
Reviews of Books

Nataly Kelly and Jost Zetzsche. *Found in Translation. How Language Shapes Our Lives and Transforms the World.* A Perigee Book, 2012. ISBN 978-0-399-53797-4. 270 pp.

Unlike highly acclaimed movie by Sofia Coppola *Lost in Translation* (2003), the book under the review is titled *Found in Translation*. It is about translation/interpretation, one of the oldest but not much appreciated professions in the world. *Unappreciated* was how one of the professional translators surveyed by the authors of the book, described his work, but the most common words used by the others were *fascinating, challenging, intriguing, rewarding, stimulating* and so on. The variety of tasks translators encounter in their work, challenges they face and responsibility they bear for the outcomes of their effort make translation indeed a fascinating enterprise, which deserves our utmost appreciation. It is also the biggest industry in the world, worth an estimated \$33 billion, because it covers every aspect of our lives and affects everything – from the movies we watch to opinions we hold, from holy books to Pap smears. “Translation fuels the global economy,” - Nataly Kelly and Jost Zetzsche maintain in the introduction to the book, - “prevents wars, and stops the outbreak of disease. From tummy tucks to terrorist threats, it’s everywhere” (p. xiii). And it is not an exaggeration, as the readers will find in the course of the book, following the authors through their engaging account of various spheres of human life where translation is involved.

There are seven chapters in the book, and just by their titles alone the reader can realize the scope of this involvement. *Saving Lives and Protecting Rights in Translation* was chosen to be the first chapter, as it deals with translation saving lives not only of patients, people on trial, or people pursued by criminals. It can also bring back to life extinct languages, like in case of Wampanoag, a language spoken by Native Americans, those who welcomed the Pilgrims and who are celebrated each year at Thanksgiving by their descendants.

On a broader scale, the importance of translation is shown in the second chapter *Waging War and Keeping the Peace in Translation*, which deals with the role translation plays in politics and defense. The stories range from the predicament of the interpreter for the Nuremberg trials faithfully interpreting for the war criminals, who murdered his whole family at Auschwitz, to the plights of thousands of Iraqi and Afghani people serving American forces as interpreters, and as such being on the top of the target list for assassination in their home countries. Imagine the scope of work and responsibility that 132 interpreters at the United Nations and 344 at the European Parliament carry out. With interpreters at the European Parliament having delivered 109,667 interpretation days in 2010, it seems a costly enterprise, but “the cost of democracy,” according to the book, amounts to only 2.3 Euros per citizen per year!

Every chapter of *Found in Translation* is interspersed with short vignettes relating fascinating anecdotes from the real translation practice connected with the topic of the chapter. Thus, chapter three, *Doing Business and Crossing Borders in Translation*, mentions episode when a banking and financial services giant HSBC ran a popular *Assume Nothing* campaign. When the phrase was mistranslated in several countries as “Do Nothing” it cost the company \$10 million in rebranding initiative. “Money talks - in many languages,” Kelly and Zetzsche concede and prove this with the data showing that translation services are always

in high demand. More than twenty-six thousand companies worldwide sell translation and interpreting services, with fifty of the top-earning firms accounting for nearly \$4 billion profit (p. 73). Even during the economic downturn, translation business is growing because it helps other companies increase their revenues. The reason is that customers want products with information in their native language, and nine out of ten Internet users browse the websites in their native languages. The bottom line is that “translation has and always will be important for any company that wants to do business in multiple markets” (p. 74). Take, for instance, “the most translated airline in the world”, *United Airlines*, which operates in 170 countries, flies to all six inhabited continents, and needs up to 355,000 words to be translated into eleven languages.

Nevertheless, in spite of all the money that translation makes, translators of the most difficult texts, poetry and literature, are perhaps, the least paid in their guild. Chapter Four, *Sharing Stories and Spreading Religion in Translation*, reveals a harsh reality of professionals dealing with literary art, and, to certain extent, creating art themselves by producing literary translation. As Kelly and Zetzsche put it, people translating the bestselling literary masterpieces and the works of the greatest poets earn much less than those who translate the ingredients for your toilet paper. They can be appropriately called *starving artists* as, according to one survey cited in the book, “the average earning power of a literary translator was inferior to the average wages in manufacturing and services in every single country analyzed, about 66 percent of this amount” (p. 94). Yet, their work is extremely challenging not only because of the issues of copyright, but also due to the nature of literary and poetic texts and degree of freedom translators are allowed without overstepping the borders of authorship. Kelly and Zetzsche bring a vignette of examples of challenges encountered by translators of the works by Agatha Christie, J. K. Rowling, Milan Kundera, Dr. Seuss and others. The degree of difficulty in translating literature increases with poetry to the extent that some deem adequate poetic translation impossible, while “transferring religious texts into another language can be a veritable minefield” (p. 108). The book *Found in Translation* gives a short but very impressive retrospective account of various attempts to translate the Bible, Koran and other holy texts into other languages, starting from work of St. Jerome, the patron saint of translators, to the efforts of modern translators of the Koran, formerly forbidden for translation at all. This work bears incredible significance not only because important religious texts became available to millions of people around the world, but also due to the effect these translations had on other people’s languages, cultures and faith.

Chapter Five, *Partaking in Pleasures and Delighting the Senses in Translation*, is full of amusing stories about translators engaged in matchmaking, crossing cultures in rendering romantic and erotic literature, translating films, comics and Internet sites of adult content, and the like. The reader can’t miss the paradox brought out by the authors that “one important area of porn translation is perhaps one of the unsexiest topics you can imagine – search engine optimization” (p. 131). And do you know that a peculiar tradition of two Valentine’s Days in Japan is the result of the mistake made in translation of the Morozoff Ltd. Company’s message by another chocolate company, which lead people to believe that women were supposed to buy chocolate for men? You can read this story in Chapter Five together with other interesting and amusing episodes from the practice of translators dealing with beauty products (e. g., *Shampoo to Promote Hair Loss*), tattoo (e. g., faulty *rebelle fleur* inked into Rihanna’s neck instead of *fleur rebelle*), wines, food, and so on.

Sports and entertainment is another vast area where international and cross-cultural encounters would be impossible without translation. *Entertaining Fans and Playing to the Crowd in Translation* is exactly what translators do in sports and entertaining business, as Chapter Six will tell us. Librettos need to be translated, and Broadway musicals are performed in many countries in their languages, and Cirque du Soleil requires the interpreting team covering fifteen languages. But can you imagine the amount of translating effort that goes into operating Olympic games? Summer games, for instance, include twenty-eight different

sports, with four hundred different disciplines within those. Interpreters have to be prepared for all of them and serve athletes from more than two hundred different nations. Depending on a host country this challenge may become even more trying. For instance, the translating team working for Olympics in London had only about eighty interpreters, while in Beijing two hundred were required because Chinese is not an official language.

Connecting the World and Advancing the Technology in Translation is the final chapter of the book and it brings our attention to the role that translation plays in social and professional networking, spreading of information (Wikipedia in 284 languages!), developing software and hardware in different languages, even in developing machine translation. Will the latter at some point in the future replace humans in a variety of areas? No, according to Ray Kurzweil, one of the most renowned computer technology experts, who characterizes translation as “the most high-level type of work one can imagine” (p. 231).

Machines can write music, but still “real,” human music continues “to surround us and enrich our lives. So, too, will translation,” - Nataly Kelly and Jost Zetsche conclude. I hope those readers who will choose to familiarize themselves with *Found in Translation. How Language Shapes Our Lives and Transforms the World* will agree with this conclusion and become a little bit more appreciative of tremendous work translators and interpreters do for all of us.

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