Book Review

Translation as Social Justice: Translation Policies and Practices in Non-Governmental Organisations

Tesseur, W. (2022). New York: Routledge. ISBN 9780367646882 (cloth) US$170.00; ISBN 9781032331317 (paper) US$48.95; ISBN 9781003125822 (e-book) US$36.71. 196 pages.

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For decades, a convincing body of scholarly literature has elicited the deeply embedded value of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in upholding social justice, ensuring equity and access, and achieving sustainable development, which traverses geographical boundaries, language, and cultural barriers. However, the link between NGOs' use of language translation and interpreting (T&I) and their operational goals of social justice has been "largely overlooked" (p. 2). Such disregard may magnify the potential gaps in communication when the default use of the dominant language (e.g., English as lingua franca) silences less-heard local language communities, particularly in peace-building and other post-conflict scenarios. The neglect of local or minority language communities may further impinge on the principles of inclusion and human rights in international development and humanitarian settings, despite the overarching mission to leave no one behind (United Nations, 2015, 2022). To bridge potential communication gaps, Tesseur's insightful monograph is written with two key guiding questions: (1) what can international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) do to embed a more linguistically attuned approach in their translation work? and (2) what can translation researchers do to ensure more socially just language and translation practices?

   With these questions in mind, Tesseur highlights traditionally ignored aspects of NGOs' language work as a tool of empowerment in facilitating multilingual communication, addressing longstanding cultural colonisation

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concerns, and achieving language diversity and social justice. She does this by drawing from a wealth of ethnographic interviews with staff in international and national NGO offices (e.g., Amnesty International, GOAL, Oxfam GB, Save the Children UK, Tearfund UK)[1] with impactful active operations in the Global South.[2] As such, this book contributes to a growing body of interdisciplinary research in social justice from the perspectives of anthropology, sociolinguistics, language policy, and T&I studies.

Theoretically, the author proposes the notion of "translation as empowerment" by concentrating on two closely intertwined concepts: social justice and language choice (p. 10). On the social justice front, she endorses two conceptual models: Bell's (2016) framework of participatory social justice and Fraser's (2005) political representation. Bell's framework considers social justice both as a goal and a participatory process. The process is respectful of an inclusive justice that balances human diversity and agency. By comparison, Fraser's model views social justice from the perspective of political representation. In the context of INGOs' communication, the language and translation policies of INGOs may impact political representation and participatory rights of local staff whose native languages do not fall within the INGOs' working language. It may deny local staff equitable access to vital information and other opportunities. On the language policy front, Tesseur advocates Spolsky's (2004) concept of language policy, which synthesises language management (the formulation of an explicit plan or official policy in formal written documents), language practices (what people do), and language beliefs or ideology (what people think they should do).

Methodologically, the author presents a robust account of social justice through the lens of T&I studies in the context of NGOs. The strength of this book is the author's use of rich sources of authentic empirical data from three credible research projects: (1) Tesseur's (2015) doctoral research on translation policies in Amnesty International (see Chapters 2, 3, and 4), funded through an EU Marie Curie Action grant (2011-2014); (2) her research project, *Translation as Empowerment: Translation Policies at Amnesty International* (Tesseur, 2019), which is about human rights in the Global South (2019-2021), funded through the CAROLINE Co-Fund Postdoctoral Fellowship Programme from the Irish Research Council and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, and conducted with GOAL's MEAL team (Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning) in and outside Ireland on the role of translation in multilingual COVID-19 information campaigns (see Chapter 6); and (3) the UK-based research project, *The Listening Zones of NGOs: Languages and Cultural Knowledge in Development Programmes* (2015-2018) (INTRAC, n.d.), which

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[1]According to a 2015 report by the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) on the State of the Humanitarian System, the five named organisations represent roughly 31% of NGO humanitarian expenditure worldwide (ALNAP, 2015).

[2]Tesseur's use of the term "Global South" is intended to include poorer or less economically developed countries in interdisciplinary discussions (p. 14).

was funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC), and includes case studies developed in Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, and Peru on the role of cultural knowledge and languages in relationship-building between international and local NGOs (see Chapter 8).

The book is clear in its structure and readable in its writing style. Chapter 1 sets the scene by providing an evolutionary account of INGOs' language and translation policies over time. As noted above, Chapters 2 to 6 present empirical findings from language and translation work that are presented in relation to the concepts of social justice and language choice. These chapters mainly focus on two types of INGOs: those with integrated T&I functions and those without such functions.

For those with T&I operations (see Chapters 2 and 3), drawing on archival evidence, the author adopts a historical approach to examine language and translation policy within each organisation and then applies a comparative approach to assess developments in similar practices in other organisations. While writing these closely knitted chapters, the author also highlights motivations and challenges behind these developments: (1) the low profile of language and translation work in INGOs and essential "language silence" throughout the history of taken-for-granted work (p. 26); (2) the need for organisational growth and "decentralization" (p. 34); (3) competing demands for "accuracy and consistency" in multilingual communication (p .49); and (4) the "complexity" of global communication and the diversity of "voices" in representations (p. 50). Shifting from the professionalisation of internal T&I practices to discussions of informal translation, Chapter 4 ruminates on the risks and consequences of volunteer translation by sharing useful examples of successful collaborations.

For INGOs without internal T&I operations, Chapters 5 and 6 concentrate on language and translation policy discussions, potential risks and problems, and solutions. In Chapter 5, the author analyses the paradox between English as a lingua franca and an inclusion and empowerment device for diverse language communities. Drawing on data from 29 semi-structured interviews with staff from five INGOs that use English as a bridging language without an internal translation department, the author identifies two distinctive approaches to language and translation policies. One approach is English as a lingua franca, which prioritises cost-effectiveness and efficiency. The other approach is mutual language learning and translation. The former approach encourages all non-native English-speaking staff in all countries to learn and use English as a working language, which puts the native English speakers in an advantageous position and runs the risk of upholding and exacerbating language inequalities. In contrast, the latter approach endorses the "translanguaging" practice in sociolinguistics to overcome barriers in interlingual communication. For example, each person speaks their language, or speakers draw on their entire multilingual repertoire to make communication work. Nevertheless, Tesseur points out, both approaches highlight the necessity of a translation budget, as INGOs are highly dependent on donor funding and require high-quality and

effective language communication across various functions in all countries.

In Chapter 6, the author critically examines three common options for interlingual communication in different contexts (day-to-day v. crisis response), practices (human v. machine; individual v. multi-agency), and language needs (official language v. local dialect): (1) free machine translation (e.g., Google Translate); (2) multilingual staff as language aides; and (3) collaborative, multi-agency translation process. Due to time constraints, and a lack of trained professionals for a given language pair or in a specific location, ad hoc or informal translation practices are considered to be more practical, affordable, or feasible options. However, drawing on three cases studies of informal translation and interpreting solutions, the author raises awareness of interlingual and intercultural challenges and their implications for INGOs' social justice values, as locally based staff, staff from local partner organisations, and local communities may be excluded from opportunities without the equitable access to information. For free machine translation, the author raises the ethical issue of potential data breaches on confidential donor information, such as personal financial data and the issue of translation quality, as the lack of contextual information could lead to misunderstandings. For multilingual staff as language aides, the author touches on the loss of staff time to translation or language training instead of their formal work, frustration and anxiety among staff members who carry the extra burden of multilingual work without support or recognition. For the collaborative and multi-agency translation process, INGO staff consider it empowering, as it brings out the synergy of language and translation, cultural adaptation, and health information dissemination that allows local communities to access the same information in their native language by participating in information campaigns.

Chapters 7 and 8 serve as the conclusions to this book. In Chapter 7, the author summarises the main findings of T&I provisions in INGOs concerning social justice values (p. 135). Here Tesseur points out that the growing needs for translation and interpreting have paved the way for the institutionalisation of translation through developing empowerment-driven language and translation policies and establishing internal translation departments (e.g., Tearfund UK and Amnesty International). However, based on Bell's (2016) social justice framework, current language and translation policies do not ensure equitable access to opportunities in INGOs' programme development, information access and ownership, dialogue, and accountability practices. Moreover, the insufficient provision of translation and interpreting may further undermine the importance of local cultures and lead to inequalities between staff within the organisation.

In Chapter 8, the author evaluates the impact of her research using a Theory of Change, which is a widely employed framework for planning and evaluation in government and non-profit sectors. This theory is intended to enable evaluation of the situation in which the change happens, the stakeholders who need to be engaged in relation to the sought-after goal, the trigger element, and the underlying assumptions on which the vision of change is based. Using this

theory, Tesseur identifies that the importance of language and translation have not been fully recognised as core elements of INGOs' work, which may affect inclusion, accountability, and programme effectiveness when operating field missions in non-English native-speaking local communities in Global South countries. Thus, she proposes a long-term vision for NGOs to create more linguistically inclusive policies and practices to empower changes in beliefs, knowledge, and attitudes about language and translation. For example, one suggested approach is integrating quality translation and multilingual communication efforts with existing institutional policies and actions, such as using multilingual versions and providing T&I options as a tool of empowerment when monitoring peace-building projects, drafting reports and blog posts, and organising workshops and seminars. Tesseur maintains that this approach has the potential to fulfil the rights of participation held by local and minority language communities and put them on an equal footing with native English-speaking communities in NGOs' communication, particularly in peace-building and conflict resolution scenarios.

Overall, this book exemplifies the value of engaged research with critical reflexivity and radical integrity. Although the author honestly acknowledges that the book may show compromises induced by her positioning, worldviews, privileges, and other limitations, *Translation as Social Justice: Translation Policies and Practices in Non-Governmental Organisations* remarkably demonstrates three distinctive contributions. Firstly, for international NGO general offices, it raises awareness of the link between social justice, power, and language work. For example, the book sheds light on the less-explored aspect of linguistic racism based on accent, dialect, and speech patterns, which may be effectively addressed by the strategic use of T&I-focused training and inclusive solutions. Secondly, for national NGOs with or without T&I functions, it inspires contemplation on their practices and impactful solutions to optimise their current operations. In this regard, the author provides evidence-based solutions by eliciting less-heard voices from developing countries such as Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, and Peru language communities. Thirdly, for research funders and universities, this book invites meaningful collaborations with non-academic partner institutions to create impactful language choices from a broader perspective. Given these contributions, this book is a helpful reference for interdisciplinary researchers and scholars in social justice and T&I studies.

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