

## INNOVATIVE ECOLOGICAL APPROACHES IN TRANSLATION STUDIES: MAPPING THE FIELD

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**Abstract:** This introductory article frames the special issue *Towards an Ecology of Translation: Translating Nature, Places, and Identities in the Global World* by outlining the main conceptual strands informing ecological approaches to translation. It traces the evolution of *eco-translation* from Clive Scott’s emphasis on the translator’s embodied engagement with the text, through Michael Cronin’s expansion of the concept within a broader political-ecological perspective, to Gengshen Hu’s *eco-translatology*, grounded in models of selection and adaptation. Drawing on Cronin’s work on linguistic diversity, power asymmetries, and minority language agency, the article situates eco-translation as an approach attentive to the social, cultural, political, and environmental conditions of translation in the Anthropocene. It then outlines the main research trajectories explored in the nine contributions, including representations of nature in tourism discourse, mediation and diversity, redefinitions of land and environment, and hybrid textualities. As an inaugural contribution to the Italian debate on ecological perspectives in Translation Studies, the volume aims to foster critical reflection on translation through ecological entanglements, situated knowledge, and practices of care and responsibility.

**Keywords:** Translation Studies; ecological turn; eco-translation; eco-translatology; environment; identity; mediation; diversity.

### 1. *Ecological approaches to translation: terminological clarifications*

In the context of the escalating climate crisis, environmental and ecological concerns have become central to public debate, prompting Translation Studies to engage more deeply with reflections on the complex interactions between living organisms, societies, cultures, and environments, from the specificity of their cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspectives. The development of a broad and diversified set of new research questions in TS has been made possible, in particular, by the emergence of “eco” paradigms across related academic disciplines.

Within this interdisciplinary landscape, ecolinguistic approaches (Haugen 1972; Ludwig, Mühlhäusler and Pagel 2019; Fill and Penz 2018) have provided an important framework for investigating the social and ecological contexts in which linguistic exchange takes place, as well as for examining the translation of texts concerned with climate change and environmental issues. Along similar lines, contributions from discourse analysis to ecolinguistics have offered the theoretical tools and methodological resources needed to explore how language shapes human relationships with the environment (Stibbe 2015). Finally, the critical, theoretical, sociological, anthropological, and literary perspectives that have converged within ecocriticism have further contributed to reframing the ways in which texts, environments, and processes of cultural mediation are conceptualised within TS.

Ecological approaches to translation encompass a broad and far-reaching spectrum, and resist reduction to any single perspective. Even a brief overview of the labels assigned to the paradigms that have emerged from the lexical combination of “ecology” and “translation” attests to the richness of these new directions in translational inquiry. Their concerns began to come to the fore in the early years of the twenty-first century, although the labels by which they are now identified started circulating only a few years later. From Clive Scott’s to Michael Cronin’s interrelated but distinct notions of *eco-translation* to Gengshen Hu’s *eco-translatology*, it becomes clear that incremental interpretative layers have accumulated over time, expanding and diversifying the range of research questions within the field. Examining the differences, similarities, and points of convergence among these three paradigms can thus help elucidate the trajectories pursued by the contributions in this special issue, while also providing a concise overview of the current state of the art.

The term *eco-translation* emerged – perhaps unsurprisingly, given that ecocriticism had already established itself as a central critical framework in literary and cultural studies from the late 1970s (Rueckert 1978/1996; Buell 1995; Glotfelty 1996) – within Literary TS. Clive Scott defined *eco-translation* (2015) as “the translation of any text into eco-consciousness” (*ibid.*: 285), a term which includes (1) the environment in which the source text locates its subject; (2) the text’s very textuality understood as a linguistic environment inhabited by the reader; and (3) the immediate environment of the act of reading. For Scott, reading itself is an ecological activity, in which the environment is understood as the “continuous texturing of the life-dynamic” (*ibid.*: 286). His emphasis is therefore procedural: translation, conceived as a specific mode of reading,

becomes an act of inhabitation through which translators and readers engage with the environment embodied in the source text.

Scott's conceptualisation of eco-translation finds a point of convergence with Michael Cronin's work, which extends ecological thinking in TS beyond the literary domain towards a broader, systemic perspective. Ecological thinking with reference to translation, which Cronin had already started elaborating in his previous works *Translation and Globalization* (2003) and *Translation and Identity* (2006), finds its most coherent theorisation in his *Eco-Translation, Translation and Ecology in the Age of the Anthropocene* (2017). It borrows Scott's terminology but extends it beyond text-centred approaches. Cronin envisions *eco-translation* as encompassing the full range of translational practices operating within an increasingly globalised world. His use of the hyphenated word *eco-translation* signals an open, provisional, and relational concept, foregrounding translation as an ongoing process rather than a bounded disciplinary object, and emphasising its embeddedness in social, political, and material conditions (Cronin 2017: 2-4, 13-16).

Within this framework, translation is approached as a socially and environmentally situated practice whose value is articulated in terms of responsibility, relationality, and place. Drawing on post-humanist ecological thought, Cronin redefines translation as part of wider ecosystems of language use, cultural exchange, and material conditions, in which linguistic practices are shaped by historically contingent environments and asymmetrical relations of power. From this perspective, his formulation of eco-translation entails a methodological commitment to analysing translation in relation to local conditions of language contact and global forces of cultural production, highlighting its role in either sustaining or eroding linguistic and cultural diversity under conditions of globalisation (Cronin 2003: 165-172; 2006: 125-127).

While eco-translation foregrounds the discursive and ethical dimensions of translation informed by ecological awareness, the third, parallel perspective, i.e., *eco-translatology*, offers a systematic theoretical and methodological framework. The paradigm developed primarily within Chinese scholarship, most notably through the work of Gengshen Hu. As Yu (2017) notes, Hu had already begun articulating the concept of "translation as adaptation and selection" in 2001, drawing on Darwinian principles. However, the term *eco-translatology* was first introduced in a paper presented in August 2006 and later published in 2008 as *Eco-Translatology: A Primer*<sup>1</sup>. Then, in *Eco-Translatology: Toward an Eco-Paradigm of Translation Studies* (2020), Hu articulated a framework based on metaphorical analogies between translational and natural ecosystems, together with conceptual borrowing as a key methodological principle. Drawing on ancient Eastern eco-wisdom, *eco-translatology* provides a structured paradigm that complements and deepens the insights of eco-translation, offering translators guidance based on the principles of selective adaptation and adaptive selection, multi-dimensional transformation, and green translation.

<sup>1</sup> For an extended bibliography on *eco-translatology*, including works authored by Hu, see Yu (2017).

The conceptual frames conveyed by such diverse terminological definitions have attracted critical attention and, far from undermining the coherence of the approaches involved, have been welcomed by scholars such as Carolyn Shread as a “Copernican paradigm shift” (2023: 114). Shread argues that in our geological era, the Anthropocene, where a collapse of the distinction between natural history and human history has taken place, the turning point in TS lies in a new awareness of translation’s constitutional embedding in ecology. This brings her to claim that ecological approaches to translation are no other than “a belated and embarrassing recent addition to the discipline of Translation Studies” (*ibid.*: 115).

Taking these considerations as its point of departure, the present special issue *Towards an Ecology of Translation: Translating Nature, Places, and Identities in the Global World* seeks to engage with the ongoing debate by bringing together nine original essays that interpret eco-translation through contemporary interdisciplinary lenses. The intent is to examine how intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic translations – all involving the English language as the lingua franca of globalisation – affect or are shaped by the intricate interactions among individuals, their languages and their physical environments.

In addition, the issue examines how global migration patterns, movements of people and goods, and human intervention in the biosphere shape translational processes involved in the negotiation of identities. This includes the often complex, multilingual, and transcultural positioning of speakers and narrators, as well as the ways in which natural and cultural ecosystems are discursively represented and reconfigured through translation. The contributions, employing carefully honed tools, can be grouped into the four subcategories outlined in the following sections.

## **2. Eco-translation and nature representation in tourism web texts**

Tourism, as a social practice shaped by mobility, mediation, and cultural encounter, provides the focus for the first group of contributions, which examine the relationship between translation and ecological awareness in digital tourism communication. Lorenzo Buonvivere’s study addresses institutional tourism discourse concerned with the representation and transmission of environmental knowledge, while Anna Raimo and Douglas Mark Ponton focus on non-institutional tourism narratives circulating in online blogs. Together, the two contributions explore how translation participates in the construction of nature and place within tourism discourse, and how promotional communication negotiates its relationship with educational and ecological concerns in a globalised context.

Buonvivere adopts a corpus-assisted methodology to analyse the translation of the RomaNatura website, the regional body responsible for managing an extensive network of parks and nature reserves in the Rome area. His essay conceptualises eco-translation not only as a metaphorical framework but also as a practical concern in the transmission of site-specific environmental knowledge. In doing so, he draws on the notion that cultures are always also “eco-cultures”,

in the sense that “ecological affiliations and practices” are “inextricable from – and mutually constituted with – sociocultural dimensions” (Milstein and Castro-Sotomayor 2020). Buonvivere’s analysis shows that eco-translation in tourism should not be limited to preserving ecological accuracy, but should also foreground eco-cultural narratives in order to reconcile educational and promotional aims. In this way, translation can contribute more effectively to ecoliteracy and to the development of sustainable tourism practices in urban contexts such as Rome.

At the other end of the spectrum, Raimo and Ponton’s contribution examines the narratives found in blogs dedicated to tourism in Sicily, shifting the focus away from institutional tourism discourse towards a form of mediated, discursive promotion that blends marketing strategies with personal narrative and experiential authority to shape travel perceptions and choices. Their approach to eco-translation foregrounds processes of linguistic and cultural mediation embedded in English and Italian blog texts, including instances of what House (1981) terms “covert translation”. Their analysis shows that the frequent reliance on generic descriptors in these blogs produces a homogenised representation of Sicily, in which local specificity is obscured by attractive yet superficial and often clichéd language characteristic of Mediterranean tourism discourse (MacCannell 1976; Urry 2002). As a result, the island is subsumed into a broader Mediterranean narrative, a tendency that is closely linked to bloggers’ commercial imperatives, such as audience expansion and content monetisation through advertising, sponsored posts, or affiliate marketing.

### ***3. Eco-translation, mediation and diversity***

The second group of contributions examines eco-translation as a framework for negotiating the interplay between standardising translational practices and the maintenance of linguistic, cultural, and epistemic diversity. Laura Diamanti conceptualises culinary translation through an ecosystem-based model that situates embodied knowledge and culturally embedded meaning within stratified semiotic environments; Pietro Manzella and Nicoletta Vasta problematise institutional eco-discourse by exposing the homogenising effects of English-as-a-lingua-franca mediation in multimodal translation; Raffaella Leproni reframes eco-translation as an educational praxis, positioning storytelling and self-translation as ecological sites of inclusion, agency, and identity formation.

Diamanti’s study suggests an ecologically grounded framework for the analysis of culinary discourse in TS, conceptualising recipes as stratified semiotic ecosystems in which cultural identity, affect, and embodied knowledge are distributed across distinct textual registers. Situated within eco-translation theory, the study develops a mixed-methods analytical design that integrates register-sensitive corpus linguistics with qualitative eco-semiotic interpretation. The analysis is based on a large corpus of twelve cookbooks by Nigella Lawson (approximately 1.1 million tokens), systematically segmented into ingredients, instructions, and narrative discourse, and examined through MTLTD lexical-diversity metrics. The quantitative results identify narrative discourse as the

primary locus of lexical density and cultural ecological salience. These findings are subsequently deepened through an ecosystem-based qualitative analysis of selected narrative passages, which models recurrent configurations of culturally embedded meaning as semiotic habitats. By triangulating corpus-driven evidence with eco-semiotic annotation, the paper proposes a replicable analytical model that connects empirical linguistic investigation with ecologically responsible translation practice, foregrounding the translator's role in mediating biocultural meaning within culinary texts.

Recognising the inherently multimodal nature of most environmental discourses (Lemke 2023), Manzella and Vasta examine the imperfect mediation conveyed by the English subtitle translations of a corpus of FAO's *Youth Action Music* Videos on the theme of equal access to water, produced in response to a call involving students, families, and educators from various countries (and linguistic backgrounds). By signalling the translation loss occurring in English-as-a-lingua-franca subtitles – which precedes the localisation and dissemination of the videos with subtitles in the languages of FAO's regional offices – the authors show how, in this case study, the use of English as a semiotic bridge intended to facilitate the contact and interplay among different linguistic and cultural resources risks becoming a diversity-effacing mechanism. In the video snippets analysed, translation appears to serve the homogenising forces of globalisation, despite FAO's institutional message claiming to pursue social inclusion, understood as the process of improving the terms of participation in society through enhanced opportunities, access to resources, voice, and respect for rights (UN 2016). In their concluding remarks, the authors advocate greater respect for the different sociocultural identities and intersemiotic meaning-making strategies of the various stakeholder communities in order to preserve cultural specificities.

Inclusion also constitutes one of the foci of Leproni's paper, which brings the analysis into the classroom with the primary goal of promoting participatory citizenship. The pedagogical practice experimented with and illustrated by Leproni combines storytelling (Stibbe 2015; Bruner 1987, 1997) with self-translation to create inclusive learning environments that accommodate diverse learning needs, while fostering critical ecological awareness and enhancing linguistic competence. Her proposal of an integrated approach to second/foreign language teaching – based on the combined implementation of storytelling and self-translation practices within an ecolinguistic framework – is corroborated by effective practical tools and guidelines for developing communicative competence, enhancing cultural sensitivity, and promoting participatory citizenship in diverse educational settings through creative strategies, in line with the recent “ecolinguistic turn” in language education (Sterk 2025; Chau and Jacobs 2022).

#### **4. Eco-translation, and the redefinition of land and environment**

The third group of contributions approaches eco-translation as an analytical lens for examining the mediation of land, space, and territory through translation.

Eleonora Gallitelli's study engages with the topic by examining how environmental values are reframed through editorial and interpretive mediation, while Eleonora Natalia Ravizza's contribution addresses geopolitical documentation produced within historically asymmetrical power relations. Taken together, the two analyses examine twentieth- and early twenty-first-century texts to investigate how translation intervenes in the construction and circulation of environmental and territorial meaning within ideologically complex contexts.

Gallitelli's comparison of the different environmental discourses constructed in the original edition of Aldo Leopold's posthumous conservation work, *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There* (1949), and in its three Italian editions seeks to identify the different emotional reactions (Mackenzie and Alba-Juez 2019) evoked – particularly with regard to the possibilities for environmental action – by their differing peritextual voices, primarily inscribed in prefaces and illustrations. The “voices framework” guiding Gallitelli's analysis is rooted in the belief that, in new editions and retranslations of a classic, the voices of a multiplicity of agents tend to surface (Alvstad and Assis Rosa 2015), resulting in a manipulation not only of the original writer's intention, but also of the attitudes that readers are encouraged to adopt. Respectively signed by the then secretary general of WWF Italy, a French academic and a contemporary Italian novelist, the prefaces of the Italian editions function as sites of reframing that ultimately fail to do justice to Leopold's Land Ethic, which is alternately cast as an old-fashioned and naïve fantasy, a call to arms, or a romantic utopia, rather than as a concrete way of uniting ecology and ethics through living in community with the land.

Ravizza's contribution, instead, examines the intersections between eco-translation and colonial and postcolonial concerns by interrogating a foundational document in the history of the formation of the Iraqi nation. The essay focuses on a report written in 1920 by the renowned archaeologist, travel writer, secret agent, and colonial administrator Gertrude Bell, at a moment when a British Mandate over the former Ottoman governorates of Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul was being proposed by the League of Nations. Bell's report is approached as an act of intersemiotic translation that transforms territorial mapping into textual form, while simultaneously engaging with the dynamic relationship between language, culture, and structures of power. Ravizza's analysis thus explores how processes of cultural mediation operated within the so-called “colonial archive” – that is, the vast body of historical documentation produced in the context of British imperial governance – in order to reopen this archive to new lines of inquiry and critical interrogation. Finally, the essay addresses the ethical implications of a recent Italian translation (the first of its kind) of this seminal yet highly controversial text in the modern history of the Middle East.

### ***5. Eco-translation and hybrid textualities***

The final group of contributions addresses eco-translation in relation to linguistic and cultural hybridity, shifting the focus from territorial and institutional forms

of mediation to writing that emerges from multilingual and transcultural borderlands. Vivian M. De La Cruz's study engages with hybrid literary language as a challenge to monolingual translation norms, while Maria Cristina Seccia's contribution reflects on translational practice as a means of negotiating hybrid textual environments. Together, the two analyses examine how eco-translation can account for linguistic hybridity as an ecological, ethical, and aesthetic dimension of literary mediation.

De La Cruz considers Giannina Braschi's poetic-prose work *Yo-Yo Boing!* (1998) and its English translation by Tess O'Dwyer (2011). This literary translingual work, which employs a hybrid or nonstandard language variety such as Spanglish, functions as a linguistic experiment that resists translation. In the Italian edition, what is lost is the fluid interplay between languages, namely the translanguaging practices that articulate Braschi's linguistic and cultural hybridity. Informed by the ethical principles of eco-translation, De La Cruz engages in the practice of what she refers to as "resistant translation" in an effort to preserve the hybrid texture of Braschi's translingual text. Her approach draws on Attig's recommendation of translating as little as possible in order to maintain the hybrid quality of the original (Attig 2019).

Seccia's contribution similarly adopts an ecological approach by reflecting on the choices she made in her own Italian translation of *The Lion's Mouth* (1982/1993), the debut novel by Canadian author Caterina Edwards, set between Italy and Canada. Drawing on Clive Scott's notion of "ecomorphosis" (Scott 2018), according to which each translation functions as an extension of the source text that enables target-text readers to access the new "environment" articulated in another language, Seccia selectively deploys typographical devices to signal the shifts generated by an Anglophone source text in which Italian operates simultaneously as the code-switched language and as the target language. Inspired by Scott's theoretical framework, this strategy is grounded in the assumption that typographical devices shape how readers navigate and perceive textual space. The resulting effect is a reorientation of Italophone target-text readers' attention, one that accounts both for their familiarity with the environments represented in the novel and for the specificity of the narrative voice, which alternates between autodiegetic and heterodiegetic modes.

## 6. Concluding remarks

As an inaugural contribution to the Italian academic debate, this publication brings together works by scholars of eco-translation and seeks to help open and consolidate discussion on the complexity and challenges of contemporary translation by engaging with ecological entanglements, forms of situated knowledge, and practices of care and responsibility, while critically negotiating tensions between ethics and activism in eco-translational practice, local ecologies and global environmental discourse, fidelity and adaptation in the translation of ecological knowledge, and linguistic diversity and ecological homogenisation, in a context of acute planetary urgency. It is our hope that this initial collection will also encourage further research and sustained dialogue

within the international academic community, fostering new theoretical perspectives, methodological approaches, and translational practices capable of responding to the evolving ecological challenges of our time.

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