

Peter Skrandies**Book review: Boéri, Julie and Maier, Carol (ed.) (2010) 'Compromiso Social y Traducción / Interpretación - Translation / Interpreting and Social Activism'****Article (Published version)
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Boéri, Julie and Maier, Carol (ed.) (2010). *Compromiso Social y Traducción/Interpretación Translation/Interpreting and Social Activism*. Granada (Spain): ECOS Traductores e Intérpretes por la Solidaridad, pp. 389, £ 30/22.88 €. ISBN 978 8461317592.

This bilingual Spanish – English volume brings together papers first presented at the International Forum on Translation/Interpreting (T/I) and Social Activism, which took place in 2007 at the University of Granada. It is a political book, hoping to overcome the traditional divide between social activism and scholarly research. ECOS, the publishers behind the volume are devoted to facilitating “communication across language barriers for those individuals and groups excluded from the institutional and private market” and to raise awareness about “injustices in the present-day world” (8-9). The political motivation and commitment to widening access are reflected by the bilingual format of the book – all articles either originally written in Spanish or English are presented in both languages – and by the fact that the texts were registered under a ‘copyleft’ license, which stipulates that the material can be copied and circulated as long as the work of the original authors is acknowledged. This is an alternative to academic publishing where knowledge is treated as intellectual property and texts as commodities.

The central unifying theme of the articles is that T/I are, either explicitly or implicitly, political activities which take place in a world of political and social conflict and that many translators are political and social activists playing a role in these struggles. The common ground in theory and practice is summarized by the participants in the Granada Declaration (156-57). At the theoretical level the idea that T/I can be reduced to politically neutral “bridge-building” is rejected, while the implication for the professional practice of translators and interpreters is that they cannot escape politics. In a world full of injustice and conflict, translators and interpreters are forced to take sides and cannot hide behind an ethos committing them to translation quality and linguistic fidelity. The position taken by the writers represented in the volume is clear in that they align themselves with ‘alterglobalisation movements’ and the resistance against a neoliberal world economic order.

Unsurprisingly for a conference publication the articles range widely in format, style and subject-matter. Broadly speaking, the contributions can be divided into texts concerned with the theory and practice of politically-aware T/I practitioners on the one hand, and articles and case studies reporting research on the political implications of T/I on the other. Several articles describe and analyse the experience of T/I volunteer organisations (ECOS, Babel and Tlaxcala) whose members are committed to resisting the logic of neoliberal capitalism and Western imperialism. A recurrent theme is the question of the impact of T/I volunteering, the difficulties

associated with building effective organisations and the tension between volunteering and professionalism. In her contribution to the volume, Mona Baker suggests to use narrative theory to describe and analyse the role that T/I “communities of resistance” have played in the global struggle for social and political justice.

The issue of T/I training is taken up in a joint article by Rosalind M. Gill and María Constanza Guzmán, two T/I teachers based in Toronto, who reflect on their classroom practice and how it links to the social realities of Toronto as a multilingual and multicultural global city where people live together (and apart) under vastly different socioeconomic circumstances. In his article, Jesús de Manuel Jerez links the professional ethos and interests of interpreters to the patronage of the powerful elites they serve, and outlines the possibilities of developing a more politically aware and inclusive practice in the interest of the needs of the whole of society.

A number of researchers report on politically motivated translation projects. An article by Richard Jacquemond describes state-sponsored (propaganda) efforts by Western media to win the “hearts and minds” of Arab readers. The authors describes these efforts as “translation exportation” (45) situated within the contexts of colonialism, neo-colonialism and the “war on terror.” Analysing the activity of a translator who lived under the Franco dictatorship, Marta Ortega Sáez shows how his work escaped censorship and reflected the author’s Republican political beliefs. Using Bourdieu’s notions of social fields, symbolic capital and mobilisation, Ileana’s Dimitriu describes how translators working under the Ceausescu dictatorship practised their craft as “a mode of underground political resistance” (52). After the end of communism, translation “was put to the service of a rapidly modernising, pluralistic society” (54). However, this process was accompanied by commercialism and the pressures of global cultural homogenisation.

Christina Delistathi and Martha Cheung both report research on politically motivated historical translation projects. Delistathi outlines how the 1919 translation of the Communist Manifesto into Greek under the auspices of SEKE (the forerunner of the Communist Part of Greece) was shaped by a number of social contexts and political considerations impacting on the design of the brochure, the choice of language, the organisation of the text and specific translational choices. Cheung, also concerned with translation importation, looks at the connection between translation and political activism in Late-Quing China (1840-1911). During this period of crisis and instability, translation was used by a number of actors to initiate political and social change. Although the impact of these efforts is difficult to measure, the authors is convinced of the “potential of translation to function as a catalyst for change” (104).

Two articles, by María López Ponz and Olga Castro Vázquez deal with translation and the politics of immigration and feminism. López Ponz investigates recent work by Chicana writers and shows how authors who “translated themselves” created a politically conscious hybrid literature to resist the marginalisation they experience as women and migrants in US-American society. In her article, Olga Castro explores the practice and possibilities of non-sexist translation, attempting to overcome the patriarchal ideological burden manifest at the discursive as well as the word level of language.

Alternatives to the intellectual property regime established by the market are presented in Ignacio Carretero’s article on free software and translation in which he outlines the possibilities for translators who do not wish to subject themselves to the dictates of commercial software companies.

Since the conference was held in Granada five years ago the world has witnessed the near collapse of the neoliberal world order and a new wave of struggles in search of democracy and economic and social justice. Undoubtedly, translators and interpreters have played a prominent role in the Arab spring and in the resistance against austerity measures imposed on societies by ruling classes in the interest of a small political and economic elite. This useful and interesting volume is testament to the fact that a growing number of translators and interpreters have been active “in the struggle for the emancipation of the excluded majority of humanity” (144). It is encouraging to see some T/I academics and practitioners leaving their ivory towers and engaging with politics.

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