

Garda Elsherif

Sumillera, Rocío G.; Surman, Jan & Kühn, Katharina (eds.) (2020): *Translation in Knowledge, Knowledge in Translation*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

1/2021

DOI: 10.25365/cts-2021-3-8

Herausgegeben am / Éditée au /
Edited at the: Zentrum für
Translationswissenschaft der
Universität Wien

ISSN: 2617-3441

Zum Zitieren des Artikels / Pour citer l'article / To cite the article:

Elsherif, Garda (2021): Sumillera, Rocío G.; Surman, Jan & Kühn, Katharina (eds.) (2020): Translation in Knowledge, Knowledge in Translation. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, *Chronotopos* 2021 (1), 148-152. DOI: 10.25365/cts-2021-3-1-8



Garda Elsherif

Sumillera, Rocío G.; Surman, Jan & Kühn, Katharina (eds.) (2020): *Translation in Knowledge, Knowledge in Translation*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins (Benjamins Translation Library 154). 272 p. ISBN 9789027207586 272

The anthology *Translation in Knowledge, Knowledge in Translation* is the result of the international conference “Translation in Science – Science in Translation”, which was held at the University of Giessen in March 2017. The volume intends to offer a contribution to the “interdisciplinary conversation” between translation studies and the history of science (SUMILLERA & SURMAN & KÜHN 2020: 1). In their introduction, the editors Rocío G. Sumillera, Jan Surman and Katharina Kühn note that both translation studies and the history of science are taking up translation processes in the scientific field at roughly the same time. The simultaneity of this turn is paradigmatically demonstrated by the independent publication of a special issue on translation studies and a special issue on the history of science, both of which focus on the translation of science and, significantly, both of which were published in 2018, which the editors therefore dubbed a “momentous year” (SUMILLERA & SURMAN & KÜHN 2020: 5). In the special issue of *Alif: A Journal of Comparative Poetics*, Mona Baker focuses on the knowledge-producing moment of translation, while Sven Dupré, editor of the special issue of *Isis: A Journal of the History of Science Society*, argues that the history of science needs to focus on translation in a way which portrays changes and transformations of scientific knowledge not as betrayals of the original, but as a productive part of the history of science.

The volume reviewed here is intended to connect to both disciplinary discourses and thus to intensify the urgently needed interdisciplinary exchange. In addition, it is intended to contribute to overcoming the asymmetrical reception habits between translation studies and the history of science, for while translation studies are certainly aware of the translation-related work of the history of science, the reverse is rarely the case. This one-sided direction of reception is to be counteracted by a consciously multidisciplinary preparation of the anthology: “This asymmetry, perhaps stemming from the differing histories of the disciplines is one of the reasons why this volume seeks to be consciously multidisciplinary.” (SUMILLERA & SURMAN &

KÜHN 2020: 3). A look at the disciplinary background of the authors represented in the volume shows that it does indeed bring together a variety of disciplinary perspectives. With seven authors, historiography is the most strongly represented field. However, among the contributors are also authors who can be located in area studies, social sciences, and translation studies. What is striking, however, is the comparatively weak representation of translation studies, which seems detrimental to the intended goal of promoting the reception of translation studies literature among historians of science. Nevertheless, in the introduction the editors' attempt to connect to the discourse of translation studies is unmistakable, thus demonstrating their proficiency in both disciplinary discourses. The essays themselves are only occasionally connected to both discourses. The contributions by Laura Meneghello, Saskia Metan, Pablo Toribio, Philipp Hofeneder and Irina Savelieva deserve special mention in this regard.

Despite the different disciplinary backgrounds of the contributors, the volume assembles essays whose common interest is "to shed light on, among other things, the workings of scientific communities, the dynamics of the dissemination of knowledge across languages and cultures, and the transformations of that knowledge and of the scientific communities involved in the process" (SUMILLERA & SURMAN & KÜHN 2020: 2). At the centre of the volume are questions about the production of knowledge through translation and its travels across linguistic, cultural, ideological, geographical, and temporal boundaries (SUMILLERA & SURMAN & KÜHN 2020: 6).

Although the concept of knowledge on which the volume is based is not made explicit, the change of titles between the conference and the anthology from *Science* to *Knowledge* already indicates an expansion of the concept. While the conference remained limited to knowledge in the natural and social sciences, as can be seen from the Call for Papers and the conference programme (cf. SUMILLERA & SURMAN & KÜHN 2016, HSS 2017), the anthology breaks away from the concept of 'science' shaped by European modernity and also includes pre-modern and non-European forms of knowledge. Sumillera, for instance, looks at sixteenth-century Europe and outlines the publication and distribution mechanisms of scientific writings that go back to Greek antiquity, the Arabic-speaking world, and the Hebrew tradition. In Saskia Metan's contribution, the re-adoption and modification of ancient geographical knowledge in the *Tractatus de duabus Sarmatiis*, published in 1517, is discussed as a temporal intradisciplinary translation process. In this way, the volume is placed in a more generally understood history of knowledge, which is prominently represented by Jürgen Renn (2015) and Peter Burke (2015), among others. Here,

scientific knowledge naturally stands alongside intuitive and practical knowledge, so that the volume also focuses on the transformations of practical forestry knowledge according to the German model in Russia under Tsar Peter I (Avxentevskaya).

The concept of language underlying the volume is also not limited to national languages. Rather, various sociolects and disciplinary languages are included, so that the various contributions discuss different processes of transfer and transformation of texts, sign systems, practices and concepts between different languages, cultures, disciplines, and epistemic fields, depending on the authors' concept of translation. The heterogeneity of the volume thus results not only from the representation of different disciplinary perspectives, but also from the diverse materials on which questions of knowledge production and dissemination are discussed.

The anthology comprises a total of twelve essays, which are divided into three sections of four articles each. In the following, the individual contributions will not be discussed in detail. Rather, the reviewer attempts to distil the overarching goal of each section and thus to reveal the organising principle of the volume:

The contributions to the first section *Constructing and disseminating knowledge in-through translation*. Agents discuss processes of knowledge construction and dissemination with a focus on the participation of individual or collective agents. Dissemination here means not only the actual spatial distribution of printed translations (Sumillera) and political radio news (Ottersbach), but also the spread of scientific knowledge into other epistemic fields (Meneghello), as well as interlingual popularisation processes (Dagenais). The focus of each contribution lies on the actors of knowledge dissemination. Simon Ottersbach, for example metaphorizes *Radio Free Europe* as a translator or mediator between East and West in the context of the Cold War. In her contribution, Laura Meneghello turns to Jacob Moleschott as a translated and translating scholar. She makes not only clear that translation played a decisive role in the dissemination of Moleschott's materialism in Europe, but also that his scientific concepts themselves were first shaped by Moleschott's ongoing practice of translating from Dutch into German. Moleschott's thought was subjected to a further process of translation after his emigration to Italy, where – as a member of the Senate – he used his physiological knowledge for his political argumentation and thus 'translated' scientific concepts into the epistemic field of politics (Meneghello 2020: 71). Thus, Meneghello traces the role of translation in the production of scientific ideas, their travel into other linguistic scientific cultures and ultimately into other epistemic fields.

While the focus of the contributions in the first section lies on the *actors* in the dissemination and translation of knowledge, those in the second section *Linguistic strategies and visual tools in the translation of knowledge* focus on medial (Surman), linguistic (Metan, Toribio) and visual strategies (Hofeneder) employed in the process. Both, Saskia Metan and Philipp Hofeneder, with recourse to Lefevere, do not relate their concept of translation exclusively to language-related translations, but understand each new edition as a translation “in a broad sense of the word” (Metan 2020: 106). They compare the various new editions of the *Tractatus de duabus Sarmatiis* and the *Istoriia* with regard to changes in paratextual elements (Metan) or figurative material (Hofeneder). Jan Surman analyses the appropriation of positivist thought in Polish and Czech in the second half of the 19th century on the basis of several series of publications published in Warsaw and Prague. He thus focuses less on translations of individual authors than on the seriality of their publication in deliberately compiled series. In his analysis, he tries to work out media strategies that favoured the success of a series.

The third section, *Institutions and translation policies. The politics of translation*, brings together contributions that focus on different moments of translation policy. Avxentevskaya and Savelieva discuss state-commissioned and state-supported translation projects. Sandipan Baksi discusses the political motivations behind the beginning of scientific writing in Hindi in the late 19th century, and Christoffer Leber looks at the popularisation of the monistic worldview based on science by the German Monist Association.

The division of the contributions into the three sections is quite understandable. All contributions in themselves provide exciting insights into processes of knowledge translation in different historical and geographical contexts. Due to the diversity of translation concepts in the individual contributions, a stronger cross-volume reflection on the conceptions of translation at play in each chapter and the added value of presenting them together would have been helpful. This would also have achieved a stronger interlocking of the individual contributions, whereby the volume would not only resemble – as one might partly get the impression – a juxtaposition of several case studies that are each exciting in their own right – case studies that can all be associated with the keywords ‘translation’ and ‘knowledge’, but which – in view of the broad version of these two terms – then refer in part to strongly divergent processes. Through an explicit explanation and discussion of the *constants* of all the described processes of appropriation and dissemination of knowledge and the conceptual approaches to ‘translation’ used, the volume could prove even more

fruitful for the interdisciplinary conversation between translation studies and the history of science, which the editors rightly want to push. One such constant across essays, for example, seems to be the *transformation* that inevitably occurs in these processes.

In summary, it can be said that with their volume *Translation in Knowledge, Knowledge in Translation*, the editors are responding to new research challenges that – unlike the translation of literature, for example – has only started receiving substantial attention in the last few years. In drawing further attention to this burgeoning discourse, they provide important insights into a growing field of research and, thanks to the diversity of the integrated perspectives, remain connectable to a range of specialist discourses: including cultural studies-oriented translation studies.

This review was translated from German by *DeepL* and post-edited by the author.

Bibliography

- BURKE, Peter (2015): *What is the History of Knowledge?* Cambridge/Malden: Polity Press.
- HSS, History of Science Society (2017): *Conference: Translation in Science – Science in Translation*. <https://hssonline.org/conferences/conference-translation-in-science-science-in-translation/> (22.03.2021).
- KÜHN, Katharina & SUMILLERA, Rocío G. & SURMAN, Jan (2016): *CfP: “Translation in Science, Science in Translation”*. <https://www.uni-giessen.de/faculties/gcsc/newsboard/cfp-2016translation-in-science-science-in-translation2016> (22.03.2021).
- RENN, Jürgen (2015): “From the History of Science to the History of Knowledge – and Back”, *Centaurus* 57, 37-53.