

“I, as a Translator, am Someone with a Story being Told”: The Influence of Personal Experience on the Act of Translation

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For decades, Translation Studies focused predominantly on linguistic, textual, and functionalist approaches, often treating translators as invisible figures in the translation process. As Berman (1995/2009: 57) argued, “the translator’s life is not our concern, and neither are his moods”. According to this perspective, a translator’s biography was considered largely irrelevant, with exceptions made only for famous translators whose lives might warrant further study. However, in recent years, the field has undergone a ‘biographical turn’ (Renders et al., 2017), drawing increasing attention to the complex interconnections between translators’ personal experiences, professional choices, and the sociohistorical contexts in which they operate.

This panel explores the biographical dimensions of translation by examining the lives of translators and the ways in which their personal experiences shape their work. The discussion aligns with Kaindl’s (2017) argument that the translator should be understood not as a mere conduit but as a complex social being whose biography intersects with historical, cultural, and political factors. Similarly, Bourdieu’s (1987) concept of the ‘biographical illusion’ warns against oversimplified, linear narratives of life trajectories, reminding us that translators, like all individuals, experience contradictions, ruptures, and unexpected turns in their professional and personal paths.

The idea that the translator should remain a neutral intermediary has long been central to translation theories, particularly in the early days of Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) and functionalist approaches such as Skopos theory (Reiß & Vermeer, 1984) and Holz-Mänttari’s translational action theory (1984). These models, focused on the goal-oriented nature of translation, implicitly reinforced the notion that translators’ individual identities and experiences were secondary to the functional demands of the translated text. However, later sociological approaches, including those influenced by Max Weber’s (1978) categorization of social action, are challenging this reductionist perspective.



Weber's distinction between 'instrumentally rational action' and 'value-rational action' is particularly relevant to the study of translators, as their work often balances calculated professional decisions with deeply held personal and ideological commitments.

Moreover, as Foucault (1977/2019) argued in *Lives of Infamous Men*, biography is not reserved for the 'great men' of history; rather, the lives of lesser-known individuals can provide critical insights into broader social and political contexts. Translators, as figures often relegated to the margins, exemplify this principle. This panel brings together five scholars who investigate the lives of translators across different historical and cultural contexts, shedding light on how personal narratives intersect with professional practice:

John Milton (University of São Paulo) examines "The Translations and Adaptations of Major Brazilian Writers Graciliano Ramos and Monteiro Lobato", exploring how their personalities and perspectives influenced their treatment of the works of Booker Washington (Ramos) and J. M. Barrie, Cervantes, Hans Staden and La Fontaine (Lobato).

Marina Darmaros (University of São Paulo) discusses "The Oblivion of Tynianova in Post-Soviet Russia", investigating why the Soviet-era translator Inna Tynianova, despite her notable career and "lineage" (she was the daughter of prominent Russian formalist Yuri Tynianov), has remained largely unrecognized in Russian literary history, and seeking to re-establish her biography through interviews and the rare photographs and letters of hers collected by the researcher. Her analysis connects with questions of political memory and cultural erasure.

Silvia Cobelo (Independent Researcher) presents "Lia Wyler in flesh-and-blood: the Brazilian celebrity translator & Harry Potter", exploring the biography of one of Brazil's most renowned literary translators, whose work includes Portuguese versions of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series. Her presentation examines how Wyler's personal and professional trajectory contributed to shaping contemporary Brazilian literary translation. The main objective of this study is to reveal the connections between Wyler's fame and her Harry Potter translation *à la Monteiro Lobato* (Wyler 2003:7), transposing Rowling's text into a legible recognizable Portuguese language, becoming a familiar and praised name by millions of Brazilians kids.

Cecilia Rosas (Independent Researcher) discusses "The Transplanted Woman: The Literary Translations of Tatiana Belinky". Born in 1919 in Petrograd, to a Russian-speaking Jewish family, Belinky lived in Riga until the age of ten, where she was educated in German and Russian. In 1929, her family moved to São Paulo where she worked as an author, playwright, critic, and translator, gaining significant acclaim as a children's writer. Nevertheless, her contributions as a translator have not achieved the same level of recognition as those of some of her contemporaries, predominantly male figures in the field. This paper focuses on her translation work and her role as a cultural mediator among different cultures, languages, and media.

Each of these case studies highlights the ways in which translators' social roles, identities, and personal histories intersect with their professional activities. Whether through moments of 'turning points' (Denzin, 1989a), such as forced career shifts or ideological transformations, or through long-



term biographical influences, including gender, migration, and political context, this panel aims to illuminate the richness and complexity of translators' lives.

By incorporating the perspectives of Translation and Translator Studies, Biography Studies, and Sociology, this discussion contributes to the growing recognition of translators as active agents rather than neutral conduits. Following Pym's (2012) call to place the translator at the center of Translation Studies, we argue that understanding the biographical dimension of translation allows for a more nuanced and comprehensive approach to the field.

This panel thus engages with fundamental questions: To what extent do translators' personal experiences influence their translational choices? How does the biographical approach reshape our understanding of translation history? And in what ways can auto/biographical research in Translation Studies contribute to broader discussions on identity, agency, and cultural mediation?

Ultimately, the panel aims to challenge the enduring notion of translator invisibility, advocating for a more holistic understanding of translation as an inherently human and socially embedded practice.

