

ESSAY

Translating for Language Justice, across the Disciplines

KAREN EMMERICH

Do translations! This is the invitation I want to make, relaying and rephrasing—deliberately countering—the advice I once received. Yes, yes and absolutely. Do translations, for the simple reason that we need them.

—Kate Briggs

Do anthropologists have a professional duty to carry out or encourage translations of important works that are related to their practice? Yes. Does everyone have translation skill? Of course, no. . . . It is my humble view that those anthropologists who have the skill should try their hands at translation of anthropological texts or works that are related to the concerns of the discipline. And if I had my way, I would make acquisition of this skill an integral part of the training in anthropology.

—Peter-Jazzy Ezeh

As a scholar of comparative literature who is also a longtime practicing translator, I have grown a thick skin when it comes to people's devaluing translation and its products in my professional circles and in the broader cultural surrounds. Colleagues in a range of disciplines routinely depend on translated texts in their research and teaching, yet rarely do they mention the interpretive labor of the translators who produced them, unless it is to criticize their choices, usually on the basis of their own interpretation of a text's content or form or what particular words or phrases "actually" mean. A great many of these colleagues routinely engage in translation themselves, even if they might not identify themselves as translators: they translate passages from other-language sources to quote in their writings, engage in translanguaging fieldwork or archival research, and so on. Some have

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even translated entire books, but they still might not think to fold discussions of translation choices, methods, or approaches into the texts they write or the courses they teach, or even to include translators' names alongside authors' names on their syllabi. Translation is even presented by some as the potential downfall of language and literature departments, complicit in the appropriative moves of a world-lit-ification that flattens the supposed untranslatable of texts, languages, and cultures. This collective dismissal is reflected in the pervasive institutional devaluation of the work of translation: according to the 2007 *Report of the MLA Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion*, translations were rated "not important" by 30.4% of the departments surveyed—with a telling breakdown between departments granting doctoral degrees (47.4%) and those stopping at the master's (14.0%) or baccalaureate level (16.7%). Similar percentages were reported for other forms of intellectual labor that do not rise to the level of "original" work, such as critical editing, writing a textbook, or editing a scholarly journal (41).

While I am certainly used to others downgrading practices of translation, I have also learned to have counterarguments at the ready—and I offer this piece in that spirit, as an extended public counterargument. The stakes here are not just theoretical or academic in the sense of being removed from the daily struggles of real people out there in the world. On the contrary, our institutional structures and individual habits in academic settings both reflect and shape structures and habits external to those settings. While many critics of translation(s) may present themselves as defenders of language learning and propose a false conflict between the two, it is foolhardy and misleading to separate the dismissal of translation in US academic circles from the broader cultural suspicion of language learning, hostility to migrants, and neglect of crucial translation and interpreting services that pervade our social fabric, such that critical language brokering often needs to be undertaken by untrained volunteers or conscripts—including, of course, many of the children who grow up to be our students, or, in markedly fewer cases (and I note this here as an issue of

structural inequity), many of those who grow up to be us or our colleagues (Baer).¹

In this atmosphere of English-centrism, marked by a suspicion both of other languages and of translation, I am grateful not only for the MLA's long-standing support of the study of languages and literatures but also for its increasing support of translation. Since the 1990s, the MLA has offered three separate translation prizes: the Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Prize for a Translation of a Literary Work, the Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Prize for a Translation of a Scholarly Study of Literature, and the Lois Roth Award for a Translation of a Literary Work. The MLA Texts and Translations series, meanwhile, has published dozens of translations of literary works, primarily for pedagogical use, with source texts published in companion volumes, while the transdisciplinary forum TC Translation Studies sponsors sessions at the MLA convention and discussions on the *MLA Commons*. Catherine Porter's year as MLA president was a particularly fruitful one for thinking about translation: her presidential theme for the 2009 MLA convention in Philadelphia, "The Tasks of Translation in the Global Context," resulted in over fifty panels dedicated to issues of translation, while Porter, calling herself "a translator from SUNY Cortland," used her presidential address to defend translation and advocate for the urgency of fostering multilingualism in the United States (546). More recently, as MLA president in 2022, Barbara Fuchs chose the theme "Multilingual US" for that year's hybrid convention, likewise stressing in her presidential address the importance of both language instruction and public-facing work promoting multilingualism outside the university. A series of MLA task force reports have also recognized translation as a meaningful scholarly activity at both the graduate and faculty levels. The *Report of the MLA Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion* suggests that, like critical editions, trade books, and textbooks, "annotated translations of important primary texts" could "contribute to a body of scholarly and professional work that can meet the highest standards of scholarship in the tenure-review process" (40). And because of the particular challenges translated texts pose for current systems of scholarly

evaluation, in 2011, the MLA—drawing on the work of the American Literary Translators Association, the PEN American Center Translation Committee, and individuals including Michael Henry Heim, a long-time translation advocate²—published guidelines on its website for evaluating translations “as an integral part of the dossiers submitted by candidates for academic positions and by faculty members facing personnel decisions” (“Evaluating”). In 2014, the *Report of the MLA Task Force on Doctoral Study in Modern Language and Literature* similarly recommended that the “spectrum of forms the dissertation may take” be expanded to include (among other things) “translations, with accompanying theoretical and critical reflection” (14). Also, *PMLA* accepts translations of scholarly materials first written in languages other than English, including those it publishes in its exemplary series *Criticism in Translation*, inaugurated in the late 1980s—though it unfortunately remains one of few scholarly journals in the United States to publish translated critical writing.

I am therefore very pleased to have this piece appear in *PMLA*'s special topic on translation—yet another indication of the MLA's ongoing commitment to promoting the visibility of translation and to fostering what Brian James Baer calls “translation literacy” among our students by beginning first and foremost with the way we ourselves talk about, think about, and practice translation (140). Bringing translation from the margins to the center of scholarly practice in the humanities and social sciences can benefit our intellectual communities in countless ways, in part by helping us counter the various forms of language injustice in which the overwhelmingly English-centric US academy has long been complicit. At all levels of the academic hierarchy, from undergraduate work on up, by highlighting and encouraging multilingualism rather than sidelining or punishing it, translation offers opportunities for inclusiveness, information sharing, and collaborative knowledge production across linguistic, social, economic, and geographic divides. The translation of scholarly texts in particular offers a form of hands-on apprenticeship for our students, modeling various possibilities for what their own scholarly writing

might look like. Translation can also train students in forms of intellectual and scholarly rigor without the highly pressured and often confusing institutional demands for “original” contributions or interventions in the field. In fact, translation challenges the limited and limiting assumption that an intervention must be “original”: the translation of both literary and scholarly texts, while not customarily considered original work, does in fact allow us to make sometimes quite substantial interventions in the field, even to shift where the field is located. And for scholars of all ranks, translating the texts of colleagues writing in other languages can help us break down certain forms of insularity, including disciplinary insularity; can counteract the disproportionate influence of texts first written in English; and can allow scholars working around the world greater access to certain channels of distribution, recognition, and influence.

In advocating for a more central role for translation, we must recognize the extent to which translation is already central to our research, reading, teaching, and scholarship more generally. Academic work across the humanities and social sciences is fueled by practices of translation: not only do we engage with countless texts in translation produced by others, we also translate while doing, recording, or reporting on our fieldwork; while researching in archives; while quoting from work in other languages as we draft scholarly texts; while offering impromptu translanguaging paraphrases of other-language written or audiovisual materials in the classroom; and so on. Yet vanishingly few undergraduate or graduate students are encouraged to engage with translated texts *as* translations or are trained in practices of translation, either in their own discipline(s) or as an interdisciplinary node of intellectual engagement. In many humanities departments, if graduate students encounter translation formally at all, it is in the shape of “translation and commentary” exams. These exams, designed to test linguistic knowledge, adopt what Lawrence Venuti would call an “instrumental” view of translation (*Contra Instrumentalism*), and they are usually administered to students who have not been provided any specific prior training in translation as an interpretive process and usually evaluated by faculty members who have not had such training

either. Beyond this, few departments treat translation as an essential skill at the undergraduate or graduate level, much less as a foundational research methodology for more senior scholars. In advocating for this to change, I recognize the need to remain cognizant of the power differentials between languages that affect any experience of interlingual contact. Yet this imposed or constructed hierarchy of languages makes it essential that we double down on our commitment both to the multilingualism that makes translation possible and to translation as a mode not of promoting but of countering what Yasemin Yildiz has called the “monolingual paradigm,” a politically motivated and historically situated conception of language and its relation to ethno-nation that, beginning in the eighteenth century, came to displace “previously unquestioned practices of living and writing in multiple languages” (6).

My contribution here is modest: I simply outline some of the many ways in which cultivating rigorous practices of translation in institutions of higher education can increase language justice and access, foster complex critical thought, and facilitate exposure to other traditions of knowledge production. I divide my comments according to existing groups—undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty members—with the understanding that what is true for one is also often true for the others and that concurrent changes will have to be made by the journals and presses that publish our work, as well as by administrators involved in making personnel decisions. These suggestions all involve encouraging people to do more translations, to do them more thoughtfully and self-critically, and to make space for others to do the same. And underlying them all is a critique of the emphasis on originality that has, I believe, played a large role in the devaluation of translation in our academic institutions and beyond. It is to this critique that I now turn.

What Is “Original” Scholarship, and Why Do We Value It So Much?

I pose this question here to invite some collective reflection on our current habits of assigning and assessing student work; evaluating different forms

of knowledge production for hiring, tenure, and promotion; and staking claims to intellectual interventions, in part through the citational practices we use to distinguish between others’ words and ideas and our own. But who among us could rightly say that all the *non*quoted words in a piece of writing that bears our name are really our words representing our ideas? Even putting aside weighty theoretical discussions of the signature, what about the lengthy acknowledgments that often preface our scholarly monographs, mentioning friends, family members, and colleagues who have shared ideas or commented on drafts, or the suggestions of anonymous reviewers (and now would be as good a time as any to sincerely thank the two anonymous reviewers whose thoughtful and insightful comments on this piece made it immeasurably better than it was before), or the hours of collaborative thinking we engage in with our students, whose questions and comments subtly shape our understanding of the issues at hand or point our research in new directions? What about generic conventions and disciplinary norms? Or the discriminatory structures of access baked into the institutions we encounter from birth on up that likewise enable or encourage certain thoughts while discouraging others? Or the ways in which a lifetime of reading and listening and sitting with others on porches and stoops, participating in the many overlapping communities to which we belong, has shaped the kinds of thoughts we can have and articulate and share? Surely there are others who have sat down for a last edit of a piece before sending it off to press and seen a tissue of citations, interactions, and intellectual relationships spreading over the page. Surely there are others who have sat and thought, well, if this concept was honed out of anger against X’s annoying use of term Y, and this other thought was first articulated in that long phone conversation with M, and this third idea was a product of reading the work of scholars A through J, and my whole commitment to pursuing topic Q through the lens of theory R is related to my life experiences of E, F, and G, could it possibly be that in this whole darned piece, not a single thought could really be said to be mine and mine alone?

This may sound flip, or silly, or so unoriginal a train of thought as to be unworthy of, say, publication in a leading peer-reviewed scholarly journal. I hope, in fact, that it does. Because a general recognition of the slippery nature of any claim to intellectual or scholarly originality would bring us one step closer to more fairly appreciating the myriad kinds of intellectual labor that continue to be undervalued in many of our fields: translating, but also teaching, mentoring, editing scholarly journals, editing more generally, public scholarship, civic engagement, program development, education advocacy, and so much more. Many of these kinds of labor involve forms of writing that fall outside existing academic structures of valuation—forms of writing that, while research-based, intellectual, and creative, and often at least as impactful as whatever scholarly article or monograph we might otherwise have been working on, are also not original according to most current usages. Yet even within the fairly specific context of scholarly writing, the concept of originality remains vague and ill-defined: in a recent analysis of UK guidelines for granting PhDs, Gillian Clarke and Ingrid Lunt note that while “the term ‘originality,’ or other similar expressions that convey creativity and new work, is often used in general criteria that are intended to be used by [PhD] examiners and applied across all disciplines,” the concept itself remains “a source of mystique.” “There has been an assumption,” they write, “that evidence of ‘originality’ will be easily recognized by doctoral examiners, and that the use of this concept is relatively unproblematic” (804), whereas in fact “there is no universally agreed definition of what ‘originality’ means when used as a criterion for making a doctoral award” (808)—or as a criterion for hiring or promotion at the faculty level. Indeed, we might see the anxious stake claiming of so much scholarly work, the reflexive amplification of one’s own intervention as much as believability will allow, as a by-product of the continued institutional investment in an originality whose terms are entirely unclear. We could, of course, respond to Clarke and Lunt’s findings by trying to quantify the particular titration of supposedly original thought necessary to pass muster, to

regulate more clearly the shadowy distinction between the original contribution and its nonoriginal surrounds. Or, given the complicated admixture of the mine and not mine, the original and the derivative in all intellectual pursuits, we might instead see an opportunity to reevaluate the largely individualistic conception of intellectual labor that pervades the humanities and some social sciences and to embrace forms of scholarship that are explicitly derivative and concertedly nonindividualistic, while also necessitating hard-earned knowledge, intellectual rigor, and a high degree of expertise and interpretive skill.

Translation could be considered an exemplary case of such work—and in proposing that scholarly translation be considered another genre of scholarly writing, I hope both to promote an understanding of translation as a rigorous scholarly practice and to encourage a healthy suspicion of the originality of any other work of scholarship, no matter how important, impactful, impeccably researched, or compellingly written. There is already an ever-growing body of scholarship suggesting that the line between literary translation and original writing has never been terribly clear, despite the current policing of that distinction in copyright law, author and translator contracts, and so on. Scholars and theorists of translation have long been working to chip away at the misguided yet persistent belief that translation is a process that merely transfers (or fails to transfer) some preexisting content or meaning between languages and to present it instead as a form of interpretive labor.³ Venuti has proposed a “hermeneutic” model that understands translation as a process by which a translator inscribes a particular interpretation of a text (*Contra Instrumentalism* 1), while Matthew Reynolds’s term “prismatic translation” similarly describes how translation “open[s] up the plural signifying potential of the source text and spread[s] it into multiple versions, each continuous with the source though different from it, and related to the other versions though different from all of them too” (2). In addition, translation not only requires the inventiveness needed to create an entire text where no text was before but also involves functions akin to editing: cutting and adding, shaping

and changing. Translators must inevitably negotiate between the multiple versions of a given work that almost always exist, thereby shaping their “originals,” or “source texts,” in the process of translating (K. Emmerich, *Literary Translation*)—which, of course, are neither original nor even really sources, since all writing is, as Stephen Voyle puts it, “borrowed to varying degrees, insofar as genres, forms and language are shared” (408).

Recent work by scholars of a range of linguistic and literary traditions has likewise been questioning the division between authorial originality and translatorial derivation. We might think, for instance, of the work of Wiebke Denecke, Michael Emmerich, Valerie Henitiuk, and Lydia H. Liu in premodern and early modern East Asian contexts; or of Rita Kothari’s work on “everyday practices of translation” in modern and contemporary India (263); or of Ferial Ghazoul’s research into the fluidity of textual and oral literary production in early modern central and western Asia. In the European and colonial contexts, Rita Copeland, A. E. B. Coldiron, Mary Helen McMurrin, and Isabel Hofmeyr have likewise traced medieval, early modern, and eighteenth-century traditions of authorship and translatorship that challenge the strict distinction between those functions.⁴ McMurrin, for instance, presents an eighteenth-century world in which “it is often impossible to tell what is a translation and what is an original to begin with” (3), given the extreme changes in plot, length, style, genre, and so on (in addition to the change of language) that works would routinely undergo during the process of translation. On the conceptual front, Douglas Robinson’s cheekily brilliant *Who Translates? Translator Subjectivities beyond Reason* (2001) probes the silently reigning metaphor of translator as spirit channeler to place translation squarely among other forms of writing, in part by “empty[ing] out the act of writing (whether by an ‘original author’ or a translator) of authority, specifically the authority of intentionality” (3–4). Thanks to these and other efforts, the so-called Romantic ideology of authorship—which, as scholars such as Tilar Mazzeo have argued, is to many of us merely a story certain Romantics told about themselves, a story others, including multinational entertainment

conglomerates, have found it useful to co-opt (Mazzeo)—looks more and more to be an odd blip in a much longer-term historical understanding of texts as multiply authored, or at least as enabled by the creative labor of many individuals, some of whose influence and participation can be traced, some of whose cannot.

There is nothing new in the idea that translation is interpretive and creative work or in the idea that writing of all sorts is derivative and dependent on preexisting modes of expression, or even fundamentally collaborative and nonindividual. On the contrary, these are commonplaces of sorts. Yet they exist in tension with other, competing commonplaces that have thus far proved more convincing on a grand societal scale. And while many scholars of language and literature are increasingly willing to recognize *literary* translation as a form of writing with constraint and to recognize the derivative nature of “original” *literary* writing, there is one realm in which the hard line between translation and other forms of writing seems to be particularly tenacious: the academy, where the privileging and policing of “original thought” and “original expression” continue to structure our expectations of scholarly production at all levels, from undergraduate term papers to academic books. This privileging of supposedly original thought not only elides the much more complicated reality of collaborative knowledge production but is, I suggest, a major factor in the academic suppression of translation, including the near nonexistence of a North American tradition of translating scholarly work written by colleagues in other languages and places. If we as an academic community seek to redress the injustices of our current system of knowledge production and dissemination, we could certainly do worse than to throw ourselves wholeheartedly into fostering robust, informed, and ethically sensitive practices of translation at all levels of our academic hierarchies.

Translation and Language Justice in the Undergraduate Curriculum

From community colleges to elite private universities, from urban commuter campuses with

multilingual majorities to campuses in parts of the country where monolingualism holds even greater ideological and practical sway, courses of undergraduate study across a range of disciplines are plagued by the pervasive language injustice of an institutional monolingualism that, as Sean Cotter, of the University of Texas, Dallas, writes, “gives an advantage to students who were raised and schooled in English-language culture” (141). Taught exclusively in English and downplaying the translanguaging work that has gone into the constitution of these disciplines and their objects of study, degree programs in literature, history, religion, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and so on thereby reinforce what Isabel Gómez calls the “English-centric mindset of our public sphere” in the United States—a mindset that “may lead heritage speakers to feel ashamed of the language spoken at home and inadequate in college classrooms after having grown up in primary and secondary educational cultures that, by and large, continue to treat bilingualism as an obstacle” (55).

In and against this context, the inspiring work of numerous scholars and educators—including Cotter and Gómez—who seek to identify, name, and counter this institutional monolingualism, in part by centering practices of translation, gives us many excellent models to emulate. For instance, though rhetoric and composition programs have historically fostered an English-centric mindset, in a 2011 position paper in *College English*, Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, Jacqueline Jones Royster, and John Trimbur called for a “translingual approach” to composition and the language arts, one that acknowledges the Conference on College Composition and Communication’s 1974 resolution “Students’ Rights to Their Own Language”—intended to defend “the right of students (and all other writers) to use different varieties of English”—and extends it to apply to “differences within and across all languages” (Horner et al. 304). This translanguaging approach involves “(1) honoring the power of all language users to shape language to specific ends; (2) recognizing the linguistic heterogeneity of all users of language both within the United States and globally; and (3)

directly confronting English monolingualist expectations by researching and teaching how writers can work with and against, not simply within, those expectations” (305). The paper’s authors repeatedly propose translation as one tool that can help students and faculty alike “better understand and participate in negotiations of difference in and through language” (308). They also stress the need for changes “in the design of writing curricula and in the hiring, training, and professional development of writing teachers” (309)—including collaboration across traditional disciplinary boundaries “separating composition studies from ESL, applied linguistics, literacy studies, ‘foreign’ language instruction, and translation studies” (310).⁵

Teachers and scholars of rhetoric and composition face an uphill battle in making these changes, particularly given what has been called a “stunning” decline in language enrollments, including the closures of over 650 language programs and departments between 2013 and 2016, according to MLA data (Johnson; see Looney and Lusin). If anything, however, the dire situation of language instruction in the United States makes it even more crucial that we recognize the centrality of translanguaging work to disciplines across the university—and that we raise issues of language justice explicitly in language classrooms. In her courses for Spanish heritage learners at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, Gómez incorporates work in and about translation to draw on what Maria Luisa Parra calls students’ “ethnolinguistically hybrid, complex identities” (qtd. in Gómez 51). Gómez notes that many of the factors that have contributed to the US academy’s long-standing inhospitality to translation and translation studies have also “informed the relationship heritage language learners have with their languages” (51); she thus stresses the importance of assigning materials that emphasize “the decolonial potential of translation and interpretation in the context of the colonial history of translation into Spanish, French, and English in the Western Hemisphere as tools of assimilation” (64). In other words, the colonial history of translation is not translation’s only history, and it need not be its only present or future: resistant modes of

translation can be drawn on and fostered to help counter narratives that oppress or exclude. As part of this effort, Gómez notes how important it is to incorporate translation theories from outside the Western or anglophone worlds. Her syllabi draw heavily on the work of Latin American translators, translation theorists, and translation activists, and she encourages students to use their own writing and translating to contribute even further to decentering English and engaging in forms of “multilingual knowledge production” (51).

Drawing on heritage knowledge can have similar effects in literature courses. Christopher Leary notes that the student body at Queensborough Community College in New York, where he teaches, “represent[s] 127 nations of birth and 78 native languages” and that nearly half the students in his literature courses in the English department are “capable of writing in multiple languages” (215). Leary employs exercises in editing, translating, and anthologizing to validate that ethnolinguistic diversity, to help students “comprehend and articulate the mechanisms by which quality is overlooked in ways that are harmful to individuals and to society” (212), and to foster new habits of intervening in conventional, predominantly monolingualist modes of valuation. Projects like these, which incorporate thinking about translation into a broader engagement with other processes of “rewriting” (in the sense proposed by André Lefevere’s *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* [1992]), could also be meaningfully tailored for students without a strong foundation in another language. In fact, in a 1996 essay in *College English*, Venuti argues for the importance of requiring courses in translation studies especially in undergraduate English programs serving primarily monolingual students, to encourage them “to be both self-critical and critical of exclusionary cultural ideologies by drawing attention to the situatedness of texts and interpretations” (331).⁶ And while Venuti’s essay calls for dedicated courses on translation, small-scale emendations to existing courses can also be meaningful and effective: adding a simple in-class exercise comparing multiple translations of a single work, for instance, can be a remarkably

powerful way of training students in the practices of close reading, historicization, and contextualization that remain central to the study of literature, while also showing students the richness of interpretation that translation(s) can offer. Space can also be made in world literature courses and “great books” courses for substantive discussions of translation and other forms of textual mediation—discussions that shift the focus onto how literary traditions are formed in and through translanguing exchange and that show cultural production more broadly to be an endless chain of often translanguing call-and-response.

In undergraduate creative writing programs, translation exercises or dedicated courses can normalize translanguing literary creation, can allow students to immerse themselves in many kinds of differently excellent writing as a mode of literary apprenticeship, and can help them recognize the multiple varieties of a particular language that the monolingual paradigm tends to obscure or marginalize (Prevallet). Similarly, advanced language courses that invite students to translate texts into their language of study can help them explore the many registers or geographic, temporal, or cultural varieties of two languages at once. And because courses in language and literature departments tend to be organized around national literary canons and largely ignore the impact of translated texts in the formation of those literary traditions, here, too, incorporating translated texts can be a powerful conceptual and practical move. Moreover, because translation involves collaboration and problem solving, bringing translation practice into classroom activities in a range of disciplines also helps foster an ethos of collaboration, as well as emphasizing “interactivity, openness, and the decentralization of authority and knowledge” (132), as Kathleen Antonioli and Melinda A. Cro note in their account of folding translation and digital humanities work into an advanced French class at Kansas State University.

Thus far I have focused on fields immediately relevant to many readers of *PMLA*. Yet countless other disciplines—anthropology, sociology, linguistics, history, philosophy, classics, economics, and so

on—likewise depend on translation as a research methodology as well as on translated texts as objects of investigation. And in these disciplines, too (at least as practiced in the United States and in other countries of global language dominance), the fact of translation is routinely suppressed in the classroom and in scholarly writings. These are habits we can begin to make apparent to our students and to counteract in concrete, practical ways, in every syllabus we design, regardless of our discipline. In fact, a newfound commitment to translation literacy can help us draw an explicit methodological link between disparate disciplines of the humanities and social sciences. Embracing translation will thus help those of us in beleaguered language and literature departments articulate more fully to our colleagues and administrations some concrete ways in which our courses allow students to hone skills and garner knowledge that supports their work elsewhere at the university. If language justice, scholarly collaboration, fostering nuanced approaches to ethnocultural difference, and the decentralization of knowledge are key goals for us as members of a broader academic community, we can reach toward such goals by incorporating translation into our undergraduate teaching, advising, and mentoring in numerous ways—through discrete courses, through projects or units in courses primarily focused on other content, and through one-off class sessions spent discussing relevant translation theories or the role of translation(s) in the creation and perpetuation of our fields.

Translation in and as Graduate-Level Research

The many benefits of incorporating translation into undergraduate courses and programs of study have their correlates in graduate programs as well: here, too, translation practice and theory can draw on students' rich multilingual and culturally complex experiences in the world; can decenter English and combat the monolingualism of the US academic sphere; can help students question received narratives about languages, histories, cultures, and literary traditions; and can provide a form of apprenticeship in the many genres of writing our

students aim to produce, including scholarly prose. Venuti's 2017 edited volume *Teaching Translation: Programs, Courses, Pedagogies* includes a number of contributions dedicated to specific contexts where graduate work in translation is already happening: a certificate program in translation studies housed within a department of comparative literature; a master's program in translator training; translation workshops in MFA programs; a doctoral program in translation studies; and a piece on helping graduate students in comparative literature address issues of translation in their own teaching.⁷ Venuti's volume is a wonderful resource for those working in language and literature fields. And since translation is both central to and routinely suppressed in a number of other fields as well, centering translation(s) in our own practice can provide opportunities for us to trace common threads in disciplines sometimes considered quite distant from ours. I thus want to focus here on the role translation already plays, and on the increased role it could play, as a methodology in graduate research in a range of disciplines—and to suggest ways in which we could support that work both by modeling an engagement with translation in our own research and writing and by offering discipline-specific or interdisciplinary courses in translation theory and practice. If, as Peter-Jazzy Ezech suggests, translating "important works that are related to their practice" is part of the "professional duty" of scholars in humanistic and social scientific fields, it follows that the "acquisition of this skill" should be "an integral part of the training" we provide our graduate students (217). This is particularly important in an intellectual atmosphere in which language requirements for graduate work, even at the doctoral level, are also being sharply reduced across North American institutions. Dedicated courses, graduate certificates, and other programming highlighting the centrality of translation as a research methodology in a range of disciplines may in fact encourage graduate students to pursue language study for longer and more intensively than they might otherwise, even given these reduced requirements.

During my own years in graduate school, working toward a PhD in comparative literature, several

professors and mentors discouraged me from spending too much time translating, advising me to focus instead on those forms of research and writing that were more commonly recognized as scholarly. I chose not to heed their advice and slowly began to articulate to myself and to others the importance of translation to my intellectual and scholarly life. While pursuing my PhD, in addition to other translation projects, I produced book-length collections of the poetry of two of the figures I focused on in my dissertation. These translations required not only a close engagement with these poets' work but also contextualizing research into the arcs of their careers, their place in the twentieth-century European literary sphere, their connections with writers and thinkers abroad, and their critical reception—all of which were not extraneous but central to the task of translation as I conceived it. After spending time on these translations, which built up my confidence in my interpretations, writing dissertation chapters and scholarly articles to house those interpretations in supposedly more scholarly forms felt like a comparative walk in the park. There were also numerous other benefits to translating extensively at this early point in my career: my pride in being able to contribute in a real and lasting way to my field, by publishing translations that could shift the ways in which the literature I was committed to as a scholar would be read and studied in English; the opportunity to build friendships and professional relationships with other translators, writers, and publishers in the United States and abroad; the sense of belonging to a supportive community of literary translators, at a time when my graduate program felt aggressive, competitive, and sometimes openly hostile; the ability to diversify my intellectual life and cultivate transferrable skills and expertise, which helped assuage my anxiety about the very real possibility that a sustainable life as an academic might never materialize for me; and the ability to earn supplemental income (however paltry) from literary and nonliterary translation jobs, thereby reducing the stress of living on a graduate stipend. These benefits may seem incidental to the work of scholarship per se—yet I would argue that my work as a

translator has been instrumental in shaping both my scholarship and my teaching, beginning with those very first steps. While I never had the opportunity to take courses in translation history, theory, or practice, doing so would certainly have bolstered my sense of institutional acceptance and support, and likely would have helped me come to certain ideas and skills sooner than I did, and with less tortured reinventing of the wheel.

I realize this is a bit of an exceptional story, and I certainly do not mean to suggest we begin to train our graduate students for careers as translators—particularly given the extraordinarily low rates of compensation involved and the precarity of the gig work it entails (similar in both regards to the exploitative adjunct positions that await many graduate students upon completion of their degrees), not to mention the uncertain future of human translators for many genres of texts in an era of natural language processing and machine translation. Rather, I want to cultivate a recognition both of the intellectual riches offered by translation and of the fact that many graduate students across the humanities and social sciences are already translating—not only in parallel to but as part of their academic work, as they juggle the various kinds of translanguaging work involved in their projects and fields. And yet most graduate students will encounter precious little in-depth engagement with translation either in coursework or in the scholarly books and articles they might see as models for their own scholarly writing. In a recent article, Erynn Masi de Casanova and Tamara R. Mose analyzed the contents of forty-seven book-length ethnographies on Latin America and found that only thirty percent of the books included “explicit discussion of how informants' language was translated” (9); a more extensive discussion of translation—in an appendix or part of the introduction, say—appeared in only six percent of the studies. De Casanova and Mose note the persistent historical links of ethnography and translation “to colonial and neocolonial social and economic relations between the West/Global North and its ‘others’” (15); even today, they write, “only 1.7% of scholarly research on Latin America is produced within the region,” and “most

scholarship is done by scholars who are not from or not based in Latin America” (2). The task of representing “the spoken accounts and interactions—never mind the social realities and ways of thinking—of racialized, disadvantaged, or stigmatized others” (15) is thus an ethically fraught one, and the authors are unambiguous in their stance that ethnographic texts produced in translingual environments should openly address and account for not only the fact of translation but also the particular challenges faced and strategies adopted.

This is, of course, just one article surveying a sample of recent books in a single interdisciplinary field. Yet a quick trip to your own bookshelf will no doubt corroborate their findings, and I suspect that similar surveys of books published, courses taught, and graduate program requirements across the many disciplines of the humanities and social sciences would produce fairly consistent results: a reliance on practices and products of translation, accompanied by a lack of explicit engagement with translation as such.⁸ It seems of critical ethical importance, then, that faculty members begin to recognize this crucial aspect of our own and our students’ research and intellectual lives and to offer the training that will help them translate and engage with translation(s) with greater depth and sensitivity to these tasks and their far-reaching implications—such that, if de Casanova and Mose were to repeat their survey fifteen years down the road, they would turn up remarkably different results. For all these reasons, I now actively encourage graduate students at my institution to do more rather than less translating, and to do it more consciously and conscientiously. For the past few years, I have been teaching a graduate-level workshop focused on cultivating informed practices of translation; we spend the first half of the semester reading a heavy load of texts about translation from a range of disciplines and the second half workshoping our translations as a group. The course is open to graduate students from all disciplines, though most have come from language and literature departments (German, French and Italian, English, comparative literature), as well as religion, art history, history, East Asian studies, and classics. Some have active freelance

translation careers; some do not yet but are interested in developing them; others translate primarily in the service of their other scholarly work. All, however, express gratitude for the engagement with translation the course provides, and all report a dearth of discussions of translation as a methodology in their respective departments; some even say they have gotten pushback from their advisers or departments for taking the course, even when translingual work is crucial to their dissertation projects. I also recently cotaught an interdisciplinary graduate course with a colleague in the Department of Anthropology that likewise built both conceptual and practical engagements with translation into our discussions and workshoping of student writing. The students in that course were primarily budding anthropologists. Almost all of them were conducting fieldwork in non-English contexts, translating interviews, conversations, and secondary materials; yet here, too, few had previously taken courses in which translation figured centrally, and most seemed to find our conversations about the practical and ethical dimensions of translingual research productively discomfiting—first and foremost because of the extent to which their own disciplinary training had failed to address these issues in any great depth.

In my years of engaging with graduate students, I have been discouraged to see that this failure to address the central role of translation in most disciplines of the humanities and social sciences has lessened very little, if at all. And despite widespread dissatisfaction with the model of the dissertation as proto-scholarly book, and the suggestion of the 2014 *Report of the MLA Task Force on Doctoral Study in Modern Language and Literature* that departments explore “alternative formats for the dissertation,” including “translations, with accompanying theoretical and critical reflection” (14), little seems to be changing on that front, either. I have therefore come to believe that, if our institutional cultures and modes of valuation are to change, faculty members, particularly those of us who are relatively secure in our positions, will have to engage in some serious self-education, or peer-to-peer continuing education, regarding the centrality of

translation to our fields. Rather than expect graduate students to take on “risky” intellectual projects we ourselves are not willing to commit to, we can best change our systems of valuation by leading by example—which is to say, once again, by doing more translations and making space for others to follow suit.

Faculty at the Forefront: Do Translations! Make Curricular Change!

The many changes to coursework and curricula described above would, naturally, need to be initiated by faculty members and sometimes approved by departments, programs, and administrations, and they are all important steps we can start taking immediately. In addition, one particularly effective way multilingual faculty members can combat language injustice while raising the status of translation in academic settings is to commit to translating more—or, for those who cannot do this, advocating with journals and presses to take on more translated work, serving as peer reviewers of translations, and so on. Taking on or supporting new projects of literary, scholarly, and collegial translation and advocating for their legitimacy and importance are perhaps the most direct ways in which faculty members who write primarily in English can help counteract the unequal access to channels of circulation and dissemination that reduces, in turn, our own access to culture and knowledge being produced in other languages. Centering the translation of scholarly texts in disciplines across the humanities and social sciences would also lessen the existing pressure on scholars working around the globe to write in English or to pay for their work to be translated into English, often by translators who are not specialists in a given subject. In her introduction to a 2019 forum on world anthropologies in the journal *American Anthropologist*—which (as the statement of purpose on its website notes) is “the flagship journal of the American Anthropological Association,” “advances research on humankind in all its aspects,” and welcomes “contributions from international colleagues” but does not accept manuscripts that “have been published elsewhere in any

form” (which seems to mean, among other things, that it does not accept translations of previously published work [“AAA Statement”])—Virginia R. Dominguez writes:

No one should have to work in a specific language, but shouldn't anthropologists commit themselves to fighting colonial and imperial patterns in all their forms? Doesn't this apply to language and communication? That language inequality is so palpable these days in anthropology, despite its progressive and anticolonial commitments, is sobering. What to do about it is for all of us to figure out. (205)

I would, unsurprisingly, suggest that a commitment among scholars of the Global North to translate more scholarship, particularly from the Global South, is one of those things.⁹

Given the English-centric nature of publishing in the United States, if scholars in various fields are to take on more translations, they will likely also have to advocate with the boards of journals to begin accepting translated materials, as few currently do—*PMLA* is a rare exception—and with academic presses, whose lists of books in translation are regrettably thin and often limited to the writing of European thinkers who already have a readership or at least name recognition in English. At *Translational Knowledge*, a 2022 virtual symposium on the production and circulation of scholarship in translation organized by Cotter, Ignacio Sánchez Prado shared anecdotally his *Twitter* call on all US academic presses to commit to publishing one work per year written by a scholar from the Global South and paying for the translation¹⁰—a commitment that, he noted, would represent a significant change from current patterns of circulation and distribution and would also involve a similar commitment by scholars working in English to step up and translate many of these texts. We could imagine similar commitments on the part of journals or scholarly organizations, along the lines of the Michael Henry Heim Prize in Collegial Translation, which offers a cash prize and publication in *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, the journal of the Association for Slavic,

East European, and Eurasian Studies, to an “exemplary translation” by a “colleague from a relevant discipline” of a piece of scholarship in the humanities and social sciences written in an East European language (*Michael Henry Heim Prize*). Pause for a moment to imagine how the terrain of scholarship might change if every academic organization with an affiliated journal were to create a similar prize. Imagine, too, the shift that might take place in our intellectual and institutional cultures if every tenured scholar in the humanities and social sciences with the requisite linguistic knowledge (and as many nontenured and non-tenure-track faculty members as could do so without endangering their livelihoods) were to commit to undertaking a single project of collegial translation at some point in the next three years; scholars less confident in their language skills could pair up with others to cotranslate.

I fully recognize how ambitious this plan is and the amount of advocacy, training, and resource sharing that would be involved in implementing it. And by suggesting that we all just start translating, I do not mean to suggest that we will all be good at it right away or that we are all equipped to effectively undertake large-scale translation projects. With so few US faculty members specializing in translation studies as a field, and a history of active suppression of translation both as a scholarly activity and as a topic for research and teaching not just in language and literature programs but in *all* the many fields that routinely rely on translation as a methodology and translations as products, there are many obstacles in the path of any major shift in our institutional treatment of translation. Certainly not all of these translations would be successful, and not all of them would find venues for publication. But we as scholars and as a community would gain so much from the project, including hands-on experience of the difficulty and rigor of the task, an acknowledgment of the usefulness of discipline-specific training in translation as we ourselves struggle with the challenges involved, and a broadening of our own reading practices to include more scholarship written in other languages. Many steps are involved in completing a project of

collegial translation: considering various texts as potential objects of translation and selecting one to focus on; engaging closely with the content, form, and style of the text in question; reading widely to contextualize the argument of the text and fill gaps in our own knowledge; considering the difficulties involved in registering certain conceptual vocabulary, discipline-specific terminology, and neologisms; exploring how others have approached similar issues; talking to colleagues working in both languages about the consequences of certain translation decisions; and so much more. I believe these steps would teach each of us a great deal not only about the text or scholar in question but also about the conventions and assumptions of our fields, and about the way that translanguing exchange can deepen and broaden our engagements with the material at hand. Meanwhile, this commitment of our own precious research time to practices of collegial translation might also make us more likely to advocate internally with departments and administrations, and even with journals and presses, to recognize the work of translation as important intellectual and scholarly labor that actively contributes to the health of numerous fields. We would, in other words, all suddenly have a lot more skin in the game.

In addition to individually committing to engaging in collegial translation, faculty members, departments, administrations, and academic organizations could take on many other projects to begin to center discussions of translation: yearly forums or workshops on evaluating translations for faculty members, administrators, and publishers at the MLA’s annual convention (and other such conferences); departmental guidelines for things as simple as citing translators on our syllabi; support for class visits by translators and scholars of translation to cover translation-related topics; speaker series focusing on translation across the disciplines; departmental guidelines for reviewing translations for the purposes of tenure and promotion, along the lines of the 2011 MLA guidelines (“Evaluating”); changes to degree programs to allow students to engage in translation projects for their dissertations, as recommended in the 2014 MLA task force report (14; 37);

reading groups in translation studies targeting faculty members and graduate students; one-off or ongoing faculty development seminars in translation theory and practice, led by specialist colleagues or professional translators brought in for that purpose; small grants to faculty members who want to engage in intensive self-guided study in topics related to translation or want to take on translation projects; and course development grants that would encourage faculty members to incorporate translation practice or translation-related readings into existing courses or to create new courses centered on translation. At my university, we recently began offering non-credit-bearing mini-translation workshops open to students, faculty members, and staff members who have been particularly effective in creating dialogue between members of the university community who might not usually interact as peers. Colleges and universities might also consider creating interdisciplinary working groups on translation or, where funds allow, creating new faculty lines for discipline-specific or interdisciplinary positions dedicated to translation (even my own well-funded university has yet to hire a single faculty member specifically to work on translation studies). Existing programs in translation studies could take the lead in hosting forums, sharing course descriptions and syllabi, and setting up interinstitutional conversations between seasoned teachers of translation(s) and those just starting out on this path or between working groups at various institutions looking to form programs of their own.

Of course, not all institutions will be in a position to support these kinds of initiatives—but our collective newfound facility with online education would make it possible for well-funded institutions to create opportunities open to colleagues working in a range of settings, thus enabling the kind of collaborative, interinstitutional sharing of information and resources that benefits us all.¹¹ By taking on this kind of work, we would be countering not only language injustice but also the stratified access to resources that likewise hampers the ethos of inclusivity, equity, and collaboration across differences that so many of our institutions espouse. Intellectual production has always been a collective rather than

an individual endeavor, even if our criteria for degree granting, hiring, tenure, and promotion would have it otherwise. And if translation is a way of countering the pervasive fetishization of so-called original work at all levels of our academic hierarchies, and of breaking down the barriers between knowledge production happening in different places, languages, and times, it can also create opportunities for fostering solidarity and furthering collaboration across the unequal terrain of institutional access and support.

NOTES

1. For sociological work on child language brokers, see Orellana.

2. See Heim and Tymowski.

3. See, e.g., Snell-Hornby; Hermans; Klein; Tymoczko; K. Emmerich, *Literary Translation*; Venuti, *Contra Instrumentalism*; and Reynolds.

4. All the scholars I have listed in this paragraph were writing in English, and most are scholars working in North American contexts; my works-cited list more generally is yet another indication of the unequal barriers to circulation faced by scholars working in other languages. I hope in future to expand my reading on this topic to other-language materials, aided in part by the collegial translations of others.

5. In another position piece likewise published in 2011, Horner, Samantha NeCamp, and Christiane Donahue encourage scholars to produce translations of “translations of non-anglophone journal articles into English,” to write (where possible) in languages other than English, and to make consistent efforts to read and cite more work written in a range of other languages (Horner et al., “Toward a Multilingual Composition Scholarship” 290). For fuller discussion of steps faculty members can take to combat language injustice, see the final section of this article.

6. Wittman and Windon provide an account of a course like this that they participated in (as instructor and student, respectively) in the English department at the University of Alabama.

7. See Johnston and Losensky; Massardier-Kenney; Sedarat; Flotow; and K. Emmerich, “Teaching.”

8. For the field of literary studies this suppression of translation is now well documented, but for a few indicative examples we might turn to Venuti’s “Translation and the Pedagogy” and “Hijacking,” as well as his brief analysis of the treatment of translation in the MLA’s series *Approaches to Teaching World Literature* in “Translation, Interpretation” (7–8).

9. I am using the term “Global South” here not in a geographic sense but in what Ann Garland Mahler describes as a

“postnational” sense, “to address spaces and peoples negatively impacted by contemporary capitalist globalization.”

10. Sánchez Prado has been instrumental in shepherding several texts by Mexican scholars and intellectuals into English translation as the editor of the series *Critical Mexican Studies* at Vanderbilt University Press.

11. Princeton University’s 2021 online conference *Global Publishing and the Making of Literary Worlds: Translation, Media, and Mobility*—which hosted 250 early career participants from around the globe, required no registration fee, and included one-on-one coaching sessions with editors and publishers—is an example of this kind of initiative. So too was the symposium *Translational Knowledge*.

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Abstract: This piece acknowledges the MLA’s many initiatives in support of translation while also advocating for even greater visibility for translation as a mode of combatting language injustice in disciplines across the university. Translation offers opportunities for inclusiveness, information sharing, and collaborative knowledge production across linguistic, social, economic, and geographic divides. It also offers a form of hands-on apprenticeship in intellectual and scholarly rigor for undergraduate and graduate students alike. And by translating the texts of colleagues writing in other languages, scholars working in languages of the Global North can help further goals of language justice and access by facilitating exposure to and for other traditions of knowledge production. This piece proposes that, instead of treating translation as a threat to an individual’s academic viability, we embrace translation as a means of increasing the vitality and equity of our intellectual communities.