

# **Narratives of Mistranslation: Fictional Translators in Latin American Literature**

Kripper, Denise. 2023. *Narratives of Mistranslation: Fictional Translators in Latin American Literature*. New York: Routledge.

Reviewed by MANSHI YADAV

The Western etymology of the term “translation” has contributed to the development of certain enduring notions in the field, including the notions of “faithfulness” and an excessive preoccupation with the concept of an “original.” The term “translation” originates from the Latin language, specifically from the verb “translatio”, which translates to “to bear/carry across” (Bassnet 1998:38). The traditional concept of translation necessitates the translator to remain unquestionably fidel to the original text while carrying its meaning from the source language to the target language. Being an intricate art of conveying meaning and intent across a binary divide, translation enables communication, fosters cultural exchange and bridges gaps between distinct linguistic communities. Due to the interaction of cultures and languages, the potential for mistranslation and error arises. Contrary to the traditional definition, Kripper advocates the role of the translator as an actor who is playing the more foundational and fundamental part rather than being invisible. However, she not only negates the image of the translator as a bridge between cultures and languages but also questions the fluid transnational discourse in translation. Kripper further extends her focus to the relevance of the translator’s ‘bad translation’ or the flawed translation, supporting Lawrence Venuti’s statement, “Translation is radically transformative” (2019: 176). Her book “Narratives of Mistranslation” destabilizes the traditional conceptual notion of translation and

supports mistranslation as an intentional and conscious strategy to translate, which further acts as the resistance against the power dynamics of authorial authority that governs the translation practice. This book is also a part of Jacob Blakesley's and Duncan Large's literary translations series entitled *Routledge Studies in Literary Translation*. Other books included in this series are *Translating Transgender Identity: (Re)Writing Undecidable Text and Bodies* (2021), *The Afterlife of Dante's Vita Nova in the Anglophone World: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Translation and Reception History* (2022), and *A Literary Translation in the Making: A Process-Oriented Perspective* (2022).

## Chapter Overview

Denise Kripper divided *Narratives of Mistranslation: Fictional Translators in Latin American Literature* into five chapters, in addition to the introduction and conclusion, laying a solid foundation of comprehensive and focused examination of the subject matter. Each chapter is accompanied by an "In the Classroom" section, providing a practical suggestion for engaging with the text in an educational setting. This division provides readers with a clear progression of Kripper's ideas and analyses.

In the "Introduction", she starts with an illustration from Paublo De Santis's *La Traduccion*, where a translator uses a lighthouse as a paperweight, a souvenir from a conference. Giving this subtle reference to Walter Benjamin's essay "The Task of the Translator" through former illustration, she laid the foundation of the volume. At first, she discussed various shifts that Translation Studies have gone through in the last decades, including 'translators' invisibility' to 'translators' visibility', 'cultural turn' to 'fictional turn', 'mistranslation as an error' to "mistranslation as a form of resistance'. Further, she outlines the aims and purpose of the book, the central tenets and its significance. The foremost aim of this study is to

highlight the productive potential of mistranslation by engaging case studies of translated literature and scholarships from Latin America.

Chapter 1 introduced the major themes of the book i.e., translation as productive translation strategy and ability of fiction to be utilized as translation theory. *Reading Fiction as Theory: The Potentialities of Mistranslations* specifically examines the works of three Argentine translator-writers, namely Jorge Luis Borges, Rodolfo Walsh and Julio Cortazar, to illustrate these points. Antecedents to the contemporary trend of translation narrative in Latin American literature in Spanish, Borges' *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote*, (1962) translated by Anthony Bonner, Walsh's *Nota al pie* [Footnote] (1981), and Cortazar's *Diary for a Story*, (2001) translated by Anne McLean collectively reflects on "theory of cultural identity formation" (Gentzler, 2008:109). Pierre Menard's story addresses the volatility of originals and what might be gained instead of lost in translation. "Nota al pie" visually represents the movement of the translator from a peripheral position to a more prominent one. Similarly, "Diary for a Story" questions the translator's ethics.

Chapter 2, titled *(Mis)Translation in Latin America: A Fictional History*, offers evolution of historical perspective of Latin American identity from the percept of fictionalized translators. The chapter also present a methodology that challenges conventional understandings of faithfulness and subservience in the context of translation and interpretation. Thereby it establishes a narrative of both cultural and linguistic empowerment through innovative acts of defiance. As a sample of study, the author chose Carlos Fuentes' *The Two Shores*, translated by Alfred Mac Adam, Nestor Ponce's *The Interpreter*, translated by Denise Kripper, and Jose Donoso's *The Garden Next Door*, translated by Hardie St. Martin.

Chapter 3, entitled *Publishing Fiction(s): The Market of Translation*, focuses on two translation narratives (Kripper called them "market narratives") that render translators as breadwinners

while traversing with the tension arising from their profession's intellectual and economic value. In the given context, additional actors involved in the translation process, such as editors, publishers, and readers, assume a crucial role in creating and disseminating translated materials. This involvement has the potential to undermine the autonomy and influence of translators. To reveal the material condition of translated works, the chapter analyses Kripper's translation of "The Translator" by Salvador Benesdra and "O'Jara's Will" by Marcelo Cohen. The frictional translators in these literary works employ a deliberate mistranslation strategy to challenge and subvert the translation industry that exploits their labor.

In the chapter 4, titled *Silence Speaks Volumes: Gender Politics and Interpretation*, the examination of convergence of gender and translation. This analysis focuses on a comprehensive examination of an expanding collection of Latin American literary works, which sheds light on the portrayal of women translators and interpreters. The findings reveal the enduring presence of sexism and gender inequalities in both the theoretical frameworks and practical applications of translation. The two main novels here introduced for case studies are Nadia Volonté's *Ambactus: (Server)* (2017) and María Sonia Cristoff's *Include Me Out*, translated by Katherine Silver (2020). Contrary to the prevailing perception of translation as an acquiescent and feminized activity, the novels under examination challenge the conventional understanding of interpretation's communicative role.

Kripper titled chapter 5 *In Search of an Original: Writing in Translation*. In the milieu of world literature, this chapter looks at pseudo-translation as a similar phenomenon associated with global novels. Using translation as a narrative formation and "translatese" as their literary language, Roberto Bolao's *2666*, translated by Natasha Wimmer (2009), and Andrés Neuman's *Traveller of the Century*, translated by Nick Caistor and Lorenza Garcia (2012), are two

examples of this rising trend. These novels challenge the distinction between writing and translating by presenting translation as a form of writing. This final chapter examines the contemporary Latin American global novel concerning originality and translatability while considering other scholarly works that address these issues.

Lastly, in the “conclusion”, the author provides final reflections on the growing stature of translators and the significant role of mistranslation in literary arena of Latin America. It also tackles the inherent conflict between the actual process of translation and its portrayal in the fictional works. Additionally, it evaluates the educational merits of transfiction.

## **Critical Assessment**

Translators’ and interpreters’ roles in shaping any culture must often be addressed or made visible. Denise Krippner tried to grab scholarly attention to this disregarded role of a translator by discussing the productive potential of mistranslation rather than seeing it as a bad translation. *Narratives of Mistranslation* offers a stimulating and engrossing examination of the intricate nature and much ignored of mistranslation within the realm of literature. This scholarly publication explores the complex and intricate aspects of translation, emphasizing the significant consequences that arise from inaccuracies in the translation process. These inaccuracies can significantly influence the understanding, analysis, and reception of literary works within diverse cultural and linguistic contexts. Throughout the book, the author adeptly integrates a range of case studies and anecdotes derived from the captivating realm inhabited by fictional translators within Latin American literary compositions, thereby presenting instances wherein mistranslation treads the delicate path delineated by the Latin concept of *errare*, which refers to “mistakes” that possess the potential to unveil new

avenues, thereby blurring the distinction between errors that are not barely mistakes.

One of the notable strengths of the book is attributed to Kripper's vast knowledge and profound understanding of Latin American literature. By utilising a diverse array of literary works from various time periods and genres, the author adeptly analyses the representation of translators as individuals within the narratives. This analysis serves to illuminate the broader societal and cultural concerns by exploring the challenges they face in grappling with language and the consequences of encountering mistranslations. Her work encompasses a wide range of literary voices, spanning from esteemed authors like Jorge Luis Borges and Anthony Bonner to contemporary figures such as Lorenza Garcia and Valeria Luiselli. In doing so, she effectively highlights the recurring theme of mistranslation, which holds great significance within the Latin American literary tradition. The author also unveils the intricate and multifaceted manner in which intentional mistranslation (and pseudotranslation) functions as a potent literary tool, enabling profound investigations into the realms of language, culture, and communication.

In addition, it is worth noting that Kripper's writing style is both engaging and accessible, rendering the book equally approachable for both scholars and general readers. The author adeptly combines scholarly rigour and literary analysis, effectively presenting her arguments in a transparent manner. Additionally, she provides ample contextual information to enable readers to comprehend the importance of the works under discussion fully. Incorporating pertinent quotations and textual illustrations enhances the reading experience, facilitating a direct connection between readers and the analysed texts. One potential limitation of the study is its occasional tendency to engage in extensive analysis of theoretical frameworks, which may pose a challenge for readers with limited familiarity with translation theory. Nevertheless, Kripper's adeptness in providing

lucid rationales and her capacity to establish connections between theoretical concepts and tangible illustrations significantly alleviate this particular apprehension.

In a nutshell, the self-translation conducted by Kripper from Spanish to English of this book has enhanced the relevance of her research within the domain of translation studies. In her capacity as a translator, she possesses a heightened understanding of the translator's role as a conveyer of meaning and intention to the target language, while also grappling with the various limitations that emerge throughout the translation process. Nevertheless, despite enduring significant hardship throughout the translation process, the evaluation of the translation continues to be based on its fidelity to the original text, thereby raising concerns about the integrity of translators. *Narratives of Mistranslation: Fictional Translators in Latin American Literature* mitigates this concern and serves as an essential reference for academics, students and individuals with a keen interest in Latin American literature, world literature, translation pedagogy, and translation studies.

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## **About the Reviewer**

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