

PROCEEDINGS OF THE ACTRADUCTOLOGIE #1 CONFERENCE

Against all odds

Surviving as a Translator
or Interpreter in Times of Crisis

Edited by

CARLOS DJOMO TIOKOU

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Introduction.

Translation as Resilience

Carlos Djomo Tiokou

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Les changements sont certains, et le secteur des métiers de la traduction, comme moult autres secteurs d'activité, est concerné par les progrès de l'intelligence artificielle. Pour les formations universitaires, l'heure est donc à l'adaptation. Il s'agit de préparer les étudiants aux futures réalités du marché.

– Loock (2019, p. 55)

The survival of translators and interpreters is a topic that can no longer be avoided. It is even more relevant as the idea of language professionals being replaced by machines (what external stakeholders have long predicted, hoped for, or fantasized about) is close to becoming a reality – to some extent. However, from Troyanskii's “translation machine” patented in 1933 (Somers, 1993, p. 4) to automated systems powered by artificial intelligence and misleadingly advertised as “approaching human-level accuracy” (Langlais, 2022, p. 176), the language industry has been resilient throughout the major societal and technological turns. It survived all technological (r)evolutions (Allain, 2021, pp. 14-18). It is, consequently, set to survive the current wave of AI-assisted

“augmented” workflows and any subsequent software-based tools, but resilience has a cost. It implies, among others, reviewing current practices, redefining both theories and their applications, as well as developing updated systems and roadmaps. It supposes to identify the needs of an ever-changing industry and ensure trainees acquire the much-needed skills (Froeliger, 2023, p. 151). This falls in line with the overarching challenge translation studies scholars and trainers face. As Medhat-Lecocq, Negga and Al-Zaum (2025, p. 15) put it, it is all about adapting theoretical fundamentals, adopting new teaching/learning methodologies and widening the scope of translator/interpreting training, so as to comply with the ever-changing market needs.

In view of all of the above, this book leverages contributions made during the first ever *ACTRAductologie* conference, held virtually from 11 to 13 July 2024. Hosted by the Cameroon Association for Translation Studies (ACTRA/CATRAS), in collaboration with the University of Buea’s Advanced School of Translators and Interpreters (ASTI), under the theme “Surviving as a Translator or Interpreter in Times of Crisis”, the conference covered a wide range of relevant topics. Participants – from practitioners to scholars, trainers, and students – agreed upon the need to revise theoretical and practical paradigms. This includes developing strategies to respond to market demands, and embracing innovative training methods, with the aim of preparing both translation and interpreting graduates to thrive in fast-changing and challenging environments ahead.

This book is a collection of nine (09) papers cherry-picked among those presented at the conference. They tackle various aspects from different perspectives and are grouped into three thematic parts, namely (i) Translation and AI; (ii) Interpreting in Crisis Contexts; and (iii) Translation Theory, Policy, and Pedagogy. Part I explores the tumultuous, love-and-hate, or worrisome relationship between translation and artificial intelligence (AI). In Chapter 1, **Yvan Rudhel Megaptche** investigates ChatGPT’s potential to translate

Chinese idioms into English, and compares its rendering with outputs from two prominent machine translation (MT) systems, namely DeepL and Youdao. Based on the blacklist evaluation method, he assesses MT performance, along with human evaluation, in a drive to enhance its reliability. This helps discuss translation challenges in the artificial intelligence era, the evolving demands, as well as the critical collaboration between humans and machines.

Chapter 2, by **Moïse Ateba Ngoa**, addresses similar issues from a different angle. It examines the conflicting relationship between human and artificial intelligence in the current translation landscape shaped by increasing workloads and ever-tighter deadlines. Despite client demands for lower costs, quality remains a key requirement for professional translation. As such, the author – as a translator trainer – reflects on how to best factor in AI-based tools in training programmes, so that next-generation graduates can bridge machine learning capabilities and human intelligence to future-proof their careers.

In Chapter 3, **El-Shaddai Deva** explores ways to leverage philosophical and cultural theories – that dominated translation studies before the advent of AI – in the current era of computational and data-driven approaches. He therefore questions the contemporary relevance of Walter Benjamin’s thinking on pure language and translators’ tasks. By analysing German translations generated by Google Translate of the book *Voyage en Absurdie* by Stéphane de Groodt, Deva assesses the ability of AI systems to produce a translation that aligns with Benjamin’s thinking.

Part II deals with interpreting in crisis and overall challenging contexts. It covers professional interpreters’ working conditions, common challenges, and main prospects. **Laurent Azambou** and **Ibrahim Saley Baare** focus, in Chapter 4, on the specific case of interpreters in Niger. They highlight the critical importance of conference interpreting in crisis areas, as it brings together stakeholders from different (sometimes conflicting) cultures, interests, and perspectives.

Their field-oriented study reviews common interpreter profiles and usual challenges, then shares recommendations to enhance multistakeholder communication in such sensitive environments in Niger – and beyond.

Chapter 5, by **Sebastien Gandu**, emphasises the role and importance of community interpreting in a multicultural environment like Cameroon, and calls for its enhancement and professionalisation. In fact, considering the increasing demand in community interpreting, and in light of the recent developments due to Cameroon’s “Anglophone crisis”, the role of community interpreters in ensuring national unity and integration is more than necessary.

Last but not the least, Part III deals with translation theory, policy, and pedagogy. It addresses theoretical topics, regulatory frameworks, and purely language-related challenges both in translation schools and professional circles. In Chapter 6, **Georges L. Bastin**, one of the conference’s three guest-speakers, addresses (human) self-revision among (human) translators. He leverages the outcomes of two experiments carried out with both undergraduate and post-graduate students, where works were collectively reviewed, then self-revised by their respective authors. As such, he covers frequent writing challenges, common pitfalls, and the dynamics of group work – as he reflects on how to better enhance would-be translators’ writing skills.

Viny Djongoue Tchoula and **Suzanne Ayonghe**’s Chapter 7 investigates the potential of e-learning as a sustainable and supplementary teaching method since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on responses by student-translators at the University of Buea’s Advanced School of Translators and Interpreters (ASTI), both authors demonstrate the relevance of e-learning for translator training. Despite inherent flaws, most trainee translators see it as an effective training mode and advocate for the right blend of e-learning and traditional face-to-face lectures.

In Chapter 8, **Stephanie Sophie Maba** investigates the relation between translation and national language

policies, as implemented in multilingual contexts – like most African countries – where translation plays a critical role in toppling down barriers erected by linguistic diversity. Her contribution focusses on Cameroon’s public service, with a descriptive study of practices carried out in a country where English and French, as official languages, coexist along about 270 local languages. Based on outcomes of her study, she ends up calling for the adoption of inclusive, language-oriented policies with emphasis on translation, in a drive to help solve the country’s long-standing language issues.

In Chapter 9, **Rissikatou Moustapha Babalola** carries out a contrastive analysis with a focus on verb tense equivalence. She assesses the use of both the *‘présent de l’indicatif’* and *‘imparfait’* in Mariama Bâ’s *Une si Longue Lettre* – and how such instances were translated based on specific linguistic features. Based on extracts from the original novel and its English version (*So Long a Letter*) translated by Modupe Thomas-Bode, her study reveals a diversified approach to translation. Despite many noticeable divergences and “irregularities”, the whole translation strategy to handle tenses seems to fall in line with an “eight-level gain” theory developed by Weinrich (1973, p. 34).

All in all, this book tackles the survival of translator and interpreter in times of crisis from different perspectives. Following a multidisciplinary approach to a multifaceted challenge, it bridges theories, practices, and strategies in order to redefine professional expertise and question current training models. This is a humble contribution to diagnosing *what* professional translators and interpreters face in times of crisis as well as *how* to better prepare (and equip) them accordingly. It highlights one key takeaway, though: translation studies, as a field of study, must align and adapt to major societal changes, including technology-induced one. This is critical to remain relevant. As a matter of fact, this is a key requirement to thrive in the current fast-changing era – and beyond.

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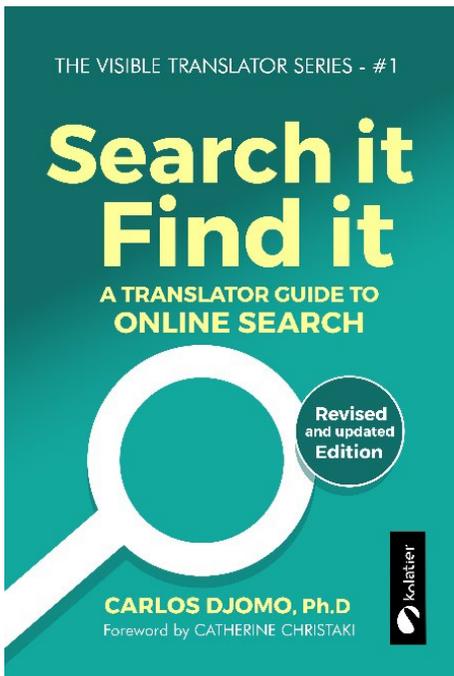
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Perspectives

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The Internet Is an Ocean. Here's Your Compass

Here is a practical guide with effective strategies to enhance your online searching skills (*even if you aren't a geek*). Uncover search engine dynamics, AI prompting best practices, and little-known tactics to find accurate terminology, specific documentation, high-paying opportunities, or virtually anything that is available online.



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