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Reseña

## Klaus Mundt (2025). *Teaching the Translation of Cultural Items: Pedagogical Theory and Practice*

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Klaus Mundt's *Teaching the Translation of Cultural Items: Pedagogical Theory and Practice*. *New Frontiers in Translation Studies*, in the *New Frontiers in Translation Studies* series, addresses a central challenge of translator education: moving beyond sentence-level accuracy toward robust cultural mediation. The book makes two closely related claims: first, that the oft-cited discourse of "untranslatability" is not an ontological given but a historically situated construct; second, that the translation of culture-specific items can be taught as a threshold concept through a research-based pedagogy that aligns cognition, affect, and practice. The threshold concept is an area of knowledge that is hard to grasp but can be transformative for a learner when understood (Meyer and Land 2006a, b). The argument unfolds in three movements: a reconceptualization grounded in pragmatic traditions beyond Europe; a quasi-experimental classroom study that tests a carefully designed module; and a set of concrete teaching instruments ready for curricular integration.

Distinguished by its interdisciplinary design, Mundt's volume situates the history of translation theory within the sociopolitical contexts of colonial governance and combines established translation-competence models with educational psychology concepts. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development and Feuerstein's Mediated Learning Experience offer the scaffolding for support, while Meyer and Land's threshold concepts frame cultural translation as challenging yet transformative. Snyder's Hope Theory adds an emotional dimension, challenging deficit views of the translator's role. The result is a pedagogy that integrates cognition, emotion, and practice, tested in a carefully documented classroom intervention.

The opening chapters situate "untranslatability" as historical rather than ontological. Mundt traces a trajectory from hermeneutics to poststructuralist suspicion, showing how the emphasis on strict textual fidelity emerged in tandem with specific political projects. In West Africa, the griot or okyeame's role as mediator presupposed explanation, adaptation, and performance; in East Asia, translations of Buddhist sutras came with glossing, commentary, and newly coined terms to naturalize complex concepts. One striking example is a sixteenth-century Spanish legal requirement that

interpreters render speech "clearly and openly, without omission or addition," effectively codifying one-to-one literalism even where target-culture resources were lacking. As the book shows, these traditions treated cultural incongruence not as a boundary line but as an invitation to creative mediation. Rejecting a narrow notion of fidelity, the book foregrounds purpose, audience, and genre in determining when to risk creative shifts, draw on precedent, and clarify in unobtrusive ways.

The empirical core of the volume is an extracurricular postgraduate module, "Translating Culture," delivered to Chinese L1 MA students translating from English into Chinese. Over the eight-session module, the treatment group produced five group submissions in different genres, each submission was rated by an experienced rater using an analytic scale and accompanied by detailed annotations. Tutorials and classroom discussions were recorded, providing a window into learner reasoning and the influence of feedback.

Text selection was deliberately eclectic to test cultural decision-making in multiple registers. The literary component drew on Neil Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book*, including the emotionally saturated leave-taking scene and the culturally ambiguous figure, "the Lady on the Grey." Audiovisual translation was represented by an excerpt from the sitcom *How I Met Your Mother* that hinged on a punning cultural allusion. Institutional discourse came from an adapted segment of the 2004 UNDP Human Development Report, with its fixed expressions, named entities, and evaluative stance. A passage adapted from Umberto Eco's *The Book of Legendary Lands* introduced layered abstractions such as "kitsch" and "sublime." Across these materials, students were required to identify and prioritize culturally salient items, research them, weigh strategic options, justify decisions, and revise their translations.

The study provides several important insights into the potential and limitations of specialized cultural-translation training. The treatment group exhibited a statistically significant increase in self-reported ability to understand other cultures thoroughly, as shown by a Wilcoxon signed-rank test with a p-value of 0.046 and an effect size of  $r = 0.446$ . A detailed analysis of student work indicates a noticeable evolution in translation approaches, illus-

trating a gradual shift from an initial reliance on literal or default strategies to more sophisticated and creative solutions. This includes thoughtful cultural substitutions that reflect the development of intercultural competence.

The individual pre- and post-test scores, however, did not show statistically significant changes for either group. Mundt interprets this cautiously and in line with existing evidence: declarative knowledge and a willingness to take calculated risks can shift within a short cycle, while procedural fluency typically requires repeated practice, iterative feedback, and time. PACTE's findings that strategy acquisition precedes consistent, fluent execution are echoed here. The analysis is more productive than a binary "worked/didn't work": the module changed how learners approached difficult items, talked about options and risks, and justified decisions. The textual analyses demonstrate why this matters.

These gains were not accidental. They were prepared through classroom instruments that made learners locate, rank, and argue for what mattered most. Three pedagogical instruments stand out for their clarity and transferability. First, mandala coding is a visual method for prioritizing cultural items in a source text by concentric significance. Second, text and emotion mapping shifts attention from lines to arcs. In fiction, the exercise requires learners to identify where emotional intensity clusters and to plan how the target language (TL) can reproduce those clusters with culturally plausible means. Third, research ladders operationalize instrumental competence. Quick web searches often produce superficial or unreliable answers; the module scaffolds learners toward corpus consultation, library-based reading, and basic fieldwork with emic informants. These components are unified through the "Pedagogical Imperative" cycle (Lantolf & Poehner 2014), which creates a dynamic feedback loop between theory and practice. Together, they address key challenges identified in the study while incorporating contemporary technological considerations, demonstrating effectiveness in developing strategic competence and creative problem-solving skills among learners.

As a contribution to the field, the book consolidates and extends existing strands. It complements the social-constructivist turn represented by Kiraly by embedding measurable outcomes and positive psychology within a detailed classroom study. It goes beyond product-focused observations in Olk and Leppihalme by supplying teachable alternatives that make strategy selection routine. It resonates with PACTE's competence framework and longitudinal findings by distinguishing

gains in awareness from slower shifts in fluency, and by offering a pathway from one to the other. It aligns with the PICT curriculum by staging development from recognition and analysis to creative solution-finding. The study's value lies in the transparent reporting of methods and results, which invites replication and adaptation.

*Teaching the Translation of Cultural Items* is a lucid, persuasive, and practical contribution to translator education. By historicizing "untranslatability" and recovering pragmatic traditions, Mundt creates the conditions for a pedagogy that treats cultural translation as a strategic, research-intensive practice. By integrating threshold concepts, mediation, and hope into a coherent framework, the book makes confidence a designed outcome. Through well-documented classroom instruments tested with real texts and learners, it provides a repertoire educators can adopt and adapt. Most importantly, the book reframes the question from "Can this be translated?" to "How do we teach what matters when we must translate this?" and answers with evidence that honors both the cognitive and affective journeys of students. It belongs on the reading lists for translator educators, curriculum designers, and graduate students; the methods it introduces invite replication across language pairs and institutional contexts.

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