

BOOK REVIEW

EMOTIONAL TRANSLATION OF HISTORY

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La traducción emocional de la historia. La memoria traumática en la obra de Svetlana Alexiévich, by Margarita Savchenkova. Granada: Editorial Comares, 2024, 136 pp., €14.25 ISBN 978-8-413-69773-4.

Margarita Savchenkova's volume on the emotional translation of history is extremely relevant, as the world is now witnessing war, ideological conflicts and changing times. Counting on more than one perspective on historical events avoids the potential danger of a single narrative which is seen as the absolute truth as dictated by the power elites. The author warns the readers about how historical texts are just one of the multiple translations of reality which can be used to rewrite the past. Her main goal with this monograph is to offer a translation analysis of historical narratives focused on trauma and to raise awareness of the importance of understanding history in its plurality to inspire other academics to explore and bear witness to the stories of trauma survivors represented in Alexievich's compilation of testimonies.

Resorting to canonical authors such as Barthes, Foucault, Derrida and Potter, the four chapters that make up the volume are based on the notion that objective reality does not exist but is built through language. The author insists on the fact that language is never neutral, as there are always ideological traces which are linked to the exercise of power. Thus, in the first chapter, Savchenkova starts from the idea of the desacralization of the original, according to this poststructuralist view. She uses the example of Ridley Scott's film *The Last Duel* to lay the groundwork for the topics that will be addressed later, while observing that, through deconstructivist ideas, she seeks to unravel what is "real", thus placing the focus on how language and translation contribute to the construction of reality. The chapter explores different theories on the role of language as an inexhaustible source of meanings and interpretations (p. 27), seeing that it is an instrument of power.

In the second chapter, the author focuses on the expansion of Translation Studies with the most recent definitions of the field, such as the concept of "tangible translation" (p. 40), which highlights the potential of objects to translate, but also to be translated, as well as the omnipresence of the translation process as an interdisciplinary act following the outward turn (Bassnett & Johnston, 2019). She engages in a debate which tries to define what translating means and how Translation Studies have gradually become more interdisciplinary, following the different turns. The translational turn, as well as other later 'turns' which would ultimately lead to the outward turn (p. 35), prompted researchers to look beyond the autocomplacency denounced by Bassnett (p. 32). These new perspectives allow the consideration of new

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definitions of texts as well as the inclusion of new objects of study, such as the body (now integrated in academia to a considerable extent) or objects, which are not static, but tell stories and are translatable.

In the third chapter the author focuses on history and memory to offer an interpretation of both elements from the perspective of Translation Studies. She analyses the understanding of history before the linguistic turn and insists on the important role that memory plays in constructing new narratives of the past, where the study of trauma has an impact on a linguistic and emotional level. She begins the chapter by pointing out that knowing plural stories allows us to comprehend the past beyond the dominance-imposed versions of the elites. Addressing history as rewriting and thinking of it as one of the multiple translations of the past leads to a new understanding of the concept of memory. She does not only talk about memory linked to recollection, but also about forgetting and how it can protect or relieve people from trauma. In addition, silence can sometimes speak louder than an oral story (p.58), as trauma can be incomprehensible and fall beyond intelligibility and language. Indeed, memory cannot be but fragmented and partial, given its inherent emotional factor. This means that traumatic memories are subject to manipulation but narrating those traumatic events can also be therapeutic and revitalising. By resorting to concepts such as 'second witness' and the figure of the interviewer, which will be key in Savchenkova's analysis of Alexievich's work, the author proceeds to the fourth chapter.

In the fourth and last chapter, the author offers an analysis on Alexievich's *Voices of Utopia Series* and identifies the main strategies used by the writer and the interviewees to emotionally translate experiences. She contextualizes the author, winner of a Nobel prize, whose work can be defined as a novel of voices where rewritings of emotions and trauma can be observed. Savchenkova's corpus of analysis consists of fragments from the five novels in the series and a large number of interviews. It should be noted that each volume contains between 500 and 700 testimonies, interviews which Svetlana Alexievich has reedited throughout the years. This means that the work escapes categorical definitions and poses challenges as to what literary genre it belongs to, but it is clear that Alexievich creates a new translation of the past, transports the reader to the traumatic events being narrated and allows them to empathise with what happened in the form of emotional translations and rewritings of the past.

To conclude, this is a relevant contribution to the field when considering the current global situation of war and conflict. In the first three chapters, Savchenkova builds an extremely solid theoretical framework which undoubtedly contributes to clarify the evolution of Translation Studies and how the discipline has started to consider new objects of study, such as a memory, emotions, objects or silence. This leads to a detailed and well-illustrated analysis offered in chapter four, followed by relevant conclusions which raise awareness of the importance of counting on a plurality of voices and the need for rewriting history beyond the official and canonical versions traditionally considered to be objective. All of this highlights the significance of ethical practices in translation to negotiate difference, overcome frontiers and give voice to silenced collectivities.

REFERENCES

Bassnett, S. and Johnston, D. (2019) 'The Outward Turn in Translation Studies', *The Translator*, 25(3), pp. 181-188 [online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13556509.2019.1701228>

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