Modern Languages & Literature Faculty Publications

Modern Languages & Literature Department

1-17-2021

Book Review: Translating Texts: An Introductory Coursebook on Translation and Text Formation, Edited by Brian James Baer and Christopher D. Mellinger

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Peer Reviewed

BOOK REVIEW

Translating texts: an introductory coursebook on translation and text formation
edited by Brian James Baer and Christopher D. Mellinger, New York and Amsterdam, Routledge, 2020, 288 pp., $120 (hardback), ISBN: 9780415788083, $35.96 (paperback), ISBN: 9780415788090, $29.22 (ebook), ISBN: 9781315225609

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Published online: 17 Jan 2021

Translating Texts: An Introductory Coursebook on Translation and Text Formation is a versatile textbook addressed primarily towards translation students and novice translators, providing a strong foundation in text analysis and the development of text awareness. The volume may also appeal to language learners given its genre-based approach to writing. Following a solid research-based approach, this textbook offers detailed stylistic and rhetorical analyses of authentic text types in six languages: Chinese, English, French, German, Russian, and Spanish. Because of its text-centred approach to translation, the volume can be used in conjunction with two well-known volumes that follow a functionalist approach to translation: Nord's (1991/2005) *Text Analysis in Translation* and Schäffner's (2001) *Annotated Texts for Translation*. Moreover, it can be used along with Colina's (2015) *Fundamentals of Translation*, which serves as an introduction to translation theory and practice and, focuses, to a great extent, on textual analysis, parallel texts, and corpora. Similarly, due to its focus on problem-solving during the translation process, *Translating Texts* is a likely complement to González Davies (2004) *Multiple Voices in the Translation Classroom*, which provides translation activities, tasks, and projects that can be adapted to different learning contexts and used in different language combinations. Additionally, Baer and Mellinger's coursebook provides valuable instructional materials to complement recent proposals in the field of language teaching which argue for the informed integration of translation as a pedagogical activity and mediation skill (e.g., Carreres and María 2011; Cenoz and Gorter 2013; Carreres 2014; Corcoll and Davies 2015; González Davies 2014; Colina and Lafford 2017; Muñoz-Basols 2019; Piccardo, North, and Goodier 2019).

Translating Texts is structured into seven chapters and includes two appendices as well as supplemental materials available online. While chapter 1 provides an overview of the distinctive features of the book and theoretically grounds its research-based approach to teaching translation and textual awareness, chapters 2–7 present sample text types accompanied by analyses in all the languages represented in the volume. The six text types included for analysis are the following: recipes, instructional manuals, museum guides, patient education materials, news reports, and business letters. The order in which these text types are presented is not arbitrary, with the first three being largely expository and the later more argumentative. As explained by the editors, this order allows learners to move progressively towards 'more complex textual analysis and decision-making during the translation process' (12).

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the unique features of the textbook, emphasising its research-based pedagogy and purposeful focus on text awareness. Drawing on Shreve's (2018, 165) definition of texts as 'units of language larger than a single sentence, typically comprised of several written sentences or spoken utterances grouped together in a particular sequence,' text awareness is presented as a crucial skill to guide translators' decision-making and to foster in

novice translators the kind of top-down processing found in expert translators. As Baer and Mellinger indicate, research has shown (e.g., Lörscher 1991; Kussmaul 1995; Göpferich 2010) that novice translators typically process texts from the bottom-up when translating, that is: they tend to translate small units, they do not rely on context, they do not approach translation problems strategically, and they ignore documentation resources such as parallel texts. Text awareness is also approached as a desirable skill for second/heritage language learners, particularly for developing writing skills in the target language. This textbook raises text awareness through meticulous analysis of genre-specific and language-specific corpora created specifically for this project. The example texts included in the textbook are drawn from these corpora to document micro- and macro-textual conventions. The authors emphasise that corpora are practical pedagogical tools for translation students and language learners alike: 'Rather than relying solely on bilingual dictionaries, student-translators can use corpora to provide a more holistic understanding of how texts are made. At the same time, text-type- or genre-specific corpora are an effective way to instil in language learners a keener understanding of register and rhetoric while also challenging a structuralist understanding of language as a fixed and discrete code' (1–2). Chapter 1 also focuses on the value of incorporating theory in the translation classroom. Like previous researchers (e.g., Malena and Penrod 2017), the authors emphasise that the explicit discussion of theoretical concepts related to the translation process allows students to conceptualise translation as a complex decision-making process, provides guidance in their problem-solving, and offers a thorough understanding of text formation. Lastly, this chapter identifies contexts where the textbook can be used, including language-specific and non-language-specific translation courses, and language-oriented courses. The latter is particularly relevant given the increasing attention that translation is receiving in language teaching (e.g., Colina and Lafford 2017).

Chapters 2–7 are organised consistently as follows: First, an introduction to the specific text type covered in the chapter is offered; second, the mandatory and optional macro-textual features as well as the most common micro-textual features are described; and third, a sample text with an exhaustive analysis is presented. For every chapter, the English-language text analysis comes first, followed by text analyses in each of the various languages. This intuitive structuring allows for a non-linear and flexible use of the book in different teaching contexts, from professional translation to second/heritage language programmes and language for specific purposes. It also allows for the chapters to be used in multiple language combinations and directions. A potential limitation of this flexible structuring is that students may be first introduced to texts that require more complex textual analysis and decision-making during the translation process. For this reason, instructors should keep in mind that the coursebook orders the text types based on their level of difficulty. The specific text types presented in chapters 2–7 show different textual conventions across languages. For example, at the macro-level, while English recipes favour precision and clarity, Russian recipes tend to resemble storytelling. Similarly, at the micro-level, the use of conjunctions is less frequent in Chinese than in English. The use of second-person pronouns, which shows significant variation across languages, is prominently discussed particularly in relation to museum guides (Chapter 4) and patient education materials (Chapter 5). Focusing on the use of second-person pronouns offers a great opportunity for instructors to explore the linguistic representation of register in all the educational contexts mentioned above. A remarkable feature of chapters 2–7 is that accessible definitions of key text analysis concepts, such as field, mode, and tenor, are offered, which helps students develop a meta-language to talk about texts and how they are analysed.

Appendix A includes a sample holistic grading rubric which aligns with the micro-textual and macro-textual features discussed in the previous chapters. Specifically, this section focuses on vocabulary and phraseology, grammatical forms, syntax, coherence and cohesion, discourse organisation, and cultural dimensions. The holistic nature of the rubric favours the kind of formative assessment that allows learners to continuously monitor their progress and reflect on their translation choices, which has proven to be crucial in translation pedagogy (Venuti 2017). Appendix B describes the most important aspects of building a corpus and provides available tools and resources to undertake this task effectively. The specialised corpus selection criteria presented is particularly useful. It includes information on corpus size, text type size, number of texts, medium, subject, text type, authorship, language, and publication date. This information is remarkably valuable to promote corpora building among students and instructors alike and it should be noted that it is rarely described in such detail in other volumes. Instructors can create multilingual specialised corpora of source texts to be used inside and outside of the classroom, while students can create their own corpora of parallel texts to guide their translation projects. The online materials available include an introductory presentation on texts and text types, sample translation briefs, and a text-analysis template. These materials can be used in class and also serve as models for instructors to develop classroom displays and translation activities, and they prove to be invaluable for instructors with limited experience in translation or translation instruction.

In addition to its well-grounded research-based pedagogy, one distinguishing feature of this textbook is its versatility. It can be used in non-language-specific and language-specific translation practice courses. Non-language-specific courses, which include students with a range of language pairs in the same class, are becoming increasingly more common within language programs. In addition, the languages represented in the textbook can be used both as source and target languages, which expands the number of language combinations that can be practised. Instructors should, however, consider the difficulty levels of texts, as well as students' proficiency levels, before assigning the texts. Similarly, it is suitable for second/heritage language courses with writing components and does not require previous experience with translation from language instructors. Novice translators who seek to develop text awareness may also do so independently using this textbook.

Another distinguishing feature of this textbook is its support of a text-based and student-centred approach to translation instruction. On the one hand, a text-based approach favours the identification of the linguistic (i.e., text type) and extralinguistic factors (i.e., function) that shape source texts, as well as the collection and analysis of trustworthy parallel texts, before the translation of a given text. Additionally, it promotes the learner's decision-making process by focusing on how to justify or defend translation choices while fostering continuous reflection. According to Baer (2017), a text-based approach allows novice translators to move away from a 'focus on words and phrases and a blind fidelity to the source text' (63) to an examination of the text as a whole. On the other hand, a student-centred approach focuses on 'a collaborative exploration of the translation process and product' (González Davies 2017a, 71). Collaborative learning moves away from a teacher-centred approach and promotes learner autonomy (learners are in charge of their choices during the translation process), awareness (achieved through continuous collaboration and reflection), and authenticity (achieved through simulations and projects that resemble professional practice). In this approach, translation is understood as a dynamic process of communication (Hatim and Mason 1990) and stresses the identification of the function of texts to guide the translation process (Nord 1997). In González Davies' words,

this approach encourages students 'to move away from a literalist approach to translation towards an approach that encourages creative, motivated choices informed by a specific translation assignment' (2017a, 72). Likewise, for language teaching contexts, *Translating Texts* aligns with González Davies (2017b) *Integrated Plurilingual Approach*. This pedagogical proposal uses translation as a natural plurilingual learning strategy to promote language learning and the development of a plurilingual communicative competence.

In sum, this book is a timely contribution that reflects current and more fluid understandings of the connections between the fields of professional translator education and language education.

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