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# Translation and Public Policy

Interdisciplinary Perspectives and Case Studies

Edited by  
Gabriel González Núñez  
and Reine Meylaerts



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# Translation and Public Policy

This book brings together an ensemble of leading voices from the fields of economics, language policy, law, political philosophy and translation studies. They come together to provide theoretical perspectives and practical case studies regarding a shared concern: translation policy. Their timely perspectives and case studies allow for the problematising and exploration of translation policy, an area that is beginning to come to the attention of scholars. This book offers the first truly interdisciplinary approach to an area of study that is still in its infancy. It thus makes a timely and necessary contribution.

As the 21st century marches on, authorities are more and more confronted with the reality of multilingual societies, and the monolingual state polices of yesteryear seem unable to satisfy increasing demands for more just societies. Precisely because of that, language policies of necessity must include choices about the use or non-use of translation at different levels. Thus, translation policy plays a prominent yet often unseen role in multilingual societies. This role is shaped by tensions and compromises that bear on the distribution of resources, choices about language, legal imperatives and notions of justice. This book aims to inform scholars and policy makers alike regarding these issues.

**Gabriel González Núñez** is an assistant professor at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley where he teaches several BA and MA courses in translation and interpreting, including legal translation and court interpreting. He is also the Undergraduate Translation & Interpreting Programs coordinator.

**Reine Meylaerts** is professor of Comparative Literature and Translation Studies at KU Leuven where she teaches courses on European Literature, Comparative Literature and Translation and Plurilingualism in Literature. She was director of CETRA from 2006–2014 and is now a board member. She is also the review editor of *Target*.

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# 1 Interdisciplinary perspectives on translation policy

## New directions and challenges

*Reine Meylaerts and Gabriel González Núñez*

As the title of this collection ungallantly announces, this is a book about the role of translation in public policy. This is, then, a volume on *translation policy*. It is not the first text ever written on such a topic, but what little attention has been paid to translation policy in the past has come mainly from the field of Translation Studies (see González Núñez 2016a, 35–38). And yet public policy can be studied from so many different academic fields, all of which can provide helpful and distinct insights. In recognition of that reality, this collection attempts to throw the door wide open by inviting a number of perspectives on translation policy from different fields. The authors, all of whom bring relevant and well-recognised expertise in their own fields, provide insights that invite further reflection and can spark additional research on this relatively under-researched topic. These insights are found in both theoretical pieces and in case studies. And, our hope is that it will help the reader (whether a student, scholar or policy maker) begin to think about policy in terms of translation, as well as the complexities of it all.

Books such as this one that address policy can provide important perspectives that can have an impact in the daily lives of real people. This is due to the nature of policy. Like translation, policy can be hard to define at times. Yet in a way, people seem to recognise policy when they read, hear or talk about it (Jenkins 2007, 22). Attempts to define policy may fall short, as they would have to be able to encompass all of the elements found in this list compiled by Jenkins:

- Policy is an attempt to define, shape and steer orderly courses of action, not least in situations of complexity and uncertainty.
- Policy involves the specification and prioritisation of ends and means, and the relationships between competing ends and means.
- Policy is best regarded as a process, and as such it is ongoing and open-ended.
- The policy process is, by definition, an organisational practice.
- The policy process is embedded in and is not distinct from other aspects of organisational life.

- Policy appeals to, and is intended to foster, organisational trust — that is, external trust of organisations, and trust within organisations — based upon knowledge claims and expertise.
- Policy appeals to, and is intended to foster, organisational trust based on legitimate authority.
- Policy is about absences as well as presences, about what is not said as much as what is said.
- Policy may be implicit as well as explicit.
- Further: policy formulation and policy implementation cannot really be disentangled, since one informs the other and vice versa. (Jenkins 2007, 26)

This is a complex concept grounded in worldviews that lead to specific goals and consequent procedures implemented to achieve those goals. That can happen at different levels and include any number of actors, including in academia (see Du Plessis and Robichaud, in this volume). This highlights the usefulness of the definition of *public* policy adopted by Gazzola and Grin in this volume, which originates in Knoepfel et al., as “a series of intentionally coherent decisions or activities taken or carried out by different public — and sometimes private — actors, whose resources, institutional links and interests vary, with a view to resolving in a targeted manner a problem that is politically defined as collective in nature” (2007, 24).

Based upon that understanding of public policy, one might say that a translation policy can be defined as a series of intentionally coherent decisions on translation or translation activities made by public, and sometimes private, actors in order to resolve collective linguistic and translation problems. Even so, sometimes translation policy may be the result of decisions that are not meant to be coherent, or at least that are not intentionally so. These may be uncoordinated decisions that interact to create a policy in terms of translation (see, e.g., González Núñez 2013, 485–486). Thus, the study of translation policy can be helped if the object of study is understood as something “encompassing translation management, translation practice, and translation beliefs” (González Núñez 2016b, 92). This follows after Spolsky, who identified the study of *language* policy as the study of language management, language practice and language beliefs (2012, 5). Following his lead,<sup>1</sup> one might understand translation management as “the decisions regarding translation made by people who have the authority to decide the use or non-use of translation within a domain” (González Núñez 2016b, 92). Translation practice might be understood as “the actual translation practices of a given community” (González Núñez 2016b, 92). And translation beliefs might be understood as “the beliefs that members of a community hold about issues such as what the value is or is not of offering translation in certain contexts for certain groups or to achieve certain ends” (González Núñez 2016b, 92). This understanding of translation policy helps to highlight the complexity of what is studied in this volume.

It also helps to highlight that even in contexts where there are no explicit, written policies, when it comes to translation “there is always a default [policy]” (Gazzola and Grin, in this volume). This is so because governments or administrations “cannot abstain from using at least one language” and thus need to make, at least implicitly, ad hoc decisions on what to translate, for whom, when and how (González Núñez 2016b, 92). González Núñez illustrates this point in this volume through the example of Brownsville, where there is “no written policy document to outline how the City should deal with LEP residents” and thus practice becomes “the main factor in developing policy”.

It should go without saying that issues of implicit or explicit translation policy affect a wide array of disciplines and topics, including those listed in this book: justice in society (De Schutter); minority rights under international law (Mowbray); language planning (Diaz Fouces); language policy evaluation (Gazzola and Grin); lingua franca in academia (Robichaud); language access in the judiciary and local government (González Núñez); and higher education (Du Plessis). Such a wide range of issues calls for a thorough, interdisciplinary investigation of translation policies. The advantage of interdisciplinary research is that it integrates techniques, tools, perspectives, concepts or theories from two or more disciplines in order to advance understanding or to solve problems beyond the scope of a single discipline. Interdisciplinarity has increasingly come to the forefront in recent times, precisely because traditional disciplinary subdivisions are not always effective in addressing complex issues like translation policies in multilingual contexts. Interdisciplinary investigation should enable the understanding of the relations between various components of translation policy, such as the aforementioned translation management, practices and beliefs. It should also help unravel the inner complexity of each, since all components share official and semi-official layers of communication, and hence of translation. Such unravelling could reveal the tensions and compromises that exist and that contribute to the success and failure of the objectives of translation policies. Such an increased understanding should be of benefit not only to scholars from different disciplines but also to policy makers in a variety of fields (see below).

Thus this volume is intended not only for scholars and students but also for policy makers. They are the ones that deal with everyday realities in terms of multilingualism. They have to deal with complex questions: Why should a local or national government implement a specific translation policy? What would be the purpose of analysing and evaluating existing translation policies, of designing new and better ones? Why would translation and the regulation thereof in the public domain be a worthwhile topic at all? These are all good questions that researchers and policy makers share. They are questions that matter. As González Núñez in this volume rightly observes: “The study of translation policy yields insights [...] on social policies that affect the lives of real people”.



These insights are valuable on many levels, ranging from the international to the national and the local, from empires to cities. In our modern world, where cities have an increasingly important role, it is relevant that the “very core of the potential to act as a citizen<sup>2</sup> — be it in ancient Athens, in Renaissance Florence, or contemporary European cities — is formed by communicative resources” (Kraus 2011, 33). Past and present cities therefore face enormous challenges in terms of linguistic diversity, and they don’t always have the full legal power to conduct translation policies on their own (see Meylaerts, forthcoming).

This is not an issue that affects cities alone. For example, in past multilingual empires such as the Abbasid Caliphate (750–1258), the Inca Empire (1438–1533), the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), the Spanish Empire (1492–1975), the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1848–1918), the Russian Empire (1721–1917), the Ottoman Empire (1299–1922), the British Empire (1603–1997), the French Empire (1804–1814) and others, translation policies served to resolve linguistic problems. Further, they were a tool to create imperial subjects who adhered to the occupying, imperial authorities. Consider the Spanish Empire, which spread over four continents and ruled over language communities “with different scripts, from spoken languages in Africa to Maya glyphs in America and Japanese characters in Asia” (Gruzinski 2009, quoted in Behiels et al. 2014, 113). The *Secretaría de Interpretación de Lenguas*, created by Charles V in 1527, translated from and into no less than 14 West European languages (Latin, Greek, Castilian, Catalan, Valencian, Portuguese, Tuscan, French, German, Dutch, English, Swedish, Danish and Norwegian), all of which goes to illustrate the importance of translation for imperial rulers (see Behiels et al. 2014). Empires are indeed translinguistic force fields (Pratt 2015, 351). They thus depend on communication and must therefore employ translation and interpreting as a method of communication between the occupiers and the occupied (Rafael 2015, 85). Translation then becomes a means of domination and exploitation, “in tandem with the power structures of the imperium” (Von Flotow 2015, 98). Translation policies have been instrumental in creating “regulated practices, hierarchies of command, and judicial processes” (Pratt 2015, 352–353). And yet, despite the important role of translation in Empire, apart from some isolated studies scattered among different scientific fields (Liu 2004; Federici 2014; Wolf 2015; Yücesoy 2015, just to name a few), the history of translation policies in empires has yet to be written.

The political model of the (European) nation-state, as it developed from the 15th century onwards, was (and still is) characterized by “centralized organization, direct rule, uniform field administration, circumscription of resources within the territory, and expanded control over cultural practices” (Tilly 1994, 25). On this point, Kraus explains:

Generally speaking, since the Peace of Westphalia (1648), the long-term historical trend was to create uniformity within the different units

composing the European state system (. . .). Thus, the generalization of national forms of rule can be considered to be one of the most salient features of Europe's path to modernity, and this generalization often became synonymous with cultural homogenization.

(2011, 26)

The ideal nation-state was a linguistically unified space where everyone shared the same national language. Since the French Revolution (1789), the link between language, translation and the state became gradually even more important. Inspired by the Enlightenment, the 1789 *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* made explicit certain principles of freedom and democracy. In time it became a fundamental document for the creation of human and civil rights. It proclaimed that the state should represent the general will of the citizens, that all citizens were equal before the law and should have the right to participate in legislation directly or indirectly. From then on, citizens needed “to be able to act in autonomous and enlightened ways, to participate in collective deliberation, and to influence decision-making, locally, nationally, and transnationally” (Kraus 2011, 33). In this context, language became a state matter more than ever before. It became institutionalised as (the) official language(s).

The establishment of national languages for modern nation-states created so-called linguistic minorities — before then “there was no majority to define minority” (Wright 2004, 119; see also Wickström 2014, 1–2). The national language was not the mother tongue of these minorities. At first they were expected to use their mother tongue, their language, only in limited domains. However, “[a]s the 20th century wore on, many national minorities pushed to maintain their own identity, often represented through language”, which was possible in part because states became “more open to the principle of pluralism, as evidenced by the recognition of the existence of minorities (including linguistic minorities) through the application of different remedies in different situations” (González Núñez 2016a, 6). As a consequence, the issue of language rights — defined here as “the right [of an individual] to use her or his mother tongue in various contexts (e.g., in dealing with the authorities, local, regional or state-wide), orally or signing it, in writing, or all of these” (Skutnabb-Kangas 2012) — was put high on the agenda.

This has happened at a time when, as a result of international migration, linguistic diversity at the city and state levels has increased significantly. “The number of international migrants worldwide has continued to grow rapidly over the past fifteen years reaching 244 million in 2015, up from 222 million in 2010 and 173 million in 2000” (United Nations 2016, 1). One third of these international migrants live in Europe (United Nations 2016, 1). The movement of peoples includes refugees, the worldwide number of which “has reached the highest level since World War II” (United Nations 2016, 9): 19.5 million in 2014 (United Nations 2016, 1). The majority of these

migrants are to be found in today's metropolises. This results in a number of issues that pertain to language and identity. Indeed, "[i]t is obvious that the right to preserve one's cultural identity and to maintain one's mother tongue has its most immediate institutional relevance in those urban zones where migrants are typically concentrated" (Kraus 2011, 28).

So it should be clear that translation policies can play a key role in securing language rights, in the city and beyond. Institutionally regulated citizenship, in order to be meaningful, must be grounded in communication. Such communication, to be fully possible, must be based on the new ideas of language rights citizenship and popular sovereignty. Institutionally regulated citizenship, therefore, requires appropriate language and translation policies aimed at regulating language use in the public sphere. In whatever language policy authorities try to implement, ranging from institutional monolingualism to multilingualism, translation policies will be a crucial part (see Meylaerts 2011). However, the role of translation policies in creating and securing linguistic and civil rights remains largely under-researched in Translation Studies and largely unheard of in other disciplines.

Understanding the role of translation policies is no simple task. The questions that need to be addressed are not simple questions. How to know if authorities and citizens are really able to communicate with each other? How to know what role is played by translation in those communications? How to take into account countless contextual factors? Many chapters in this volume implicitly or explicitly refer to the complex and context-dependent nature of public policy issues in general and of translation policies in particular. Among the factors that "tend to be decisive in practice when determining different degrees of recognition" of translation policies for certain groups, Diaz Fouces distinguishes, for example, between citizens who have been recognised as a "native group or come from the outside" and between groups whose "presence in the territory is compact or not". Previous research tends to indicate policy maker's tendency in favour of historical territorial minorities as beneficiaries of translation services, whereas recent immigrants who live more scattered within a given state are often enjoying far less translation facilities (see, e.g., Meylaerts 2011; González Núñez 2016a). The issue of context also arises in Du Plessis's study of educational interpreting at the University of the Free State, where he concludes that the context "has changed to such an extent" that the challenge for a future language and translation policy will be "how to reconcile a revised language policy with the demands for transformation (and integration), on the one hand, and the insistence on maintaining diversity (including language diversity), on the other hand".

Translation policies are, then, complex and context-dependent. When considering them, Gazzola and Grin stress that "the evaluation of language policies is necessarily *partial*, that is, it addresses one or a *few* questions at a time, in a specific context" and that "language policy evaluation produces