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Doing Geography Without Losing the World: Taking Interpretation and Translation Seriously, and Other Ways to More Skilfully Make Geography Multilingual

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Abstract

Colonial patterns continue to shape knowledge production in Geography. The way the discipline is globalizing is asymmetric and shaped by linguistic privilege, which is often invisible to those who have it. It includes being haphazard about using language support, if it is used at all. Improving our use of both interpretation (oral) and translation (written) works against these dynamics and can help world and decolonize Geography. This has become more accessible with tech jumps in equipment and software. These should be used carefully and require new skills, which are reviewed here along with general best practices for using language support. Too rarely are we teaching how to do cross-language communication well or discussing the ethics of it. Anglophone hegemony can ironically be eroded with more translations into English, and more and savvier two-way interpretation. English is the master's tool, but if used critically, and worlded, it can be used to dismantle the master's house. We need stronger disciplinary norms for translation in journals and for interpretation in conferences, fieldwork, and field courses. This is part of a broader shift needed towards worlding our reading and citation practices. Other ways journals and conferences can foster multilingualism are proposed. These, and practices for increasing and improving our use of both interpretation and translation, particularly into English, are ways of not only of improving our conceptual analysis, but also deepening and widening our connections in Geography, so that we can more powerfully work for change together.

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Keywords

multilingual, cross-cultural, translation, interpretation, anglophone hegemony, worlding

Introduction

When was the last time you read an article translated into English?[1] Have you had your work translated? Were you taught how to get an accurate translation? How to use live interpreters? Have you ever taught students how to work with interpreters and translators? Are you up to date on how to use new tools for cross-language communication?

Geography as a discipline began deeply embedded in the imperial project (Driver 2001) and even as many of us now aim to use it to dismantle systems of domination, we still have a ways to go to unentangle ourselves from those colonial patterns (Peake 2011). They continue to shape relations of knowledge production, as evidenced by the dominance of geographers based in the UK, US, and Canada (Müller 2021). There is a growing consensus that the power geometries of knowledge production and exchange in Geography are in urgent need of change. As Jazeel (2016) puts it, the way Geography as a discipline is globalizing is deeply asymmetric. For some twenty-five years now there have been repeated calls to address Anglophone hegemony in the discipline (Garcia Ramon 2003; Aalbers and Rossi 2006; Garcia Ramon et al. 2006; Houssay-Holzschuch and Milhaud 2013; Fall 2014; and many more, reviewed in Hancock 2016) that now resonate with newer calls to decolonize the discipline and rethink the world plurally, from various places (Radcliffe 2017), and to open to other geographies (Oswin 2019). If we care about the power dynamics in our discipline, and how they affect the quality of our work, we should care about languages and the way they are used, and how to be more skilfully multilingual.

Müller (2021) documented linguistic privilege amongst authors and editors in Geography journals and handbooks, and the results are striking. He found 95% of handbook editors and 90% of journal editors were affiliated with institutions in Anglophone countries. It was 82% of journal board editors, and 70% of journal authors. Most of the recent improvement is from the inclusion of Western European authors, rather than those from the Global South or East. Müller argues for worlding Geography, embracing many worlds, which he contrasts to globalization, understood as "the ever-widening embrace of the same relations of production and regulation" (2021, 16). He proposes worlding Geography's gatekeepers and worlding English, opening to more flexibility in its use so that it can serve as a *multilingua franca*, a shared language that carries traces of other languages. Finally, he proposes worlding the canon: expecting every author to seek out work by non-Anglophone scholars (as Whitehand (2005) would put it, working to overcome their Anglophone squint).[2]

To world Geography, as Amilhat Szary et al (2025) put it, is to foster an epistemological pluriverse, to 'do geography without losing the world' (the inspiration for the title of this article). They argue that the epistemic disarmament we need is crucially a question of

[1] Parts of this article were first published in Spanish (Koopman 2024a). Some Geography journals have policies against this which could be changed.

[2] Many thanks to Martin Müller for reading an early draft of this article and being an inspiration for pushing for these changes in our discipline.

language. I could not agree more. A key way to world Geography, I argue here, is to increase and improve our use of both interpretation (rendering speech from one language to another) and translation (rendering written text), particularly into English.[3] This changes not only who can talk to whom, but what we can think and how we can struggle for change together. We each bring different insights from our particular locations, and ways of seeing the world through our languages. As geographers it is essential that we be more strategic with translation and interpretation, and new tools for these, so that we can not only be better geographers, but be part of weaving more transformative and less colonial solidarities that have more power to build the other, more just, worlds that we dream of (Hammond and Cook 2023). More and better use of translation and interpretation can particularly make for more powerful engaged scholarship (or public, participatory, or community geography, even in English terms vary by context (Koopman 2024b)).

Linguistic privilege is often invisible to those who have it (Müller 2021). This includes being haphazard about using language support, if it is used at all. There have been major tech advances in multilingual communication. In this article I share tactics for savvy and ethical use of these and how to use them to also increase access for people with disabilities. I also argue for more use of and stronger disciplinary norms for interpretation in conferences and fieldwork and translation in journals. How to work multilingually should be a core part of any qualitative methods course in Geography. Astoundingly it is not currently included in our methods textbooks, with the notable of exception of Peake, et al (2024),[4] nor it seems in the statement of professional ethics statements of any of our professional organizations.[5] I will start with best practices for using interpreters for fieldwork, conferences, and class field trips, then discuss other ways to make our gatherings more multilingual, and end with ways we can increase and improve our use of written translation and other ways our journals could foster multilingualism.[6]

Who am I to be making these arguments? Before reinventing myself as a geographer, I earned my living for many years as a freelance professional translator and interpreter. I am a federally certified Spanish court interpreter in the United States and certified as a translator of Spanish into English by the American Translator's Association. I have interpreted in a wide variety of settings. I specialize in social movement terminology and blog about these

[3] Though in some contexts the term translation is used more broadly, to use language services well it is important to make this distinction. I have seen the term interpreter misused in our field, in relation to cross-language communication, to refer to a research assistant who is doing cultural bridging of customs (Rigg 2020). Some have told me they avoid the term because of this misunderstanding, but it would be better for us to teach and use the terms correctly.

[4] Another exception was the third edition of *Key Methods in Geography,* but it was removed for the fourth edition.

[5] This is particularly surprising for Canada and New Zealand. Not even the International Geographical Union mentions it.

[6] I do not engage here with geographies of translation or translation theory or interpretation studies. Houston and Trudeau (2023), for example, argue that translation, writ large, is emergent and geographic and generates conditions for social transformation. Jones (2020) has done a series of articles on the geopolitics of interpreting. Hammond and Cook (2023) completely changed my understanding of what translation is doing as they trace four trajectories of translation and how they create relational spatialities. There is much to gain from engaging with this work, but there are also practicalities we need to work on as a discipline that I prioritize here.

conundrums at Spanishforsocialchange.com. I discuss here what little has been published in Geography on language services,[7] but the advice I present is primarily based on my personal experience and discussions with clients and colleagues.

Using interpreters skilfully

There are tech breakthroughs that we can use for oral interactions when we understand some of a language but not all of it. Before discussing these, I review basic principles for using human interpreters. Even occasional interpreter use, say for an in-depth interview or a class field trip, can be fruitful. Tech jumps also make this more feasible for moving conversations, as I discuss below.

Although the terms are often misused, interpretation is oral and translation is written. Using the terms correctly shows respect for language professionals but also shows you are a savvy user of language services. Just as someone who writes beautifully can be a terrible speaker, someone who can translate can't necessarily interpret well. Translation is more like chess, with slow strategic deliberation, and interpretation more like volleyball, where the focus is on keeping the ball in play.

It is also important to understand the difference between consecutive and simultaneous interpreting. In the former a speaker speaks in a source language, then waits while the interpreter renders it in a target language. In the latter the interpreter is rendering into the target language as the person speaks, a phrase or two behind the speaker. Simultaneous interpreting is more difficult at first, but with practice can become easier for the interpreter – and it makes communication smoother and faster. It is what you want for conferences, but I also recommend it for fieldwork. Speak more slowly for simultaneous interpretation. Ask your interlocutors to do the same. In group conversations be sure that people are not speaking over each other.

For consecutive interpreting it is important to avoid breaking/ it up into/ gibbles, be sure not/ to break until a complete sentence has been expressed in case the other language puts the verb at the end, for example. Professional interpreters will have note taking and memory skills and be able to interpret much longer phrases. They will also be comfortable telling a speaker when to stop. As a right-handed interpreter I stand to the right of the speaker so that even as I am writing notes, I can use subtle elbow bumps if they speak for too long. I warn speakers of this beforehand. Inexperienced interpreters tend to let people speak too long, and this is where a lot gets lost. Interpreters should have a small notebook in hand and take notes of key terms and numbers. It is harder to do consecutive interpreting if there is walking involved. I strongly recommend simultaneous for this. When using consecutive be sure to account for everything taking twice as long.

Ideally for fieldwork or class field trips you would always use someone with some training in basic interpreting skills (you can search for local interpreter organizations and use their directory to hire directly rather than through agencies, or try online ones like proz.com) but especially for languages of lesser diffusion and in rural areas that can be unrealistic. Even so, being bilingual is not enough for interpreting. Look for people with at least some informal

[7] There is also very little in the field of interpretation and translation studies, though see the brochures created by the American Translator's Association at www.atanet.org/client-assistance/buying-language-services/.

interpreting experience. This is more important than, say, being a graduate student – unless they are a student in a translation and interpretation program. Before hiring, ask about their experience and any interpretation training. Be sure they are working in one of their primary languages, not say between their third and fourth language. Ideally your interlocutor is also speaking their strongest language, not their second or third. Ask the interpreter when and how they learned this language and how much if any of their formal education has been in it (if that is offered in that context).

Before hiring an interpreter for fieldwork, it is helpful to know their role and status in the community. Though you are an outsider, they may be an insider in various ways you can be thoughtful about. You might ask them if they know any of the people you will be speaking to, and if they have any conflict of interest or see any reason why they should not be interpreting for them. They may be known to have a very different political position, for example, or have strong opinions about the issues you will be talking about. They are unlikely to point themselves to their own class position but in general it useful to think about, and perhaps you can discuss with them their social location and how that will affect dynamics (e.g. age, gender, marital status, religion, family ties). Some of these might open doors, others slam them shut, but they will certainly affect your interactions. Confidentiality and trust are something to be aware of. Be thoughtful in how you discuss ethics with your interpreter (Smith, 2009) and include the interpreter in your ethics forms. When you write up, thank the interpreter by name, if that is safe and they agree to it, but also mention their social locations and their potential impact, along with your interpreter's qualifications. This is surprisingly rare in Geography (Twyman et al. 1999). They are not just invisible transmitters of information (Smith, 2009). Acknowledge that they are coproducers of situated knowledge (Harrowell et al. 2018, 235). This can be a strength, not something to hide!

If you have to use an interpreter with no experience or training, you can offer them some basic training before starting and as you go along. There are basic interpreting skills tips online and online training programs you could pay for.[8] The first and most important thing is to stop them from saying "they said" or "she said". Likewise, *the* most important thing for you to remember when using an interpreter is to never say "tell her" x. Just speak normally and directly to the person you are speaking to. Do not communicate *to* the interpreter but rather *through* the interpreter. It is also key to *look* at the person you are speaking to. Many people are tempted to look instead at the interpreter, so as an interpreter I tend to not engage in eye contact with either speaker to encourage them to look at each other.

If the interpreter needs to speak for themselves, for example to ask for a break, they should use the third person, "the interpreter requests a break". If you need to communicate *to* the interpreter, say to ask if they need a break, or water, speak to them in that odd way as well, "does the interpreter need a break?". You can role play this third person communication beforehand with untrained interpreters. All these skills could be role played in a qualitative methods class.

Do give them regular breaks. Accuracy plummets without them, but we are so busy interpreting that we have trouble registering that. Conference standards are to have two people interpreting if the event will be longer than 2 hours, and to have them each take turns

[8] https://www.thecommunityinterpreter.com/how-to-become-an-interpreter

every 20-30 min and take a one-hour break after 3 hours of work. That is not realistic for most fieldwork situations, but I offer it for comparison.

Be cautious when using untrained interpreters. Bilingual people without practice and training in interpreting regularly edit and drop information as they do not have the memory, notetaking, and processing skills. They usually do not realize how much they are missing or changing. Be attentive. You may need to use shorter and simpler sentences. You might need to remind them to interpret everything.

However, some people are naturally gifted interpreters and may be able to do simultaneous interpreting fairly easily. You can get some sense of what this is like yourself by practicing shadowing, which is just repeating what someone is saying in the same language but a few words behind them. This is a useful exercise in a methods class. If using interpreters for fieldwork it is worth having them try simultaneous, even if it is new to them. If they can do it, they may lose less content that way. It also makes walking and talking easier.

If you will be having them interpret simultaneously for more than two listeners at a time you will need equipment. The headphones and transmitters that some houses of worship use for the hard of hearing will work and can often be borrowed. Recent tech jumps have opened new equipment options, and rather than the big pirate radio I once used you can now get small FM transmitters that connect to a phone that the interpreter speaks into and use radio apps on the phones of the listeners. Even easier is to set up a zoom room even for live events and have listeners call in with their phones to hear the interpreter via zoom. This however requires strong wifi/ cell service which the radio hack does not. It also has more lag time. Perhaps the easiest solution is that if you are, say, doing fieldwork and talking to a group of 5 people, the interpreter could use consecutive when going from English into, say, Somali, but simultaneous with no equipment when interpreting for you from Somali into English.

If you speak a little of the language, use it for introductions and goodbyes – so before and after communicating through an interpreter. That raises the question of how much of a language one should speak before doing research in it. Some argue that to decolonize our research practices you should never use interpreters and only work in languages you speak well. But if you, or perhaps they, are working in your second or third or fourth language you can lose nuance, and things might just be left unsaid. You might choose to use an interpreter just for your more in-depth conversations.

Starting every new interpreted interaction by telling the person you are speaking to that the interpreter will interpret everything you each say will avert them trying to have a side conversation with the interpreter, which happens regularly. This will also reinforce this value for the interpreter. Untrained interpreters may be used to having side conversations where they explain their take on what you have said or put it in local context. If there are several instances where a long statement is rendered with a short interpretation, or vice versa, stop and express your concern to the interpreter and reiterate that they interpret fully and exactly. You might take a break and do that privately. There should not be any back-and-forth conversation between the interpreter and the person you are speaking to. If the interpreter needs to ask your interlocutor what a term means, or needs a repetition, the interpreter should tell you that this is what she is doing, with something like, "the interpreter needs to clarify a term."

Beware of role slippage. If your interpreter is also your research assistant (or perhaps a community leader) they may be attached to a certain story line or argument, and edit or emphasize this line when interpreting. Or they may step out of their role and coach respondents, as described by Garrett and Brickell (2015) in one of the only articles in Geography on working with interpreters. Listen and keep an eye on the interpreter's body language to make sure they are not coaching or suggesting an answer. This is not to say that we should expect the interpretation to perfectly correspond with the original. This is of course not possible, and interpretation is also a relational act and an act of creation, a sometimes messy one as the volleyball metaphor above points to. It is particularly hard for interpreters to convey pauses, stutters, slips, and body language - so tune in to these in the source language as best you can (Krzywoszynska 2015).

What about cultural bridging? Some interpreters will not see this as their role, but even if they do, if the person you are speaking to is expressing a culturally embedded concept which you do not understand, do not expect the interpreter to be a cultural expert. They may come from a very different background. Interpreters have their own world views and who knows, their personal understanding of an issue may not be accepted in their cultural group. It is always best to ask questions like this directly, "how do you do this, what does this mean to you, etc." But your interlocutor may not be able to fully explain it either. Ideally if you or they are expressing a concept which the interpreter thinks may not transfer culturally, you can ask her to let you know that, by saying something like, "the interpreter is not sure that the concept of citizenship is being understood in the same way" (Bancroft 2015). Discussing such terms and concepts in depth with your interpreter can help you see and unlearn your own assumptions and is essential for cross-cultural research (Maclean 2007; Cameron et al. 2015). Terms that may seem straightforward, like gender, or space, may not be (Houssay-Holzschuch and Milhaud 2013; Garcia Ramon et al. 2006). Some terms will not have equivalents and are best imported into the target language to signal this after discussion. It is ideal to have these conversations before or after your interpreted interactions. If you need to discuss a term during an interview, tell your interlocutor that you will have a side conversation with the interpreter for a moment to clarify a term rather than leave them wondering what you are talking about. If using consecutive interpreting you could have the interpreter listen to the recording afterward with you and perhaps offer term changes upon reflection (Crane et al. 2009; Twyman et al. 1999).

For key terms it can be useful to get a variety of opinions, and as interpreters we frequently consult colleagues. When terms are difficult to render this can offer insights into worldviews (Jazeel 2016; Maclean 2007; Zhao 2020; Hessek 2024) and lead to a deeper understanding of the issue itself (Crane et al. 2009; Krzywoszynska 2015). Even cognates can carry different embedded meanings (Hancock 2016; Fall 2014). To minimize unnecessary inequivalences avoid slang, idioms, and most metaphors, especially sports ones. Even when not being interpreted, if you are speaking to those listening in their second (or fifth) language, this will also help (Houssay-Holzschuch and Placial forthcoming; Belina 2005).

Using new technology to make our oral interactions more skilfully multilingual

Recent tech leaps offer new support for oral interactions when we speak some of a language. When I listen in Portuguese, but respond in Spanish, linguists call this intercomprehension, or non-convergent discourse. Despite that name, it can be a tool to

further converge our understandings of the world across language gaps. Many of us understand a language well enough to read or listen to it, but not well enough to speak it confidently. Where you have perhaps seen this type of conversation is the conversations between Chewbacca and Han Solo.

The ease of intercomprehension varies depending upon the language pair, the direction of comprehension, and the modality (spoken vs written). For example, for Spanish speakers it is easier to understand written Portuguese than spoken. At the Encuentro de Geógrafos de América Latina in Bolivia in 2017 many Brazilians put the entire text of their presentation on the screen. That is generally the last thing one would want to do for a dynamic presentation, but in this case it made the presentation much more understandable for me. Although it is not as key for other languages and other directions, this is something that could also be done more, for example, by those who present or lead group discussions in English in contexts where for many of the listeners it is not their first language. PowerPoint, Keynote, YouTube live, and Zoom all now provide live AI transcription while you are speaking, in several languages. You either need a microphone or to be close to the computer, and still the transcript may garble some words, but it is getting better all the time, even with accents. When using these systems, it is important to establish in which language we are speaking (and change that as needed). There is an option on YouTube to provide your own transcript, if you are reading a text. If you are posting the video later, you can edit the auto generated captions and improve them. Captions also make your event more inclusive for those with hearing challenges, attention challenges, and people who are neurodivergent.

A transcriptlation is when you go from audio in the source language to a transcript in the target language, without ever doing a transcript in the source language. We can also now use live AI transcriptlation, that is to say, live subtitles. PowerPoint, YouTube live, and Zoom currently offer this. You may want to test and see which currently works best for your language pair. AI transcription has errors, that are then compounded by machine translation. But they can be surprisingly decent, and especially useful to look at occasionally for difficult terms. Still, if a listener understands some of another language, they may just prefer the transcription. Ideally you could offer both. With Zoom or YouTube you could set it up, even for a live event, so those who want the subtitles (or closed caption) can watch these on their laptops as you speak rather than have them show for all up front.

You could also play a recording of an interview in one of these platforms to get a machine transcriptlation. But note that there are serious privacy and legal concerns here. It is unclear who owns the copyright to these outputs, and these tools cannot be held legally liable (European Language Council et al. 2025). There are also online services such as Reduct.video where you can upload a video and pay for both a machine transcript and translation of it, which appear side by side. These may be more accurate for your language pair and more private.

Again, there are problems with automated translations. We have been using these for longer than AI. Machine translation came out in 2016 based on huge databases of translations done by real humans and shared by the EU and the UN. I used to say it should only be used with unimportant informal communication. With AI added to it, it is now technically called neural machine translation (though still widely abbreviated as just MT) and that has gotten much better, particularly for more common language combinations. Nevertheless, like any AI, it is important to use it with caution. It can sound deceptively fluent but have serious errors,

bias, and lack cultural nuance (International Federation of Translators (FIT) 2025). It will particularly get theoretical ideas and cultural expressions wrong. Note, too, that MT works even less well for languages of lesser diffusion, say Finnish, or Sámi, or other languages of first peoples - since it does not have as many human translations to learn from. MTs like DeepL or Google Translate, because they are built on those human translations (when they exist), are currently better than general AI such as ChatGPT or Claude (European Language Council et al. 2025). Along with political, ethical, and legal concerns there are of course serious environmental concerns with the use of these tools.

Obviously, it would be better to have professional simultaneous interpretation, which is why I started with that, but it can be costly. When human interpretation is not possible, AI transcription and translation tools can give us some idea of what is being said. These tools, with all their errors, may be more useful than pressing into volunteer service people who are bilingual but have no experience or training in interpretation.

If you do have human interpreters for an online event, beware of throwing volunteers into interpreting on Zoom. All of the usual warnings about untrained interpreters apply, but Zoom also requires a set up where interpreters log in twice to listen to each other. Be sure to allow time to practice beforehand with interpreters. Assign someone to monitor the interpretation channel for tech issues, like the interpreter cutting out or not switching the language direction button.

If you know you are going to be interpreted, it is a huge help if you can get your presentation to the interpreter beforehand so that they can research and discuss with you terms like 'plantationocene'. If you do not have a script, give them a list of potentially tricky terms that they can make a glossary from. You could also give them related publications to look over. If you are not interpreted, but speaking to people listening in what is not their first language, Belina (2005) recommends you not read a speech, as you will then go faster and use longer and more complicated sentences.

It helps if everyone comes, as Desbiens and Ruddick (2006) say, prepared for multilingual communication and the patience it requires. Ask speakers to speak slowly – whether using interpreters or simply to make the English more accessible for non-native speakers. It can be difficult for speakers to remember this when they get excited (or run out of time), and moderators could use a yellow SLOW sign. Pronounce important words carefully, avoid acronyms, and if you use neologisms explain them (Belina, 2005). Rosière and Fall (2008) suggest that a workshop style gathering with more interaction and chances to find common ground will bridge divides better than simply presenting papers. Live interpreters would be particularly helpful for this.

Ideally, at conferences we would have simultaneous interpreters in soundproof booths. Realistically booths are expensive, and I have often worked without one. It gets particularly noisy if you have more than one language combination. Either way be sure not to put the event in a small room and put a table on the side for the interpreters where they have a clear view of the speakers' lips and are at least a short way away from the audience. Post good signage about the availability of interpretation and set up a staffed table to hand out and pick up headsets.

Getting translation done well

I will move now to discussing translation, which again is written vs. interpretation, which is oral. Neural machine translation (MT) is good enough for most emails these days (still if it is outgoing you could add a disclaimer saying that you are using it, given potential inaccuracies and lack of confidentiality). I also think it works for getting most of an article you are interested in reading in another language. But I am afraid it is being naively overused without appropriate caution. It will often miss connotations, cultural references, and sometimes just have dangerous basic errors (European Language Council et al. 2025; International Federation of Translators (FIT) 2025). I still do not recommend using it for important outgoing documents, like your own article, and certainly not a survey, at least without editing it.

Most professional human translations today are actually done with the help of MT inside a translation management system. This is software that helps the translator phrase by phrase, first by remembering if that phrase or a similar one she has translated before exists in her glossary or her translation memory (segmented memory of past translations she has done), and then by offering translations from three different services (which three are best will vary by language pair) amongst which the translator chooses the best and edits the errors by hand. I recommend the platform Wordfast anywhere, which you can get just one month of. If you pay the tiny per word fee for three better MT services like DeepL inside of it this, it is cheaper and more effective than just paying for, say, DeepL.

A key next step is to have other humans look it over. Professional translations usually go through an editing process where another human translator compares the source text, sentence by sentence, with the translation and recommends changes to the original translator, who chooses which to incorporate. Then (or at a minimum) a proofreading process where someone who speaks the language of the translation as their strongest language simply reads the translation to see if it sounds right in that language and again offers tweaks to the original translator.

In contrast to interpretation which, outside the context of the United Nations, is usually done in both directions, professional translators only go in one direction, towards our strongest language. Be wary of translators that go in both directions and especially of those going into their weaker language. I use the term strongest language instead of mother tongue because there are people who have always spoken two languages but who have done most of their studies in one. Check your translator and editor's affinity with and knowledge of the discipline and topic, and academic publishing in general. Ask for an example of (ideally academic) work they have translated. Provide or work with them on a bilingual glossary of key terms. Give them a sample of relevant academic articles in the target language if possible.[9]

Another challenge in the translation process is that many authors speak some English (or whatever the target language is), although they may not feel comfortable doing their own translation. I have seen cases where after the translation the authors make their own changes that can sometimes be drastic, and errors can enter such that afterwards the translator does not want to put her name on the document. I have also experienced this phenomenon from

[9] These final tips come from an International Geographical Union handout developed by Virginie Mamadouh. Many thanks to her for her support with this article, and her inspiring advocacy of these issues.

the other side when I hired a translator into Spanish for an article of mine and it was someone who did not understand the concepts well, and I had to correct key terminology. Ideally, there should be a continuous exchange between author and translator during the process, and the author, if she speaks enough of the target language, does a complete review using track changes so that the translator can go through accepting or rejecting, and they talk about each rejection. Ideally, they also discuss any translator's notes about terms.

If the author does not speak the target language well enough to be the editor, then another translator should be hired to go through both source and target text sentence by sentence using track changes. Ideally, they can use the same translation management system, like Wordfast, to make this easier. This is both a cheaper and a far more effective way to get a high-quality translation than to pay for a back translation into the source language. Again, in the industry it is also common to then have a proofer, who only edits the target text to ensure that it sounds right. Surveys, in particular, should have proofers based in the target community. They are the last thing I would use machine only translation for, but problematically a recent methods textbook advocated this (McGuirk and O'Neill 2016).

Filep (2009), in one of the only articles in Geography on the specifics of using translation and interpretation (though see Maclean 2007) argues for using back translation to catch errors, rather than this editing process. Unfortunately the same is true for the otherwise great Geography encyclopedia entry on translation (Smith 2009). Back translations are widely scorned in the translation industry. They will not accurately reflect errors of grammar, spelling, style, and more – and will instead likely introduce new errors. Most importantly they do not offer much insight into how to do it right, and you will simply have to get a new translation done, tripling your costs. Unfortunately, some ethics boards and government agencies still require them – a reflection of how poorly understood the process of translation continues to be.

Improving and increasing translations in our journals

The vast majority of translations are out of, rather than into, English. It is common to say that only 3% of the books sold in the United States are English translations, based on a study done in 1999 (Heilbron) and another looking at books between 1980 and 2000 (Sapiro 2016). A 2012 study of books published in the UK and Ireland also found a 3% level, although in the rest of Europe levels of translations into their national languages are typically between 30% to 60% (Heilbron 1999). There are no studies on the translation of academic articles, but it seems far fewer than 3% are translated into English – at least openly. It is possible that authors who do not speak English as their first language write their article first in another language and pay for a translation themselves (reinforcing economic inequality) or do their own translation before submitting it, without saying that it is a translation. We can do better.

There are some new efforts to change these dynamics at Geography journals based in primarily English-speaking countries that I want to celebrate while also pointing to room for improvement. A key step is to establish a fund to pay for translations. *Antipode* has done this through the Antipode Foundation, and they are actively looking for key essays to translate. One way of publishing translations is to translate classics along with commentaries. For example *Antipode* published a translation of a manifesto written by Milton Santos with his students (Bernardes et al. 2017), along with an introduction to the manifesto and its impact

(Melgaço 2017), and a forum of 10 new comments on the manifesto, also translated into English ("Symposium – Introducing Milton Santos and 'The Active Role of Geography'" 2017).

There is growing recognition of translators, but all journals could do better. The *Antipode* symposium above, for example, lists the translators at the top of the PDF and on the web site, but not in the metadata, so when you download the article to Zotero they are lost. Some journals have included the translators in the metadata but as authors. We could all do better at citing translators clearly in our citations. Ideally you would have enough space to list the full title of the work in the original language, in case a reader wants to read it in the original and to signal that it is a translation. But again, this is now generally not offered either in the PDF or the metadata of translations.

Another challenge with translations is how to manage the peer review process. At *Antipode* the peer review process is done in the original language by peers who speak both that language and English and might suggest changes not only to the argument, but also for adapting it to standard English structure and argumentation styles. Though as Mamadouh details, this is a big request of reviewers and editors (Agnew et al. 2020, 25). Fall (2014) describes how off-putting having to make these changes can be for authors. Germes and de Araújo (2016) argue for avoiding this 'domestication' and letting the strangeness of the text stand. Once it is accepted, *Antipode* will pay for the translation. I am on the international advisory board of *Antipode* and advocated for this workflow. Translating an article before the review process is a risky investment, as it could be rejected or require many changes. Unfortunately, there is still no way on the *Antipode* site to search for and find the translations.

Being online makes it easier for journals to publish both the translation and the original, side by side. The *Journal of Latin American Geography* (JLAG) accepts articles in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, and now regularly commissions translations of some accepted articles that have the potential to make lasting contributions to the discipline – explicitly to change the colonial dynamics of geography (Finn et al. 2020).[10] The Spanish and Portuguese versions are open access for one year. Unfortunately, the web locations of the two are still not clearly linked online (you have to open the PDF and look for the note after the title). There is also no way to search for translations on the site. The translation and the original should be connected, with clear button links at the top of both the web page and the PDF. Too often at many journals the other language version is hard to find. Another place it is sometimes hidden is under a supplemental material tab, as recently done in the *Annals* when an author offered her own translation into Spanish (Castañeda 2025).

Ideally there would be funds for translation, but even if not, it would be fantastic if every journal would publish multiple language versions of an article if the author provided them. It could even be standard policy to ask authors if they want to publish a version in any other language alongside the original. Journals can also accept articles in various languages without always translating them. *ACME* accepts articles, and can do peer-review, in English, French, Italian, and Spanish. Sometimes it accepts in other languages (German for example)

[10] The editors do recognize that these are the colonial languages of the Americas and invite proposals for submissions in indigenous languages to first discuss with the co-editors the logistical challenges of finding reviewers and editors on a case by case basis (Budds et al. 2023). This raises the important point that all translations done so far across Geography journals seem to be into and out of colonial languages. This is not only because of these logistics, but also what is seen as legitimate and valuable.

but asks authors to first consult with the editors. Sadly, *ACME* too still does not have a way on its site to find articles in other languages, much less translations. Some articles have their translations clearly linked at the top of the web page, but most do not. *ACME* is fantastically now publishing a translation a year along with a commentary by the translator (see Hessek 2024), but those commentaries are not clearly linked on the articles or even cited on them (nor vice versa).

Journals could be much clearer on their web pages about what their translation policies are. For example, the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research (IJURR)* says that on a case-by-case basis the editors may choose to review papers in languages other than English. They do not specify which languages they would take or whether they would then pay for translation.

The situation at journals based in countries where the primary language is not English is different, and a source of inspiration. Many journals based in Europe accept and publish articles in both their primary language and in English, and can do peer review in either. *Via Tourism Review* stands out for publishing in seven languages and translating all articles into at least two other languages (Müller 2021). The journal *Justice Spatiale/ Spatial Justice* publishes most articles in both English and French. They ask authors to provide their own translations - but when authors are unable, they pay for translations.

Not only do we need to change the policies of journals to foster translations, set up translation funds, and change the website infrastructure - we also need to change academic norms to give more credit to academics for doing translations. Tenure and promotion guidelines in English speaking countries rarely give credit for translations, even those done by the author themselves. Publishing a commentary on the process might help with this. *ACME* is now publishing commentaries with translations (see Hessek 2024) and is looking for translations of key essays, or translated interviews with key authors, where the translator writes an introduction that puts the work in context and explains why it is key. Müller (2007) suggests that the critical translating geographer can create awareness of the polyvalency of some meanings by offering social context and genealogy, as Hessek (2024) does. Rather than the depoliticizing positivist take that wants translators to be invisible (Müller 2007; Smith 2009; Houssay-Holzschuch and Placial forthcoming), journals can open space for and encourage translator's commentaries, or at a minimum generous room for translators' footnotes about terms, or translator glosses, that is interlinear annotations. This can make it more clear that translation is a complex and political act (Müller 2007; Houssay-Holzschuch and Placial forthcoming).

Even in one language a word can have a constellation of meanings that can vary by place and context (Amilhat Szary et al. 2025; Hammond and Cook 2023). All too often a word is used in the target language that is not an exact fit, without clear explanation. It can even be a cognate with a different resonance. Instead of eliding this we can highlight the strangeness, the disjuncture or ambiguity, and learn from it. We can establish a norm of importing some terms from the source into the target language (Müller 2007; Houssay-Holzschuch and Placial forthcoming). Sharp (2024) argues that to bring out difference this way, rather than suppress it, is a feminist and decolonizing move and a praxis for invoking new worlds. Rather than foreignizing English, as translation studies would put it (Houssay-Holzschuch and Placial forthcoming; Smith 2009), I consider this to be worlding English (Müller 2021) and worlding geographies by, as Amilhat Szary et al (2025, 3) put it, "practicing a form of theoretical

multilingualism in how we understand and use concepts." There is a growing trend of not italicizing these imported terms so that they sit right in, rather than alongside or too often below the other terms. Zaragocin (2024) offers a term together in both source and target language with neither italicized. These steps all break the illusion that translation is transparent and could help counter the dynamics of epistemic expropriation that Halvorsen (2018) argues are always a danger with these efforts. As he says, it is important not to romanticize trips from South to North.

Beyond translation: journal reports and more

More *Progress* style reports of recent literature in other languages could help our discipline be more multilingual and make it easier to cite work not in English (though the very concept of progress is loaded, as Jazeel (2016) points out in relation to these debates). If we learn about work through these reports that we are interested in, at this point machine translation is likely good enough to give us a useful gist of the article (Timur et al. 2025). It is also true that many of us who can read in other languages may do so less than we would like because that work is not as well indexed, or we are just not pushed (say by referees) to keep up on what is being published in other languages.

We have done some of these reports, but we could do more. Between 2003 and 2009 the journal *Social and Cultural Geography* did regular country reports. Many were compiled in the book *Mapping Worlds* (Kitchin 2007). They were published in both English and the language of the contributor, which is a great model. Sadly, no translator credit is given (a problem still common across journals). We should give credit even when, as here, the translations were done by the contributors (Kitchin, personal communication). These were published in the journal as one PDF, with the translation following the English. This is not a structure I recommend, as the titles are only in English and there is no easy way on the site or the top of the PDF to know that there is a translation. The other language version is not indexed and, again, there is no way to search for work in translation in the journal. *Gender, Place & Culture* did 39 different country reports on feminist Geography for its 25th anniversary in 2019 (Blidon and Zaragocin 2019).

Transactions has a new section, as of 2022, entitled 'Geography in the World' for regular country reports on Geography writ large – while recognizing that both the nation and the discipline are imperfect units for reflection and questioning (McFarlane 2021). Indeed a recent intervention in response (Amilhat Szary et al. 2025) that calls instead for worlding geographies, and particularly for more consideration of languages, left me wondering why these reports are not of work in a particular language, rather than country. The *Journal of Historical Geography* as of 2025 also has a new section with reviews of work that so far seems to be by country. Reports in *Progress* itself rarely now mention other languages, and though they used to ask authors to mention the linguistic perimeters of the report, they no longer do.[11]

Other journal sections could serve to world the canon, as Müller (2021) put it. A model proposed by Minca (2000) is for journals to establish a regular roundtable where authors from

[11] Many thanks to Myriam Houssay-Holzschuch for pointing this out, for all of her feedback on this article, and her advocacy of these issues.

different countries discuss a particular topic, each bringing the perspective of work done on it in their language. *Geographica Helvetica* does fora on topics like this, without the back and forth. The latest *Transactions* Geography in the World section was also on a theme. Several journals have put out calls for reviews of books written in languages other than English, though none seem to offer to translate such reviews into English. *JLAG* does do translations into the language of the book itself (Spanish or Portugese) and publishes it in both. Journals could also sister with a journal that primarily publishes in another language and each translate one article a year from the other journal (a proposal suggested by the Babel team of *ACME* but not yet implemented). This was done decades ago, between then-*Ecumene* under Denis Cosgrove and *Géographie & Cultures* under Paul Claval - but the exchange did not survive when Cosgrove left the position, which points to the need for strong institutionalization of these exchanges rather than relying on personal connections.[12] A more one-off possibility is to do a special issue that is published across two journals, in two languages. *Geographische Zeitschrift* and *L'information géographique* recently did this with an inspiring special issue where French speaking authors were asked to present to German speaking readers theoretical approaches rooted in the uniqueness of the French language, with an in-person seminar before final write up (Calbérac and Germes 2024).[13]

We could also do other sorts of reporting to strengthen this work. The *Journal of Historical Geography* recently published an editorial detailing the global locations of authors published and efforts to broaden that (Tolia-Kelly et al. 2020), an accounting all journals could do regularly. Journals could also report on how many of their editors and reviewers are multilingual or based in non-Anglophone countries (and could presumably help authors cite more widely) (Garcia Ramon and Estévez Vilariño 2015), as well as how multilingual citations are, and how many translations they publish and from what languages. Editors have a key role to play in making these changes but as members of boards and authors and readers we can all push for them.

Conclusion

Geography as a discipline was established as a tool of empire, and we still operate with and in deeply colonial structures that are often hard for us to recognize - including linguistic privilege. More widespread and savvy use of translation and interpretation is a key tool for changing our power geometries of knowledge production and exchange, rethinking the world more plurally (Radcliffe 2017), and opening to other geographies (Oswin 2019). If we want to decolonize the discipline, being sensitive to the power dynamics of multilingualism is a key step. This begins with understanding the difference between interpretation and translation and extends to knowing how to use the different forms of language interpretation well, and how to support untrained interpreters should you need to work with them. When doing fieldwork with interpreters there are steps we can take that can improve both

[12] Thanks to Myriam Houssay-Holzschuch and Claire Hancock for this history.

[13] Thanks to Myriam Houssay-Holzschuch for pointing me to this. I do not cite nearly as many articles in other languages or in translation here as I would like. It seems that much of this conversation in Geography is happening in English - though the three special issues have been multilingual. There was one in *Social Geography* www.soc-geogr.net/special_issue10.html, one in *Terra Brasilis*, journals.openedition.org/terrabrasilis/796, and one here in *ACME*, acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/issue/view/97.

communication and the ethics of working with interpreters. There are also tech leaps that can help us with oral cross language communication that we can teach and keep up with. As well as changing our individual practices, we can change our institutions. These skills should be taught in our qualitative methods courses, included in textbooks, and modelled in field courses. These issues should be discussed in the ethics statements of our professional associations.

In our gatherings we can also foster intercomprehension, or speaking in different languages that are understood passively better than they are spoken. One way to facilitate this is to offer closed captions of our presentations. There are several platforms that offer live AI transcripts but also transcriptlation, or subtitles in another language. These have errors but can nevertheless be useful, particularly for key terms when a listener understands some but not all of a language. These tools can also make events more accessible to those with hearing or attention difficulties. Of course, live human interpreters at events are still ideal, and either way there are many things we can all do to improve multilingual communication.

Translation (again, written) is best done these days by a human cleaning up neuro machine translation, and there are platforms that make this much easier now. As a discipline we should take advantage of this tech jump and do more neuro machine *assisted* translations, with good work flows, or as the International Federation of Translators puts it (2025), we can collaborate with machine translation to augment our human translations. As a field we should give more academic credit to the humans that do this work.

We are particularly lacking in translations into English, which are done at a dramatically lower rate than translations out of English. Journals that primarily publish in English should publish, and ideally pay for, translations into English. Fostering these is a way to be *less* anglocentric. It could be argued that English is a master's tool, that will never dismantle the master's house, per Audre Lorde (2007). But the same argument could be made for the discipline of Geography itself. Though it has long been a tool for Empire, we are reworking it as a tool for liberation, peace, and justice. Doing so well requires remaining aware that it has a history of being a master's tool and thus must be held carefully, or we may think we are taking tiles off the roof when we are actually reinforcing the foundation of the master's house. The same is true for using English as a multilingua franca. It would not have been my choice for it to be the most widely understood language in the world, but here we are. Translating into English is useful not just for Anglophones, but also for the many multilingual readers who can read English (Davies 2021). This argument for more translation into English has long and repeatedly been made by Catalan geographer Garcia Ramon (2003; 2015). One way to use this master's tool carefully is, as Müller (2021) puts it, to *world* English, and allow for traces of other languages to linger in it. We can all be more flexible, as readers and editors, and recognize that there are various ways of using English.

There are also other ways to change power/knowledge circuits. Again, Müller (2021) proposes more non-Anglophone and multilingual journal editors and reviewers, allowing for more flexible use of English, and expecting authors to cite non-Anglophone work. Houssay-Holschuchz and Placial (forthcoming) offer strong recommendations that can be given to reviewers. Jöns (2024) proposes more conference locations in the Global South, more support for conferences by organizations with more resources, and multilevel fees. Here I have also argued for several formats and reports that journals could use to shift the culture of Geography towards more global reading and citation practices.

I want to caution, however, that all of these efforts be understood as building a bigger messier us, rather than a homogenous us, or reinforcing us/them paradigms (Fall 2014). The other way of putting this is, as Kitchin (2007) argues, that it is important that these not be framed as bringing the work of the margins to the centre so that it can be pillaged. Instead may they serve to, as he puts it (2007, 6), expose the circuits of power that constitute what counts as valuable research and help to reconfigure them. Tolia-Kelly et al (2020, p.1) likewise call for a shift in our "intellectual foundations, scholarly orientations, and ethical praxis" to value and include scholarship from all corners.

There have been many calls for, as Jazeel (2016) puts it, less extractive and more responsible relationships with field spaces and communities. Sometimes these relationships are obviously about control, such as when Geographers have been funded and worked (sometimes covertly) for U.S. armed forces (Bryan and Wood 2015). We have made some recent strides at addressing this, though more needs to be done (Wainwright and Weaver 2020). But there are many more subtle ways we can, even unintentionally, fall into desiring and engaging with difference in ways that reinforce systems of domination rather than of co-existence (Peake 2011, 766). All of the efforts to world Geography described here could usefully keep that danger in mind. As Zusman (2021) puts it, seeing geographers writing in other languages as valid interlocutors helps to avoid translation being a strategy for what she calls epistemological extractivism.

Increasing and improving our use of both interpretation and translation, particularly into English, is a way not only of being better geographers and improving our conceptual analysis (Amilhat Szary et al. 2025), but also a way to deepen and widen our connections in Geography, so that we can more powerfully work for change together. Worlding is not about adding more diversity to the dinner party while leaving the house intact, argues Müller (2021) – it is about opening up to the world's alterity knowing the house might not be left standing. Indeed, the master's house needs some dismantling, and if modified and used with caution, the master's tools of English and Geography can do some of that work.

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