

A Foundational Contribution to Translation Studies a Review of Mustapha Taibi's *Translation and Community*

TAIBI, M. (2025). *Translation and Community*. Routledge.

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Introduction:

Contextualising Translation and Community

The landscape of contemporary global society is increasingly defined by intricate patterns of migration, cultural diversification, and the imperative for inclusive public services. Within this dynamic context, community translation has emerged as a field of paramount importance, directly contributing to the establishment of more equitable and sustainable communities. This vital practice facilitates communication by empowering minority groups, including migrants and refugees, who frequently encounter significant language barriers in accessing essential services and participating fully in civic life. The growing recognition of community translations' profound social mission has, in turn, spurred expanding interest in both its pedagogical and research dimensions within the broader discipline of Translation Studies.

In the light of this background, Mustapha Taibi's *Translation and Community* (2025) is a resourceful textbook crafted to meet a noteworthy pitfall in the arena of translation studies. Postulated as the prime accessible and interactive introductory book prolific in this ever-mushrooming area, the book aims to offer a wide-range, a rather "step-by-step guidance" to students undertaking an undergraduate or postgraduate course focused on varied aspects of community translation, public service translation, or translation as a social service in multilingual and multicultural societies (Taibi, 2025, p.2). The author, Mustapha Taibi, is an illustrious scholar with over two decades of teaching experience, well-known as a leading authority in the field. Besides, he is also the convenor of the International Community Translation Research Group. His authority and expertise are visible on every page of his work. Taibi's work

celebrates a rare kind of pragmatic relevance to community service. He ascertains his commitment to foster and encourage pragmatic critical engagement among students, going beyond the theories explicated in verbose classrooms to encourage active learning.

Besides, the well-thought-out placement of Taibi's *Translation and Community* within the Routledge Introductions to Translation and Interpreting Series, edited by Sergey Tyulenev, further emphasises its significance. In fact, this series is particularly curated to deliver essential teaching materials for translator and interpreter training, targeting both novice students and experienced instructors. A prime objective of the series is to bridge the gap between the academic and professional world, an end that echoes deeply with the dual theoretical and practical foci of Taibi's work. This strategic alignment with a prominent academic publisher's pedagogical series indicates the book's recognised demand for foundational texts that are theoretically informed and made practically applicable for a global readership, quite simultaneously. Such contextualisation suggests a deliberate effort by both the publisher and the author to meet a pertinent need for comprehensive, foundational resources in this evolving sub-discipline.

Foundational Concepts and Theoretical Frameworks

Taibi's *Translation and Community* vehemently endorses the conceptual and theoretical foundation for understanding community translation. It engages with it not merely as a linguistic task but as a professional service with a thoughtful social mission. The book asserts community translation as a professional service and offers it a formal qualification. This stress on a professional approach is presented as crucial for effectively linking the communication divide between public services and organisations on one side, and speakers of minority languages or minoritised communities on the other. By consistently underscoring its social mission inherent in this practice, Taibi highlights its fundamental role in empowering linguistically and socioeconomically weaker communities.

However, this mission is significant for its local focus, as it primarily serves minority language communities and addresses their needs in accessing essential public services such as healthcare and

education. With a more sensitive approach, community translation resounds with a need for greater equity within a broader ethical and political framework, thus elevating its academic and practical importance beyond traditional linguistic definitions. Mindful of the vulnerability of the minority communities with their languages, this enterprise connects directly to contemporary societal challenges of diversity and inclusion.

A significant tenet of Taibi's argument is the well-delineated interpretation of translator agency within the community translation context. Agency is defined as the willingness and ability to act and the capacity for exerting an influence in the world. In a crucial deliberation, Taibi distinguishes this form of agency from overt activism, asserting that community translators are not activists in the partisan sense. He considers them to be adequately trained professionals. The exercise of agency, in this framework, manifests through the translator's translation choices by making them consistent with the needs of disempowered audiences.

This enables access to vital information, fosters literacy, and contributes to broader societal and economic change. By carefully delineating translator agency from overt activism, Taibi establishes a crucial ethical boundary. This allows translators to function as proactive social agents without overstepping professional impartiality, a common point of contention in broader discussions concerning translator ethics. This balanced perspective is vital for maintaining trust with public service commissioners while simultaneously serving the critical needs of the community.

Taibi's writing champions a functionalist approach, particularly the Skopos theory, deemed most suitable for community translators. This theoretical lens views translation fundamentally as a purposeful activity where the intended communicative function (skopos) holds paramount importance (see Chap. 3). This perspective prioritises the target text's functionality and adequacy over strict source-text equivalence (ibid). The functionalist framework is presented as empowering for translators, elevating their status to being almost equal to authors and legitimising a wide range of renderings and translational actions, including adaptations and 'transcreations'; a term coined by P. Lal (Mendonça, 2022, p.79). The adoption of

Skopos theory fundamentally shifts the focus from source-text fidelity to target-audience reception and underscores the communicative purpose. This represents a significant departure from traditional literalist views of translation, providing the theoretical justification for adaptations, simplifications, and other interventions that are essential for the empowering mission of community translation, ensuring comprehensibility and utility for diverse and often vulnerable audiences. To ensure the effective realisation of community translations' social mission, Taibi introduces a comprehensive multilayered quality assurance framework. This framework operates across four interconnected levels through societal obligations, interprofessional collaboration, the translation stage and translator's role, besides post-translation quality assurance. This holistic model extends responsibility beyond the individual translator, implicating a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including policymakers, public services, language service managers, and end-users. The framework places particular emphasis on translation accessibility and plain language, besides the critical importance of seeking community feedback as integral components of quality. This multilayered approach broadens the concept of quality assurance to encompass systemic and collaborative responsibilities. It suggests that achieving high-quality community translation is a shared endeavour, necessitating supportive policy-making, robust inter-agency cooperation, and continuous feedback loops, rather than solely relying on individual translator competence. The interrelations among these core concepts are fundamental to Taibi's overarching argument and are seen vividly in the points mentioned below:

- ***Community Translation*** is the overarching purpose which drives the application of all other concepts by empowering minorities, bridging communication gaps, and offering professional services.
- ***Translator Agency*** is how community translation is realised and made operational through the functionalist approach. Eschewing activism, this entails an ability to act, influence and enhance social roles through translational choices.

- **Functionalist Approach (Skopos)** suggests translation as an activity with a purpose, allowing adaptations and ascertaining functionality as significant. It directly suggests translation strategies and quality criteria.
- **Multilayered Quality Assurance Frame** is a comprehensive system to reiterate that community translation, assisted by functionalism and agency, achieves its social endeavour. This frame is connected to post translation and ensures effective, apt, and impactful results.

Each of the points mentioned above outlines key concepts, their definitions, and their interrelation and are deeply interconnected and mutually reinforcing. The social mission of community translation provides the *raison d'être* for the groundwork, which is then operationalised through the ethical exercise of translator agency. The functionalist approach offers the theoretical and methodological tools for this agency to be applied effectively, prioritising the target audience's needs. Finally, the multilayered quality assurance frame provides a comprehensive system to ensure that the entire process, from policy to post-translation feedback, consistently delivers high-quality, impactful community translations.

Pedagogical Design and Comprehensive Coverage

Translation and Community is meticulously crafted with a clear pedagogical intent, designed to serve as a foundational resource for students entering the field. The book is explicitly structured and written in a manner that provides step-by-step guidance to students enrolled in undergraduate or postgraduate programs covering community translation. This systematic progression ensures that learners are introduced to concepts in a logical sequence, moving from fundamental theories to specialised applications. The curriculum blueprint embedded within this “step-by-step guidance” (Taibi, 2025, p.2) is particularly valuable in a nascent field where standardised pedagogical materials may be scarce, offering a coherent pathway for learning from foundational theory to practical application. The structure covers key topics and issues in community translation, beginning with core theoretical concepts in the initial

chapters, transitioning to specific text types and their translation challenges, and concluding with essential professional practices.

The book's commitment to accessibility and interactivity is evident throughout its framework. It is heralded as the “first accessible and interactive introductory textbook”, employing a “pedagogical style” enriched with “frequent examples and boxes to illustrate and discuss the question at hand” (Taibi, 2025, p.i). Each chapter is thoughtfully equipped with a collection of pedagogical support features, including questions to consider or discuss, examples relevant to the topic at hand, suggested activities, further readings, and a comprehensive reference list. This consistent integration of active learning prompts encourages students to apply theoretical knowledge, engage in critical reflection, and explore topics independently. Such an approach is crucial for developing the practical and analytical skills necessary for navigating the complexities of community translation. Furthermore, the provision of additional resources and activities on the Routledge Translation Studies grid enhances the book's interactive dimension, offering supplementary materials that extend the possibility of learning beyond the printed page.

A significant contribution of *Translation and Community* lies in its explicit aim to address an identified gap in the existing scholarly and pedagogical landscape. The author highlights that community translation, despite its growing importance, “has not received sufficient attention in terms of research publications and teaching and learning resources” (Taibi, 2025, p.1). Taibi notes that his previous co-authored work, *Community Translation* (Bloomsbury, 2016), while a scholarly introduction, “was not specifically written as a textbook” (Taibi, 2025, p.1). This new volume is thus meticulously designed to fill that precise pedagogical void, providing a dedicated, comprehensive resource for classroom instruction. By explicitly acknowledging the prior absence of a textbook of this nature, Taibi situates *Translation and Community* as a foundational text that not only synthesises existing knowledge but also establishes a coherent framework for the systematic teaching and research of the field. This represents a substantial contribution to the institutionalisation and academic legitimacy of community

translation as a distinct and vital sub-discipline of Translation Studies.

Practical Dimensions of Community Translation: A Chapter-by-Chapter Synthesis

A. Defining the Practice and Role

What is special about community translation? The foundational opening chapter immediately establishes the unique characteristics of community translation, framing it as a “key facilitator of communication strategies between public services and people who do not share the language of those services” (Taibi, 2025, p.2). It delves into the inherent social role of this practice, the distinctive agency and responsibilities of community translators, the critical importance of translation accessibility and plain language, appropriate dissemination methods, and the multifaceted requirements for quality assurance. The chapter's immediate focus on the socio-political and ethical context of community translation, rather than a purely linguistic definition, sets the tone for the entire book. This approach ensures that technical skills are consistently viewed through the lens of social responsibility and communicative effectiveness, providing a holistic contextualisation of the practice.

Your role as a community translator: Building on the foundational understanding, the second chapter meticulously explores the complex and often paradoxical role of translators. It draws upon established codes of ethics, which typically emphasise impartiality and accuracy, and integrates these with academic discussions of translators as intercultural mediators and social agents. The chapter specifically dissects the community translator's identity through multiple lenses: as a member of their community and broader society, as a professional, as a text processor, as a communication facilitator, as an intercultural mediator, and finally, as a social agent. A particularly crucial aspect of this discussion is the careful delineation between overt “activism” and “community translation as an enabling, context-sensitive and functional language service”(Taibi, 2025, p. 2). This exploration provides a critical understanding of the complex professional identity of community

translators, particularly the inherent tension between traditional notions of impartiality and the imperative to act as a social agent. It offers a robust framework for students to navigate these ethical dilemmas in real-world scenarios, acknowledging the “loyalty paradox” that can arise when serving both professional codes and community needs (ibid).

B. Textual Analysis and Strategic Application

Text types, translation brief and translation strategies: The third chapter serves as a pivotal bridge between theoretical frameworks and practical application, providing a foundational overview of “functionalist models” of translation, with a particular focus on Skopos theory (Taibi, 2025, p. 42). It systematically identifies the theoretical contributions most relevant to community translation, offering practical, illustrated advice on translation strategies. This guidance is rooted in key functionalist notions such as the “translation brief,” “text type,” and “text function” (p.44). The chapter also candidly addresses the “potential tensions between translation briefs and the social role of community language services”(Taibi, 2025, p. 2). By linking abstract concepts like Skopos to concrete tools such as text typologies and translation strategies, the chapter equips students with a systematic methodology for making informed translation decisions, especially when adaptation is necessary. The discussion of tensions between client briefs and social roles directly applies the ethical considerations introduced in Chapter 2, demonstrating how theory informs practical decision-making.

Translating public messaging: Moving into specific applications, the fourth chapter focuses on the practicalities of translating “public messaging” texts, which are typically “informative and operative texts published by public institutions to raise awareness” (Taibi, 2025, pp. 59-60). It meticulously describes the main features of such messages, their functions within institutional communication strategies, appropriate translation strategies, and the critical importance of communication and negotiation with stakeholders. The chapter strongly asserts that “accessibility, appropriateness and effectiveness are clearly key in

community translation”, advocating for “accuracy [to be] understood in a pragmatic sense” (Taibi, 2025, pp. 59-70). This emphasis on audience design and personas highlights a sophisticated understanding of target audience segmentation, moving beyond a generic “minority group” to specific user profiles (ibid). The chapter underscores that public messaging translation is fundamentally about achieving impact and behavioural change, not merely linguistic transfer. The argument that “accuracy vs. accessibility should not be a major dilemma” for public messaging is a strong normative statement, prioritising the communicative outcome and reinforcing the book's core mission of empowerment (ibid).

Translating regulatory texts: The fifth chapter shifts focus to “regulatory texts,” which adopt a “more institutional perspective and tone and aims to regulate rights, services and relationships” between public services and citizens (Taibi, 2025, pp. 82-83). It critically examines the overlap between regulatory, institutional, and legal translation, noting that translations in this domain “might better serve the official voice and power structures” (ibid). This raises pertinent ethical questions regarding translator loyalty. The chapter stresses the paramount need for accuracy, precision and maintenance of the institutional voice for these texts, clearly distinguishing them from the more reader-oriented public messaging. This discussion highlights the inherent tension between institutional control, which demands precision and adherence to official voice, and the community's need for accessible information. It implicitly advocates for a pragmatic balance, where accuracy in regulatory texts is achieved without resorting to inaccessible literalism, emphasising continuous dialogue between commissioners and translators. The differentiation between “public messaging” and “regulatory texts” (p. 85) is crucial, as their differing communicative purposes necessitate distinct priorities in translation strategy, particularly concerning the degree of adaptation and the maintenance of institutional voice.

Translating culturally sensitive texts: The sixth chapter delves into one of the most ethically complex areas of community translation, cultural mediation and sensitivity. It specifically addresses “cultural mediation and cultural sensitivity in community

translation”, examining various “communicative situations and sensitive contents that might require certain levels of mediation” (Taibi, 2025, pp.99-100). These include highly sensitive topics such as sexuality, sexual abuse, domestic violence, religion, and offensive language. The book proposes several parameters to assist translators in making decisions in relation to cultural adaptations, including awareness of cultural differences, the translation brief, ethical considerations, and available language resources. This chapter directly confronts the “loyalty dilemma” (p. 67) in its most challenging form, where cultural norms and taboos directly confront the imperative for accurate and empowering communication. The proposed parameters offer a systematic decision-making framework for translators navigating these sensitive terrains, moving beyond intuition to a reasoned, principled approach to cultural adaptation. The discussion of euphemisms versus accuracy highlights the practical trade-offs and the need for a principled approach, rather than arbitrary choices.

C. Modalities of Dissemination and Official Documentation

Translating for different dissemination media: The seventh chapter addresses the critical challenge posed by “variation between communication channels, coupled with sociolinguistic variation in multilingual societies” (p. 4). It meticulously details the “differences between dissemination media and the adjustments community translators may have to make” (p. 4). These adjustments encompass a range of linguistic and stylistic considerations, including the choice of language varieties, variations in register and style, simplification of sentence structures, editing for conciseness, and modifications to address terms. The book argues that community translators possess the expertise to “act as expert advisers in relation to the appropriateness of dissemination media for their target communities”(pg.4), emphasising that their decisions should be guided by each medium. This chapter expands the translator's role beyond mere text-to-text transfer, positioning them as experts in multimodal communication. It recognises that the effectiveness of community messaging is intrinsically linked to the chosen dissemination channel, requiring translators to understand media-

specific constraints and advise on optimal formats for diverse audiences. The contemporary trend of public messaging moving from traditional written texts to audio and video formats, as seen in COVID-19 campaigns, necessitates a broader skillset for translators, moving them into the realm of communication strategists.

Translating personal official documents: The eighth chapter is uniquely dedicated to the specialised area of translating personal official documents, such as civil registry certificates, driver's licenses, and academic qualifications. Its inclusion is justified by the crucial role these translations play in facilitating their integration into their host or mainstream societies for migrants and refugees, enabling their access to essential services. The chapter meticulously outlines the special nature, features and challenges inherent in these documents, providing practical guidelines for professionals on key quality criteria: accuracy, language appropriateness, document integrity and presentation. Certification is highlighted as a distinctive and paramount feature, differentiating this area from other forms of community translation. This chapter underscores a distinct, high-stakes area of translation crucial for migrant integration, where the translator effectively acts as a “public authenticator”. The stringent certification requirements and the focus on “document integrity” emphasise the role of translation in legal and administrative gatekeeping, where trust and authenticity are paramount (Taibi, 2025, p.138). The historical context, where official document translation often preceded broader community translation services in response to migration needs, reveals its foundational role in migration management.

D. Professional Tools and Collaborative Practice

Locating and using resources: The ninth chapter provides practical guidance on a comprehensive range of translator resources, spanning from traditional tools like “dictionaries, thesauri, glossaries and encyclopaedias” to “technologically advanced ones such as machine translation and artificial intelligence” (AI) (Taibi, 2025, p. 155). It meticulously outlines the possible uses of these resources and the risks associated with each one of them, with a particular emphasis on the risks of over-reliance on technology. The chapter

underscores that while technology offers efficiency, it necessitates a high degree of critical digital literacy from translators. The warning against over-reliance and the detailed discussion of MT/AI limitations—such as struggles with ambiguity, nuance, idiomatic expressions, cultural context, and data scarcity for minority languages—highlight the enduring value of human critical thinking and the indispensable need for post-editing. The comparative analysis of outputs from different machine translation tools, like Google Translate and Copilot, directly illustrates the quality issues and the necessity of human intervention. This practical demonstration reinforces the theoretical argument for critical engagement with technology, especially for students in early stages of their training, for whom over-reliance could hinder skill development.

Revising your and another translator's work: The tenth chapter introduces translation revision as a critical step in ensuring that translations meet established quality criteria and are fit for their intended purpose. It differentiates between “self-revision,” “other-revision,” and “post-editing”, outlining the essential “required skills and qualifications” for revisers, which include not only analytical but also crucial interpersonal skills (Taibi, 2025, p. 172). The chapter details various “revision parameters”, placing special emphasis on “language appropriateness, coherence, effective communication and information accessibility in the context of non-specialised translations for the community” (ibid). The inclusion of an example of an unrevised translation immediately demonstrates the practical necessity of revision. This chapter positions revision not merely as an error-correction step but as a systemic quality control mechanism vital for professional integrity and effective communication. The detailed discussion of reviser competencies, including interpersonal skills, and specific parameters underscores the complexity of revision and its role in continuous professional development within a collaborative professional setting.

Teamwork and community engagement: The concluding (eleventh) chapter broadens the scope of translator competence beyond linguistic and technical skills, focusing on the “professional and community relationships of community translators” (p. 5). It

emphasises interpersonal competence as a critical skill, encompassing active listening, empathy, cultural sensitivity, negotiation, and conflict resolution. Taibi strongly advocates for the importance of teamwork in translation, highlighting its benefits for quality assurance, efficiency, and problem-solving. It challenges the traditional lone wolf image of translators, asserting that effective community translation is not a solitary act but a deeply collaborative and socially embedded practice. Taibi's insistence on community engagements to foster connections with language-specific communities, assert language skills, and foster trust, suggesting learning and internships as practical avenues for this engagement, is noteworthy. This nexus with the broader sociolinguistic network is presented as crucial for ensuring cultural relevance and language vitality. The emphasis on interpersonal competence and teamwork directly echoes the book's principal theme of community translation as a collaborative, socially responsible endeavour, with community engagement serving as the logical extension of this value.

One of the persistent threads which connects the tapestry of this book is the nuanced conceptualisation of quality across different community translation contexts. While focal criteria like accuracy are generic, their specific application and prioritisation vary significantly across different community translation contexts. This malleability is a direct consequence of the functionalist approach or Skopos, which prioritises the communicative purpose and target audience needs.

Critical Assessment and Contribution to Translation Studies

Mustapha Taibi's *Translation and Community* stands as a momentous and focal influence on the field of Translation Studies, significantly for the ever-expanding sub-discipline of community translation. Its fortes are diverse, invariably locating it as a requisite resource for students, educators, and researchers alike.

The book's **comprehensiveness and systematic structure** are its noteworthy hallmarks. With *a step-by-step approach* (emphasis added), the textbook ensures a holistic understanding of community translation. Its all-inclusive approach covers foundational theory,

diverse text types, practical tools, and professional ethics. This organised and structured advancement from core concepts to specialised applications is predominantly relevant for pedagogical purposes. The book excels at **linking theory and practice**, consistently applying the functionalist approach to real-world translation challenges. Invariably, the overt goal of the Routledge series to bridge the academic-professional divide is made possible through such an enterprise. Moreover, the conscious integration of suggested activities, further readings, and questions to consider within each chapter, and a pedagogical style featuring frequent examples and boxes, encourages active learning, critical reflection, and independent exploration.

Taibi's strong underscoring of ethics and societal connections via community translation, designating it as a medium for empowerment and social justice, situates the enterprise with significant social responsibility right from the start. Conclusively, the author's wide praxis, knowledge and leadership in the domain lend significant command and credibility to the book's content, making it a highly reliable resource. Despite its several merits, a critical re-look reveals certain pitfalls where further depth or alternative perspectives could have enriched the book's utility. Though the book vehemently supports a functionalist approach, a clearer and more unambiguous discussion on the limits of adaptation, particularly in risky and vulnerable contexts, may be considered. Mindful of this, institutional demands for literal translations might clash with audience accessibility needs and concomitantly manifest complex ethical and practical problems that demand reflective examination.

The book's discussion on machine translation and artificial intelligence in Chapter 9, while valuable, could be expanded to include more specific guidance on advanced post-editing workflows and the evolving ethical implications of AI integration in professional practice, moving beyond general quality concerns to address the rapidly changing technological landscape.

It is indeed praiseworthy that the book acknowledges the diversity of global communities (eg, Australia, USA) and provides illustrations from various linguistic backgrounds, for instance: Arabic, Chinese, Spanish and Swahili. However, a wider range of

international case studies could further supplement the discussion on cultural and sociolinguistic variations and present a more universally sound outlook. The praxis-oriented utility of this textbook, while balancing accuracy and accessibility, is highly context-dependent. Contextualising real-world scenarios through a critical understanding, where these principles face challenges and dilemmas, would enhance their pragmatic utility for advanced learners and seasoned practitioners. This will then encourage their movement beyond ideal scenarios to address complex grey areas.

All in all, Mustapha Taibi's *Translation and Community* presents itself as a significant resource to the academic discourse of Translation Studies. It formalises the enterprise and offers a pedagogical approach to community translation. It offers a much-needed, wide-ranging, comprehensive textbook in an area that hitherto lacked steadfast resources. Taibi's work underpins the swelling recognition of community translation as a unique and dynamic sub-discipline, thus raising its benchmark from a niche area to a principal component of socially engaged translational research and praxis. Therefore, it is posited to orient future curricula for translator education programs, offering a consistent yet flexible framework for teaching the theoretical, ethical, and pragmatic dimensions of community translation. The book also reinforces several prospects for future research.

Conclusion

Mindful of the rapid progress in technology and research, particularly the integration of advanced AI tools into community translation and curricula, there is a need to focus on developing future-oriented skills. Mustapha Taibi's *Translation and Community* stands as an innovative contribution to Translation Studies, particularly for the expansive and significant field of community translation. Its wide-ranging coverage, laborious theoretical rootedness in functionalism, and vigorous pedagogical plan make it a reliable resource for students seeking to learn and practice community translation. By effectively filling a critical gap in teaching materials, this textbook offers educators a well-structured and interactive resource. It provides researchers a solid groundwork

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for future investigation into the complexities of social, ethical, and practical dimensions of translation in diverse communities. Convincingly, Taibi's work efficaciously articulates community translation not merely as a philological task but as a vital social service, which is proactive in empowering minority groups and nurturing more egalitarian societies.

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