

Many turns after

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In the preface to the third edition of her *Encyclopedia*, Mona Baker states:

One of the most fascinating things about exploring the history of translation is that it reveals how narrow and restrictive we have been in defining our object of study, even with the most flexible of definitions. When we read about how African interpreters regularly translated African drum language into actual words, for instance, we begin to realize that the current literature on translation has hardly started to scratch the surface of this multifaceted and all-pervasive phenomenon (Baker in Saldanha and Baker 2020, xix-xx).

The first and second editions of the *Encyclopedia* do have an entry for the concept of equivalence. However, the third does not. In this volume, the editors emphasize the importance of reflecting “the many exciting developments that continue to take shape, sometimes in unanticipated directions, even as we write” (Saldanha and Baker 2020, xxiv).

Indeed, one of the most fascinating aspects of translating is that it never ceases to be connected to the world. To translate is to live — to engage with difference and feel that difference. Elsewhere, in a *Trujamán* entitled “Definiciones”,¹ I noted some time ago that to translate is to live intentionally, like Benedetti. It is to recognize that this mouth is (not) mine, like Sabina. It is to discover a manuscript, like Cervantes. It is to become the other while remaining oneself. It is to rediscover, again and again, the tremor of first

¹ Available at https://cvc.cervantes.es/trujaman/anteriores/diciembre_16/12122016.htm.

experiences. It is to rewrite a voice to unite two bodies. It is to understand that one does not know, to understand that one is known, to understand that one savors the scent of another. It is to doubt without doubt, to revisit without treading on what has already been lived. It is to erase in order to write, to erase in order to construct, to erase in order to create palimpsests. To translate is to create words from things and to articulate things from words.

This is how translation is viewed today, from multiple, diverse, and evolving perspectives. Such a perspective has only become possible by moving beyond the early binarisms and essentialisms that once dominated the field. Since the prescriptivist approaches of the mid-1960s, translation studies have undergone significant transformations. The cultural turn proposed by Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere marked a pivotal moment, laying the groundwork for subsequent developments such as Maria Tymoczko and Edwin Gentzler's power turn. Rather than striving for absolute equivalence, it is now widely accepted that to translate is to say *almost* the same thing (Eco 2003); it is to transform (Robinson 2016). For decades, scholars have increasingly recognized the inherently creative dimension of translation (Loffredo and Perteghella 2006; Robinson 2016; Malmkjær 2020; Lee 2022). Today, many believe that translation is no longer simply the substitution of one word for another, no longer a mere "channel" between languages, but rather a "prism [...] opening up the plural signifying potential of the source text and spreading it into multiple versions" (Reynolds 2019, 3).

An excellent example of these new approaches to translation is a special issue of the journal *Translation Studies* (16 (2), 2023). In this issue, we read that there cannot be "perfect equivalence [...] The question of faithfulness and equivalence makes perfect translation impossible and, in turn, raises ethical issues" (Polezzi 2022, 306). Conversely, translating implies reconfiguring: "No translation can ever be the 'same' as the original, for translation involves so much more than the linguistic, though obviously language is a crucial element [...] [T]ranslators have to deal with more than just words which may or may not have dictionary equivalents" (Bassnett 2022, vii).

Translating "not only as linguistic and geographical, but also as cultural, social, artistic and psychological phenomena" (Maher, Polezzi and Wilson 2025, 1). This broadening of the field brings with it "a shift away from seeing translation as a predominantly linguistic activity, to acknowledging the cul-

tural dimension to all acts of translating” (Bassnett 2024, 13). The traditional definition of “text” is called into question (Boria et al. 2020).

For decades, other disciplines, such as visual studies, have been incorporating translation (Bal 1985/2009), taking us beyond the merely linguistic. The humanities are opening up to “traveling concepts” (Bal 2002), which are kaleidoscopic. In this same line, one of the most significant developments in translation studies, among many others, was the so-called *outward turn* introduced by Susan Bassnett and David Johnston in 2019 in a special issue of *The Translator*. This issue stressed the importance of translation opening up to other disciplines, in line with what had already been advanced by Michael Cronin (2017) with his eco-translation or Sherry Simon (2012, 2019) with her multilingual cities. Beyond the purely linguistic,² translation turns outward to anthropology, philosophy, cultural studies, and a long etcetera. This was undoubtedly necessary, given that translation is now ubiquitous, from legal and institutional contexts to media, audiovisuals, advertising, and more.

Translating is a process, not a product, as Bassnett (2024, 19) also points out: “translation is always in the making, always in motion, never reaching a final point of stillness and completeness”. Translation cannot be understood as “in a monolithic and permanent way. It is a polymorphic concept always to be negotiated” (Gambier 2023, 319).

After successive turns, translating is a process that transcends the binarisms typical of initial approaches to our discipline. Beyond those previously mentioned, numerous other studies (Bal 2002; Apter 2007; Bal and Morra 2007; Arduini and Nergaard 2011; Bachmann-Medick 2013; Bassnett and Johnston 2019; Malmkjær 2020; Koskinen 2020; Boria et al. 2020; Petrilli and Ji 2023, 2022; Ellëstrom 2023; Blumczynski and Sadler 2023; Campbell and Vidal 2019, 2024a, 2024b; De Francisci and Marinetti 2025, to name but

2 Marais (2019, 22-23) states that “with technological development, multimodal communication is becoming the norm, and translation studies will define itself out of existence if it limits its interests to interlingual translation only. Furthermore, even aesthetic artifacts are becoming increasingly multimodal. This means that translation studies might run the risk of not being able to account fully for translational phenomena in various forms of aesthetic expression, including multimodal art.”

a few) are contributing from diverse perspectives to enrich and expand the contemporary definition of translation to include concepts closely related to translation such as conflict, memory, trauma, emotions, and ethics.

However, such an expanded definition “does not mean that everything is a translation but that many things have a translational dimension and can be better understood if this dimension is taken into account” (Meylaerts and Marais 2023, 4). A recent instance of this trend that is currently gaining momentum in translation studies is the 2nd Tertextuality Conference titled “Material Turns in Translation: Intermediality and Circulation” (September 4-6, 2025, Anderson Centre for Translation Research and Practice, University of Galway). This conference features, among many others, discussions that broaden the definition of translation.

These and many other expanded approaches to translation need not exclude linguistic approaches (Haapaniemi 2024, 21–22; Bennett 2022, 61). As the editors of the previously mentioned special issue of the journal *Translation Studies* observe, “a consensus seems to be emerging that translation is primarily a semiotic activity. This means that each and every semiotic activity has a translational aspect to it that can be studied in TS. Once that position is accepted, interlingual translation is by definition an important part of TS, as are intralingual and all other forms of translation” (Zheng, Tyulenev and Marais 2023, 175).

Indeed, I believe that essentialist dichotomies impoverish the field, whereas recognizing both approaches as complementary broadens the definition of translation, enriching the discipline and acknowledging a reality that cannot be denied, namely that as disciplines like anthropology have shown, language is just one of many modes of communication. Contemporary perspectives on translation present us with significant methodological diversity, opening up rich avenues for research (Blumczynski 2016, 138). A glance at recent titles of articles, books, edited volumes, and *Handbooks* reveals the breadth of this expansion. Topics now include video games, cinema, dubbing, activism, indigenism, ecology, memory, trauma, migrations, emotions, ethics, history, philosophy, sociology, and art, and the list continues. Translation is more vital than ever. It is everywhere.

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