

TRANSLATING SENSUOUSLY: EXPLORING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES THROUGH THE LENS OF TRANSLATION

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Translating Indigenous knowledges: Toward a sensuous translation, M^a Carmen África Vidal Claramonte, London and New York: Routledge, 2024, 222 pp., €43.99 (paperback) ISBN 9781032866987, €35.19 (ebook) ISBN 9781003528630.

The field of Translation Studies is currently witnessing a growing interdisciplinary and epistemological openness. This shift is encouraging many researchers to reflect more deeply on how the core concept of our discipline can be applied beyond the interlinguistic—and even beyond the linguistic—realm. Such is the case with África Vidal Claramonte’s book, *Translating Indigenous Knowledges: Toward a Sensuous Translation*, which explores the notion of ‘sensuous translation’ as a framework for engaging with indigenous worldviews. Through this work, Vidal Claramonte challenges traditional Western epistemologies and examines how translation can illuminate new ways of knowing, particularly within indigenous contexts. The result is a rigorously argued, interdisciplinary monograph that will undoubtedly be of interest not only to translation scholars but also to researchers in anthropology and sensory studies.¹

In the introduction, Vidal Claramonte outlines the overall trajectory of her monograph, which unfolds across four chapters. The author situates her study within a broad range of theoretical frameworks that have been instrumental in shaping the aforementioned EPISTRAN project, such as Piotr Blumczynski’s (2023) and Douglas Robinson’s (2017) ‘translationality’, Michael Cronin’s (2017) ‘eco-translation’, and Kobus Marais’s (2019) ‘(bio)semiotic translation’. Her focus, she explains, is on indigenous knowledges, cosmovisions, and worldviews, as well as on forms of translation that extend beyond the strictly linguistic. In doing so, she seeks to move past reductionist dichotomies such as the body/mind divide, emphasizing instead the central role of the body, objects, experiences, senses, and emotions, elements that become the principal agents in the translations she examines.

Translation, in Vidal Claramonte’s approach, is never static or definitive; it is rhizomatic in the sense of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1980 [1987]), and recalls the medieval notion of *translatio* as movement. She conceives translation as a weaving of “knots, threads, colors, and bodies in movement” (p. 3), as ‘shamanic translation’,

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¹ Notably, the reviewed book appears on the website <https://www.sensorystudies.org/books-of-note/>, which features works of interest in the field.

‘translation as equivocation’, and ‘total translation’. These modes are explored in depth across the book’s chapters, each illuminated through carefully selected case studies.

The opening chapter, titled ‘A knowledge of many knowledges’, immerses readers in the world of shamanic translations, practices that are creative, fluid, and perpetually in motion. Long marginalized by what has been termed ‘epistemicide’ (Bennett, 2007, 2023, 2024; Santos, 2014, 2016; Price, 2023), these translations are particularly compelling because they allow us to apprehend the world—or rather, worlds—beyond binary oppositions, the so-called ‘one-world world’ (Law, 2015), and Eurocentric globalization.

Within this context, Gloria Anzaldúa’s (2002) notion of *conocimiento*—“a theory of knowledge from intuition” (p. 27)—becomes especially significant. Translation, in her view, operates through the body, emotions, and senses, directly challenging rational, scientific Western conceptions of knowledge. Vidal Claramonte underscores how, for Anzaldúa, connecting with nature positions translation as an experiential, embodied practice. Building on this perspective, she turns to Carlos Castaneda’s (1968 [1985]) *The Teachings of Don Juan* and to the shamanic narratives of Davi Kopenawa (Kopenawa and Albert, 2013), guiding readers into the world of shamans and their epistemic translations of the universe, in which “feeling is the most complete way of accessing knowledge” (p. 38). Through these examples, Vidal Claramonte highlights the centrality of the senses and affirms the relevance of the sensory turn and sensory studies (see Howes, 2022) for contemporary translation theory.

The second chapter, ‘Expanding translation’, opens with the idea that the sensuous knowledges introduced in the first chapter cannot be translated through traditional Western methods. Translation, the author argues, must go beyond words, beyond the search for equivalence and mere reproduction; it should be conceived as difference, as equivocation, and as a form of communication that can extend between human and non-human beings. Such approaches are essential for conveying knowledges grounded in sensory experience.

As the author explains, in the context of indigenous knowledges, a range of anthropological theories can further enrich our transdisciplinary understanding of translation. Among these are Anne Taylor’s (2015) concept of ‘shamanic translation’ between humans and nature; Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s (2004) idea of ‘translation as equivocation’, which challenges univocality and equivalence; Boaventura de Sousa Santos’s (2014, 2016) notion of ‘intercultural translation’, framed as a “way of avoiding the epistemicide of non-Western knowledge” (p. 88); and Jerome Rothenberg’s (1962 [1981]) ‘total translation’, which involves performing ethnopoetry beyond language, engaging all the senses.

Building on the theoretical discussions and examples presented in the previous chapters, the third chapter, titled ‘Translating through the senses: Cecilia Vicuña’, turns its focus exclusively onto the Chilean artist Cecilia Vicuña. Through her works, deeply influenced by indigenous practices, Vicuña demonstrates the central role of the senses and the body in translation processes. Her artworks themselves function as translations,

transforming ideas and stories from one materiality into another. Among these, *quipus*—threads or cords—stand out as tangible translations of narratives, allowing viewers to engage directly with indigenous knowledges and Andean cosmovisions. Vidal Claramonte carefully shows how Vicuña’s art embodies tactile modes of translating ‘reality’, fostering connections with the ancestral and the natural, and enabling communication beyond language.

In the final chapter, ‘Toward a sensuous translation’, the author once again underscores the extensive work of translating indigenous knowledges highlighted throughout the book, emphasizing that knowledge is acquired through the senses, the body, and in connection with the natural world. Within this perspective, translation emerges as a “sensuous journey between worlds inhabited by humans, non-humans, and extrahumans” (p. 168). To capture this dimension, Vidal Claramonte coins the concept of ‘sensuous translation’: a mode of translation enacted through the senses, through the sensory expressions of experience, always dynamic and operating on multiple levels. This form of translation, inherently creative and unique to each person, offers a means of engaging with knowledge beyond the universalizing and colonial frameworks that seek to dominate and homogenize.

Overall, as in Vidal Claramonte’s other recent monographs—*Translation and Contemporary Art: Transdisciplinary Encounters* (2022) and *Translation and Objects: Rewriting Migrancy and Displacement through the Materiality of Art* (2025)—this book offers a wealth of material for reflection. In line with the expanding interdisciplinary scope of Translation Studies, it invites a deeper appreciation of translation’s relevance across diverse academic fields, thereby enhancing our understanding of the concept itself. In *Translating Indigenous Knowledges*, Vidal Claramonte opens a profoundly emotional world by presenting the work of various indigenous sensuous translators, united by a common aim: to free translation from binary thinking and to reveal the beauty and richness of translating not merely *difference*, but *through difference*, translating with the senses.

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