

**Compromiso Social y Traducción/Interpretación**  
**Translation/Interpreting and Social Activism**



Edited by  
**Julie Boéri and Carol Maier**



# Compromiso Social y Traducción/Interpretación

## Translation/Interpreting and Social Activism

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A necessary, exciting book that will force translators to rethink their ethical position with respect to the complex process of translating in a society that has globalised everything from (dis)information to poverty.

*África Vidal Claramonte, University of Salamanca (Spain)*

In the same way that the emergence of organised civil society brought equity and democracy, this controversial and timely book enters the discussion about the contribution translators and interpreters could make to language diversity and mediation out of a sense of shared responsibility, activism and solidarity, and if their training covered not only technical proficiency but also social awareness.

*Eduardo Kahane, member of the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC)*

In a world marked by the lack of understanding and the resultant conflict prompted by a deceptive claim of unification on the part of neoliberal (or corporate-led) globalisation, the role of translators and interpreters is increasingly critical and sensitive. Consequently, there is an urgent need to rethink translation and interpretation in socio-, geo-political, and ethical terms. Led by that need, ECOS organised the 1<sup>st</sup> International Forum on Translation/Interpreting and Social Activism in April 2007. Conceived in the same spirit of the Forum, *Compromiso social y Traducción/Interpretación – Translation/Interpreting and Social Activism* explores the relation between T/I and social activism in the context of daily practice, teaching, and research methodologies at a time when it is crucial that T/I be conceptualised and discussed in terms that are more critical, complex and engaged. The volume comprises the keynote address and selected papers presented at the Forum. Together, the essays provide insight and guidance about T/I at the cross-roads between activism and academia.

Co-founder and co-organiser of the International Forum on Translation/Interpreting and Social Activism (Granada, April 2007), **Julie Boéri** holds a PhD from the University of Manchester and a Master's degree from the University of Granada (Spain). As a member of ECOS and Babels, she worked as an interpreter and/or coordinator in various social forums in Europe and Latin America. Her work, which has been published in *Eurotopia* (Transnational Institute), *The Translator* (St Jerome), and *Puentes*, focuses on Babels' activist interpreting in the Social Forum and the Alter-Globalisation Movement, and Babels' impact on conference interpreting as a profession and in the context of research and training. She is the co-founder of LINK Interpreting & Society.

**Carol Maier** teaches at Kent State University, where she is affiliated with the Institute for Applied Linguistics. Her research interests include translation theory, practice, and pedagogy, and she has published translations of work by Octavio Armand, Rosa Chacel, Severo Sarduy, Nivaria Tejera, and María Zambrano, among others. She is also the co-editor (with Anuradha Dingwaney) of *Between Languages and Cultures: Translation and Cross-cultural Texts* and of essays about translation in the context of intervention and conflict. Currently, she is guest-editing (with Mona Baker) a special issue of *The Interpreter and Translator Trainer* on ethics and the curriculum and co-editing (with Françoise Massardier-Kenney) *Literature in Translation: Teaching Issues and Reading Practices*.

Contributors: Mona Baker, Ignacio Carretero, Olga Castro Vázquez, María Constanza Guzmán, Christina Delisthati, Jesús de Manuel Jerez, Ileana Dimitriu, Rosalind Gill, Moira Inghilleri, Richard Jacquemond, Anastasia Lampropoulou, María López Ponz, Anne Martin, Eloísa Monteoliva García, Marta Ortega Sáez, Martha P. Y. Cheung, Esther Romero Gutiérrez, Leticia Sánchez Balsalobre, Mustapha Taibi, and Manuel Talens.

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# Compromiso Social y Traducción/Interpretación Translation/Interpreting and Social Activism

Edited by / Coordinado por  
*Julie Boéri – Carol Maier*

**ECOS**  
Traductores e Intérpretes por la Solidaridad



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Julie Boéri and Carol Maier

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Julie Boéri y Carol Maier  
Mayo de 2010

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# Introduction

By Julie Boéri and Carol Maier

In a world marked by the lack of understanding and the resultant conflict prompted by a deceptive claim of unification on the part of neoliberal (or corporate-led) globalisation, the role of translators and interpreters is increasingly critical and sensitive. Consequently, there is an urgent need to rethink translation and interpreting (T/I) in socio-, geo-political and ethical terms. Led by precisely that need, ECOS (the Association of Volunteer Translators and Interpreters for Solidarity), with the support of the University of Granada, organised the 1<sup>st</sup> International Forum on Translation/Interpreting and Social Activism in April 2007. For three days, individuals with a wide range of perspectives – academics, professionals and activists – converged in Granada to reflect on their work and discuss issues related to socio-political engagement, theory, and practice. On the last day of the forum, participants adopted the *Granada Declaration*, also referred to as the “Manifesto in favour of translation and interpreting at the service of society as a whole and of all societies” (*Granada Declaration*, in this volume). Aligning itself with critiques of the longstanding misconception of T/I as neutral, the *Granada Declaration* constructs T/I as a tool of both resistance and dominance. It calls on scholars, professionals, teachers and students not to place their knowledge solely at the service of the market, but to think in terms of society as a whole, to refuse to interpret in wars of occupation, to promote linguistic diversity in the field and beyond and, finally, to build a more inclusive and mutually supportive community of translators and interpreters.

Conceived in the same spirit of the Forum and the *Granada Declaration*, this collective volume *Compromiso social y Traducción/Interpretación – Translation/Interpreting and Social Activism* (referred to throughout as *Translation/Activism*) explores the relation between T/I and social activism in the context of daily practice, teaching, and research methodologies at a time when there is a pressing need for T/I to be conceptualised and discussed in terms that are more critical, complex and engaged. The volume comprises the keynote address and selected papers presented at the Forum. Together, the essays provide insight and guidance about T/I as an action which is both engaged and reflective.

Given the purpose of the Forum and the wide range of perspectives the conference included, it follows that *Translation/Activism* is not a conventional academic volume. Although it was prepared according to the principal guidelines for academic publications – the essays were selected from the proceedings as a whole and then peer-reviewed and edited – it also takes issue with the production of an academic knowledge that is disconnected from the very practices under analysis. In this sense, the volume advocates for a theory of T/I and activism not generated exclusively in academic circles and limited to them, but also generated and disseminated in the field of political engagement and social action.

*Translation/Activism* also implements an open and flexible language policy. Like the Forum, it was conceived as a bilingual endeavour in Spanish and English. In addition, a Chinese version is being prepared by researchers of the Centre for Translation (CTN), Hong Kong Baptist University, co-edited by Martha P. Y. Cheung, Bai Liping, and Esther Kwok. Although the effort is a small step towards a linguistically diverse translation policy in T/I studies, it can serve as a reminder that the uncritical use of English as a lingua

franca is inconsistent with the goals of the discipline and that a change in language policy will allow T/I studies to include the different world views, concepts and processes that a diversity of languages has the potential to contribute. It will also enable scholars who work with languages other than English to be included more fully in the international channels of research dissemination. A change in policy along these lines is not easy to implement, although work on *Translation/ Activism* has shown us as editors that it is possible. In the case of this volume, for instance, some of the essays were originally written in Spanish and some in English. Their selection, peer reviewing, editing, and translation was performed by many translators and authors, whose collaboration has resulted in a book that comprises two very similar but not perfectly identical halves.

Another editorial choice related to language policy and increased access was to register the essays in *Translation/ Activism* under a copyleft license, registered under Creative Commons, a non-profit organisation devoted to expanding the range of creative works that others can share and on which they can build legally.<sup>1</sup> This means that the essays may be distributed, copied and exhibited by third parties, as long as authors and editors are given credit for their work.<sup>2</sup> Third parties wanting to reproduce, translate and distribute these papers refer to the license chosen by each author, mentioned at the end of each paper, where conditions under which this might be done are stated.<sup>3</sup> The decision to use copyleft is particularly appropriate in this instance, because it circumvents the barriers traditionally posed to the reproduction, translation and dissemination of knowledge beyond the usual channels through which books are commonly circulated. ECOS decided to publish *Translation/ Activism* itself, in order to ensure maximum autonomy in implementing a copyleft, linguistically diverse and engaged research policy. As scholars from two generations with a command of both English and Spanish who have overlapping interests in the recent rise of a politically-engaged agenda in and beyond research, and because of our involvement in planning for the Forum (Carol as member of the scientific committee and Julie as member of the organising committee and one of the initiators of the Forum within ECOS), were invited to serve as editors.

In fulfilling our role, our goal was to include a combination of individual and collective experiences of activist translators and interpreters in the field, in addition to analyses of and reflections on past and present activist T/I in the media, in the courtroom, in the class-room, in civil society, in academia, and in the many situations of conflict under dictatorships and other current forms of persecution on the basis of politics, gender, religion, or nationality. Some of the essays are firmly rooted in experience in the field, others offer a theoretical inquiry into that practice. Since most of the essays encompass both reflection and practice, it is the themes and topics explored through the lenses of different theories and experiences that guide the organisation of the volume.

The book opens with an essay about ECOS written collectively by members of the Association, which is uniquely positioned at the cross-roads between civil society, the profession, and academia. The essay described ECOS' emergence, development and praxis in the decade since its inception. In addition, it discusses some of the key issues at stake in undertaking activist T/I – the relationship between means and ends of social change, the tension between volunteering and professionalism, to cite just two examples.

The reader is then taken to Tlaxcala, the network of translators for language diversity, whose origins and aims are explained by Manuel Talens. One of Tlaxcala's founders and a professional translator and writer, he describes the early convergence of translators with a

shared concern about the use of English as a lingua franca in circulating counter-hegemonic ideas throughout cyberspace, providing a dynamic reflection upon the need to make activists more aware of the importance of linguistic diversity in challenging hegemony.

In a complementary way, Mona Baker argues that for a socio-politics of T/I to emerge, it is also necessary to raise awareness among T/I studies scholars about the activist role that translators and interpreters play in civil society, in particular during the last decade. Talens' personal account of the birth of Tlaxcala is completed here by Baker's case study of this community. She examines its strong connections to activist projects beyond T/I, the endeavours the group decided to oppose and support, and their strategies for social change. Set in this broad context of establishing activist communities of translators and interpreters throughout the world, her narrative model of analysis and the far reaching research agenda she elaborates will no doubt inspire a new generation of engaged scholars and reflective activists willing to explore and practice T/I as a driving force of change.

The broad landscape of activist communities of translators and interpreters described by Baker is further explored by Anastasia Lampropoulou, whose case study of the interpreting policy of Babels, the International Network of Volunteer Translators and Interpreters in the Athens European Social Forum in 2006, provides an inside exploration of the constraints and shortcomings of advocating volunteer, disinterested work and linguistically diverse interpreting in civil society. Raising issues of quality, professional standards, working conditions and training, Lampropoulou discusses the core tensions inherent in activist, volunteer interpreting and the innovative and the alternative forms of interpreting organisations that emerged from them in the context of the Athens European Social Forum.

The reader is then taken from civil to mainstream society. Anne Martin and Mustapha Taïbi offer an alert to the dangers posed by the lack of regulation of translators and interpreters in court and police settings and reveal the appalling manipulation of the case of Tayseer Allouny, an Al Jazeera journalist based in Granada who was jailed for charges constructed to fit into the narrative of the War on Terror. Tayseer remains under house arrest today, despite the many inconsistencies of his case. The case is currently pending appeal to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

The instrumentalisation of T/I is further explored in the mass media and in the book market by Richard Jacquemond. Exploring the choices, strategies and norms of Western translation policies towards the Arab World, Jacquemond examines and reflects upon the role of translation in the agenda of cultural diplomacy of the most powerful Western states, geared towards 'winning hearts and minds' in the Arab World, since World War II to 9/11.

If Bourdieu inspires Jacquemond to reflect on the ethical dilemmas posed to translators by the co-optation of translation to serve hegemonic agendas, it also inspires Ileana Dimitriu's case-study of literary translation as a locus of resistance to Ceausescu's dictatorship in Romania. Exploring the shifting role of translation in Eastern Europe from the subversion of communist regimes to the integration of the region into the global neoliberal market, Dimitriu argues for contemporary forms of activist translation that strive for "intensity of the local" in order to emancipate the East from both the oppressive regimes of the past and the trend towards cultural uniformity fostered by neoliberal globalisation.

With a similar focus on literary translators' subversive role in times of dictatorship, Marta Ortega Sáez explores the ways in which the weaknesses of Franco's regime in Spain opened a clandestine space for writers and translators to "promot[e] a more Republican way

of life'. Her analysis of Juan G. de Luaces' *Intemperie*, the Spanish translation of Rosamond Lehmann's *Weather in the Streets* (1945), reveals a surprising (and fortunate) unawareness on the part of Spanish censors that translation could be used to disseminate repressed narratives of women's emancipation from patriarchal society that explicitly address notions of sex, adultery and abortion.

Moving beyond the context of dictatorship and censorship, María López Ponz examines the overlap between migration, feminism, diaspora, and hybridisation in recent work by Chicana writers. She focuses on Sandra Cisneros' novel *House on Mango Street* and explores the ways in which Chicana writers have found, in literature, a space to translate themselves and to voice and resist the multilayered (racial and gendered) marginalisation Chicanas experience in American society.

Christina Delistathi also works with texts and their translation, but focuses on the case of a political text. She provides a case study of socio-political constraints in the production and reception of the communist manifesto, a canonical text that has inspired and continues to inspire generations of activists throughout the world, despite its unfortunate instrumentalisation by oppressive regimes. Focusing on the socio-economic, socio-educative and socio-linguistic asymmetries that characterised the Greek context at the beginning of the 20th century, Delistathi reveals the awareness of translators and translation commissioners of the factors that might constrain the dissemination of ideology and thus make specific contextual, paratextual, and textual translation choices.

Moving further back in time, Martha P. Y. Cheung studies 19<sup>th</sup> century Late Qing China, whose socio- and geo-political instability makes it a particularly suitable context for exploring the historical relationship between translation and the (contemporary) notion of activism. Her model of analysis, based on Aberle's classification of social movements (redemptive, reformist, transformative and alterative), will doubtless open new avenues of research on activist translation in different temporal and spatial contexts.

From a more linguistic but also more socio-political perspective, Olga Castro's essay then reminds translation scholars and activists that the language we choose to employ shapes the society in which we live. To make the case that language is constitutive of reality, there is no better example than that of feminism, which is demonstrated in Castro's review of and critical reflection upon the relationship between the gendering of language and translation and the emancipation from patriarchal society.

Since change cannot be sustained without the involvement of new generations of translators and interpreters, the focus of the volume moves to the relation between training and social change. T/I programs are in a unique position to assist the underserved populations in a globalised world. Often the students in such programs either have first-hand knowledge of those populations or they empathise with them readily. At the same time, however, students may resist awareness-raising in the classroom, given their suspicion of what they might perceive as indoctrination. It is those challenges that María Constanza Guzmán and Rosalind M. Gill address as they explore, theorise and reflect upon their own teaching practice. Their essay, composed of two individual pieces integrated by a shared introduction and conclusion, embodies a teaching philosophy that embraces otherness and spurns autocratic teacher-centeredness. Their exploration of the social and ethical ramifications of the pedagogy of translation in a global city such as Toronto and in an asymmetrical world provides a coherent body of learning outcomes for the translation classroom and beyond.

Raising social awareness cannot be achieved without questioning dominant structures of power that await the student in her future professional practice. In a critical review of key texts and figures in the field of interpreting research, particularly Gile, Pöchhacker, AIIC, as well as the code of professional ethics of the latter, Jesús de Manuel Jerez explores the dominant position of conference interpreting vis-à-vis the interpreting profession as a whole during the second half of the twentieth century. This position paper, which outlines a far-reaching agenda for change based on factual evidence, rigorous theoretical analysis and discussion makes an important contribution to the development of a political and educational project for interpreting.

Finally, transcending civil society, the profession and the classroom, the pressing question of the type of technical tools used in the translation process is addressed by Ignacio Carretero. Reminding translators that choices that involve technology carry political and economic meaning, Carretero discusses OmegaT, a free Computer Assisted Translation (CAT) tool, a free knowledge software, whose use allows translators to emancipate themselves from the practical constraints and ethical dilemmas of using proprietary software.

In the closing pages of the volume, Moira Inghilleri's personal account of her experience at the Forum in Granada and a reflection upon its contribution to T/I studies provides an afterword to both the Forum and Translation/Activism. Her candid and critical remarks about activism and ethics are a reminder that the way change is effected and the definition of "ethical" remain subject to the multiple and unforeseeable contexts in which T/I can occur. For engaged research to be meaningful to T/I studies and to society, it must not, as Inghilleri reminds us, fall into an a priori approach to social change that risks a simplified notion of activism. Such simplification leads all too easily to a failure to investigate, question and build on previous initiatives; it also jeopardises the success of future endeavours. Our hope as editors is that the essays in *Translation/Activism* prompt the nuanced understanding of activism that Inghilleri advocates even as they stress as well the need for a strong, clearly defined commitment to social change. That commitment, however flexible and reflexive, will ensure that endeavors such as the Forum are not activist in name only.



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### ***Endnotes***

1. See [www.creativecommons.org](http://www.creativecommons.org)
2. Mona Baker's paper is an exception since the rights already belonged to a publisher. The Spanish version of her paper is included in this volume and in the online book with the kind authorisation of Palgrave Publishers.
3. Some authors have released all rights, in their opposition to restricting any right (as under the by-default copyright license "all rights reserved"), while others have released only certain rights and under certain conditions (no modification of the content, no commercial use, etc.).