Understanding Visual Communication in Translation: The VISTAC Project

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Visuals hold a prominent position in the communication of science and technology (S&T), helping scientists and engineers think through ideas, understand the ideas of others, and present them publicly (e.g., Ferguson, 1977; Hutto, 2007; Rowley-Jolivet, 2000). But creating and understanding visuals hinges on learned cultural experiences (Kostelnick, 1995); visuals themselves are "constructed" objects shaped by selection processes, idealized visions of representation, truth and objectivity, ethical values, power and gender, technology, among other factors (Daston & Galison, 1992; Kienzler, 1997; Rosner, 2001; Pasveer, 2006). This questions the ability of S&T visuals to transcend language, disciplinary, professional, national and other differences. It also points to issues non-native English speakers face when publishing and presenting their research internationally. It further points to issues of translating in academic contexts. We address these issues by describing the VISTAC – Science and Technology Visuals in Translation study and the pilot study that led to it. The pilot study found that people visually portray S&T concepts differently for audiences from different cultures and nationalities (Durão et al., in press). But what happens to visuals in translated S&T documentation? Finding only a handful of publications on translating S&T visuals (e.g., Tercedor-Sánchez & Abadía-Molina, 2005), we developed the VISTAC in Translation study, which seeks to learn how translators, translation companies and publishers perceive the importance of translating visuals in S&T documentation, and their habitual procedures when preparing S&T documents for translation. In this presentation, we will describe our research methodology, including the data collection method, and how this methodology accounts for the diversity in languages of our study; describe the survey questions and dissemination strategies, and present some preliminary results; and discuss with the audience the implications of translating and not translating S&T visuals for non-native English researchers needing to understand and produce visuals for international contexts.

Project website: http://act.nmt.edu/humanizingtechnology/

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Biodata

Joana MOURA (MA, SUNY Stony Brook, 2011) holds a Masters Degree in Comparative Literature from the State University of New York at Stony Brook and is currently a PhD candidate at the same program. At the moment, she holds a doctoral grant from the Portuguese Research Council (FCT) to complete her PhD thesis entitled "Mistranslation and the Mis-uses of Literary Authorship: Peter Handke and translation". She is a member of the Centre for Comparative Studies at the University of Lisbon as part of the project "Moving Bodies: Itineraries and Narratives in Translation". She also collaborates in the "VISTAC – Science and Technology Visuals in Translation" project hosted at New Mexico Tech.

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