

Call for Papers (Edited Volume)

Translating the Nonhuman in Colonial and Postcolonial Contexts

Translation is a practice and an academic discipline that is always concerned with otherness. While it can be framed optimistically as an act of connecting and fostering engagement with different cultures, it must also be considered as a potentially harmful act. Especially with regard to so-called cultural *realia*, translators are increasingly aware of the ethical implications of their work. As Ritva Leppihalme explains, “[s]ince all texts are anchored in their culture, it follows that culture-bound items in the source text can present problems for translators” (126) and translators should thus possess “intercultural awareness” and “metacultural competence” (Leppihalme 127). While translation studies has dedicated considerable effort towards the ethics of translating cultural *realia* (cf. Bassnett and Lefevere), there is another related aspect that has not received sufficient attention yet (cf. Zhao and Geng 47): The translation of the nonhuman, encompassing, among other things, descriptions of the ‘natural’ world, animals and other nonhuman objects. Since the depiction of the nonhuman is intricately connected to human epistemologies and cultural histories, it cannot be entirely separated from their practices and ideologies. When translating texts from different cultures, it must therefore be taken into consideration that descriptions of natural environments and nonhuman agents are not only influenced by their cultural contexts but might also carry manifest or latent markers of their moments of inception, cultural embedding and related ideological ideas. Colonial natural history, for instance, “reveals and conceals competing histories of how different peoples and cultures have understood and related to the natures around them” (Bewell 110). Likewise, the description of natural environments in colonial texts probably replaced indigenous ways of relating with colonial ideas and understanding of the nonhuman, which is why Alan Bewell declares that “when we are dealing with colonial environments, we are not so much dealing with natures, but natures in translation” (Bewell 117).

This collection of essays sets out to discuss translation at the interface of ecocriticism, colonialism and postcolonialism. What are the ethical implications of translating nature and how are literary descriptions of nature interwoven with colonial histories? What are strategies to render the colonial routes of ‘natural’ environments visible and what affordances do translations offer in this endeavour? Under the category of ‘eco-translation’, translation scholars have recently taken an interest in how we might “use translation to move towards a post-anthropocentric relationship to the world, vital for any notion of ecological survival” (Cronin 5). Focussing on colonial and postcolonial contexts, this volume pursues the following questions: What could be a postcolonial eco-translation? What might be the responsibility of a decolonial translation strategy when it comes to texts from the colonial period? Can or should translation be an act of reparation? How and when do we speak of untranslatability in this context? And, last but not least: How can translation practices in a colonial and postcolonial context help us to diversify the academic field of Ecocriticism with its vast imprint of the “Anglo-Saxon world” (Valero Garcés 262) in terms of not only words and expressions but also concepts and ways of thinking?

Contributions that move beyond Anglo-centricity and engage with the full range of source and target languages are very welcome. Please send abstracts of about 300 words to the editor of this collection, Yvonne Liebermann (yvkap100@hhu.de), by mid-January 2026.

Finished contributions of ca. 7.000 words will be due by the end of August 2026.

References

Bassnett, Susan and André Lefevere. *Constructing Cultures: Essay on Literary Translation*. Routledge, 1998.

Bewell, Alan. *The Colonial Translation of Natures*. John Hopkins UP, 2017.

Cronin, Michael. *Eco-Translation*. Routledge, 2017.

Leppihalme, Ritva. "Realia." *Handbook of Translation Studies*, vol. 2, edited by Yves Gambier, John Benjamins, 2011, pp. 126-130.

Valero Garcés, Carmen. "Ecocriticism and Translation." *Odisea*, vol. 1, no. 12, 2017, pp. 257-272.

Zhao, Meiou and Jiyong Geng. "What Can Translation Do For the Endangered Earth? : An Overview of Ecocritical Translation Studies." *Trames*, vol. XXVIII, no. 1, 2024, pp. 37-51.