

Theoretical Article

Collective Memory, History, and Translation: Epistemological and Ethical Issues in Cross-Cultural Transmission

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Abstract

This theoretical article examines how collective memory and history are transmitted through the complex process of translation, focusing on epistemological questions (related to knowledge and understanding) and ethical considerations. Drawing on a framework combining cultural memory and translation theory, the article analyzes specific challenges in the Albanian context, considering interactions between Albania, its diaspora, and multilingual environments. Through detailed examination of Albanian excerpts compared with translations into French, it emphasizes how translators' choices influence collective understanding of the historical past, the legitimization or marginalization of certain memories, and the ethical dimensions of disseminating narratives. The article underscores the translator's responsibility in constructing and conveying cultural memories and concludes with concrete recommendations for practitioners and researchers

to improve translation quality and integrity while strengthening intercultural dialogue about memory and shared history.

Keywords: *translation, language, culture, collective memory, history*

Introduction

Collective memory, as a social and cultural construct, is a complex, dynamic process that is built, transmitted, and transformed over time. When based on texts and narratives, these convey not absolute truth but vectors of multiple interpretations. This complexity amplifies when narratives cross linguistic and cultural boundaries. The central question becomes: how is collective memory

Theoretical Article

constructed, transmitted, and reinterpreted within intercultural exchanges?

The chosen framework is the Albanian context and its diaspora – a particularly important field for studying the circulation of memories. In post conflict or transitional societies like Albania, translation emerges as a key tool that can both activate and legitimize certain historical interpretations or, conversely, neutralize or marginalize others. This highlights the importance of considering translation not only as a linguistic act. This study aims to clarify epistemological issues related to intercultural memory transmission – i.e., how knowledge is produced, validated, or contested during translation – and to address ethical issues concerning who decides which memorial elements are transmitted and under what conditions.

Theoretical Framework: Collective Memory, History, and Translation

Collective memory (Halbwachs, 2025) refers to memories shared by a social group beyond the sum of individual memories. It shapes shared identity and relies on social practices, rituals, and “places of memory” (Nora, 1984–1992). History is not a simple factual summary but is constructed and narrated according to choices that guide perception of the past. Historical narratives serve to create collective identity, including or excluding certain events or interpretations. (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983).

Translation is essential in transmitting memories across cultures. Descriptive Translation Studies (Toury, 1995) show how translation is socially and historically situated. Ethical approaches (Venuti, 1995) emphasize the translator’s responsibility to respect cultural contexts and sensitivities related to memory, maintaining critical transparency.

Epistemological and ethical questions include: who has access to which memories? Which versions of the past are legitimized? How do lexical choices shape reception? And how can the translator avoid reproducing cultural power biases?

Methodology and Analytical Framework

The approach is based on in depth critical analysis of different text types: collective memories, historical manifestos, personal narratives, and contemporary media examples. The corpus includes historical texts of Albanian origin, transcribed oral testimonies, newspaper articles, and translated academic documents, with special attention to the Albanian diaspora in Europe and North America.

Analytical criteria focus on transparency of translation choices, traceability of strategies (clarification of culturally significant terms, smoothing, preservation of regionalisms). Each fragment is contextualized within its historical, social, and linguistic environment to highlight ethical tensions between faithful reproduction and cultural adaptation.

The Albanian Context: Collective Memory, Language, and Transmission

The Albanian language plays a central role in national identity. (Assmann, 2011).

It has two main dialects (Tosk and Gheg). Standardization in the 20th century strengthened unity, adopting Tosk as the standard.

Diasporas help preserve and spread the language. Transmission of collective memory in Albania rests on public institutions (museums, archives), media, literature, the education system, and community practices (especially in diaspora) (Assmann, 2011; Nora, 1984–1992).

Challenges include language policy (managing regional diversity and minority languages), controversial historical representations in textbooks, and the translation of historical texts into multiple languages (Albanian, Greek, Serbian, Turkish, English, etc.).

Epistemological and Ethical Issues in Intercultural Transmission

Theoretical Article

Epistemology of translation: Translation cannot be reduced to simple linguistic transfer. (Toury, 1995; Venuti, 1995).

Translated historical knowledge is imbued with interpretative frameworks and ideologies. The translator is an active interpreter, incorporating cultural, political, and linguistic presuppositions. In the Albanian context, this becomes a co construction of collective memory.

Ethics of memory: Who decides which memories are transmitted? It is ethical to respect source communities' rights, including consent for dissemination, and to ensure marginalized voices are faithfully reproduced.

Power and representations: Translations are inseparable from power relations. (Tymoczko, 2012). Translation can perpetuate official narratives or offer critical revision, empowering minority or alternative narratives from the diaspora or internal ethnic groups.

Translation as intercultural mediation: Explanatory elements (notes, glossaries, historical contextualizations) and involvement of local voices (joint editorial committees, community consultations) ensure ethical, transparent transmission.

Specific challenges for Albania: Dialectal diversity complicates spelling choices; tension between centralized national memory and diasporic memories; role of academic institutions as authority versus horizontal dynamics in diaspora.

Practical Implications for Researchers and Professionals

Ethical translation methodology requires: (a) actively including community consultants; (b) systematically documenting translation choices; (c) providing explanatory notes.

Transparent editorial framework: bilingual glossaries, accurate footnotes, a section on "translator's limits and choices." Training and awareness: deep intercultural competence, understanding of ethical issues, regular memory auditing practices.

Transdisciplinarity: involve historians, linguists, anthropologists, community representatives.

Resources: develop structured bilingual corpora and style guides for translating historical memories.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Collective memory transmitted through translation is much more than a linguistic passage – it becomes an ethico epistemological field. The Albanian case reveals challenges related to dialectal diversity, diaspora trajectory, and multiplicity of voices. Future directions include promoting reflective, co constructed translation practices; strengthening collaborations between academic institutions, translators, and communities; creating accessible learning resources; and developing clear translation protocols with contextual notes, bilingual glossaries, and sections dedicated to "memory change."

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