Journal of Translation 19:1 (2023): 117–121
https://doi.org/10.54395/JOT-XA6HP
ISSN 1558-7282
journaloftranslation.org

Teaching Translation: Programs, Courses, Pedagogies

Lawrence Venuti, ed. London & New York: Routledge, 2017. 259 pp.

Reviewed by

ERNST WENDLAND
South African Theological Seminary; USA; Zambia
erwendland@gmail.com

Unfortunately, as a former UBS translation consultant (TC) and current trainer of TCs, I studied through this book much later than I should have, given its publication date. On the other hand, perhaps this delay in access was fortuitous since, in the meantime, I have been able to participate in several larger workshops involving personnel working in many non-Western world regions, thus enabling an initial comparative study to be made. Therefore, while carefully working through the text, I made note of a number of important issues regarding the philosophy and pedagogy of translation teaching that are worth documenting in this overview (not strictly a "review" per se). After an initial summary of the book's contents and stated purpose, I will note several points of information that I found especially relevant and applicable to my own methods of teaching (and learning!). In conclusion, I mention a few areas in which perspectives and approaches employed in the teaching of "*biblical* translation studies" might enrich those in the broader field of translation studies.

Venuti begins with a brief but systematic and informative introduction to *Teaching Translation* that provides a critical theoretical and historical orientation to the field.[1] The main aim of the book "is to take stock of how translation studies is taught at the present time...[seeking] to document a variety of programs, courses, and pedagogies situated in various kinds of institutions...[and] implicitly [asking] how the teaching of translation research and practice can improve—and

[1] Lawrence Venuti is a professor of English at Temple University, USA. As a leading translation theorist and literary translator, he is well qualified to edit this collection of essays on the subject of "teaching translation."

© SIL International, 2023

how improvement can be measured…" (2). Venuti distinguishes between the traditional "instrumental" view of translation in which the practice "is seen as the reproduction or transfer of an invariant that is contained in or caused by the source text, whether its form, its meaning, or its effect" (6)—and his proposed "hermeneutic model," where "translation is understood as an interpretive act that varies the form, meaning, and effect of the source text according to the intelligibilities and interests of the translating culture" (8).[2] Not surprisingly, all of the studies included in this book view "translation," its description, and its teaching, from the latter perspective.[3]

The book's twenty-six incisive chapters are divided into four major parts:[4] (1) a description of recommended degree programs: undergraduate certificate, graduate certificate, MA in translation, MFA in literary translation, and a doctoral program in translation studies; (2) more specific "teaching translation practices," including those that focus on foreign language majors, instruction through text types, a "collaborative pedagogy," the translation of poetry, a multilingual workshop, theater translation, audiovisual translation, translating "a canonical author" (C. P. Cavafy) as well as a "literary tradition" (Arabic); (3) having a more theoretical and historical focus, covering subject areas such as: translator training, comparative literature, interdisciplinary humanities, literature in translation, world literature, culture and technology, (post)colonial

[2] This would seem to reflect a definite "Skopos" model of translation practice (208). In chapter 25, these two models of translation are referred to as the "transmissionist" and "positivist" methods (204). One wonders from the perspective of Scripture translation whether there is not the possibility of some middle ground between these two approaches, for example, where the "instrumentalist" aims at the "recreation of an equivalent essence" of meaning rather than the "reproduction of an invariant," while the "positivist" agrees to take special care during the contextualized process of "varying the meaning" of the sacred source text in translation.

[3] Venuti observes regarding the book's coverage that "[w]ritten translation is emphasized over interpreting (or oral translation), which might more effectively be covered separately, given the different conditions under which interpreters work" (12). Furthermore, since practically speaking "more than one translating language could not be treated thoroughly in a single book, … [t]he focus also falls squarely on translation into English," which "has become the lingua franca of the international community of translation scholars" (12). The book does contain a chapter (23) on "Folklore in Translation" that makes reference to methodologies in the translation of oral art forms.

[4] The front matter includes a table of chapter titles, a page giving the editor's "acknowledgements," and academic notes on the book's contributors. At the back we have a combined bibliography for all chapters plus a rather basic index of the main subjects and persons named in the book.

translation, bilingual authorship, folklore, and translation in the human sciences; and, finally, (4) recommended resources, namely, "a survey of translation pedagogies," and "a review of textbooks in translation studies"—in short, just about everything one wanted to know about the didactic aspect of (secular) translation studies but didn't know where to look.

As indicated by the preceding listing of the book's principal topics, their breadth and diversity preclude a descriptive look from a detailed perspective. Instead, I will illustrate the book's potential relevance by presenting several quotes that seem to be of special importance to practitioners who are engaged in the teaching of Bible translation trainers, in particular, translation advisers and consultants.[5] Those who are thus active in the training of others will then be able to compare their current methodologies with the practices being advocated in this book. There will obviously be some differences due to the sacred, "high value" nature of the Scriptures as a source text and "target" (23, 34)[6] audiences who may already be somewhat familiar with biblical content and even wordings, based on translations in other languages. However, I found a significant number of teaching as well as translation principles and procedures that would be helpful to review or perhaps learn for the first time as a way of improving our own pedagogies. As a brief sample of the book, then, I have selected four important issues which are cited below, followed by a few of my own reflections in *italics*.

- Venuti strongly recommends that translation courses and programs should *not* be led by "instructors, including senior faculty, who neither translate nor conduct research in translation." Instead, "only instructors who are professionally current in a field, who are not only conversant with its trends and methods but conduct research in it and participate in its debates, should be assigned to teach courses in that field" (4).
  While such a high ideal might not be achievable in all areas in the worldwide endeavor of Scripture translation, it is certainly a reasonable goal that ought to be aspired to.
- In addition to a demonstrated expertise in the language of the source text, "a translator must have a broad and deep familiarity with linguistic patterns, literary traditions, and cultural values in the receiving situation, not just in the culture where the source text originates" (13).

[5] Except for a few scattered references to Eugene A. Nida, the theory and practice, including the teaching, involved in *Bible* translating is virtually absent in the book. One might wonder about the reason for this large-scale omission.

[6] A more appropriate term would be "receptor" (or even "consumer"); see Willis Barnstone, *The Poetics of Translation: History, Theory, Practice*. 1993. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, p. 228.

I have found that this is a common deficiency among not only Bible translators but also their teachers and consultants. Not many have done significant research in or studied the specific linguistic character and the oral or literary art forms of the language(s) into which they are working, even the major regional lingua franca being used as the medium of instruction in local workshops. If possible, such preliminary (at least) investigation into these critical receptor languages should be carried out before attempting to "teach translation" in the areas concerned.

- Collaborative participant training work is highlighted in many chapters of *Teaching Translation*. For example, "Students are divided into groups and assigned a section of a document to be translated, although they must each draft a complete version of the section before the group meets to decide on the translation to send to the class for editing. The class then discusses each group's translation, considering the function of the document, the target audience, and the impact of these factors on their verbal choices" (19).
  Since the students at a Bible translation workshop often come from different language groups and hence RLs, it might be a helpful training exercise first to assess their ability in the language of instruction (whether English or any other) and, if necessary, offer some supplemental education concerning its main features and advice about giving useful back-translations. Additional remedial tutoring might also be needed with respect to the biblical language in focus, Hebrew or Greek.
- Another perspective on the benefits of group learning when teaching translation is as follows: "The primary objective of fostering collaboration is to reconcile theory and practice through the interaction of individual and group work that favors the acquisition of translation skills. Teamwork helps students resolve both translational and social issues, supporting those who feel more confident if allowed to voice their opinions in small groups. ... Yet the emphasis on collaboration does not shift the responsibility for learning solely or mostly onto the students' shoulders. Rather, learning opportunities are triggered and then guided explicitly by the teacher, who must be flexible enough to heed the students' suggestions and needs while maintaining a focus on the aims of the procedures. ... This approach implies that the classroom becomes a discussion forum and hands-on workshop where the teacher alternates her role as guide and expert with that of project coordinator" (71–73).
  This, too, would seem to be excellent advice that may also be applied in the instruction of Bible translation teachers and consultants. Furthermore, the instructors at any workshop should also come prepared to learn some important things from their students, including implicit and explicit advice about how to become better (more effective) trainers!

Teaching Translation is a book that should be on the reference shelf or tablet of every Bible translation theorist, teacher, field consultant, and experienced translator. It provides a diverse scholarly as well as practical account of contemporary programs, courses, and pedagogies in the discipline of current translation studies, which has informed the practitioners of interlingual Scripture transmission in many ways over the years. However, as already mentioned, there is a general lack of awareness of what is going on in the parallel field of "Bible translation studies," the various specialists of which may in fact have some significant suggestions to offer with regard to the teaching of translators and especially their trainers, for example, with regard to areas such as:

- comprehensive linguistic and literary discourse analysis procedures and case studies;
- in application to a wide range of non-western languages and verbal art forms;
- featuring orality and performance studies, with special reference to poetry;
- according to a holistic, conceptual "frames of reference" model for the purpose of project administration as well as textual analysis and assessment.

For a thorough documentation of these and other areas or issues of possible interest, Prof. Venuti and his colleagues might benefit from a careful perusal of the recently published compendium of topical entries available in *A Guide to Bible Translation*.[7]

7 Philip A. Noss and Charles S. Houser, eds., *A Guide to Bible Translation: People, Languages, and Topics*. Second edition. 2020. Maitland, FL: Xulon Press and Swindon, UK: United Bible Societies. See also an extended review of this book by Christopher J. Lovelace, which may be found at: https://sats.ac.za/conspectus/guide-bible-translation-noss-houser/.