Translation as Social Justice. Translation Policies and Practices in Non-Governmental Organizations: Book Review

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Translation as Social Justice. Translation Policies and Practices in Non-Governmental Organizations, by W. Tesseur, Routledge, 2023, 179 pp., ISBN 9781032331317

INTRODUCTION

Research into the actual translation and interpreting practices in particular institutions has increased over the last two decades with attention being paid to the processes, agents, settings, and socio-cultural contexts in which translations are produced. However, research conducted so far has dealt predominantly with European Union institutions and the United Nations. Research activity into institutional translation and translation policy has not focused extensively on International Non-governmental Organizations' (INGOs) use of translation and interpreting services and how their language choices affect aspects of inclusion or exclusion from activities.

Wine Tesseur's book seeks to establish the missing link between INGOs' use of translation and interpreting and their proclaimed inherent values and operational goals of sustainable development and social justice. It presents unique insights into how INGOs plan for translation and interpreting needs and addresses salient questions on how translation and interpreting provision can serve as a solution and contribute to addressing power imbalances that are exacerbated by language difference. The research that underpins it is highly collaborative and intends to simultaneously raise awareness in INGOs of the link between inequalities, power, and language, and encourage INGOs to be more reflective of their translation and interpreting practices and opt for more inclusive solutions.

Key Concepts Discussed

The analysis is structured around three main concepts. First, language policy and translation policy. According on Bernard Spolsky (2004), language policy includes language management (the formulation of an explicit plan or policy, often written in a formal document), language practices (what people actually do), and language
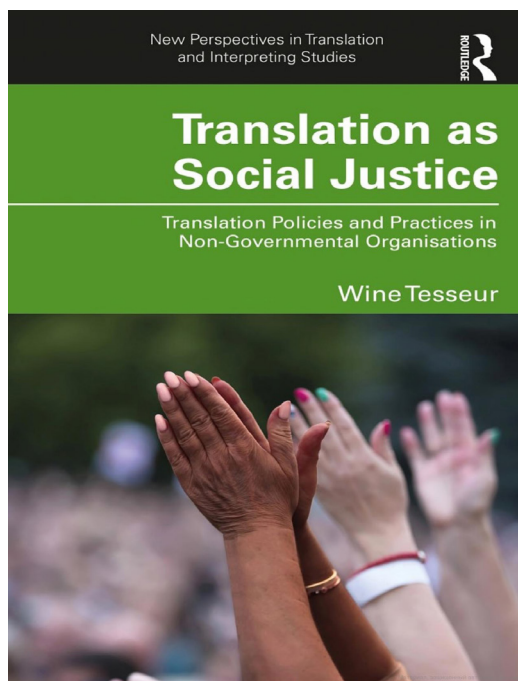
beliefs or ideology (what people think should be done). This broad definition allows the exploration of what actually happens in practice and what beliefs shape practices and management tools in INGOs.

Second, social justice. Bell (2016, p.4) considers social justices as "reconstructing society in accordance with principles of equity, recognition, and inclusion, thus envisioning a world in which resources are distributed in an equitable and ecologically sustainable way, and where all members are safe, recognized, and treated with respect". The concept is conceptualized in the book as both a process and a goal, i.e., social justice should not the final aim but should be sought through participatory processes, which are respectful of human diversity and which should be inclusive and affirm people's capacity and human agency.

Third, translation-as-empowerment. Here, translation is considered as a tool that can help people to gain better access to information, hold INGOs to account, and engage in equitable dialogue. The concept allows for the expression of the positive difference that translation can make. Through this concept, Tesseur is emphasizing that translation is about more than creating access, it is about actively choosing to support communication and meaning-making processes in local languages, where English and other lingua francas stop being the go-to language(s) for holding conversations and creating knowledge. Translation thus becomes a tool through which local communities can exercise their agency, and a means through which INGOs can actively choose to relinquish part of their power by challenging their own use of English as the default language of communication.

The discussions present a critical, robust account of translation and interpreting in INGOs from a social justice perspective by exploring the role that languages, translation and cultural knowledge play in policies and practices of development NGOs. Drawing on ethnographic data collected from research projects, the monograph provides new academic insights, produce practical outputs of use to the NGO sector, provide more systematic evidence of the positive difference that translation and interpreting efforts make to the work of INGOs. The general focus is on language and translation policies and practices in INGOs and how a variety of INGOs deal with language barriers and translation and interpreting needs.

CASE STUDIES AND MAIN ISSUES DISCUSSED

The Profile of Languages, Translation and Interpreting in INGOs

In the prologue, Tesseur presents key research insights from translation and interpreting studies, sociolinguistics, language policy, and anthropology that help to understand the role of languages, translation and interpreting in the INGO sector and the wider context that INGOs work in. For example, Federici et al. (2019) and Footitt et al. (2020) who assert that translation and interpreting are often an afterthought in disaster preparedness, emergency response, and the planning of development programs. The central argument is that languages and translation and interpreting are generally accorded a low profile in INGOs and not considered as central, inherent components that contribute to better outcomes. She argues that translation needs tend to have a low profile in the next stages of NGO programming as they are often overlooked in program monitoring and final evaluations. Another key challenge faced by translation and interpreting is budgetary as budgets for translation and interpreting is low and professional provision of translation and interpreting is limited while those who use their translation and interpreting skills are often not recognized or supported for their efforts. Tessuer argues that these practices may lead to inadequate outcomes from a social justice perspective. The body of research also reveals the link between power and privilege and speaking lingua francas, such as English, which helps explain some of the underlying ideologies that have led to INGOs' negligence of translation and interpreting needs.

Translation Management in INGOs Throughout History

Tesseur explores key questions around INGOs' gradual development of translation management through the creation of language and translation policy statements and internal translation services. She examines how INGOs have managed their translation needs throughout their organizational history and how the creation of INGOs' translation policy statements and their internal translation services relate to INGOs' social justice aims and values through a case study on Save the Children UK. The discussion reveals that, it was translation that provided the necessary information for campaigning, and which ultimately led to the foundation of Save the Children (p.27). She further explores the link between translation management decisions and underlying beliefs or orientations regarding the role of translation in the organizations under analysis. Although the textual data that she draws on is varied, the different resources are complementary. These include material from the Save the Children UK archives, the Oxfam GB archives. The ensuing discussions reveal that the three language orientations described by Ruíz (1984), i.e. language-as-resource (translation as a resource for effective messaging, organizational impact, and growth), language-as-right (translation to ensure accessibility and inclusion, representing a social justice approach), and language-as-problem (translation-as-risk) can all be found in the development of INGOs' translation management tools, although some of these orientations have exerted more influence than others. Evidence presented in the book reveals the following three points; Firstly, policy and other internal documents from INGOs tended to

acknowledge the importance of translation-as-resource for organizational growth and impact. Secondly, the orientation of translation as a tool for inclusion is present in some of the policy documents and other written outputs from translation staff, but again its implementation seems vague and is contradicted by the limited remit of INGOs' internal translation services. Finally, the orientation of (professional) translation as risk management seems to be the most dominant motivator to institutionalize translation services.

Language and Translation Policy in Amnesty International

As both an authoritative research institution on human rights and a global movement of human rights activists, Amnesty. encounters challenges in aiming to be a global organization with one message presented by many voices. Tessuer argues that it has been challenging for the organization to align the need for urgency and plurality, which is necessary for its local campaigning work, with the need to deliver a clear, well-researched message in an authoritative voice. She discusses the tension around these competing needs and the role that translation plays in communicating that message through a case study of the translation of quotations in Amnesty press releases.

The discussion illustrates that, concerns about the role of translation in Amnesty were also concerns about who could speak for Amnesty, who was losing power, and who would be allowed to speak in future. While some translators considered themselves as part of the category that would lose power and control, some attitudes and beliefs on translation and language from translators illustrated exactly why decentralization was needed in Amnesty if it truly wanted to be diverse, inclusive, and horizontal in its ways of working. Efforts to decentralize the organization and to expand translation services to more languages were received with much apprehension by staff in various locations. While some considered translation as a tool for risk-management, (to safeguard the organization from reputational loss or risks posed to human rights victims), others, such as local press officers saw translation as a means to an end, (a means to ensuring maximum organizational impact. Whatever the stance, there was a pressing need to adapt Amnesty's material, including its institutional voice, to the local level.

Managing Volunteer Translators

Tessuer interrogates the risks and consequences of relying on volunteers for translation in a set-up where translations are not subject to careful proof-reading, and what this means in light of social justice values. Through a case study of Urgent Actions (UAs), Tessuer examines into how Amnesty deals with the need for urgent translation in languages that fall outside the remit of its Language Resource Centre.

Amnesty is known for its 'letter writing' tactic in human rights campaigning which involves sending Urgent Actions to its global network of activists by letter, e-mail, SMS or tweets. Rapid translation plays a crucial role in spreading this information across the network of Amnesty activists, who speak a wide variety of languages. Tesseur illustrates how Amnesty International Flanders managed its translations of UAs into Dutch through a network of 80 volunteer translators. A look at the risk, ethics, and quality in volunteer translation demonstrates that, the translation management choices resulted in translations that contained a high level of inconsistencies and errors which affected the readability, clarity, and overall meaning of texts leading to human rights victims' stories not being accurately represented. Although staff recognized that the translations were low in quality in terms of inaccuracies and inconsistencies, they nevertheless defended the practice by arguing that, the translations were not a priority because they were perceived as low-risk due to their intended purpose and target audience. The study contributes additional insights to research on volunteer translation, ethics, and translation quality.

Language and Translation Ideologies in INGOs

Tesseur shifts the focus of attention away from the few IN-GOs that have internal, professional translation services to INGOs that have not developed an integrated approach to translation and interpreting. She questions why so many INGOs bypass translations as a suitable solution for interlingual communication and explores some of the language and translation ideologies that allow and legitimize the use of English as a lingua franca in an international sector that is heavily associated with social justice aims. Ideologically, she explores if staff conceive of translation as a necessary evil or rather as a helpful tool that could create more linguistically inclusive working practice arguing that, an individual's language and translation beliefs can have an influence on both practices and management although some actors have more agency or individual power than others when it comes to influencing language and translation practices and management. The two interviews analyzed give access to the underlying language and translation ideologies of two people in management positions in an INGO, who despite identifying similar language challenges considered entirely different solutions, including a very different view of the suitability of translation to overcome language barriers.

Ad Hoc and Informal Practices

Through case studies which touch on a range of different practices, contexts, and language needs in the work of IN-GOs, Tesseur explores the extent to which informal translation practices can serve as tools of empowerment while also reflecting on their downsides. The key challenges with informal translation practices are that while they may increase accessibility and dialogue, they often go hand in hand with an increase in potential risks to INGOs' program participants and staff including issues with privacy breaches or misunderstandings arising from inaccuracies in translation. Tes-

seur asserts that, finding solutions that can work as a tool for empowerment, and balance the need for accessibility, better dialogue, and ownership with minimal risk is central in developing approaches to translation and interpretation that adhere to INGOs' social justice values. The case study on COVID-19 illustrates that informal translation can lead to successful outcomes when they are part of a collaborative process. She concludes by declaring that, informal translation practices are, and will continue to be, an important part of INGOs' multilingual work, arguing that they are often better than no translation at all, and their absence would automatically lead to more exclusion. Nonetheless, the risks of relying on informal solutions should be carefully assessed in each individual case.

Ideas for a More Socially Just Approach to Language and Translation in INGOs

Drawing directly on her interaction with INGOs, Tesseur presents a menu of ideas or actions that INGOs could take to develop a more socially just approach to languages and translation. She focuses on actions that can be undertaken on two different levels of an organization: firstly, the development of an organization-wide language policy, and secondly, ideas that INGO staff can draw on to enhance their informal translation and interpreting provision. One of the major ideas advocated for is the need for a written policy statement. She argues that a written policy statement can be a helpful instrument to set out basic agreements and guidelines on the use of language and translation in an organization. Although creating a written policy does not automatically lead to policy implementation, nor does policy creation necessarily lead to policy visibility, nevertheless, policy development can help to set a baseline and offer clarity regarding who has responsibility for what.

Key Findings

The research date presented points to the fact that INGOs' internal growth and processes of decentralization have influenced their translation and interpreting needs. For some INGOs, this has led to changes in the way they manage translation and interpreting provision. The study emphasizes that the institutionalization of translation through developing language or translation policies and through establishing internal translation departments mainly serves UK head offices and prioritizes translation into former colonial languages.

The research data also illustrates that INGOs' choices of translation and interpreting provision depends on the target languages (strategic lingua francas vs. local languages), the materials for translation, and the target audiences (external communication, such as press releases or research reports vs. materials intended for internal networks and collaborators, or guidelines for staff and partner organizations).

While some organizations make use of the services of professional translators, the study reveals that ad hoc, informal practices constitute the bulk of translation and interpreting activity in INGOs. They are often relied on because they are more practical, affordable, or feasible.

The research also uncovers some of the underlying ideologies held by management staff around multilingualism, translation, the status of English, and people's ability to learn other languages. Some of these beliefs present a distinct Western viewpoint, in which there is little space for considering solutions and support for those living outside privileged contexts who find it challenging to work in English.

The data discussed in the various chapters illustrates the interaction between language and translation management and practices and related ideologies. It shows that while the institutionalization of translation and interpreting services was initially primarily led by an orientation of translation-as-resource for organizational impact and growth as well as risk management, there are some hopeful signs that INGOs are slowly starting to recognize the relevance of language and translation to debates on diversity and inclusion, shifting power dynamics, and decolonization.

CONCLUSION

Tesseur's book provides new insights into the topics of translation policy and institutional translation in the relatively underexplored area of INGOs, both from a present-day as well as a historical perspective. By documenting the state of the art in research on translation policies and practices in international non-governmental organizations through a wide range of case studies from several INGOs, the monograph allows a compelling comparison of attitudes towards translation in various organizations in varying contexts and highlights the virtues of integrating different types of expertise in the study of translation policy in various organizations. In this way, it contributes in shedding new light on the role of translation in the everyday interaction between IGNOs and multilingual populations.

Although the book touches on key issues regarding language and translation in INGOs, there is limited engagement with multilingual strategies in INGOs' direct interactions with local communities. It only pays attention to the institutionalization of translation services by INGOs that serve their head offices. There is need to discuss the linguistic relationship between local communities and INGO. The book also focuses predominantly on INGOs with head offices in the UK completely leaving out INGOs especially those in the global south. In addition, Tesseurs' ideas are framed from a Western perspective. There is thus need for more research and data from non-western contexts to complement the Eurocentric and Western bias. Nonetheless, the book offers rich and illustrative case studies and contributes to a growing

body of research in Translation Studies that draws attention to its role in contexts of unequal power dynamics, particularly humanitarian and development settings. It will be of great interest to scholars in translation and interpreting studies, development studies, and international relations.

DECLARATION OF COMPETITING INTEREST

None declared.

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