

Carmen Ardelean: *Translating for the Future: What, How, Why Do We Translate?*  
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Translation is by far one of the most used skills in academic fields, research, professions, and social media. Academics and researchers read the translated works of their colleagues from abroad even though, in some cases, they may have access to the original; physicians, computer engineers, government employees, writers, or filmmakers, to mention only a few of the professions that rely heavily on translation, are all constantly seeking updated information irrespective of the language in which the original work was initially published. On social media, we all aspire to participate in the experiences shared by our friends and relatives in the languages of the places where they live. Even if we complain about the inaccuracy of Google translate, we still "copy and paste" posts to make sense of a message posted in a language we don't know. The majority of these people are not trained translators; yet, for better or worse, they try their hand at translating with no idea what they are getting themselves into.

Serious things aside, our leisure time is also measured by the quality of translation. When we read a poetry volume or a novel, when we watch a film or attend a play, most of the time, someone has facilitated our access to the voice of the poet or narrator, to the heroes on the big screen or on stage. Carmen Ardelean's book *Translating for the Future: What, How, Why Do We Translate?*, published by Tritonic in 2016, captures the strenuous work of the behind-the-scenes translators in an impressive *tour du force* that combines theoretical approaches with a plea for interdisciplinarity and teamwork as nowadays no one person can possibly cover the vocabularies of all disciplines. Translators are, from the very beginning, defined as "cultural mediators," and this statement sets the tone of Ardelean's scrutiny into the future of the field of translation, preparing her readers for a drastic change. While her 2009 volume, *Exploring Translation Studies*, was an evaluation of the field of translation studies that can be seen as a dialogue with Anthony Pym's course, *Exploring Translation Theories*, published the same year, her most recent book is a prospective inquiry into what looks to be a "dynamic science in continuous development" (106), as she puts it in the chapter dedicated to translation training.

In order to appreciate Carmen Ardelean's endeavor to see in past theories of translation the ideology of their times as well as the potential of future developments, one has to grasp the fact that the future of translation cannot be imagined separately from the rapid progress of technology, the diversification of communication platforms, and the vast expansion of the field of knowledge with its multifaceted specialized sub-fields. For many, translation is either dismissed as a secondary activity or an imperfect rendition of the truly creative, imaginative, and original text. The original text to be translated appears to be the only one that matters, deserving the full attention of the critics and readers alike. This condescending view of translation cannot be more wrong: translation is an important factor in the "soft power" exercise of making foreign cultures attractive to communities speaking different languages. As such, the three questions in the title—what, how, and why do we translate?—indicate the responsibility that lies with translation: the selection of the texts to be translated, the strategy or the practice put to work, and the purpose served by a cultural appropriation through translation.

Structured in eleven chapters, Ardelean's book, although an academic study, is a pleasant and engaging read. The author sets the readers' expectations at a comfortable level where even the most

specialized conversations, supported by a dense bibliography, sound both informative and captivating. The first chapter opens with a nice portrait of the ideal translator who combines language skills with knowledge acquired from both cultures and with an ease in rendering that knowledge, mastering the “art of presenting the target information in a coherent, logical, and inspiring way” (20). Before the selection of major figures in the history of translation, Ardelean makes sure that we understand that she is not interested in providing synopses for each and every one of the translators who left a mark; she is very strict in following the criterion she announced upfront: she is interested in only those who have practiced translation as an “official, purposeful activity” (20). Consequently, the author considers it of great importance to break the overview after Apuleius and St. Jerome, and to mention Gutenberg’s tremendous contribution to the circulation of the translation of the Bible, which started the translation impetus, matched only by the discovery of the Rosetta Stone 400 years later, when Champollion deciphered the hieroglyphs. Dolet, Dryden, Tyler, Madame de Stael, and Schleiermacher are briefly discussed as the founders of a field that values their legacy of transferring their experience as translators into sets of guiding rules. Four names stand out from the first half of the 20th century: Vinay and Darbelnet, Eugene Nida, and James Holmes.

Quite wisely, Ardelean finds a point of departure from translation as craft after the 1950s. In “For and Against Theory,” a packed second chapter, she argues that translation is a dynamic academic field that, in addition to many professional skills, requires yet another feature from those who embrace translation as profession: openness to multiple perspectives. Presenting both sides of the argument on the necessity of a theory of translation, the author, who is both a translator and theoretician herself, suggests that one cannot exist with the other. While theory is meant to establish norms that define the field as well as the place of subjectivity in translation, practice confronts translators with ethical choices regarding the “intercultural transfer” which is, according to Anthony Pym, “a precondition for general translation” (42). From Pym’s cultural approach, Ardelean goes on to present Christiane Nord’s functional theory that solicits translators to adapt their tools and rules to the purpose of translation, taking into account the “specific cultural conditions under which a text is translated” (qtd. in Ardelean 44).

The most interesting and original part of this chapter is “Translation Theory 2.0: Developments in the New Millennium.” Here, we see the breadth of the author who understands the constant changes of our world and how they impact translation. The digital era has forced translators to become digitally literate and to add even more skills to their portfolio. Pym’s point of view that translators act both as “cultural mediators” and “complex professionals” in the contemporary world, which is governed by relationships among multidisciplinary systems, is presented at large. Globalization and the massive population relocation that has led to a huge number of bilinguals who constantly switch linguistic codes in order to communicate make translation focus more on its objective. Glancing at Pym’s “directional equivalence,” Daniel Giles’s “social dimension of translation,” and Capelli’s understanding of translation as a “heuristic tool in the investigation of lexical complexity,” Ardelean proposes a set of criteria that may help novice translators choose appropriate translation theories. These criteria are argument, novelty, author’s status, focus of the theory, and theory’s relevance for the practice of translation. For her, there are no good or bad theories, but rather theories inspiring, updated, suiting one’s style and personality, practical, and necessary for generating a change for the better at a turning point in one’s career as translator. It is this honest and collegial sharing of experience that makes Ardelean’s book so valuable: readers, students in translation studies, translators with experience, and researchers all can benefit from her insightful critique of translation theory as a means to a practical end.

From this point on, the book takes a turn to a cultural studies approach to translation, with the exception of chapters exclusively dedicated to translation training and procedures. Chapter 3, “Literary

vs. Specialised Translation,” is a plea for a formal education in translation studies that will demystify myths and preconceptions regarding the “gift” or “flair” that is needed to be a translator today. As culture and knowledge mediators, translators acquire a “multilevel competence” (61) besides linguistic competence and compliance with theoretical guidelines. Engaging with seminal works by Pym and Newmark, Ardelean insists that irrespective of the type of text to be translated, cultural and technical information is a prerequisite for any attempt at a valid translation. There is one subject to which this chapter could devote more attention: it is the literary translation that is seen only through Adrian Sahlean’s testimonial on translating poetry.<sup>1</sup> Going over Baker’s profile of a translator in control of words (1992), Nida and Taber’s idea that translation should favor meaning over the style (1982), and Catford’s conclusion that a translated text is a substitute of the original (1965), the author seems to close the loop of specialized translation by alluding to literary translation as she brings in George Steiner’s understanding of translation as deciphering its significance (1975).

Chapter 4 makes a case for translation as cultural diplomacy. Following Joseph Nye’s definition of cultural diplomacy as “soft power,” Ardelean shows why Venuti’s “invisibility” of the translator is an undesired goal. First, translators and interpreters should use their judgement in deciding what “adequate translation” means when messages may sound offensive in the target culture even though their overall meaning in the source culture is not. Second, it is in the power of translators to tip the balance when they face difficult dilemmas—negotiations between state officials, statements that contradict translators’ fundamental values and beliefs—make visible the fine line between cultural diplomacy and propaganda. Reports on the dire events in East and North Africa, North Korea, Iran, and China are proofs that translators fulfill diplomatic missions, and that mass media plays an important role in supporting (or not) their efforts. Translators, though, cannot have an effective impact as “soft power” players without multi-level competence, including intercultural and technological abilities.

Competence seems to be the red thread of the book. The next chapter investigates competence as a measurable outcome that is reflected in the product. Like the result of any other activity, the product of translation is evaluated according to specific standards. One thought-provoking aspect of Ardelean’s analysis of standards—efficiency management standards like ISO 9000 and translation-specific ones like those issued by the European Union, United States, and Canada—is the “end-users’ competence” that mirrors that of the translators. Her logic that scientific translations should be judged by specialists in the field of the translated text in order to verify the intelligibility of the text in the target language and by linguists is flawless. The evaluation of a specialized translation is a task for a multidisciplinary group who, due to their multi-competence, can determine the quality of such an interdisciplinary end-result.

Moving to the next chapter, readers may find the organization of the book somehow counterintuitive in that the emphasis on competence comes before the approach to training. Nonetheless, chapter 6 focuses on training mostly understood as formal education in Translation Studies and self-training.

A professor herself, Carmen Ardelean used the opportunity to collect data from her students and fellow faculty. Although the formulation of both groups’ expectations is quite general, there are two intriguing answers on which the author paused. Students’ comments that getting better with grammar during their studies is not a priority made sense to the author, who explains that many students come with great grammar skills in translation programs. On the instructors’ side, Ardelean draws attention to one point in particular, namely that translation authors from Western Europe answered differently than those from Romania. Westerners expected unanimously that their students would express themselves freely even at the risk of getting lower grades, whereas no Romanian expressed that expectation. For readers who know more about the Romanian education system in general, which even today does not

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter was originally a speech delivered at the Spiru Haret University conference on translation.

encourage personal contributions enough, the answer of Romanian instructors that higher grades are more important even at the cost of self-censoring opinions was predictable. (This issue would deserve an explanation of the Romanian context in at least a footnote in the revised edition of the book.)

The journey through the trials of translation reaches the critique of the methods and procedures that inform both literary and specialized translations. Chapter 7 surveys the major contributions—Vinay and Darbelnet, Newmark, Molina and Hurtado Albir—to correlating translation strategies to the types of texts to which they are to be applied. For Ardelean, procedures are meant “to help translators choose the best variant for expressing the same meaning in the target language” (120), thus suggesting that, in the end, what counts is how fast translators adapt their portfolio of strategies to the text at hand. She resumes the contrastive examination of literary and specialized text from chapter 3, indicating that culture-oriented procedures are more often employed in translating literary texts. Els Oksaar’s *kulturems* and Molina, Vlachov, and Florin’s *realia* name the most difficult to translate cultural realities. Relying on procedures may ease translators’ choices in such cases. In the context of continuous cultural changes when *kulturems* change, too, the only invariant remains the methodology with its set of procedures.

Up to this point, Ardelean has considered translation as a profession separate from and, sometimes, at odds with, original communication or work. In chapter 8, she takes translation one step closer toward a complex creative activity with textual and visual components and revisits the term “transcreation” (126-129). To give readers some context, she goes back to the 1960s and ‘70s when “transcreation” was used for the translation of advertisements. She skips the fact that later “transcreation” was also the concept carried by the video-game industry when they realized that translating only the words of a game without adjusting the visuals to the target culture was not enough to secure understanding and, thus, the success of the product. However, it is understandable why she did not want to start a more in-depth conversation about word-image or word-video productions that would have gone beyond the scope of her book. From Rebecca Ray and Natalie Kelly’s 2010 book *Reaching New Markets through Translation*, Ardelean retains the decisive situation in which translation is concerned with the overall content of an ad message, rewrites the original, and provides “a hybrid of a new content, adapted content and imagery, and straightforward translation” (qtd. in Ardelean 128). Alongside transcreation which invites translators’ creativity and competence, localization has entered the field of translation. With a focus on the translation adaptation to social media, websites, online platforms, etc., Carmen Ardelean ponders about *linguistically localized terms* massively appropriated mostly from English in other languages to avoid terminology confusions and problematic translations. Noticing the “excessive use of localization” (132) and the recurrence of non-formal writing on online platforms, the translation professor Ardelean adds bloggers to the cohort of those who influence the reception of a translated text, and also adds multi-directionality to the set of new features of communication.

With chapters 9 and 10, the book calls on the employers of translators more directly than before as the author investigates the profession through a sociological and technological lens. Challenging some employers’ view according to which interpreters/translators are simple intermediaries, Ardelean makes the argument that even when following UN or EU rigorous standards, translators do not just adopt a “mass identity” (142) to channel information. Instead, they facilitate communication between cultures whose values, societal protocols, and mentality may be so different (as is the case with high-context cultures) that translation entails both critical-thinking and decision-making skills. Educating employers how much their translators contribute to their standing—let us not forget that knowledge is power—the author recalibrates the social position of the entire profession. Continuing to advocate for translators’ expertise while presenting software, predictive text applications, machine translation, and so

forth, Ardelean demonstrates that neither translation tools nor translators can do without each other today. Translators rely on IT tools as much as developers of these tools rely on translators.

It makes sense that a book dedicated to a more and more impactful profession, which, in its turn, is impacted by politics, technology, communication, globalization, and so on, to end with the warning that with the increasing demand of translations comes a huge responsibility. The issue of a code of ethics guides both translators' performance and conduct. Again, Ardelean does what she has done best throughout her book, namely presenting reputed scholars' points of convergence and divergence as a way to state her own idea on the issue. With respect to the translation code of ethics, after Chesterman's proposal for a Hieronymic Oath (2001) and Baker's urge to activism that would bring prestige and respect to translators (2006), the author adds to her emphasis on the connection between language and ethics, two continuously changing fields that compel translators to keep up with them. The close relationship between language and ethics legitimizes the claim of translation to be equal to other interdisciplinary fields.

Carmen Ardelean did a wonderful job writing about the future of translation by answering the three questions in the title: we translate **what** reveals the complexity of the disciplinary fields that are in the making and the cultural richness of the world; **how** translation is performed may (or may not) facilitate access to successful communication and other cultures; and **why** we translate is because we want to participate in the global exchange of ideas in order to exist. The author achieved her goal of bringing theory closer to her readers by a diligent selection of fundamental works, a considerable power of synthesis of extensive research, and a very straightforward style. Persuasive, yet understated, the book shows how theory can be put to work in real life situations when translators need to make fast decisions in order to provide their high-quality service. For Ardelean, theory is an instrument that empowers and rewards the specialists who take it seriously. There is one thing that the author consistently seems to have avoided. She does not give concrete examples. While examples could be both memorable and evidence supporting, they can also be distracting. Yet, the intention of the book was "to offer an overview of what has been said on a specific topic and to make a comparison between different points of view" (172) that could shape the field of translation. As such, the book achieves this goal. It actually does more than that: it gives readers a haven to come back to and look for suggestions and definitions. The glossary of specialized concepts is, in this respect, an important addition. The author's choice to not take anything away from the space of the presentation and to not detract from the main issues with parenthetical explanations or long footnotes yields results. This exposition of various theories and their points of intersection, which in most cases would be a challenge, is a valuable read.