries of the multicultural order and the contradictions present in translation practices that engender or perpetuate inequalities. By critically examining the discourse on legal and institutional translation, Martín Ruano identifies narratives and practices that exercise symbolic violence on linguistic minorities in the international arena. The author warns against the perils that translation and interpreting practices ideologically aligned with centers of power pose to diversity in postmonolingual societies.

Gernot Hebenstreit acknowledges the challenge posed by the use of translation and interpreting as power practices and, in his chapter (“Translating and interpreting cultures. Discussing translation and interpreting ethics in a postmonolingual age”), the author stresses the need to reach an agreement on the ethical stance from which translators and interpreters can better serve diverse societies. Hebenstreit signals the need to work on ethics at a conceptual and theoretical level and reviews Erich Prunč’s concept of ‘translation culture,’ a subsystem of a culture including all agents and

resources pertaining to translation and interpreting (Prunč 1997). Like any other culture, translation culture is defined by a set of common values guiding and organizing individual actions. The chapter sets value theory at the center of the discussion on translation culture, and two of the most widely known approaches to translation ethics – Chesterman’s (2001) and Prunč’s (2005) – are examined. After reviewing the values underpinning both proposals, Hebenstreit encourages the adoption of postmonolingual perspectives on translation and interpreting practices that stress values such as *ecologicality* and *cooperativeness* in pursuing a democratic translation culture.

Michael Cronin (“Translation and Climate Justice: Minority Perspectives”) expands the debate by including non-human considerations in the need to manage diversity in order to ensure social justice. In his chapter, Cronin explores the interactions between climate and human beings to stress the importance of taking climate change into account in understanding the dynamics and results of intercultural encounters. As a novel contribution, Cronin’s approach stresses the inclusion of non-human collectives in examining human actions, particularly in relation to climate justice, thus enriching the intergroup understanding which lies at the core of translation and interpreting ethics.

De Pedro Ricoy, Andrade Ciudad and Howard are the authors of the first contribution in this volume to describe practical experiences using translation and interpreting policies to manage diversity (“The role of indigenous interpreters in the Peruvian intercultural, bilingual justice system”). This particular chapter focuses on the training of indigenous translators and interpreters in Peru in developing a State-based strategy for providing access to translation and interpreting in the justice system. Situations of conflict between the myriad of cultural traditions sharing the country are used to highlight the problems of a multicultural society with patent power imbalances between different ethnic groups, how translators and interpreters mediate such imbalances and the constraints imposed on and reactions triggered by their practices.

Shuang Li’s chapter (“Translation and Interpreting Policies in China: Ethnic Linguistic Minorities in the Judicial System”) describes the translation and interpreting policies practiced in China to provide access to justice to national linguistic minorities. Disparities between legislation and practices are highlighted using a complexity approach that considers translation management, translation practices, and translation beliefs as interrelated aspects in determining the possibilities of minoritized communities.

Jiménez Salcedo (“The asymmetry of Canada’s language policy regarding access to justice: a model for managing postmonolingualism”) describes the

evolution of the Canadian court system's stance on translation and interpreting. This chapter suggests that two sets of rights, one for speakers of the country's official languages and one for allophone communities, imply a conception of linguistic rights as second to procedural guarantees and a perception of translation and interpreting as imperfect solutions for adequate access to justice.

The purpose of the book is to afford insights into the interdependence between translation and our postmonolingual condition to inform current discussions on diversity. The different contributors offer varying theoretical perspectives and practical approaches that can shed light on the issues inherent in managing linguistically and culturally complex societies. All of these approaches and experiences converge in the idea that modern societies cannot provide an environment where all their integrating identities have a real possibility to thrive without translation and interpreting. Our diversities are here to stay and their management is our shared responsibility and common endeavor.

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List of contributors

Esther Monzó-Nebot is an Associate Professor at the Translation and Communication Studies Department of Universitat Jaume I, where she is the director of the Master's Program in Translation and Interpreting Research, coordinates the research group "Translation and Postmonolingualism" (TRAP), and the legal and administrative language section of *Revista de Llengua i Dret / Journal of Language and Law*. She is a member of the Research Institute in Feminist and Gender Studies and of the Research Institute in Valencian Philology. Between 2013 and 2015 she was a Professor at the Translation and Interpreting Studies Department of the University of Graz, Austria. She has been a practicing translator at the United Nations, the World Trade Organization and the World Intellectual Property Organization. She has published on the sociological and textual aspects of legal and institutional translation and interpreting, computer-aided translation and translation and interpreting training. Her current research focuses on the psychosocial aspects of translation and interpreting.

Gernot Hebenstreit holds a doctoral degree in translation studies and is working as a senior researcher at the Institute of Translation Studies at the University of Graz, Austria. He is a member of the technical committee on Terminology and Language Resources at the Austrian Standards Institute and of ISO TC 37. His areas of teaching comprise translation theory, translation ethics, terminology theory and management, information technologies and translation. His research interests include translation theory, terminology of translation studies, translation ethics, multimodal translation, terminology theory, terminological analysis and modeling of concepts and conceptual structures.

Juan Jiménez-Salcedo is an Associate Professor at the Department of Translation and Philology at Pablo de Olavide University (Seville, Spain), where he co-directs the Research Seminar on Gender and Cultural Studies. He holds a PhD in Humanities from François Rabelais University in Tours (France) and a PhD in French Language and Literature from the Basque Country University (Spain). He taught at the University of France-Comté (France) between 2005 and 2007. In 2009 he was a post-doctoral researcher at the Centre for Ethnic Studies at the University of Montreal (Canada) and in 2017 was a Visiting Professor at the University of Mons (Belgium). His recent research interests lie in the fields of interpreting in public services (primarily

in the courts), language policies in Canada and Catalan-speaking territories, French-Catalan and French-Spanish legal translation, and legal and administrative drafting in these languages.

Luis Andrade Ciudad is an Assistant Professor at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Peru. His research focuses on Andean linguistics and language contact.

M. Rosario Martín Ruano (GIR Traducción, Ideología, Cultura) teaches translation at the University of Salamanca. Her research interests include legal and institutional translation, translation theory, gender studies and postcolonial critique. She has published several books, anthologies and essays on these issues, including *El (des)orden de los discursos: la traducción de lo políticamente correcto* (2003, Granada: Comares), *Translation and the Construction of Identity* (2005, Seoul: IATIS, co-edited with Juliane House and Nicole Baumgarten), *Traducción, política(s), conflictos: legados y retos para la era del multiculturalismo* (2013, Granada: Comares, co-edited with María Carmen África Vidal Claramonte), and *Traducción, medios de comunicación, opinión pública* (2016, Granada: Comares, co-edited with María Carmen África Vidal Claramonte). She is also a practicing translator.

Michael Cronin is Professor of French (1776) at Trinity College Dublin. He received his BA from Trinity College Dublin, his MA from University College Dublin and his PhD from Trinity College Dublin. He taught in the Université of Tours, the École Normale Supérieure (Cachan) and was Director of the Centre for Translation and Textual Studies at Dublin City University. He is an elected Member of the Royal Irish Academy, the Academia Europaea and is an Officer in the Ordre des Palmes Académiques. His research interests cover a wide range of topics and currently focus on developing eco-criticism in relation to modern languages and translation, exploring the notion of 'translation trauma' in relation to population displacement and investigating language identities as mediated through travel.

Raquel de Pedro Ricoy holds a PhD in Arts (Translation) from the University of Edinburgh and is Chair of Translation and Interpreting at the University of Stirling, UK. Previously, she was an Associate Professor at Heriot-Watt University, UK, and has also worked as a freelance translator and interpreter. Her current research interests focus on the sociocultural dimensions of translation and interpreting, and the role of both these activities in public-service delivery, especially in post-colonial contexts.

Rosaleen Howard is Chair of Hispanic Studies in the School of Modern Languages at Newcastle University, UK. She was previously Senior Lecturer at the Institute of Latin American Studies, University of Liverpool, UK. Her research focuses on the Quechua language, linguistic anthropology and

sociolinguistics of the Andes. She has published widely on Quechua storytelling and oral history; anthropological approaches to the study of language contact, especially translation issues; language politics and cultural identity in the Andes; and intercultural education policy for indigenous peoples.

Shuang Li is a PhD candidate in the Translation Studies Research Unit of the Faculty of Arts at KU Leuven. She is currently a PhD candidate and works on China's current translation policies towards minority languages under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Reine Meylaerts. With Duoxiu Qian and Reine Meylaerts, she has published papers on this topic (in *Perspectives*, with Duoxiu Qian and Reine Meylaerts and in a collective volume edited by E. Monzó and J. Jiménez). She has regularly presented her work on China's translation policy at international academic conferences.

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