TTR
Traduction, terminologie, rédaction

Joshua Price. *Translation and Epistemicide. Racialization of Languages in the Americas*. Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 2023, 189 p.

Arianne Des Rochers

Volume 36, numéro 1, 1er semestre 2023

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1107575ar
DOI : https://doi.org/10.7202/1107575ar

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

Association canadienne de traductologie

ISSN

0835-8443 (imprimé)
1708-2188 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer ce compte rendu

Des Rochers, A. (2023). Compte rendu de [Joshua Price. *Translation and Epistemicide. Racialization of Languages in the Americas*. Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 2023, 189 p.] *TTR*, *36*(1), 264–269. https://doi.org/10.7202/1107575ar

Joshua Price. *Translation and Epistemicide. Racialization of Languages in the Americas*. Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 2023, 189 p.

Joshua Price's latest book, *Translation and Epistemicide*, is a timely, original, and astute addition to a growing list of recent interventions that uncompromisingly reveal the "dark side" of translation in our contemporary moment (see, for instance, Italiano, 2020; Samoyault, 2020). It explores how translation has been and continues to be an instrument of empire and colonialism through its participation in and facilitation of epistemicide, understood as a series of discursive, historical, political, and social processes, which involve "destroying, marginalizing, or banishing Indigenous, subaltern, and counterhegemonic knowledges" (p. 3).

The book comprises an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion. The first four chapters offer four different examples of translation-as-epistemicide: 1) the commensuration of (incommensurate) languages and worldviews in the making of bilingual (Spanish-Quechua) dictionaries during the colonial era; 2) the marginalization of 20th-century Peruvian theorist José María Arguedas within Western translation theory (in an apt comparison with the far-reaching legacy of his contemporary, Walter Benjamin); 3) the criminalization of Arab and Latinx translators in the present-day US; and 4) the assimilation of a vast array of creative practices in the Global South under the academic label "performance studies," an untranslated Western disciplinary category presented as universal and capable of describing place-specific Latinx cultural traditions. These four chapters are equally detailed and instructive, and Price's writing is always clear and precise as he connects a series of specific, tangible, and diverse translation (or non-translation) practices with the broader phenomenon of epistemicide.

Considered together, the examples provided in each chapter give an excellent overview of the kinds of practices that can function as epistemicide. Because the examples are varied and wide-ranging, the book calls upon its readers to creatively make connections and find their own examples of translation-as-epistemicide, in their own contexts or areas of specialization. For instance, reading *Translation and Epistemicide*'s first chapter, "Colonization and Commensuration: Asymmetries in the Making of Bilingual Dictionaries" while consulting bilingual dictionaries from the colonial era can prove very

useful in that it equips the researcher with a new understanding of the limits of traditional colonial approaches and methods. Price's masterful illustration of how bilingual dictionaries operated as a technology of epistemicide during the colonial period enabled this reviewer to approach, for example, Reverend Silas Tertius Rand's *Dictionary of the Language of the Mi'kmaq Indians* (1888) much more critically. In fact, the dictionary's word-for-word equivalents of English words in Mi'kmaw give us but a limited, flattened, and impoverished portrait of the Mi'kmaw language and worldview refracted through a colonial lens. Many researchers will likely find Price's insights useful and applicable, since the areas covered in the book are wide-ranging.

Part of Price's success in constructing a monograph that will speak to a wide range of scholars, both in translation studies and other disciplines, is due to the fact that he always connects his analyses of examples of translation (which can sometimes be highly lexical and semantic, in the case of the word "performance" and its possible translations into Spanish, or in the case of the refusal to translate the Arabic word "jihad" in US courts) to the broader, dominant, imperial structures of thinking with which so many scholars and translators are struggling, at least in the Americas and in former as well as contemporary colonial empires. In Price's own words, "[t]o see translation in terms of epistemicide is to move beyond a narrowly aesthetic, lexical, and semantic analysis of textual translation to include analysis of an array of political, historical, material and even ontological conditions that surround the translation" (p. 12). This move away from strictly aesthetic or text-based analysis, as well as the commitment to grappling with broader structural and collective questions, constitute without a doubt the book's greatest strengths.

As Price rightly notes, however, not all translation is epistemicide: translation can both reinforce and/or undermine hegemonic ways of knowing depending on who does it, why, and how. The fifth chapter and the conclusion thus both explore how translation can serve as a decolonial tool to counter epistemicide. After spending most of the book exposing how translation has played a role in epistemicide, it is only logical to end on a more positive note, so this turn toward translation-as-resistance or translation-as-liberation is most welcome. Unfortunately, these two chapters are a little short and, as a result, sometimes lack the previous chapters' clarity and depth. It is indeed difficult to imagine successfully elaborating a "decolonial

methodology" (p. 139) in under 26 pages, which is the total number of pages of the fifth chapter and the conclusion taken together. In the fifth chapter, the idea of stereoscopic reading as counterhegemonic methodology is presented somewhat superficially, and choosing the Western concept of "stereoscopic reading," borrowed from Marilyn Gaddis Rose (1997), as the underlying principle for a decolonial methodology is surprising here, since it paradoxically goes against the book's general argument for engaging with subaltern, marginalized knowledges and theories in order to counter, precisely, epistemicide. In the conclusion, Price revisits his translation of Cabeza de Vaca's feeling of *desnudez* by "bewilderment" (see Price, 2008), and argues for strategies akin to thick translation, which would make for translations that "add levels of epistemic and linguistic complexity rather than reducing translation to the search for a ready-make equivalent (p. 160)." If a little hasty, the two concluding chapters nevertheless constitute an interesting note on which to end this important book, and they certainly force the reader to think about alternatives to epistemicidal translation practices. It is, after all, easier to critique dominant modes of knowing and translating (which Price's book does extraordinarily well) than it is to find or create emancipatory and revolutionary solutions outside of these dominant modes of knowing, so this is perhaps less a critique of the two concluding chapters and more a remark on the difficulty of moving beyond hegemonic epistemologies—even for an accomplished, sharp, and innovative thinker such as Price.

On a more specific note, *Translation and Epistemicide* raises a few interesting terminological and conceptual questions, particularly around the use and definition of the notions of "racialization of language" and "decolonization," two terms whose meaning and usage are highly contested given their relatively recent emergence in various fields. In the spirit of dialogue, a discussion of these two notions, which are both central throughout the book, follows in the hopes that an understanding of these concepts, coming from a different location and from a different academic tradition—those of the reviewer—, can enlarge their scope.

First, the subtitle of the book, "Racialization of Languages in the Americas," can be somewhat misleading, because Price does not use the notion of "racialization of language" as it has been developed in linguistic anthropology, for example. In linguistic anthropology, "the racialization of language" refers to the ways in which humanistic and

scientific studies of language have served to racialize individuals and groups of people, and the ways in which notions of language have contributed to notions of race and culture. In particular, linguistic anthropologists such as Nelson Flores and Jonathan Rosa—whose prominent work on the topic Price, surprisingly, does not engage with—have shown how linguistic competence is a fundamental characteristic on which race is constructed and determined. In other words, linguistic features (the ways in which certain speakers speak) are socially indexed as racial features, and thus function as such. In turn, a racialized speaker's speech will always be perceived as lacking; this is what Nelson and Flores have described as the "co-naturalization of race and language" (2017, pp. 623-627). Price's use of "racialization of language" refers more specifically to how racial hierarchies are mapped onto linguistic and translation practices: Indigenous languages are presented as "lacking" in bilingual dictionaries from the colonial era because Indigenous peoples were perceived as inferior, while the translation practices of Arab translators are categorically framed as "terrorism" in the US because Arab peoples are socially constructed as America's "dangerous Other." The book is thus less about the co-constitution of language and race as constructs in the Americas (i.e., less about the racialization of language as a *process*), and more about the ways in which translation practices (such as the making of bilingual dictionaries, court interpretation, and translation theory) are shaped and determined—be it on a regional, national or global level—by already existing racial hierarchies.

The second term is "decolonization," and other words in its lexical family, such as "decolonial/decoloniality." Quoting Xamuel Bañales, Price describes decolonization as "the process of undoing *the logic of colonization* in its present form, described by many scholars as coloniality" (p. 138; my italics). Here, Price mostly draws on the modernity/coloniality group (Quijano, Mignolo, etc.) in his use of "decolonization" (cf. p. 56), which refers to analytic approaches and social or political practices opposed to Eurocentric knowledge hierarchies. In this sense, decolonization's goal is to counter social discrimination that has outlived formal colonialism and become integrated in succeeding social orders, as in the case of Latin American countries. This Latinx-centric approach to decolonization/decoloniality, seen primarily as an epistemic project, is at odds with Indigenous ideas of the concept elaborated, for instance, in Canada and the United States, where decolonization is understood as the

abolition of settler colonialism through the repatriation of Indigenous land, in order to enable Indigenous peoples to restore their ways of life. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, in their now foundational "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor" (2012), have warned against equating social justice, critical methodologies, and broad epistemic approaches that decenter hegemonic perspectives with decolonization, because "the decolonial desires of white, nonwhite, immigrant, postcolonial, and oppressed people can similarly be entangled in resettlement, reoccupation, and reinhabitation that actually further settler colonialism" (p. 1) and the dispossession of Indigenous people. They argue against the metaphorization of decolonization, reminding us that "decolonization in the settler colonial context must involve the repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted; that is, all of the land, and not just symbolically" (p. 7). Decolonization is, in this sense, not only an epistemic project but also, and most importantly, a material one centered on the land. Hence, decolonization does not mean the same thing in settler colonial contexts such as Canada—where the land and Indigenous people are still very much colonized by a settler state—and Latin America, a space largely characterized by social, cultural, and racial mixing where theories built on binaries such as settler/Indigenous are, according to some, predestined to fail to explain colonial relations and decolonial struggle (see Taylor and Lublin, 2021). This discussion of the different meanings of "decolonization" is not meant as a criticism of Price's use of the concept in *Translation and Epistemicide*, but simply seeks to highlight a dialogue between the different interpretations of the same concept emerging from different contexts.

Ultimately, these two terminological quandaries point to how rich and relevant of a proposition *Translation and Epistemicide* is as well as to the ways in which readers will be compelled to engage with, respond to, and take on this work in the collective project of counter-epistemicide. In this well-researched account, Price is cautious not to offer a grandiose, universal portrait of translation-as-epistemicide; nor is it his goal to propose an all-encompassing decolonial methodology for translation which would apply to all contexts. Instead he offers an always nuanced, critical, and daring portrait of translation, its limitations and possibilities, to which we are invited to add our own contributions from different local contexts. *Translation and Epistemicide* is a thought-provoking and rigorous book that will

undoubtedly inspire translation scholars to add to Price's project of pinpointing and countering epistemicide in their own practices, areas, and geographical locations.

References

Gaddis Rose, Marilyn (1997). *Translation and Literary Criticism: Translation as Analysis*. Manchester, St. Jerome.

Italiano, Federico, ed. (2020). *The Dark Side of Translation*. London and New York, Routledge.

Price, Joshua (2008). "Translating Social Science: Good versus Bad Utopianism." *Target*, 20, 2, pp. 348-364.

Rand, Silas Tertius (1888). *Dictionary of the Language of the Micmac Indians: Who Reside in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Cape Breton and Newfoundland*. Halifax, Nova Scotia Printing Company.

Rosa, Jonathan and Nelson Flores (2017). "Unsettling Race and Language: Toward a Raciolinguistic Perspective." *Language and Society*, 46, 5, pp. 621-647.

Samoyault, Tiphaine (2020). *Traduction et violence*. Paris, Éditions du Seuil.

Taylor, Lucy and Geraldine Lubin (2021). "Settler Colonial Studies and Latin America." *Settler Colonial Studies,* 11, 3, pp. 259-270.

Tuck, Eve and K. Wayne Yang (2012). "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society,* 1, 1, pp. 1-40.

Arianne Des Rochers
Université de Moncton

****

Franziska Humphreys, dir. *Penser la traduction*. Paris, Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, coll. « Bibliothèque allemande », 2021, 363 p.

Résultant d'un programme de recherche sous la direction scientifique de Franziska Humphreys (aujourd'hui affiliée à l'Institut Goethe à Bruxelles), l'ouvrage collectif *Penser la traduction* rassemble les contributions des intervenants sur le thème « Penser en langues – In Sprachen denken » qui ont eu lieu entre 2015 et 2020. Bien que s'inscrivant résolument dans le champ encore trop peu exploré de la traduction des sciences humaines et sociales, c'est plus précisément vers la philosophie que tendent les textes réunis, surtout la philosophie qui s'est faite et continue de se faire entre l'Allemagne et la France. L'ouvrage ne manque pas de manier avec beaucoup de dextérité les