

Call for Papers for special issue of Target (vol 38, 2026)

Guest Editors: Alexa Alfer and Cornelia Zwischenberger

Translation and Labour

To date, labour has, at best, played a marginal role in Translation Studies. While ‘work’ is perhaps more readily associated with translation, in professional discourses at least, translation as ‘labour’, i.e. as an activity structurally embedded in capitalist chains of surplus-value production (Zwischenberger and Alfer 2022), features far less prominently in current debates. What is more, neither labour nor work, as concepts in their own right, have so far been systematically applied in Translation Studies.

Foregrounding labour as a fundamental dimension of translation (and, for that matter, interpreting) should allow both researchers and practitioners to investigate translation and interpreting more closely from a socioeconomic perspective. This should, in turn, help critique the ubiquitous but increasingly stale ‘professionalisation’ discourses that, while aiming to raise the socio-economic status of translators and interpreters, too often create idealised narratives of translation and interpreting that foreground the processes of work while masking the labour involved in producing outputs whose value is, quietly or overtly, appropriated by those with a stake in the means of their production.

This special issue will be devoted to explorations of translational labour as prompted by translaboration’s (Alfer 2017) hallmark blending of ‘translation’ and ‘collaboration’. It posits that the concept of labour, as distinct from work (Arendt 1958/1998; Narotzky 2018), warrants more sustained engagement on the part of both Translation Studies and the translation profession. Indeed, the relationship between work and labour itself bears closer investigation from a Translation Studies perspective, not least because of the often deliberately obfuscating confluence of the two notions both in the professional sphere and in debates about the demarcation lines between professional and non-professional translation.

We invite contributors to probe the (im-)material and discursive conditions of translational labour, interrogate the spaces in which the labour of translation and interpreting is performed, and explore the various *types* of labour that apply to translation and interpreting. While digital labour (Fuchs 2020), playbor (Kücklich 2005), fan labour (De Kosnik 2012), affective labour (Hardt 1999; Koskinen 2020), emotional labour (Hochschild 1983), or (im)material labour (Negri & Hardt 2004) may present themselves as particularly topical sites for such exploration, many of these categories are not clear-cut, overlap, or reveal blurred boundaries. Affective labour, for example, reaches, once applied to translation and interpreting, far beyond Negri and Hardt's binary of care, kin work, and maternal labour on the one hand, and the immaterial labour involved in producing intellectual or linguistic products such as ideas, symbols, codes, texts, images, etc. on the other. While immaterial labour was originally conceived as arising from the communications of everyday life, it has increasingly become the domain of a new cognitariat and is, as such, deeply embedded in virtual, digital economies where, given the rapid advances of GenAI, translational labour and the data it generates increasingly compete with one another as sites of value generation. Affective labour, meanwhile, can serve as a useful category to interrogate translators' and interpreters' (self-) perception (Koskinen 2020) and entertains close ties with the emotional labour entailed in their professional personae's myriad acts of self-regulation (Hochschild 1983; Ayan 2020). These, in turn, can be read as internalised responses to the power asymmetries rooted in the positivist and neoliberal orders of discourse (Baumgarten 2017) that govern the translation industry, academia, and perhaps Translation Studies in particular. Finally, extending considerations of labour to current debates about the translation concept as such not only shines a spotlight on the surplus-value inherent in translation as the commodifiable expansion of a source text, but also uncovers the translation concept itself as the site of an unarticulated and unresolved tension between two competing and converging cultural

narratives that pivot on conceptions of translational value as, on the one hand, inextricably bound to and, on the other, posited firmly “outside of a profit-motivated relationship” (Fayard 2021, 216).

This special issue is based on the successful two-day [Translab 4: Translation and Labour](#) symposium jointly organised by the University of Westminster and the Centre for Translation Studies at the University of Vienna, and held in London in July 2023. It will explore labour in relation to translation and interpreting from a range of philosophical, sociological, socio-economic, and professional as well as academic perspectives. We welcome proposals for conceptual papers as well as case studies and empirical research contributions that address the labour and work of translation and interpreting in both theory and practice, and in, among others, the following contexts:

- translation and interpreting as labour and/or work
- flows of translational capital and value accumulation in professional and non-professional contexts
- translation and interpreting as digital labour
- translation and interpreting as (im)material labour
- translation and interpreting as fan labour
- translation and interpreting as affective labour and/or emotional labour
- narratives of translational labour/work and their effect(s) on the interests, status, and working conditions of translators and other stakeholders

To propose a paper, please send your abstract (700-800 words excluding references) to **both** editors of this Special Issue:

- Alexa Alfer (A.Alfer01@westminster.ac.uk)
- Cornelia Zwischenberger (cornelia.zwischenberger@univie.ac.at)

Deadline for proposals: **15 January 2024**

All authors will be notified of the outcome of their submissions by **15 March 2024**. All accepted contributors will receive further instructions and information with their notification of acceptance. All accepted contributions will be subject to double-blind peer-review.

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