

## What we talk about when we talk about translation: Concepts of translation in identity work on Twitter

How and why do people talk about translators and translation on online social media? What concepts of translation underpin this discourse? And why does it matter? These are the questions I explore in this talk. I do so against the background of theoretical or conceptual work on construals of translation and the translator (e.g., Baker 2005; Lee 2022; Tymoczko 2003; Venuti 2018). These construals play out in a tension field between conceptions of translators as victims, unheralded artists, invisible ‘servants’ to the author and text; and a (hyper)corrective valorisation of translation and the “romantic conception of translatorship” (Lee 2022, p. 13) that has developed in contestation to this – the view of translators as heroes, celebrated creators, poet-geniuses, and powerful agents and gatekeepers of intercultural communication. I argue that these concepts of translators and translation are invoked on social media as part of the processes by means of which people (non-translators and translators alike) curate and perform their networked selves online; in other words, in identity work that takes place within the technological and algorithmic architecture of the online platforms that enable and constrain it.

Against this background, I present a case study on how translators and translation were conceptualised in Twitter debates during the media furore about Amanda Gorman’s European translators (see Kotze 2021). The case study is based on an analysis of a sample of approximately 2600 tweets about the Gorman debate, covering the period 1 March 2021 to 28 February 2022. I first focus on the sharing of links, analysing how such sharing functions not only to drive debates within the algorithmically defined space of online social media, but also reflect stance-taking and identity enactment on the part of Twitter users. Second, I focus on the concepts of translation and the translator that emerge from the sample of tweets. I show how the use of these concepts form part of the complex ‘toolkit’ of ways in which people construct and perform selves or identities online. In this process, concepts of the translator and translation often function as a lightning rod, a metonymic conductor for deeper ideological and cultural contestations in relation to which people construct networked selves online.

### References

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