

Book review

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**O'Brien, Sharon and Federici, Federico M. (eds.) 2022. *Translating Crises*.
New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.**

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As suggested by its title, this volume aims to shed light on crisis translation and interpreting from several angles, taking into account different factors at play in a crisis setting. Envisioning crisis translation as a risk reduction tool (O'Brien and Federici, p. 2), the editors recognise the need for concrete linguistic planning and agile language solutions in the management of cascading crises. Unsurprisingly, the bulk of the volume is thus devoted to practical experiences of both the providers and the users of language services in a multitude of crisis situations encompassing the entire globe. Comprised of 25 chapters divided into three parts, the book is a comprehensive overview of current theoretical approaches and pragmatic considerations related to the role of translation in multilingual crisis communication.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic looms large in the body of scholarly work included in the volume, with no fewer than 14 chapters being case studies of organisational or individual experiences during the first year of this global healthcare crisis. The rest of the volume covers various sociopolitical crises, ranging from the migrant crisis in several European countries to the political unrest in Chile (Singer, chapter 11), and problematises issues related to different facets of crisis communication, such as the use of information technology in medical settings and the intelligibility of safety signage. The aforementioned case studies are a particular strength of the volume, brimming with specific details of day-to-day activities of language service providers and practical recommendations arisen out of actual field experience.

The first part of the book (chapters 1-7) deals with disparate themes underpinning the work of translators in crisis environments, such as the ethical dimensions of translators' and interpreters' work discussed by Montalt in chapter 1, with an emphasis on the notion of informed consent in healthcare and power relations between the standardized and vernacular varieties of the same language. The second chapter (Coombs and Tachkova) discusses issues related to the communication with marginalized or remote groups during major crises, pointing out the factors which play a role in the successful dissemination of crisis messages to such groups, such as the need to include local community leaders in the communication process or the simplification of core messages in order to transmit them with greater success. The third chapter authored by Matsushita and Inoue finds its point of focus in the spread of misinformation through the social media during the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic in Japan, suggesting the improvement of risk communication as a way of combating similar *infodemics*. The fourth chapter (Todorova and Poposki) is one of several chapters that give voice to refugee realities, rehumanising refugees through cultural artifacts such as graphic novels aimed at a young adult audience. The next chapter (Valero Garcés, chapter 5) examines the cooperation of local interpreters and translators with the Spanish military personnel in active conflict zones, taking note of the precarious conditions in which military interpreters live and work. Chapter six (Clayton da Silva and O'Brien) provides insight into a topic that has often been neglected in scholarly literature, exploring safety signage and its potential misunderstandings in disaster conditions. The final chapter in the first part of the volume (Schögler, chapter 7) deals with the negotiation of meaning in knowledge translation and its implications for crisis communication.

The second (chapters 8-18) and third (chapters 19-25) part of the book are devoted to practical, hands-on case studies. They cover a variety of topics, which may be grouped into several overarching themes: the importance of accessibility in crisis communication, the work of NGOs with vulnerable people during crises, experiences of children and teenagers, the role of professional and non-professional interpreters in disasters, and the use of technological advances. Many of those case studies are interview-based qualitative studies, giving voice to the people directly involved in disaster response and those most affected by such circumstances.

Chapter eight describes the incorporation of sign language interpreting into COVID-19 government press briefings in Belgium (Gebruers, Vermeire & Garitte), focusing on the nitty-gritty details of the process and the perceptions of this newly introduced practice among the Belgian TV viewers. In a similar vein, chapter 13 (Rodríguez Vázquez) explores accessibility issues in crises, this time researching the successes and failures of crisis communication with visually impaired and blind people in Spain and Ireland during the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter 24 (Maniar) brings into focus an under-researched area in Translation Studies and describes the spread of vital information to the UK's homeless population during the COVID-19 lockdown and the inner workings of grassroots organisations which provided care to the homeless in such conditions. In the words of the author, "the homeless are often talked *about* and not *to*" (Maniar, italics added), making them a vulnerable population whose multilingual communication needs often receive less attention in the academic literature.

Several contributions investigated the experiences of children in different crises. The focus of chapter nine (Antonini & Suprani) is the impact of lockdowns and distance learning on children in Italian schools, with a particular emphasis on migrant children since they were the most vulnerable to the shortcomings of the new ad-hoc distance learning systems and felt the heaviest burden of physical and linguistic isolation. The chapter examines the difficulties encountered by kindergarten, middle and high school teachers in adapting to distance learning and the effort made in making sure to include all pupils in online lessons, especially those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. It also draws attention to the instances of children being used as language brokers for their parents or younger siblings, who were less fluent in Italian. The practice of child language brokering, usually strongly discouraged due to its potentially adverse impacts on both the communicative process and the child's welfare (see for instance Gonzalez Bustamante, Matlow & Brown, p. 356), was likewise mentioned in several other chapters concerned with the lives of children in crisis settings. Thus, chapter 12 (Gonzalez Bustamante, Matlow & Brown) examined the lack of language services for migrants and unaccompanied children at the US-Mexico border, in the light of the recent changes to the US border policy. The authors point out the fact that interpreting services in the asylum-seeking process at the border are often haphazard, with migrant children being occasionally required to translate complex

legal terminology for their parents, which compounds their already stressful situation (Gonzalez Bustamante, Matlow & Brown, p. 356). As an example of successful cross-cultural communication involving migrant children, the uplifting chapter 18 (McGillicuddy & Thomas) describes the use of visual communication resources in the form of wordless picture books in south Italian migrant centres. The Silent Books project, whose roots can be traced back to post-war Germany, brings together volunteers from across Europe, and migrant children who come from an array of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Surpassing the issues related to limited literacy and the lack of language knowledge, wordless picture books serve as a communicative bridge and make a positive impact in the lives of refugee children.

Several chapters scrutinize the use of technological resources in crises and healthcare institutions. Chapter 15 (Gerlach, Bouillon, Troqe, Halimi & Spechbach) explores the use of machine translation in medical dialogue translation in the emergency room. It is a very interesting study, the first of its kind, dealing with technological advances in speech recognition software and its use in medical settings, with a focus on trustworthiness and understandability of translations produced by software. Chapter 16 (Vázquez & Torres-del-Rey) deals with the accessibility of governmental COVID-19 crisis information websites developed for disabled smartphone users in six European countries, reporting difficulties encountered by the users of those websites and concluding that greater efforts are needed to ensure that disabled users can access web content in an equitable manner (Vázquez & Torres-del-Rey, p. 478).

A large body of nine chapters (specifically, chapter 10, Jiménez-Andrés & Orero, chapter 14, Radicioni & Rosendo, chapter 17, Krishnan, Menon & Purwar, chapter 19, Schiller & O'Shea, chapter 20, Bagnulo, chapter 21, Del Gaudio & Lloyd Webber, chapter 22, Brandon & Maang, chapter 23, Tesseur, Chaipa, Friel, Loddo, Mencia & Sibindi and chapter 25, Guadagno, Matthews, Boonyaban, Cottone, Hanley, Georges, Miyake & Von Braun) deal with the institutional response to specific types of crises. Spanning the globe and encompassing a number of organisations, either governmental or non-governmental, these chapters analyse practical problems and often innovative solutions used to provide assistance to vulnerable persons. Many of them list constructive recommendations based on

lessons learned during those crises, which may serve as useful guidance for future crisis planning. An integral concept in the crisis management cycle, post-crisis debriefing and lessons learned during an emergency, serve the very purpose of mitigating the effects of similar future crises. Examples of good working practice and established communities of practice abound in the abovementioned chapters. Some of them showcase the importance of incorporating modern technologies into extant work modalities or adapting unconventional techniques to resolve specific problems. Such examples include, but are not limited to, the use of recorded videos in relevant languages spoken by affected populations and their dissemination through instant messaging applications in order to spread information about COVID-19 protective measures (Radicioni & Rosendo, p. 420, Krishnan, Menon & Purwar, p. 503), the use of audio rather than written communication in accordance with the population's needs (Brandon & Maang, p. 598), the spread of pandemic safety information via mobile units travelling to rural communities (Tesseur et. al., p. 620), the use of murals to reach both those who are literate and illiterate (Tesseur et. al., p. 622) or PA messaging on fire safety and cholera awareness disseminated through the loudspeaker systems in refugee camps (Guadagno et. al., p. 669).

Acknowledging the fact that people recruited to provide language services in crisis conditions are often hired ad-hoc, without prior experience or qualifications, a few authors raise the issues of professional status, financial remuneration, training and interpreter safety. While there is little consensus on the name used to denote the persons who serve as *public service interpreters*, *community interpreters*, *cultural mediators* or *intercultural mediators* (Schiller & O'Shea, p. 535), their scope of work usually includes a wider range of activities than those traditionally considered the remit of an interpreter. Their duties are often performed *pro bono*, with no financial remuneration. Since crisis translation or cultural mediation by default takes place in a crisis setting, even a warzone, their personal safety may be compromised. Their job profile is not subject to standardisation, thus frequently being neglected by professional associations of translators and interpreters. Volunteer or non-professional translators are not required to acquire professional qualifications in order to be able to work in the field. Bearing all this in mind, the questions raised regarding the status of crisis translators or cultural mediators are

extremely pertinent in the current post-pandemic and high-inflation professional climate.

In conclusion, this volume is a valuable contribution to an emerging field, highlighting numerous important issues within the crisis management paradigm. Even though crisis translation has so far been under-represented in theoretical considerations of disaster management, it may be surmised that it will play a much bigger role in the years to come. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the global and cascading nature of certain threats and the need to find successful ways to approach multilingual crises in a globalised world.