Course description

The founding mission of NYU as a global university is purposeful engagement in the world. In this multilingual world, our goal can only be achieved with the help of translators and interpreters. Reflecting on the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics’ prediction that translation jobs will increase by 29% between 2014 and 2024, this course considers translation as a scholarly, professional and lay activity. As we reflect on the wealth of languages and cultures in the NYU students’ community and the way in which the curriculum is indebted to the work of translation, students will critically discuss what is gained, lost or, perhaps, simply transformed in translation.

This introductory discussion of translation will address questions such as why source texts are often privileged over translations. What is a good or faithful translation and why are translations mistrusted? How does a written translation differ from spoken interpreting? What does the study of translation teach us about power relations and border crossings, or the role of gender, race or class in translational transactions? What are the ethics of translating and interpreting? What do translators say about their art and practice?

For students considering a language major, this course will support language learning and advanced literary and cultural studies. For those pursuing any other major, this course will develop a valuable awareness of the impact of translation across the disciplines, sensitizing students to a global culture that depends, for its life, on translation.

Instructor biography

Emmanuelle Ertel is an Associate Professor of contemporary French literature and translation at New York University. She is also a professional translator. Among her translations of American novels into French are Louis Begley’s The Man Who Was Late and As Max Saw It, Rick Moody’s The Black Veil, and Tom Perrotta’s Little Children and The Leftovers. Most recently, she translated Hanya Yanagihara’s A Little Life, which was shortlisted for the 2015 National Book Award, Man Booker Prize, and Pulitzer.

Learning objectives

- Identify the translations that surround us, often without our even noticing; name the assumptions we bring to these translations; then interrogate the origin and
implications of these assumptions.

- Recognize the ways that reading a translation differs from an “original” and demonstrate how a given translation produces specific effects through the interplay of translation strategies and context.

- Compare multiple translations, including those that are machine generated, to identify the strategies used and analyze the translation effects they produce.

- Summarize core ideas in translation studies scholarship and then contribute to productive discussion as together we discover the relatively new and evolving discipline of translation theory.

- Experiment with translating a text by collaborating with a native speaker peer mentor then articulate the decisions you made and your justifications by writing a translator’s preface.

- Acknowledge, relish and champion the translational culture of NYU and New York City through mastery in languages, valorizing multilingualism, and the development of translation skills.

- Encourage students to pursue a foreign language to the advanced level and to consider study abroad as integral to their liberal arts education.

Class meets once a week and attendance is mandatory. This class is designed to be a cooperative effort – please do the assigned reading, viewing, and listening before coming to class each week. 10% of your final grade for the class is based on your thoughtful, text-based contributions to class discussion and active participation. **The use of laptops, phones or tablets is only allowed for note-taking. I expect all students to be actively engaged in our collective work, and these devices can be extremely distracting both to those using them and to others.**

Work is assigned on a regular basis and is outlined in the syllabus distributed at the start of the semester. All class submissions must be typed, double-spaced and meet the page/word count assigned for each project.
Week 1

Topic: Introduction to the course, instructor and peers. Discuss objectives.

Language & Translation Autobiography (1/2 pages – 300-600 words)

Write a reflection that addresses the questions below, and any others that you find relevant to this topic. Divide your autobiography into two parts: the first on language, the second on translation:

Some language topics:
What languages do you speak and/or read?
From what age?
Where did you learn these languages?
In which contexts and with whom do you use these languages?
How do you feel about the different languages as skills you have or are developing?
How do you feel about the languages as modes of identity and expression?

Some translation topics:
Do you translate or interpret? If so, in which contexts and for who?
Have you ever translated in order to develop your language skills?
What notable translations have you encountered? Name at least one.

We will share these autobiographies in class. After reading your partner’s autobiography, you will interview them to learn more about their background in language and translation, as well as to share the resources we each bring to this class.

Please note: it is not a requirement for this class that you speak any language other than English. Speakers from all language backgrounds are welcomed here to learn about and discuss translation, which is a language practice that affects all of us, whatever language(s) we may speak.

Week 2


Reading:


Week 3

Topic: Multiple translations.

Reading:


Week 4

Topic: Re-translating the classics.

Reading:


Week 5


Visit of and discussion with publishers.
Week 6

Topic: Meaning, sound, dialects and the question of foreignization.

Reading:


Week 7

Topic: Interpretation and Human Rights.

Reading:


Week 8

Topic: Simultaneous Translation, from the Nuremberg Trials to Today’s United Nations.

Reading:


2. Claudio Bendazzoli, “Benefits and Drawbacks of English as a Lingua Franca and as a Working Language: The Case of Conferences Mediated by Simultaneous Interpreters”, in
Week 9

Visit to the United Nations.

Week 10

Topic: Machine Translation.

Reading:


Week 11

Topic: Translation and gender.

Reading:


Week 12

Topic: Audiovisual Translation.

Reading:


Week 13

Presentations of Translation Projects.

Week 14

Presentations of Research Papers.