

Call for Papers
Special Issue of *Translation in Society*
John Benjamins

**Translating Knowledge *in, by and for* Indigenous Communities:
Practices of Epistemic Defiance**

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Abstract submission

Please submit your extended abstracts (**600-800 words**) to rafael.schoegler@uni-graz.at

Language policy: All contributions published in the printed journal will be in English. In addition to these versions and acknowledging the great need for linguistic plurality in Western academia, we encourage authors to provide us with translations, extended summaries and video/audio content of their contributions in one or more languages of their choice. These additional materials only need to be submitted once the final versions of the article are accepted. John Benjamins will host these texts, audio or video materials on the journal website.

**Translating Knowledge *in, by and for* Indigenous Communities
Practices of Epistemic Defiance**

A range of institutions and their members – universities, public or private organisations, churches, governmental offices etc. – are key in organizing knowledge in “deeply interconnected” (Bielsa 2021, 2) societies. At the same time, they exert control over the kinds of knowledge held to be “allowed, disavowed, devalued or celebrated” (Mignolo 2009, 176). In this respect, **translation of knowledge** in indigenous contexts entails profound asymmetries of power between individual and collective agents resulting in deeply political negotiations where the social status of languages and their speakers are at play (Tymoczko/Gentzler, 2002; Brisset, 2017). Bacevic (2019, 388) points out that “[w]hose knowledge is seen as central and ‘translatable’ [...] is not independent from inequalities rooted in colonial exploitation.” When only certain kinds of knowledge are deemed worthy of translating and/or translation takes place also into only certain kinds of languages “a ‘knowledge hierarchy’ between the Global North and the Global South” (ibid.) is consolidated.

However, translation of knowledge may also turn into a practice central to **negotiating meaning** and **epistemic power** of individuals and collectives alike (Schögler, 2018). In this respect, Medina (2012, 3) understands “epistemic resistance” as “the use of our epistemic resources and abilities to undermine and change oppressive normative structures and the complacent cognitive-affective functioning that sustains those structures”. Similarly, “epistemic disobedience” was coined by Mignolo (2009) building on Quijano’s (1991, seminal call to “desprenderse de las vinculaciones de la racionalidad-modernidad con la colonialidad, en primer término, y en definitiva con todo poder no constituido en la decisión libre de gentes libres” [extricate oneself from the linkages between rationality/modernity and coloniality, first of all, and definitely from all power which is not constituted by free decisions made by free people]. For Mignolo (2009, 45) “epistemic disobedience” means “epistemic de-linking” from efforts to “colonize knowledges (languages, categories of thoughts, belief systems, etc.) and beings (subjectivity).” However, many indigenous scholars and political activists do not think of past and present indigenous struggles as taking place *within* Western paradigms and thus responding to **questions of obedience/disobedience**. Drawing on Telmissany’s (2016) thoughts on female **defiance** during the Egyptian revolution, we thus enhance these concepts to analyse translation *in, by* and *for* indigenous communities as practices of epistemic defiance. **Defiant scholarship** “cultivates those ways of thinking and those practices of thinking that are external to, in opposition to, and/or unconventional to the coloniality of knowledge” (Daley/Murrey (2022, 160). We thus call to question by whom, when and why knowledge is translated and are especially interested in the power of translation to inform defiance “to the established régime du savoir (regime of knowledge) informed by power relationships, and the way in which knowledge circulates” (Telmissany, 2016).

Albeit always engendering processes of mutual **transculturalisation** (Ortíz 1940/2002) between dynamic entities with equally fluid understandings of world, two patterns of translating knowledge *in, by* and *for* indigenous communities that served and still serve colonial logics can be discerned: First, practices of translation into indigenous languages serve(d) the aim of **controlling knowledge-systems** deemed epistemically deviant by colonizers. Missionaries, for example, acquire(d) knowledge of local languages and cultures to engage with communities and henceforth disseminate translated religious texts in the local vernaculars (Korak, 2020; see also Price, 2023) with the aim to “convince men to accept the grace of God in Jesus Christ, which conflicts with much that indigenous tradition holds dear and which demands complete allegiance” (Nida 1957, 11). Second, translation practices were and are used to **extract knowledge** and re-frame it within the epistemic playbook of institutionalized and accepted forms of globally circulating knowledge and expertise. This includes the ethnographer as extractor of knowledge or the environmental scientist relying on indigenous communities without acknowledging their contribution to knowledge-making (Hernandez, 2022) – but also pharmaceutical industries extracting plant-based-knowledge to transform it into profitable products within a capitalist system at the end of a wide range of translational moments.

In this special issue, we aim at exploring translation practices that break these patterns. We are interested in translation practices *in, by* and *for* indigenous communities that resist hegemonic forces of knowledge-recognition and defy their apparent normativity. We call for contributions exploring **historical or contemporary contexts** in which epistemically defiant translation practices are developed, which contribute to self-determination of indigenous communities, which help create a complex picture of historical events or empower indigenous communities to share their perspectives in democratic (trans-)national discourses. Contributions may also map out the **epistemic, social, political or legal effects** of such practices of epistemic defiance. Translation *in* communities (1) refers to translation practices within ancestral or current, rural or urban, virtual or physical **indigenous territories** whereas translation *by* (2) considers translation practices by **members of the community** who no longer permanently live on their ancestral land, however, remain connected to these territories through their political or cultural positionings and functions. Translation *for* (3) then refers

to any collective or individual translation act by **agents who support indigenous resistance** but do not necessarily identify as a member of an indigenous community. These agents can be individuals or collectives, such as NGOs, music bands or activists/artists-collectives.

With “indigenous communities” we refer to a wide array of communities around the globe that may vary significantly from one another. However, these communities are tied together by having been subjected to colonial imposition on their territories and share “marginalization and exclusion, denial of human rights, illegal exploitation of resource rich territories, dispossession and eviction from ancestral lands, even physical attacks and violence” (Antonio Guterres, 2023, UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues). Furthermore, these agents often use this term themselves in divergent manifestations of self-positioning.

Contributions may deal with these or similar questions:

How do translation practices contribute to efforts by indigenous communities worldwide to keep or claim epistemic authority of transculturised ancestral forms of knowledge? How does translation turn into a practice of individual or collective knowledge-making and contribute to indigenous self-determination in (hegemonic) political discourses? How do analogous and digital forms of knowledge-making, -dissemination and -circulation manifest in epistemically defiant translations? Under what conditions does translation transculturalise hegemonic or academically institutionalized forms of knowledge? Which spaces of knowledge-creation, -transformation and -dissemination are developed in, by and for indigenous communities through translation? Which translation policies turn translation into a practice capable of reacting to – usually multifaceted and intersectional – inequalities?

We also invite methodological and theoretical papers: How do researchers recognize epistemic defiance in translation? What methodological consequences arise for Translation Studies, Sociology, Anthropology, Legal Studies etc. when creating knowledge on translation *in, by or for* indigenous communities (e.g. citizen science, co-creation of knowledge)? What are the boundaries of translation in these contexts and where do existing conceptualizations – such as “cultural translation” or “political translation” – reach their limits? How do oral vs. written forms of knowledge-transmission play into our understanding of translation? In what way does translation encompass divergent forms of manifestation of knowledge ranging from embodied knowledge to highly formalized interventions?

We explicitly incite papers from a large array of disciplines such as Sociology, Political and Environmental Sciences, Cultural Anthropology, Translation Studies dealing with issues of knowledge translation in all regions and indigenous communities. The special issue will publish contributions discussing instances from different parts of the world as it is only through the gathering of multiple perspectives and experiences that a common ground of epistemically defiant forms of translation can be found.

Possible topics for contributions include but are not limited to:

- Translation or interpreting practices of individuals or collectives with an explicit aim of countering hegemonic forms of legal, technical, medical or religious knowledge;
- Practices of translation/interpreting set out to increase self-determination in respect to cultural heritage, knowledge of language, land rights, water rights, clean air rights, cultural practices;
- Use of existing translations (e.g. historical notes/translations of colonizers) to empower indigenous communities (e.g. in the context of land rights; ecological struggles; fighting ethnocide of peoples living in voluntary isolation);
- Retracing the past and present role of colonial languages and translations into and out of these for advocacy and activism in, by and for indigenous communities;
- Creating multilingual translations to promote and help the reacquisition of ancestral languages lost to colonial influence;

- Combining forms of expression (music, literature, performing arts, etc.) and translation/interpreting to (re-)create knowledge;
- Participatory methods of translation/interpreting strengthening self-determination (e.g. in crisis translation; Cadag, 2020)
- Interpreter/translator training sensitive to indigenous knowledge;
- Exploring meaning through translation spaces shaped by the diverse nature of languages, cosmovisions, ontologies, and epistemologies;
- Negotiating meaning through translation/interpreting in in-between spaces opened through the seeming incommensurability of languages, cosmovisions, ontologies and epistemologies;

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