Book Review


We live in an interconnected world in which globalization, the fast circulation of information through technology and digital communication, and the rapid spread of virtual communities beyond the physical boundaries of time and space make of intercultural exchanges a pervasive everyday experience. Translation has always been a privileged space of contact between individuals from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, “a builder of bridges, an extender of horizons” that allow people “to go beyond the borders of the world staked out by their own language” (House, 2014: 2). Translation is thus more than just a transfer of information from one language to another, from one person to another, it is a form of intercultural communication in which the context of situation is of absolute relevance for the participants in the speech event, including translators acting as cross-cultural mediators.

A prime on context in the study of translation is given in the volume written by Daria Dayte, Miriam Locher and Thomas Messerli, who locate their work within an interpersonal pragmatics frame and apply a descriptive approach to translation with the aim to explore how contemporary pragmatics theories and tools can be useful to investigate this fascinating locus of research. While acknowledging that previous studies in translation have extensively dealt with pragmatic concepts and phenomena, mostly from a contrastive, cross-cultural and intercultural perspective, the authors narrow the scope of the volume to the less explored area of ‘pragmatics in translation’ by opting for a pragmatics angle on translation processes and outcomes, thus “shifting the focus from a central interest in translation to a central interest in pragmatics” (p. 3).

Three key analytical issues are introduced in Chapter 1, namely ‘mediality’, intended as the multimodal contexts in which translation occurs and the influence of the medium on linguistic choices and outcomes; ‘participation...
framework’, accounting for the complex interplay of participants’ roles in communication, including the role of the translator as (active) mediator between the sender of the message and the receiving audience; and ‘relational work’, the linguistic negotiation of societal norms in context to attend to interpersonal relations and identity construction, especially in the area of (im)politeness. These three key aspects are highlighted throughout the volume, both in the state-of-the-art reviews of specific translation types (Chapters 2, 3 and 4) and in two case studies presented in Chapters 5 and 6.

Chapter 2 focuses on translation “in the narrower sense” (p. 7), i.e., a written source text that is rendered into a written target text in a different language with the aim to reach semantic and pragmatic equivalence. A brief discussion on the concept of translation as communicative practice, in which the sociocultural contexts of both the source and the target text become key aspects, is the starting point for a more detailed presentation of participation framework and relational work. The authors conceive written translation as a process and a product situated in a context where all participating roles are equally important, including the recipients, and where the translator serves as indirect mediator and animator in Goffman’s (1981) sense to establish a contact between the writer and the readers of the translated text. As for relational work, the proposed shift is towards an interpersonal pragmatics perspective in translation that analyses the dynamics between text producers and receivers mediated by the renegotiation role of the translator, who establishes (im)politeness norms in translation keeping in mind the target context and the readers’ backgrounds and expectations.

Chapter 3 deals with interpreting, a type of translation produced and received in oral modality and under time pressure, which includes among others consecutive, dialogue and liaison interpreting, chuchotage and simultaneous conference interpreting. In terms of participation framework, Wadensjö’s (1998) adaptation of Goffman’s (1981) model is recalled as a productive tool of analysis in studies on community (non-professional) interpreting and courtroom interpreting, which show that interpreters are not mere reporters, but may act as recapitulators and responders, thus playing an active role in controlling the interaction, co-constructing meaning and introducing pragmatic shifts, for instance in the use of deictic personal pronouns. Similarly, interpreting in courtroom and televised political debates are presented as a fertile ground for politeness research on how face-threatening acts can be mitigated, aggravated or left unchanged by the interpreter. Fewer studies are identified by the authors in the recent literature that follow a discursive approach to relational work, mostly dealing with sign language interpreting. These studies provide interesting results on how shared knowledge and familiarity are
key elements for successful interpretation and management of interpersonal relations.

Audiovisual translation is explored in Chapter 4, where the authors propose a conceptualisation of translation processes and products within pragmatics. This approach conceives audiovisual texts as situated language use and pays attention not only to the comparison of original and translated utterances, but also to the communicative settings in which audiovisual artefacts are produced and received, as theorized by the pragmatics of fiction (see Locher and Jucker, 2017). Dubbing is compared with text translation and interpreting to outline similarities, and, above all, differences linked to the multimodality of telecinematic texts and their technical constraints (e.g., lip synchronization and voice replacement), which necessarily affect the reception of the target text by viewers. In turn, subtitling, a more overt translation type, allows viewers a direct access to the linguacultural otherness of the original text, its meaning, context and textuality, thus establishing yet another complex interplay of roles and relationships between author, translator, receiving audience and source/target texts and cultures. Very interesting is the distinction made between traditional professional subtitling and fansubbing, with the former regarded as a more ‘distant’ communication and the latter considered a type of volunteered community-internal translation, both influencing the meaning making process in their own ways.

The second part of the volume features two case studies, partly based on previously published work by the authors, aimed at providing the reader with more contextualized accounts of pragmatic phenomena in translation along the three key issues defined and developed in the preceding chapters. Each of the two case studies opens with a box that summarises the theoretical background, the type of data and the research questions. Chapter 5 is devoted to the expression and translation of the speech act of self-praise in interpreted high-stakes political discourse, with a focus on the English-Russian language pair. The data comprise the transcriptions of simultaneously interpreted press conferences, briefings and interviews in English and Russian carried out in both oral-to-oral mode and as simultaneous-with-text interpreting, where the translator also works on a written draft of the speech. The speech events are retrieved from the United Nations Web TV and the video news agency Ruptly and involve in-house participants as well as removed audiences of potential TV watchers, thus creating complex participant constellations. The theoretical underpinnings combine the ‘self-praise iceberg’ model and the relational work framework. In the iceberg model the speech act of self-praise is further classified as overt self-praise, expressed directly by the speaker, and covert self-praise, performed indirectly for instance by means of third party quoting.
or by sharing incontestable and observable facts. Within the relational work frame, self-praise is regarded as an interactional concept described in etic as well as emic terms along the continuum of unmarked polite/appropriate face-maintaining behaviour, positively marked face-enhancing behaviour (i.e., polite) and negatively marked face-aggravating behaviour (i.e., impolite/over-polite). The instances of self-praise are first automatically extracted from the transcriptions using specific corpus queries and then manually annotated in both the original and the translated texts. The coding scheme includes the translation of self-praise with no change in relational work, the omission of self-praise in translation, and the pragmatic shift in translation, either in terms of mitigation or aggravation of relational work. The findings show that self-praise occurs relatively frequently in both English and Russian source texts, as expected in a genre where countries’ achievements are reported, and is generally carried through to the target text with very few omissions. Interpreters tend to fully render self-praise without any shift in relational work, but very frequently they also mitigate the illocutionary force of the speech act, thus playing an active role in negotiating interactional norms. Finally, no statistically significant difference is found in the direction of translation from English to Russian and vice versa.

Chapter 6 takes the reader to the intriguing area of pragmatics in audiovisual translation with a focus on relational work in Korean TV drama subtitling. Fictional telecinematic artefacts are particularly apt for the study of (im)politeness norms, as they reproduce spontaneous face-to-face exchanges through a multimodal combination of linguistic and visual indexical cues that also contribute to characters’ identity construction. Transposing relational work across linguacultures, especially very distant ones like Korean and English (see pp. 46–48), posits a challenge to translators, who have to make choices that necessarily impact the reception and perception of interpersonal relations by the foreign audience. To explore such an interesting aspect of pragmatics in translation, the authors move from a large corpus of Korean TV dramas subtitled in English, complemented with a corpus of timed comments in English and other languages added by viewers while watching the episodes on the online streaming platform. Scenes featuring moments of relational work instantiated by the occurrence of lexicon related to (im)politeness or metacommunicative comments on (im)politeness are selected as units of analysis for the study (see example 6.1 on pp. 50–51). The findings show the pervasiveness of relational work in televised Korean drama, as a reflection of the importance given to (im)politeness and positioning in Korean society. As for translation, subtitlers act as cross-cultural mediators of the salient relational work negotiations in the source text by translating the fictional characters’ use of lexical items,
address terms and meta-comments, or by adding explanatory glosses that alert the international viewership of passages that are crucial for plot reasons and characterization. A very original contribution of the study is the analysis of timed comments made by viewers while watching the episodes, which adds another pragmatically rich dimension to the already multifaceted participation structure. Through their comments oriented towards the audiovisual product or to the fandom community, viewers express emotive stance, pick up on linguistic and multimodal cues, display knowledge of the source culture and show interest for it, thus acknowledging relational work issues and further shaping the original streamed videos with their own voices.

In the concluding Chapter 7, the authors briefly revisit the notion of translation by recalling the Prototype theory (Rosch, 1973) to include not only traditional written translation but also newer and more peripheral category members, such as phone translation apps or food-related sensual translation, under the common definition of translation as an act “facilitating understanding between participants with language as a key attribute” (p. 57). Future directions in pragmatics research specifically dealing with translation data and processes are also highlighted by means of boxes (pp. 60–65) that summarise potential fruitful issues and questions to be addressed and suggest appropriate data types and theoretical backgrounds to pursue the research objectives.

Pragmatics in Translation is a concise, well-written volume full of original and useful insights for both novices and experienced researchers that intend to approach this emerging area of study in translation. The seven chapters deal with self-contained yet interconnected topics, a structure which allows the reader to appreciate the book progressively as it unfolds or to focus on individual sections in isolation. Another point of strength are the numerous precise and valuable suggestions for further research in the concluding section. All in all, this volume has the merit to present with a clear, accurate prose the details of methodologically innovative avenues of research, which demonstrate how two apparently different disciplines, i.e., pragmatics and translation studies, can interrelate to shed light on language use. While the concept of mediality is left more in the background as a characteristic of the data, participation framework and relational work are looked at from different angles and applied to various language varieties, thus showing that these powerful theoretical tools can effectively uncover the complex interplay of forces that animate original as well as translated texts.

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References


