

Dror Abend-David (Ed.), **Media and Translation: An Interdisciplinary Approach**, New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2014, 365 pp., \$84.00 (hardcover).

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The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *translation* as “the rendering of something into another language or into one’s own from another language,” while other sources loosely see the word as the communication of the *meaning* of a source-language text by means of an equivalent target-language text. Media is generally recognized as mass communication—television, radio, newspapers, newscasts, commercials, video games, websites and web pages, electronic street signs, and social media products. Until a decade ago, media experts and translators produced and published materials without a working knowledge of each other or even considering themselves as a single unit possessing a significant influence on how literate people think and act around the world. But until the fleet-minded reader closely reads every page in this book, he or she will likely find a discordant relationship between translation and media.



Of growing concern is that translation leads to a loss of meaning, and differing interpretations of the original material can make understanding translated media products a daunting experience, even for the avid reader or viewer. More people consume media content uninterested in the original language in which it was produced or they fail to take time to detect and analyze latent and inherent messages. People are more interested in using media technology for their own ends than examining the relationship between media and meaning drawn through content translation into or from other languages.

Much has been published in the field. The book’s editor cites 11 other texts, nine of which have been published within the last five years. He points out that the field has reached the “Golden Age,” and “further publications might be superfluous” (p. ix). So why should anyone bother to explore the contents of this book, **Media and Translation: An Interdisciplinary Approach**, if the subject is banal? What does it contribute to inquiry in the field of media and translation when so much ink has already been spilt over this subject? Why, then, has he taken the time, energy, and space to collect and publish essays from scholars attached to universities and language centers in Europe, North America, and Asia?

To answer those questions with any degree of precision, we need to briefly examine the editor’s arguments for producing scholarship in the area. We also look at the degree of connections among language, meaning, and media, cognizant of the fact that linguists and mass communication scholars see translation and media as codependent fields of study.

It is unsurprising to find scholars in the field with backgrounds in other areas. To wit, some 85% of the contributors in this volume have expertise in three to four disciplines—linguistics, communication, marketing and advertising, and literary theory. While their academic credentials are impressive, it is paradoxical to find multidisciplinary scholars writing on a complex but monolithic area such as media and translation. Given the unclear demarcations in audience-based media theories and the connotations created by translation and/or translated materials, the reader of this book—whether a student of psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, international media law and marketing, or media literacy—a market researcher or practitioner in search of meaning and knowledge of translated media products may come away more confused. This is partly because multidisciplinary scholars may not be well grounded in another area. The editor admits to that flaw, writing:

Even among the Translation Scholars in this collection, some come from Social Studies, and some from the Humanities, some perform empirical, some perform quantitative. Some use many examples, some are abstract, and some use professional jargon that had to be “translated” for the sake of readers from other disciplines. (p. xii)

Along with the semantic mishap are structural issues. For example, sections dealing with theories and models are mixed with pragmatic situations. From the title, we expect to follow a structure that systematically explains connections among media images, symbols, and meaning from translations in the respective languages used by the well-trained contributor/author. What we mostly find are sociolinguistic and political perspectives blended with theories. In part 1, captioned “Film Translation and Adaptation,” we find chapters dealing with the role of translation and international understanding as well as translated films. In the same section, arguments are raised about South African perspectives on translations of the gangster film genre. An entire section on sociocultural or ethnocentric perspectives of translated media (films) would be more appropriate.

Technical problems notwithstanding, the quality of writing is excellent. Material is well researched, with language codes and symbols explained.

The volume’s 23 contributors are serious scholars with vast experience in their respective areas. They serve in some of the most academically equipped research institutions and research centers we know that are involved with translation, interpretation, literary studies, and linguistics such as University of Florida, University of Antwerp, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Pompeu Fabra University (Spain), and IDC (Interdisciplinary Research Center) Herzliya (Israel). Aben-David deserves credit for bringing together the cream of authors from Europe, China, and North America, but he fails to include scholars from Africa, South America, or Australia. Those regions are fertile grounds for further explorations of media and translation. With Africa’s population of 1.3 billion and its growing exposure to satellite television, wireless radio, film, and other multimedia technology, it is unfortunate that the continent is not included.

From an economic standpoint, even the book’s discounted price is high for students. In this day and age, with IT literally at our fingertips and researched material downloadable at low or no cost, one would be hard-pressed to find a student or even a media-crazed learner standing in line to buy an \$84

book, aware that he or she could retrieve an electronic version from the company's website for a limited time for \$75, or harvest similar material for less than half the price. In terms of packaging and marketing, there is confusion about the correct size of the book—the book's flyer mounted on the publishing company's letterhead indicates the book's length at 392 pages, whereas the actual hardcover is 365 pages. Perhaps it is a typographical error. If that is the case, it should be corrected in a subsequent flyer.

The other problem lies in the expected levels of articulation and the true audience for the book. Simply put, the book is written for seasoned media scholars, experienced translators and interpreters, literary critics, and sociolinguists, most of whom should already be well aware of the discrepancies in their practice.

Organized in seven parts including acknowledgments, preface, editor's note, author biographies, and index, the book is the brainchild of a course created five years ago by the editor himself at Tel Aviv University, touted for producing top-notch scholarship. The volume's editor dutifully provides an introductory note to each section by summarizing the chapter and noting the key arguments to be found.

The book's first part addresses film translation and adaptation; the second looks at subtitling and dubbing. Part 3 covers media and computer translation, while part 4 looks at the gaps between literary material and media translation. In part 5 the authors address translation, communication, and globalization issues, focusing on idiosyncratic and sociocultural factors. One of several chapters in this section explores the impact of language on Italian end-users' reaction to humor in translated audiovisual products. Here, Delia Chiaro pits the concept of what we call 'sense of humor' with the lingua-cultural phenomenon. The author then analyses the extent to which humor may be dependent on personal traits. This trend culls from an introductory statement by the Editor who states that "...translating humor is one of the most difficult tasks that a translator faces,...then by translating humor one might be making a substantial contribution to global communication" (p. 195). Part 6 expands on the theme of globalization, emphasizing the relationship between global news and politics. Here authors provide a critical analysis of mediation in news translation and cultural bias. In chapter 12 the authors illuminate the bias of segments of the Israeli population against Aljazeera English-language broadcasts, pointing out that the bias exists against all Arab-produced news (p. 281). That interesting conclusion is dissociated from the content of the last section of the book, part 7, which deals with cultural images in translations of promotional material, commercials, tweets, and minisodes, a short special episode of a television series. In the last chapter (14), the authors examine the mediation of cultural images in the translation of advertisements. Ying Cui and Yanli Zhao analyze ways in which cultural images are altered in advertisement translation, and they show the effectiveness of such mediation when it is based on cultural knowledge. For them, local copywriters know more about the target culture, the original advertisement, the content and cultural images of target readers, and they should be the ones translating advertising texts.

Each chapter concludes with a list of references. After the last chapter, we come across a half-page of glossary material followed by a dozen pages containing abstracts. This is a curious location, given that abstracts normally appear at the beginning of chapters and/or articles. Following the abstracts are eight pages of author biographies. The problematic organization of material should not stop the curious

ones from looking for this volume, as well-researched material has been delivered in sophisticated and grammatically correct English.

At some point I would like to see reference librarians, language scholars, translators, and interpreters as well as literary critics organizing workshops on the topic of media and translation in the 21st century and dissecting this book's contents. Perhaps a symposium could be organized on whether translating and disseminating media content into different languages is a service or disservice to the audience.