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Theorizing in Tongues: Critical Translation Studies and Epistemic Justice for Critical Geographies

Claire Placial

Université de Lorraine, Écritures, Institut universitaire de France
claire.placial@univ-lorraine.fr

Myriam Houssay-Holzschuch

Université Grenoble Alpes, CNRS, Sciences Po Grenoble, Pacte
Myriam.Houssay@normalesup.org

Abstract

This paper draws on critical translation studies to support critical geographies' efforts toward greater epistemic justice in language by challenging the hegemony of social science English. Such efforts often encounter the obstacle of the apparent untranslatability of certain concepts. We build on Berman's ethical turn in translation studies, as well as Venuti's notion of foreignization. We also draw on Sakai's concept of heterolingual address, understood as intrinsic to scientific writing, as a means of undermining the hegemonic character of English and transforming it into a genuine lingua franca.

We propose four practical language tactics that offer a roadmap across different layers of textuality to make English more porous to other languages. These range from worlding and conceptualizing in multiple tongues to fostering unsettled reading through more choral writing and more hospitable editing, thereby implicating various actors in the collaborative work of sustaining heterolingual address.

Keywords

translation and geography, epistemic justice, critical translation studies

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« Ce n'est pas une question de parler les langues, ce n'est pas le problème. On peut ne pas parler d'autres langues que la sienne. C'est plutôt la manière même de parler sa propre langue, de la parler fermée ou ouverte ; de la parler dans l'ignorance de la présence des autres langues, ou dans la prescience que les autres langues existent et qu'elles nous influencent sans même qu'on le sache. »

"The point is not speaking different languages; this is not the issue. We might speak only our own language. Rather, the point is how we speak our own language, speaking it in an open or closed manner; speaking it while ignorant of the presence of other languages, or while prescient that other languages do exist and influence us without us even knowing it." [Our translation]

Édouard Glissant, *L'Imaginaire des langues. Entretiens avec Lise Gauvin (1991-2009)*, Paris, Gallimard, 2010, p. 28.

Introduction

In what language should we write this?

We asked ourselves this question when we first decided to co-author this article. Should we write in French, our first language and the main language of our conversations? Or in English, the language, *nolens volens*, of global scholarly exchange? We never considered writing in German, although we could have tried. As our readers have figured out by now, we opted for English and to let other languages seep into it as a first step toward the approach we propose. In addition, our writing is nourished by literary references ranging from European classics to African futurism as a shared ground and as a testament to our cross-disciplinary work.

This paper addresses the intertwining of language and geography, as they jointly contribute to a better understanding of the world. For both of us, who read, teach, and write in different languages, this intertwining is concrete, practical, and deeply embedded in our everyday practice. It is also a political question of epistemic justice in the context of Anglophone hegemony. Archie Davies (2021) brilliantly suggested that, "For its own purposes, therefore, internally fracturing Anglophone hegemony through translation is crucial." This is precisely our starting point.

We met through translation. Claire is a French translation studies scholar whose research spans the history of Bible translations, the theoretical stakes of translating poetry, and of reading in translation. On social media, she shared her translations of German Romantic poet Heinrich Heine.[1] Myriam, a French critical geographer who spent many years studying South African cities, has loved Heine since childhood and reached out to Claire with her appreciation. We quickly became friends and had long discussions about (shared, radical, feminist) politics, teaching, pedagogy, and caring in contemporary higher education, poetry,

[1] See https://lefestindebabel.wordpress.com/chantiers/heine-le-grand/ and her blog at https://languesdefeu.hypotheses.org/1804.

and epistemic justice. So, when Myriam began exploring more multilingual geographies and encountered translation dilemmas, she turned to Claire. We soon realized that the theoretical propositions and practical tactics elaborated by translation studies could enrich critical geography's efforts to unsettle uneven and unjust geographies of knowledge.

This is what we try to do here. We begin by suggesting that the philosophical concept of "linguistic epistemic justice" (Catala 2025, 223) resonates with the challenges both fields face today. We then offer ways to move toward more linguistic epistemic justice through concrete tactics taken from translation studies that, in Davies's (2021) words, "fracture" dominant languages to make them more porous and hospitable to other ways of speaking, thinking, writing, and reading. We show how these tactics can be (or have been) applied to scholarly practices in geography.

Geography, meet translation studies

Epistemic justice constitutes both the conceptual background and the aspiration of this paper. When Miranda Fricker (2007) introduced the concept, she defined epistemic injustice, as "a type of injustice that a person suffers specifically in her capacity as a knower or epistemic agent, that is, as someone who produces, uses, or transmits knowledge, including knowledge about her own experience of the social world" (Catala 2025, 6). Geographers would immediately add that sharing this deeply spatial experience, is telling geographical stories, and these stories are not equally heard,[2] . Fricker famously distinguished testimonial injustice, "when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility" (Fricker 2007, 1) and hermeneutical injustice, "stemming from a gap in collective hermeneutical resources" (Fricker 2007, 6), so that the necessary tools to understand a situation are lacking, in other words, a deficit in intelligibility.

More recently, Amandine Catala (2025, 223) has extended the discussion around epistemic justice and injustice to the question of language, demonstrating that there is such a thing as "linguistic epistemic injustice" in the way English is deployed as an academic *lingua franca*. For her, perceived native speakers of English enjoy a credibility excess, while perceived non-native speakers suffer a credibility deficit, both of which are testimonial injustices. Furthermore, building on Dotson, she argues that non-native speakers suffer from conceptual and contributory hermeneutical injustice, as concepts developed in less hegemonic languages are neither recognized nor valued. To this, she adds "expressive hermeneutical injustice," where non-native scholars are not taken seriously "because of how [we] are expressing [our]selves," as the legitimate style of expression "follows implicit rhetorical or stylistic norms (…) that directly affect the perception of intelligibility" but might not be accessible to linguistic outsiders (Catala 2025, 234–5).

This conceptual framework resonates strongly with the issues both critical geography and critical translation studies have been grappling with over the past few decades, namely what is unjust in how scholarly knowledge is produced, recognized, transmitted and disseminated. We will address these in turn.

[2] We thank our *ACME* editor, Joaquin Villanueva, for this reminder.

Critical geographies of knowledge and epistemic justice

Over the past 20 years or so, critical geography research on knowledge production has highlighted key issues of epistemic (in)justice that scholars must confront from their own positionalities. The international character of so-called global journals and authorship has come under scrutiny, revealing that 'international' often means, quite narrowly, the Anglosphere (Gutierrez and Lopez-Nieva 2001; Garcia-Ramon 2003). Many authors have investigated the modalities of Anglo[3] hegemony in geography and beyond (Aalbers and Rossi 2007), uncovering gatekeeping practices in editorial processes, especially the practice of peer review. These practices range from rejections based on linguistic performance to the systematic exclusion of non-Anglo authors and concepts (Braun et al. 2003), as well as to decisions about who is appointed editor, board member, or reviewer (Müller 2021). This latter, and very recent, point shows how much work remains to be done: At least 90% of positions of power, such as journal and handbook editors, as well as authors of handbooks and progress reports, are occupied by Anglophone geographers![4] At the same time, non-Anglo scholars bear the brunt of their national review and promotion processes, which demand 'international' publications, leaving them in a double bind (Lillis and Curry 2010). The material burden of writing in a language not their own, in terms of both time and money, has also been well documented (Amano et al. 2023). This situation has not gone unaddressed. 'International' journals have made efforts to become more accessible and welcoming to non-Anglophone scholars: Open access, often accompanied by multilingual publishing, has become more common; editorial boards and reviewer pools have grown more diverse; and citations in languages other than English are increasingly accepted.

Beyond the material dimensions of writing and publishing academic work, critical geographies of knowledge have foregrounded questions of epistemic justice: Theories, concepts, and theorists seen as legitimate overwhelmingly tend to originate in the West, specifically North America and Northwestern Europe. By contrast, the Global South is mined for empirical data in an all-too-familiar pattern of extractivism and coloniality, while the Global East is often overlooked (Müller 2020): a conceptual hermeneutical injustice, in Catala's terms. Here again, social science scholars are acting against this unjust geography of knowledge. Influential 'Southern Turn' propositions (Connell 2007; Robinson 2006; Roy 2009) have highlighted the importance of theorizing from elsewhere. In the 2000s, this was often couched in the language of cosmopolitanism, which urged scholars to work at making geography more cosmopolitan (Harvey 2000, 2009; Robinson 2003), while more contemporary discourses tend to favor the term of worlding (Ferretti 2025; Amilhat Szary et al. 2026). However, the idea and the need remain the same.

At the same time, Martin Müller (2021) has shown that linguistic injustice remains a persistent blind spot in international geography, and Zhao (2020) calls for a "translational

[3] Following Fall & Minca (2012), we choose to use the informal 'Anglo' to denote not only writing in English, but a dominant social position within the geography of knowledge production that comprises (but is not limited to) elements such as belonging to a US/UK institution, having acquired early on a very good command of the English language - and therefore linguistic privilege, as put by Müller (2021), considering access to international literature a non-issue, having been scientifically socialized into English-speaking theoretical frameworks, etc.

[4] For reason of methods in his bibliometric analysis, Müller used country affiliation as a proxy to define Anglophone. This choice has obvious limitations (see note 8), but still shows where power is held.

turn." Translation, as a way to address epistemic injustice, has become an urgent concern in critical geography, and for good reason. It raises epistemological, theoretical, political, ethical, pedagogical, and methodological questions. Individual colleagues have been active (as translators) and reflective on the issue (Hancock 2011, 2016), and landmark special issues in *Social Geography* (Schlottmann and Hannah 2009), *Terra Brasilis* (Ribeiro, Péaud, and Davies 2021) and *ACME* (Husseini de Araújo and Germes 2016) have mapped out the field. These studies have shown the political salience of thinking about and practicing translation, the interest in the frictions that multilingual settings bring, and the productive frustration created by the untranslatability of key concepts (Olwig 2002; Houston and Trudeau 2023). However, an extended, in-depth engagement with current advances in critical translation studies is often lacking, with the notable recent exceptions of Hammond and Cook's work on Sakai (Hammond and Cook 2023; see also Hammond et al. 2025) or Archie Davies's contributions (2024).

Critical translation studies and foreignization

In the past few decades, translation studies have undergone major changes that bring them closer to critical social sciences, as they grapple with many of the same challenges. The field now emphasizes the material conditions under which translations are produced, circulated, and read. The West-centrism and dominance of English in both the production (Venuti 2008 [1995]) and theorization (Niranjana 1992; Vrinat-Nikolov and Maurus 2018) of translation have rightly been the subject of sustained critique. Yet despite the vitality of translation studies in languages other than English and beyond the US and Europe, non-Anglo scholars continue to struggle for visibility and citations outside English-language scholarship. While publications such as the *Routledge Translation Studies* series play an important brokering role and offer contributions by non-Anglo scholars rooted in non-Anglo translation traditions, they still require authors to write in English so as to be legible widely. For instance, Chinese translation theory works with Yan Fu's classical concepts of *xin, da,* and *ya*, characterizing a good translation, and traditionally translated by "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance," or, alternatively, by "truthfulness, accessibility and appropriateness" (Zhu 2018). Xin Guangqin's fascinating paper on "Translation ethics in the Chinese tradition" (2021) presents the evolution of Chinese translation theory, rooted in the continuous translation and glossing of Yan Fu's concepts. The very use of multilingualism and multiple translations in Xin's demonstration is both a defense and an illustration of our point. Whether these concepts will be picked up and used more globally remains to be seen.

The invisibilization of non-Anglophone translation theory goes with the invisibilization of the translation processes themselves. While translation scholars have increasingly examined the specific challenges of translating the social sciences (Schwerter and Dick 2013), social scientists on the whole must still reflect on translation in two key ways. First, politically: Which papers and books are published, by whom, and in which languages? What do these patterns reveal about the power relations and legitimation processes between places and between languages (Apter 2006, 2013; Samoyault 2020; Sapiro 2008)? Second, linguistically and pragmatically: What, after all, does a translator do? Does she translate a language or a text, a message or a form? Does the nodal point of translation reside in the translation of concepts, at the level of the word, or at the level of discourse, shaped by syntax and expressivity?

Beyond these obvious commonalities between translation studies and critical geography, key advances in translation studies are, we believe, extremely valuable for developing more cosmopolitan and just forms of theorizing. Antoine Berman's work has been transformative. Trained as a philosopher of language while translating from Latin American Spanish (among others, the Guarani-infused works of Paraguayan novelist Augusto Roa Bastos), Berman has had a major impact on Francophone translation theory since the publication of his *L'Épreuve de l'étranger* (Berman 1984, translated as *The Experience of the Foreign*). In this breakthrough essay, he revisits the German Romantic *Dichter und Denker*, including Goethe, Hölderlin, Schleiermacher, and Wilhelm von Humboldt. For Berman, what makes the German Romantic generation significant is its groundbreaking conceptualization of translation as a means of foreignization in the political context of German nation-building, where language played a central role. Foreignization implies that translation need not adapt the source text to fit the target language and culture; instead, it allows the target language to be shaped by the 'foreign' one. For instance, Hölderlin's translations from Ancient Greek (1804) sought to incorporate elements of Greek syntax and prosody into German, thereby making German porous to Greek and valuing alterity as a means to enrich the self. The Romantics, most notably Goethe and Humboldt, explicitly acknowledge (and approve) the political dimension of foreignization. Berman places the political dimension at the center of his analysis of translation, showing that translation is inevitably a political operation, including at the linguistic and stylistic level. Berman's critiques of the Francophone and Anglophone translation traditions are twofold: First, they tend to naturalize the source text by erasing any trace of the foreign, and second, they present "ethnocentric translations," as he calls them, that masquerade as self-evident. Crucially, Berman considers translation a political and ethical act that, through language, opens up culture to diversity and makes it hospitable to others. Souleymane Bachir Diagne (2022, 39) builds on Berman to insist that translation is a practical and ethical model as a respectful, hospitable, and deliberately hopeful *mise en rapports* (establishing relations) of cultural differences.

However, Berman and Diagne are not naive and remind us that translation is carried out by actual people who, consciously or not, enact a specific project informed by their values – for better and for worse – and by their beliefs about what language and literature can do.[5] This Berman-initiated ethical turn in translation studies requires that translators be critically reflexive. While Berman's theory is in need of a more materialist analysis and a clearer account of power relationships between and across languages (Apter 2013; Canut 2021; Samoyault 2020; Spivak 1988, 2003), his impact on both the theory and practice of translation has been considerable and has been further refined, most notably by Venuti (2008 [1995]), who formalized the concepts of naturalizing and foreignizing translation to challenge the

[5] We do not ignore recent developments in machine translation, and the fact that (some) researchers (sometimes) use AI tools to access foreign texts or to translate their own work into languages with which they are less familiar. We would like to insist on the two following points: a) as of 2026, the commercial publication of fiction, nonfiction, and social science is still legally carried out by humans; b) our present reflection focuses on the transformative *experience* of multilingualism and translation. AI systems, as machines that operate through automatic data analysis, do not have *experiences*, unlike human researchers, translators, and writers. The formative and transformative function of multilingual experience thus provides a further argument in favor of human translation and writing in general, since we can expect, or at least hope, that humans will make conscious, critical choices.

unapologetically domesticating norms of translating into English. We fully agree with Venuti's definition of a foreignizing translation:

> The "foreign" in foreignizing translation is not a transparent representation of an essence that resides in the foreign text and is valuable in itself, but a strategic construction whose value is contingent on the current situation in the receiving culture. Foreignizing translation signifies the differences of the foreign text, yet only by disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the translating language (Venuti 2008 [1995], 15).

Venuti exposes the historical grounds that permitted translation into English to be hegemonically domesticating and to rely on the dogmas of the translation's fluency and the translator's invisibility. In Smith's terms:

> Venuti describes the 'neutral' approach to translation as a 'domesticating' approach to translation where 'fluency' and 'freedom' in translation are employed to enforce dominant canons around clarity of expression (making the act of translation at once invisible) and yet also allowing for changes to the original (freedom) to render the text readily interpretable within the target language. Freedom and fluency are judged in terms of the cultural and linguistic norms of the target language […] while leaving its effect unquestioned (2009, 363).

Once again, so-called "neutrality" hides (and, in so doing, maintains) power relationships. In his book's last chapter, entitled "Call to action," Venuti calls for foreignizing English through translations, which is all the more crucial because of the hegemonic status of English. Challenging the illusion of the translation's transparency, through "a practice that is not just more self-conscious, but more self-critical [...] offer[s] translators exemplary modes of cultural resistance" (Venuti 2008 [1995], 267).

Current translation theories, which we support here, emphasize the translation process and the agency of human translators, in line with situated epistemologies (Haraway 1991; Harding 1991). This means, first, that translators have a project: Their rendition of a text embodies their reading of it (Berman 1995; Ricoeur 2004), and this reading can, in turn, be reconstructed through an analysis of the lexical and formal choices they make. Second, translators are situated: Whether or not they recognize or claim it, their positionality in terms of education, age, race, gender, their views on literature, their experiences of cultural, social, political, and linguistic differences have an impact on their work and its reception (Grunenwald 2021; Lotbinière-Harwood 1991; Niranjana 1992; Simon 1996, 2006; von Flotow 1997). Third, translators are in practice the co-creators of the translated texts, which depend entirely on their wording choices (Emmerich 2017; Meschonnic 1999). This can even be enshrined in law. For example, translators enjoy the status of a second author under French law, unlike under Canadian law, for instance (see Saint-Martin 2022), which entitles them to receive royalties.

Epistemic justice and foreignization

Linguistic epistemic justice in critical geographies and the social sciences should operate within language itself through the foreignization of social science English. Critical translation studies are key to achieving this.

While not phrasing his theories in terms of epistemic justice, largely because he wrote his seminal book in 1995 before the term was coined, Venuti's call for foreignization does partake in a quest for challenging linguistic power relations. Hence the notion of "domestication" and "foreignization" as "fundamentally ethical attitudes toward a foreign text and culture" (Venuti 2008 [1995], 19). Venuti's concept of foreignization is, we believe, of great interest to answer the epistemic justice challenges encountered by critical social sciences, and geography in particular. On the one hand, the notion of foreignization in critical translation studies subverts the idea of languages as self-contained, impermeable systems, promoting instead linguistic hybridization and creolization in the non-hierarchical sense theorized by Glissant. On the other hand, critical geographies have been striving toward "a more cosmopolitan geography" (Robinson 2003), looking to include marginalized knowledge (e.g. Indigenous knowledge, Black geographies, feminist epistemologies) and languages (Davies 2021; Müller 2021). Both fields work toward more justice by addressing relationships of power. As Davies (2024) insists, "[t]hinking with translation insists that the movement of ideas is always frictive and laced with power." These relationships are material: The capitalist nature of the literary and scientific publishing industry and its gatekeepers shape what is published, by whom, for whom, and for whose benefit. Existing relationships of power are also contested through issues of representation and legitimacy, with the translator and/or researcher having a specific positionality that informs their legitimacy (Kanagasabai 2023).

In addition to these obvious convergences between the two fields, we believe that critical translation studies have much to offer the current epistemic justice and linguistic privilege debate within critical geographies (and the social sciences more broadly), especially regarding language. In efforts to cosmopolitanize the field, social scientists have worked to develop the circulation and use of concepts across languages while recognizing the difficulty of translating a concept encapsulated in a single word, one that is shaped by a specific linguistic and intellectual tradition and its relationship to other concepts. A classic example of this discrepancy is the different meanings of 'space' and 'espace' in Anglophone and Francophone geographies (Debarbieux 2000; Koop and Amilhat Szary 2011; Olwig 2002): While 'space' is defined in relation to place, 'espace' contrasts with 'territoire,' a term whose meaning does not align with 'territory' (Elden 2013; Giraut 2008). Tracing the conceptual genealogy of such terms to facilitate their cross-linguistic movement is what French philosopher Barbara Cassin set out to do in her *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: Dictionnaire des intraduisibles* (2004), later adapted as the *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon* (2014). Cassin's thesis is that concepts are largely untranslatable, while being continuously translated. The extensions of concepts of philosophy, religion, and the social sciences differ in their respective tongues. *Espace* is not "space," רוּחַ (*ruah*) is not "spirit" nor *Geist*, etc. Hence, the urge to not only question the translation of concepts but also to render apparent the making of the translations and to allow space for its discussion. Her *Philosophical Lexicon* questions terminological automatisms in translating philosophical texts.

To address the difficulty of translating concepts and to counter the hegemony of English, some social scientists have promoted the use of untranslated terms to better describe and analyze a local reality, while also enriching our conceptual vocabulary: Garth Myers

(Myers 2020, 49) used the notions of "*chengzhongcun*, *chengbiancun*, and *chengwaicun*,[6] translated as a village 'in-the-city,' 'on-the-city-suburb-edge,' and 'in the suburb' in English," respectively, drawn from Chinese scholarship on the Pearl River Delta, to understand the periphery of Dakar. He argues that these concepts provide more useful analytical tools than 'periurbanization' when analyzing the rapid urban expansion of the periphery under current globalized and neoliberal economic and demographic regimes. Zhao (2020, 535) likewise offered and unpacked the concept of *jiehebu* (结合部) as a tool to understand the "rural–urban juncture." Law and Mol (2020, 264) compiled an edited collection of "words and ways of wording lying dormant in other languages" (Sámi, Hungarian, Dutch, Japanese, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Portuguese), pointedly adding that these are "[d]ormant, that is, from the perspective of academic writing done in English." In this tactic, other languages drip word by word into English.

Thus, social sciences are grappling with the perceived untranslatability of concepts. This is where critical translation studies become especially useful, as they have long addressed this question, in particular, by moving beyond the purely lexical level. Indeed, translation issues should not be reduced to terminology: Finding word-for-word equivalents is a fallacy, but it helps to consider the text as a whole. When considered holistically, a text comprises not only a collection of words in a certain language but an argument, a style, and an individual author. An author does not so much use "English" or "Mandarin" per se as forge a discourse of their own, whether they write literature or social sciences and philosophy (Meschonnic 1999). For instance, Heidegger's German differs from Marx's German; therefore, we do not translate "from German" but we translate Marx's German.

Critical translation studies therefore teach us to move beyond the surface-level inclusion of non-Anglo (particularly non-Western) concepts in our papers. By subverting English from within, they open it up to alternative ways of (doing and) writing science, which honor not only content but also modes of thought, naming, and being. This is an anti-hegemonic practice that embraces plural ontologies and enables richer geographies and more epistemic justice.

Is English capable? Reclaiming the language as a true lingua franca

In a satirical 1980s sketch entitled "Concerning Language,"[7] comedians Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie discuss language in a nonsensical, verbose, and deadpan way. Laurie functions as the naive conversation partner for a learned and pompous Fry, who eventually asks the rhetorical question: "Is English capable? Is it capable... [of demagoguery]?" By no means do we subscribe to an essentialist theory of language that would attribute specific qualities to specific languages, but what we want to ask with Fry is whether English, as the main language used in scientific communication and publication, is capable of accommodating foreignization, for more epistemic justice. We do believe that it is perfectly capable of doing so but wonder whether, as of now, it is willing to do so.

As has been shown multiple times, English is not only the main language of science but also hegemonic (Aalbers 2004). One aspect of this hegemony can be understood

[6] Myers does not provide the original Chinese ideograms for the transliterated terms.
[7] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3MWpHQQ-wQg.

through the work of Sakai (Sakai 1997, 2005; Sakai and Solomon 2006; see also Hammond and Cook 2023) in critical translation studies. Sakai distinguishes between homolingual and heterolingual addresses. Homolingual address is "a regime of someone relating herself or himself to others in enunciation whereby the addresser adopts the position representative of a putatively homogeneous language society and relates to the general addressees, who are also representative of an equally homogeneous language community" (Sakai 1997, 3-4). A homolingual address assumes transparency and presumes, a priori, that its audience is linguistically homogeneous. In the context of scientific writing, a homolingual address functions as if every reader (and writer) were a native speaker of English and, more specifically, of "standard English." This is a colonial fallacy that remains widespread and ethically wrong.

On the other hand, "heterolingual address" (Sakai 2005, i-xii) is "a situation in which one addresses oneself as a foreigner to another foreigner." It implies a degree of care toward the reader, who is not assumed a priori to share the same linguistic and cultural background as the writer. Avoiding innuendos and *clins d'œil* is an example of such heterolingual care. As Sakai reminds us, "You are always confronted, so to speak, with foreigners in your enunciation when your attitude is that of the heterolingual address. Precisely because you wish to communicate with her, him, or them, so the first, and perhaps most fundamental, determination of your addressee is that of the one who might not comprehend your language, that is, of the foreigner" (Sakai 1997, 9). This has consequences for academic discourse, particularly in how it addresses its audience: ensuring that the main message of the text comes across is crucial. Without denying the creativity inherent in scientific writing or the attention its authors may give to style and inventiveness, we might argue that scientific writing is primarily intended to communicate empirical or theoretical results to a global community of scholars. As a result, scientific texts tend to be translated as if form, phrasing, and syntax were not part of the author's intentions. This contrasts with literary translations, where attending to style is not merely expected but required. However, treating scientific writing as mere content that passes unchanged from emitter to receptor is another fallacy: It is, rather, an utterance whose meaning and substance may (and often will) be altered in the process, especially because its global community of addressees is in no way homolingual, even if they are all too often considered as such. They constitute, in Sakai's words, a "non-aggregate community of foreigners" (1997, 9). Indeed, the vast majority of global scholars live outside the US and the UK and/or do not speak English at home and/or have had to learn English as a scientific language.[8] The postcolonial scholar herself is a translated subject (Bhabha 1994). Taking this heterolingual character seriously as we write allows us to, in Timur Hammond's words, "constitute the 'we' of geography differently," in a less exclusive manner.[9] This does not mean dumbing down the text, which would be deeply condescending and insulting for a multilingual audience, nor renouncing creativity. However, it calls for more inclusivity by being much more explicit about basically everything, including norms, by diversifying acceptable ways of writing, and by opening up to linguistic diversity within English

[8] We question the very notion of "native speakers," which reveals the complexity of linguistic identity in academic contexts. First, not all scholars living and working in the US or the UK speak English as a first language, nor do they necessarily write in English as fluently as they would in another language. Second, is the term "native speakers" even applicable in contexts where people grow up multilingual (e.g., being educated in English while speaking other languages at home)?

[9] We thank Timur Hammond, one of our reviewers who decided not to remain anonymous, for this formulation.

(cf. *infra*).[10] As Meschonnic (1999) noted about French, a language is always more flexible than publishers and editors believe it to be. We postulate that heterolingual readers can deal with a certain degree of foreign (*étrangèreté*), which allows them to move away from standardized, hegemonic English. In other words, this means being serious about English as the contemporary *lingua franca* of scientific writing. The original *lingua franca* was "a Romance borrowing of an Arabic borrowing of a Greek borrowing of a Latin word" (Hammond and Cook 2023; Mallette 2014). A *lingua franca* is, therefore, not a hegemonic language but a means of scientific connection, drawing on Diagne's idea of "mise en rapports" to bring together diverse linguistic worlds and scholars in a way that accommodates foreignization.

Tactics

To achieve this shift and better enact epistemic justice in our scholarly writing, we draw from critical translation studies to offer a series of actionable tactics, their respective interests, costs, and risks. Their efficiency varies according to the languages, texts, and authors' positionalities.

Foreignizing the vocabulary: Importing untranslated concepts

The first tactic is a time-honored practice in the humanities and social sciences and involves refraining from translating concepts that lack easy equivalents in other languages as they begin to circulate. Terms such as *Weltanschauung*, *coup d'état*, *desakota*, *sprezzatura*, *kintsugi*, *umami*, *duende*, *macho*, *saudade*, *nomenklatura*, *karma*, *logos*, *forum*, and *yin/yang* have entered many languages untranslated, though often italicized. Not translating, then, is a valid and efficient translation strategy. As mentioned earlier, social scientists have proposed new conceptual imports from diverse linguistic backgrounds as "words to think with" to enrich our conceptual vocabulary and interfere with social science English" (Law and Mol 2020). Zhao's article (2020), for instance, introduces the Mandarin concept of *jiehebu*, "a Chinese expression of Beijing's urban-rural juncture" (p. 2), to more accurately describe and analyze "heterogeneous 'suburban' worlds" (p. 6).

Importing terms like *jiehebu* acknowledges the limits of existing vocabulary. Introducing *jiehebu* challenges and provincializes the concept of suburbs and offers a more fine-grained account of the world: a powerful gesture toward more conceptual and contributory hermeneutical justice. This first tactic can also extend beyond the borrowing of single words to reflect their relational foundations by importing them as conceptual clusters. For example, Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft* conceptual pairing has circulated as a unit, and Myers' *chengzhongcun*, *chengbiancun*, and *chengwaicun* have likewise traveled together.

However, this tactic has a cost, which is exemplified in Zhao's brilliant text. Importing 结合部 untranslated implies first an approximate phonetic transcription in Latin alphabet/script, followed by an extensive gloss in English to convey the term's semantic nuances and justify why it is not translated. This requires considerable space and must conform to the conventions of academic English. Moreover, this tactic is not without risks: Importing a concept directly from a foreign language can be mere linguistic tokenization.

[10] which is capable (Fry & Laurie, *op. cit.*).

Doing so makes the text less accessible, bordering on jargon or elitism, and might never be taken up by others for analyzing other contexts. Nevertheless, enacting *geo-graphein*, or writing the world at the lexical level by importing untranslated concepts, highlights the diversity of languages and the interpretive choices inherent in translation. It makes the hermeneutical work visible, legitimizes languages marginalized in theoretical discourse, and enables theorizing between languages. In other words, it already powerfully contributes to epistemic justice.

Foreignizing the text: Working undercover

The second tactic moves beyond individual words and deeper into the text, so that the writing, whether in the original or in translation, addresses a heterolingual audience with care. This relies on the firm belief that, as Meschonnic (1999, 88) puts it, we do not translate languages; we translate texts. This tactic works with the text's style, its language register, the construction of its argument, its intradiegetic[11] context, the ways it uses storytelling, and so forth. As we know from literary studies, all of these are elements of the text and participate in constructing its meaning. Thus, they can also be used for hybridization and foreignization. Social sciences may be less familiar with this tactic, though scholars like Richa Nagar (2019) have already put it into practice, as she uses untranslated words, and layers of explanations of their meaning in the subsequent argument. Fortunately, literature offers brilliant examples. For instance, in his novel *Tail of the Blue Bird* (2009), Ghanaian author Nii Ayikwei Parkes interweaves two narrative voices related to two different spaces: On the one hand, the extradiegetic narrative voice focusing on forensic pathologist Kayo/Kwadwo Odamtten, based in Accra and trained in Britain, who leads the investigation, and on the other hand the hunter Yao Poku, who lives in the bush, speaks Twi, and considers the modern, CSI-style investigation with a very skeptical eye. Of course, the novel is written in English, and we read Yao's thoughts in English. But Parkes modifies the English by weaving in Twi vocabulary, as illustrated in the following quotation:

> That's why when the *graduate* Kwadwo came, I was surprised. I had thought that there was no longer a tale to tell. I mean, s**3**bi, I overheard Sargie saying he was coming on dwoda, but on dwoda a fat bald *policeman* came to watch Kofi Atta's hut while the red one slept. Benada too, the same. So wukuda, I didn't even think about it (…). p. 65

The use of italics is especially interesting: They do not underline the use of Twi words (left untranslated and unglossed) but of English terms denoting (colonial) science and control, directly imported into Twi. Therefore, the hybridization works on three different levels: first, through the juxtaposition of English and Twi; second, through the use of italics; third, through syntactic layering, as English is embedded in Twi, and Twi is then reinserted into English. This interplay highlights the distance between the perspective of the bush and that of the capital.

Moreover, Parkes incorporates Twi syntactic traits into English sentences, and Pidgin words, expressions, and full sentences add a third linguistic layer that captures the constant

[11] In narratology, diegesis designates the plot; what is intradiegetic is what happens within the plot. A narrator who is also a character is intradiegetic. A third-person narration is extradiegetic.

code-switching of a multilingual environment as a way to denote social and geographical fluidity.

> The other *policeman*, Garba, came back running and shouted as soon as he got inside the hut. E say we fur burn am before the sun go go ooh.
> And there Kwadwo looked up. Garba?
> *Sorry*, sah, *he said we should burn the remains before the sun disappears*.
> Garba, *I don't care whether you speak pidgin,* Twi*, or English. I'm trying to find out why you are running.* (p. 69)

Remarkably, this tactic of foreignizing a text beyond the lexical level carries across colonial languages. Sika Fakambi's brilliant translation, *Notre quelque part* (2014), can be recreated in French through Parkes's polyphonic and multilingual system:

> "L'autre *policeman* Garba est revenu en courant, et il a commencé à crier quand il est entré dans la case. Oduro a dit on va metté ça dans feu avant que soleil là va partiparti ooo !
> Et là, Kwadwo a levé sa tête. Garba ?
> *Pardon, saa', Oduro a dit qu'on doit brûler les restes humains avant que le soleil se couche*.
> Garba, *ça m'est parfaitement égal que vous parliez en pidgin, en twi ou en anglais. Je veux juste savoir pourquoi vous courez*" (p.125)

The value of this tactic lies in its ability to disrupt the dominance of the target language by introducing diversity and making visible the capacity of the target language to welcome other words, syntax, and grammar. It works especially well for hegemonic and/or colonial languages.

The risk might be that the reader gets lost in (non-)translation and cannot understand the meaning of the text. Indeed, Sakai warns of how heterolingual address assumes every utterance can fail. However, it is only a risk insofar as we would like the reader to understand every portion of the text and to be familiar with every discourse. But there might be political gain in the foreignization of the reading experience itself. By offering no footnotes or glossary in the English London edition, as well as the French Paris edition, both the author and the translator aim for the Anglophone and Francophone readership to experience the estrangement of diving into a (generally) unfamiliar universe. They may get lost, just as readers in Ghana may not catch every cultural reference in Dickens or Flaubert; they might also learn something in the process, like how to cope with difficulty in heterolingual address.

All hands on deck: Foreignizing the paratext

A third tactic works beyond the text, at the level of the paratext, which refers to all that surrounds the text (e.g., footnotes, translator's notes, preface, and the cover of a book, to which we add formal editing choices such as the typography, formatting, etc.). The paratext manifests the making of the text, including its material making, its translation, and the cumulative work that goes into a text. Its author is not alone, as the text is also produced by journal editors, reviewers, publishers, translators, layout designers, website maintenance workers, and others; scientific writing and publishing do indeed have a choral quality. All these sites constituting the paratext make the collective nature of writing visible, especially when working between languages (i.e., translingual work), and can be used for foreignization.

For instance, verbatim interview excerpts may appear exclusively in English, the original language, or both. These editorial choices, often dictated by journal or publisher policies, convey different degrees of foreignization and carry symbolic and political weight. A text only in English conceals not only the linguistic otherness of the interviewees but also the translation process and the choices made in the course of it, as well as their impact on the construction of meaning and tone. Conversely, systematically including the initial titles of all the translated works referenced conveys a different message.[12] The placement of the translation in the layout also matters: Whether it is printed in the body of the text or the footnotes conveys a practical and symbolic impact. It fosters specific reading practices. Do we read the footnotes at all? When? Does it interrupt our ability to follow the author's argument? The layout also establishes a hierarchy between languages, between enunciating instances and the dignity and authority of their voices (e.g., the interviewee vs. the author of the scientific text). Of course, this tactic adds to the text and, thus, affects its readability. The multiplication of levels might hinder a fluid and smooth reading experience. But for whom, exactly, in the context of a heterolingual address? And should smooth reading always be pursued at all costs?

This tactic also requires collective will – from the author, journal editor, reviewers, publisher, and others – and considerable extra work, time, and resources. Calbérac and Germes (2024) describe this process in their introduction to a special issue of *Geographische Zeitschrift* on "Theoretisch arbeiten in den zeitgenössischen frankophonen Geographien," which presents recent theoretical advances in French-speaking geographies to a German-speaking audience. The process included selecting authors, organizing a seminar with them alongside a journal editor and a scholar familiar with both German and French geographies, collaborating with an expert translator, and selecting and briefing reviewers. Catala (2025, 242) insists on addressing reviewing processes to make them more hospitable, as such measures "target systematic testimonial injustice, testimonial quieting, and testimonial smothering by making it more likely that non-native English users will be, respectively, taken seriously as knowers, consulted or invited, and confident enough to attempt to submit their work to Anglophone venues." Recommendations for reviewers could, for instance, include a reframing: identifying structural biases; forewarning reviewers so that they do not read the text through a (linguistic, credibility, and intelligibility) deficit lens; presuming that authors are competent and intentional (in terms of their choice of references, which may be non-canonical in the Anglo world, or their grammatical or lexical choices, among others); and not using linguistic issues as a reason for rejection. Reviewers' attention could also be drawn to the heterolingual nature of global scientific debates, in terms of both the authors' provenance and the audiences being addressed.

Similarly, *Terra Brasilis* set up a whole choral system for the "Políticas e geopolíticas de tradução. Circulação multilíngue do conhecimento e histórias transnacionais da geografia" special issue. It was co-edited by three geographers: Guilherme Ribeiro from Brazil, Laura Péaud from France, and Archie Davies from the UK (2021). Papers were published in three different languages, some were translations (included from previous publications), and others were not. Some authors wrote in their native tongue; others did not. Notably, the three editors wrote three different, though connected, introductions, in their own language. In so doing, they acknowledged their linguistic positionality, used their texts to bridge cultural-linguistic

[12] We thank one of our reviewers for this idea.

perspectives, and highlighted how the special issue addresses specific scientific questions within their own tradition.

Another very accomplished version of this tactic, even more extensively multilingual, was implemented by the journal *ACME*, whose radical editorial line has long contested Anglo hegemony, as expressed through monolingualism, gatekeeping, or paywalls. Simon Springer's "Fuck neoliberalism" paper (2016) has been published in 13 versions (as of December 2024) thanks to web publishing, without privileging the initial English one, and most versions make use of foreignizing methods that visibilize the translation process. The wording chosen to translate the syntagm "fuck neoliberalism" tends to make the translation strategy transparent, by quoting the English source text and making explicit the depth of meaning of the word "fuck" and its semantic range, which proves to be an interesting translating challenge. This tactic is particularly remarkable in versions in languages that do not use the Roman alphabet since the play between the English "fuck" and "fuck it," and the Greek, Chinese (both Taiwanese Guoyu and mainland Mandarin), and Japanese becomes particularly visible. For instance, the French translator uses the first tactic, by leaving the word "fuck" untranslated in the title "Fuck le néolibéralisme," while opting for another tactic in the course of the article (foreignization by frequent, though selective, juxtaposition of the English and the French), thus making the choices visible. Here is an example of this remarkable translation in the French (by a translator who wished to remain anonymous) and Japanese (by Sayuri Watanabe) versions:

> "Quel mot fantastique et riche en couleurs ! Il fonctionne comme nom ou verbe, et comme adjectif, il est peut-être l'exclamation la plus employée de la langue anglaise. On l'utilise pour exprimer la colère, le mépris, le mécontentement, l'indifférence, la surprise, l'impatience, et même comme une interjection sans sens particulier simplement parce que « fuck » (comme « foutre » en français), se dit si facilement. On peut foutre quelque chose en l'air (« fuck something up »), se foutre de quelqu'un (« fuck someone over »), dire des foutaises (« fuck around »), n'en avoir rien à foutre (« not give a fuck »), et ce mot a décidément un point de référence géographique intrinsèque dans la mesure où l'on peut vous inviter à aller vous faire foutre (« go fuck yourself »). Au point où on en est, vous pourriez même vous dire, ok, mais qu'est-ce qu'on en a à foutre ? (« ok, who gives a fuck? »). Et bien moi j'en ai quelque chose à foutre, et si en finir avec le néolibéralisme vous intéresse, vous devriez aussi."
>
> "What a fantastically colorful word! It works as a noun or a verb, and as an adjective, it is perhaps the most used point of exclamation in the English language. It can be employed to express anger, contempt, annoyance, indifference, surprise, impatience, or even as a meaningless emphasis because it just rolls off of the tongue. You can 'fuck something up,' 'fuck someone over,' 'fuck around,' 'not give a fuck,' and there is a decidedly geographical point of reference to the word insofar as you can be instructed to 'go fuck yourself.' At this point you might even be thinking 'ok, but who gives a fuck?' Well, I do, and if you're interested in ending neoliberalism so should you."

また私は、ネオリベラリズムの言説に対抗するに十分な口語的応答手段がないことを認めてしまっているようにも感じた。まるでその体系の弱体化を図るには、その雑色や雑種性、突然変異における複雑な地理的理論を用いた学術形式をもって応答するしかないかのようだ。それでは人々は理解できず彼らの無力化を招くように思え、私自身がこうした理論のいくつかを明確化することに寄与してきたわけだが(Springer 2010)、このような理論的枠組みは私が本当に論じたい事柄とは相反する働きをしていると感じることが多々ある。毎日の、通常の、目立たない、平凡な生活においてこそ政治的手段としての拒絶の行使が活かされるのだと私は思う。こうして私は、「Fuck Neoliberalism（くたばれ、ネオリベラリズム）」に落ち着いたわけであるが、それはなぜなら、私が本当に言いたい事のほとんどをその題名は伝えているからである。もちろん私の論点は題名より多少多くの意味合いを含んではいるが、この題名を考える上で、私はおそらく今までの人生の中で一番「fuck」という単語についてより深く考えることとなった。なんとすばらしく多彩な単語なのだろう！名詞だけでなく動詞としても使われ、おそらく形容詞として英語で最も使われる感嘆を表す言葉だろう。怒りや軽蔑、苛立ち、無関心、驚き、焦りを表現するのに使われ、また口をついて出てくる意味のない強調語句としても使われる。例えば次のように様々な意味で使われる。「fuck something up（何かをダメにする）」、「fuck someone over（誰かをだます）」、「fuck around（ふざける、どうでもいいことをして時間を無駄にするなど）」、「not give a fuck（関係ない、どうでもいい）」。「go fuck yourself (ふざけるな、勝手にしろ)」のように相手に対して行け(“go”)と指示できるという点で、この単語がここでは明らかに地理的基準点の意味合いを持っていることが分かる。

Foreignizing the act of reading

The last tactic follows the previous ones and focuses on how we read and how we allow a foreignized text to guide us in unexpected, uncomfortable directions. Of course, many reading experiences, especially of literary texts, already do that, but academic reading tends to prioritize the smooth transmission of content over fruitful estrangement. A foreignized reading brings more reflexive attention to the author's writing process and to the effects the text has on us. Reading with such reflexivity is slower and harder: It is work, cognitive and emotional, and pushes us beyond our comfort zones. Yet it is also a labor of love, respect, and justice.

We aim to apply to our own reading techniques what we already do as teachers. In the classroom, we regularly draw our students' attention to the effect a text has on them, to bring them to a better understanding of how the text works, and not only of what the text says. As a comparative literature scholar (Claire) and a critical geographer (Myriam), both teaching mostly French students, we help students engage with texts that are so unfamiliar they feel inaccessible. Reading high theory in English when one does not have a full command of the language is really challenging and requires a lot of scaffolding, reassurance, and rest. Yet, engaging with a reading experience that involves vulnerability, effort, and humility can be transformative. Fostering reading experiences in a foreign language can be even more radical: Part of my (Claire) practice consists of attempting to read foreign texts in their original languages, even when neither the students nor I are familiar with them. Translations are of course used at some point in the process, but trying to read a poem by Akhmatova in Russian, a sonnet by Darwich in Arabic, or the incipit of Karinthy's novel *Epepe* in Hungarian, even

before setting eyes on a French version of the text, proves very useful. Even without understanding the alphabet, we can often perceive rhyme and rhythm in a poem; listening to an audio file can make us grasp some of its music and lyricism. These examples are somewhat extreme, but the tactics employed here still work when reading, say, Shakespeare or Nnedi Okorafor in English. Many of my students initially lack confidence when reading in a foreign language. Emphasizing what they do understand (for one thing: they understand the generic structure or toponyms) is a good starting point for reflecting on the content of the text, how its construction and style affect our reading experience, and the semantic and formal choices translators make.

Engaging with a foreign text also reveals the virtues of collaboration, of reading as both an individual and collective practice. Some people in class might know more about one of the other languages we read, or about a related language. Reading in other languages is also greatly facilitated by the way authors, editors, and commentators have offered a text already shaped by earlier foreignizing tactics.

In other words, we also need to make space for the text, open up the way we read so that reading remains an encounter between strangers, and generally stay with the trouble.

Conclusion

We propose drawing on critical translation studies to support efforts within critical geographies to promote epistemic justice in language by interfering with and foreignizing hegemonic social sciences English. Berman's ethical turn in translation studies and the praxis of foreignization are crucial moves to support critical geographies' work and go beyond the apparent untranslatability of concepts. We also draw on Sakai's conception of heterolingual address, intrinsic to scientific writing, as a lever to undermine the hegemonic character of English and transform it into a true lingua franca.

We suggest four practical language tactics to navigate the different layers of academic writing, ranging from wording and conceptualizing in multiple tongues to fostering unsettled reading, and from more collaborative writing to hospitable editing, involving a range of actors in the collaborative work of sustaining heterolingual address.

In so doing, we also urge scholars to reject linguistic purity *in practice*, namely in their reading, writing, reviewing, and editing, as it constitutes an exclusionary, hegemonic move. Instead, we urge scholars to embrace the ambivalences and complicity (Hilbrandt and Ren 2022) of our linguistic positions *vis-à-vis* Anglo hegemony: outsiders can push back against the norm and offer other ways of saying, insiders can honor this gift, call out linguistic gatekeeping and enjoy fracturing the hegemony (Davies, 2021).

As the saying goes, *traduttore, traditore*: translators are traitors. This well-known *cliché* aims to discredit translation and translators as the work of translation inevitably differs from the originals. We would like to claim this work of acknowledging differences, working with them, and using translation to establish relationships (Diagne 2022). If translation is betrayal, what exactly is betrayed, and for whose benefit? Betraying privilege is an honorable way to fight for justice.

"Wir wollen hier auf Erden schon Das Himmelreich errichten. (…)	"We shall proceed right here to build The Kingdom of Heaven on earth now. (…)
Es wächst hienieden Brot genug Für alle Menschenkinder, Auch Rosen und Myrten, Schönheit und Lust, Und Zuckererbsen nicht minder.	The soil produces bread enough For all mankind's nutrition, Plus rose and myrtle, beauty and joy, And sugar peas in addition.
Ja, Zuckererbsen für jedermann"	Yes, sugar peas for everyone."

- Heinrich Heine, *Deutschland, ein Wintermärchen*, English translation by Hal Draper

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