

Book Review

Kaisa Koskinen, *Translation and Affect: Essays on sticky affects and translational affective labour*

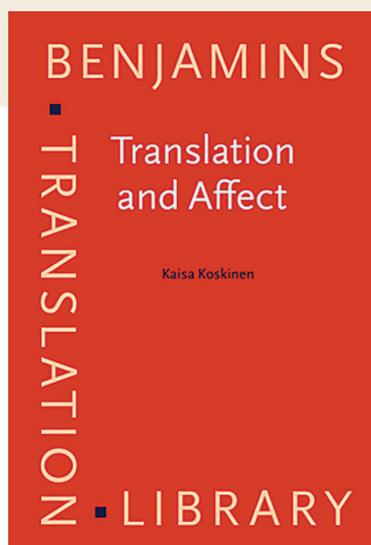
Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2020, 201 pp.

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Kaisa Koskinen's book *Translation and Affect*, published in 2020, deals with the role and importance of affects in TS. The main premise of the book is that to fully understand translation we also need to understand its affective side and the ways in which it forms a part of the lives of those who are actively involved with it, because emotions and affects are an important part of our human condition and central to our being in the world. Even though affects have been the core concept in some other disciplines for quite some time (for example, in psychology, neuroscience and sociology), and some pioneering scholars have even long recognized the relevance of affective factors in translation and interpreting studies, this topic is still fairly under-researched and has rarely been the direct object of scholarly analysis. As the author herself underlines, the vast majority of the research focused on affect has been conducted within cognitive translation studies. Nevertheless, the issue has gained momentum as a number of neighbouring fields have brought forth new findings. The notion of affect can thus function as a "bridge concept, crossing over the various orientations in TS and also cutting through different contexts and modes of translatorial action" (3).

Koskinen's book has a wide scope of inquiry, and the author draws from multiple fields and relies on different findings from other disciplines, like neurocognitive and psychological research, but nevertheless she is aiming for the sociocultural theorization of the roles of affect in TS, a view which is congruent with the sociological turn in TS in the 21st century and also with her own research interest. The author's claim



is that any manipulative decision-making will also have an affective layer because it has been found that every decision is “based on emotional and visceral responses to an equal degree as on cognitive reasoning” (55) (here she relies on the work of neuroscientist Antonio Damasio) and since translating and interpreting consists of either active or subconscious decision-making, they will necessarily deal with the concept of affect. This includes researching the concept of affects in TS as a phenomenon on an individual and also on a social level, and deals with topics such as the affective value of norms and other issues (for example, self-censorship), manipulation of affective elements in the source text, the translators’ and other agents’ personal and professional stances towards them, expectations, rules and values of a receiving culture and the affects involved in the reception of the target text. The main argument is that translating and interpreting are (among other things) forms of “affective labour” (an important concept borrowed from sociological research meaning a constant management of felt and performed affects) and that “engaging with affect is therefore of extreme value in understanding translating and interpreting as complex, interpersonal, situated and embodied forms of human communication” (27).

Because the book draws from so many different fields, the author is trying to find a subtle balance within the messy terminology which signals that the area under study does not easily fall into distinct categories. Koskinen argues strongly for her own personal preferences when choosing a suitable terminology and writes about her own struggles with navigating her way through the maze of notions and definitions from different fields and theories where “the essence of the matter was perhaps in danger of getting lost in translation” (19). The complexities of the phenomenon also allow us to appreciate that the area under study needs to be understood both on micro (neurobiological) and macro (interpersonal or cultural) levels. She stresses the importance of paying attention to the concepts being discussed and choosing the right definitions and terminology based on each researcher’s personal preferences and disciplinary affiliations.

However, despite these terminological dilemmas, the book is clearly written and well organized. It goes from the individual towards the social and interpersonal, proceeding in a linear fashion. It opens with a chapter on modulating and appraising affective valence in texts (from production to translation and reception), then in the next chapter deals with everyday affective involvement of translators and their experiencing self when they translate. The following chapter covers wider social ground, including interpersonal and bodily aspects of affects, affective capital, tendency towards neutrality, interpreter’s performance and the moral issues that come with it. Further, the book concentrates on the translatorial space and the interplay between place and affect in three different cases of translational practice connected with the metaphor of space. The last two chapters are probably the most innovative and appealing, since they deal with two very practical

topics which get lots of attention nowadays: affects in machine translation (especially in connection with translators' attitude towards new technology) and pedagogical approaches to the affects in translation in teaching practice. In these last two chapters, the author also tries to predict some plausible directions and future scenarios for further research in the two respective fields when dealing with the issue of affects.

Methodologically, the author's approach is very data-driven, and the book is based heavily on already published case studies (mainly from the author herself) which help illuminate the area under study. The author draws a lot on her own experience when dealing with the issue, and she is not afraid of approaching the topic from a very personal angle. She writes about her own fears, hopes and expectations when dealing with the issue of affects and why this topic is especially significant for her personally and why she thinks it may be salient in the field of TS as well. For the reader, the author's rather personal style is far from being a weakness – after all, the book is about affecting and being affected. The author's own recent turn from studying translation towards exploring and researching “translatoriality” and “translatorial action” (1) is in accord with her belief that the affects in fact *do* matter in TS, because they can “offer challenges that are not yet sufficiently resolved in TS literature” (25).

The intention of *Translation and Affect* is not to offer definitive answers and rigid definitions but rather to ask some salient and interesting research questions. With such openness towards other fields and practices it definitely lays the groundwork for possible future research in TS and is a very welcome interdisciplinary exploration of affects, this obvious but sometimes forgotten aspect of every translatorial work.

About the author

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