

Simon, Sherry. (Ed.).

Speaking memory: How translation shapes city life.

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Translation between languages is not an inherently beneficial and harmonious process. It rarely takes place between actors who are equally positioned in relation to power. As Sherry Simon suggests in the introduction to this volume, translation is often implicated in conflicts and tension, and at times it is driven by violent and suppressive forces. *Speaking Memory: How Translation Shapes City Life* explores the ambiguities and complexities of translation in urban contexts. Cities are approached as “fields of translational forces” (Simon, this volume, p. 4) that feature mediations, negotiations, and competitions between languages, and thus between people and memories of history. This intersection of language and the city is at the core of this volume edited by Simon, a professor in the French Department at Concordia University in Montreal. The “translational city” is a focal point, which Simon defines as the city that has heightened awareness of language because of its linguistic histories and constellations. However all cities are considered translational fields, and the appearance of cities as historically and culturally diverse as Atlanta, Sao Paulo, and Dublin reflects the range of cases that are explored in the volume. *Speaking Memory* leaves the definition of translation open, and contributors from comparative literary studies, media studies and geography each offer their own readings in relation to urban space and claims-making.

The book's thirteen chapters are organized in three parts. The first, Landscapes of Memory explores the translational histories of Eastern European cities through the literary works of local authors. Visiting Vilnius, Trieste, and Prague, the authors explore competition and cooperation between languages as they have been spoken and written, along with histories of naming and re-naming in fraught and often violent political and cultural processes. Part Two: Moving Fault Lines of the Global City shifts focus onto technologies of communication, including the mobile phone, the video chat, the radio station, the novel, and the refugee claim interview. The capacity of these technologies for translation of experiences and meaning, and their influence on the process, is brought into question, with the city as staging ground. The possibility that urban translation combines and mixes vernaculars is opened up in Part Three: Hybrid Urban Languages. Here the translation is not from one language to another necessarily, rather through means of urban “artivism,” the embodied practice of walking city laneways, and in urban writings that reflect the mixed idioms of daily life.

Each of the contributors engages creatively with notions of translation as they relate to the city, leaving behind any commonsense definition. The resulting transdisciplinary conversation about the natures and histories of translation offers interesting avenues for understanding how urban life is negotiated and mediated in and through language. The questions of power with which Simon frames the volume are particularly compelling, and are broadly significant to the study of cities whether or not they are considered translational cities per se. The fact that “translation and power go hand in hand” (Harel, this volume, p. 119) is taken up unevenly across the contributions, however, as is the specific *urbanness* of the translations under consideration. *Speaking Memory* is most captivating where the engagement is with both *translation* and *city* directly, in reference to a specific and detailed time and place.

This thought-provoking and varied transdisciplinary volume will be of particular interest to scholars who are broadly concerned with the intersecting politics of language and place. Readers who are interested in struggles over urban space will likewise find something for them here. As a doctoral student I found the volume quite accessible and thus graduate-level instructors may find chapters useful in their teaching.

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