Book review

The Routledge Handbook of Translating and Interpreting Conflict.

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Introduction

In recent decades, armed conflicts, political violence and forced displacement have intensified across many regions of the world, posing persistent challenges to conflict management, peacebuilding and post-conflict reconciliation. In such contexts, communication is rarely a neutral or transparent process. Negotiation, mediation and conflict resolution are fundamentally shaped by language, particularly in multilingual settings where meanings, intentions and power relations are continuously negotiated across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Yet despite the centrality of communication to peace processes, the role of translation and interpreting has often remained marginal in mainstream conflict resolution research.

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The Routledge Handbook of Translating and Interpreting Conflict directly addresses this gap by foregrounding translators and interpreters as key mediators in conflict and post-conflict settings. Rather than conceptualising language professionals as passive conduits, the volume positions them as situated actors operating within asymmetrical power structures, institutional constraints and emotionally charged environments. Through a wide range of historical and contemporary case studies, the *Handbook* demonstrates how language mediation shapes military operations, humanitarian interventions, judicial processes, asylum procedures and peace negotiations.

Although firmly grounded in translation and interpreting studies, the volume speaks to a much broader interdisciplinary audience. Its focus on ethics, positionality, emotion and institutional practice offers valuable insights for scholars and practitioners concerned with conflict management and resolution, particularly in multilingual and postcolonial contexts. By bridging theoretical reflection with empirical case studies, the *Handbook* contributes to ongoing debates on how conflicts are managed, mitigated and transformed through communicative practices. As such, it constitutes a timely and relevant resource for research on conflict resolution and peacebuilding, including in African and Global South contexts characterised by linguistic diversity and complex conflict dynamics.

The book

The Routledge Handbook of Translating and Interpreting Conflict comprises 31 chapters organised into four thematic parts, followed by an afterword. The volume is structured to guide readers from historical perspectives on language mediation in conflict to recurring analytical concerns, emerging areas of inquiry and research methodologies. This progression reflects a clear conceptual movement from contextual foundations to contemporary challenges and applied research, aligning well with interests in conflict management and resolution.

Part I, "Historical overview" (Chapters 1–10), examines the long-standing involvement of translators and interpreters in armed conflict, spanning from the medieval period to contemporary international interventions. The chapters cover a wide range of contexts, including the medieval Iberian Peninsula, imperial and colonial wars in the Americas and East Asia, the two World Wars, the Korean and Vietnam Wars, international criminal justice and counterterrorism efforts in East

Africa. Rather than presenting history as background alone, this section illustrates how language mediation has consistently shaped warfare, interrogation, propaganda, judicial accountability and post-conflict narratives. For scholars of conflict resolution, these historical insights highlight enduring institutional patterns and power asymmetries that continue to influence contemporary peace operations and transitional justice mechanisms.

Part II, "Recurring topics" (Chapters 11–18), focuses on persistent challenges faced by translators and interpreters working in conflict and crisis situations. Several chapters address institutional and professional conditions, such as contracting practices, role expectations and positionality management. Ethical dilemmas, neutrality and agency are examined through concrete conflict cases, while other contributions explore the emotional and psychological dimensions of mediation, including interpreters' exposure to violence, moral stress and trauma. Chapters on refugee and asylum procedures, interpreter protection initiatives and specialised training further emphasise the centrality of language mediation in humanitarian response and conflict management. This section is particularly relevant to conflict resolution research, as it foregrounds the human and ethical dimensions of mediation in high-stakes negotiations and protection-oriented processes.

Part III, "Emerging topics" (Chapters 19–25), turns to evolving forms of conflict and mediation. The chapters address changes in language use in warfare, intercultural communication in terrorist conflicts and psychological processes affecting interpreters in the field. Issues of gender, ideology and power are explored through both historical and contemporary case studies, while other contributions focus on the translation of peace proposals, technological developments in conflict-related communication and the mediation of environmental conflicts in the Global South. By extending analysis beyond conventional military settings, this section demonstrates how contemporary conflict resolution increasingly involves complex ideological, technological and environmental dimensions mediated through language.

Part IV, "Approaches to research" (Chapters 26–31), presents a range of interdisciplinary and qualitative methodologies for studying translation and interpreting in conflict and post-conflict contexts. The chapters introduce analytical frameworks that combine insights from linguistics, conflict studies, history and sociology, alongside approaches such as discourse analysis,

ethnography, biographical research, life writing and documentary analysis. Collectively, these methodological contributions support the journal's emphasis on bridging theory and practice, offering tools for examining how mediation operates within peace processes, institutional settings and post-conflict reconstruction.

Taken together, the *Handbook's* coherent structure and thematic breadth provide a comprehensive account of translation and interpreting as integral components of conflict and conflict resolution. By situating language mediation within broader political, institutional and ethical frameworks, the volume demonstrates its relevance not only to translation studies but also to interdisciplinary research on conflict management and peacebuilding.

Comments

One of the principal strengths of *The Routledge Handbook of Translating and Interpreting Conflict* lies in its consistent demonstration that translation and interpreting are not peripheral to conflict dynamics but constitute central mechanisms through which conflict is managed, negotiated and, at times, transformed. By foregrounding translators and interpreters as active mediators embedded in institutional, political and ethical structures, the volume offers a compelling corrective to approaches that treat communication as a neutral background to peace processes. For scholars and practitioners concerned with conflict resolution, this perspective highlights how mediation through language shapes trust, alignment and the possibilities for dialogue in multilingual conflict settings.

The volume's broad historical and geopolitical scope further enhances its contribution. By juxtaposing case studies from different periods and regions, the *Handbook* reveals both continuities and transformations in the role of language mediation across diverse conflict environments. This diachronic perspective is particularly valuable for conflict resolution research, as it situates contemporary peacebuilding practices within longer trajectories of warfare, governance and institutional control. Such historical grounding enables a more nuanced understanding of how present-day mediation practices inherit, reproduce or challenge earlier patterns of power and exclusion.

Another notable contribution is the *Handbook*'s emphasis on the lived experiences of translators and interpreters working in conflict and post-conflict contexts. Chapters addressing ethical dilemmas, emotional labour, psychological strain and

personal risk provide important insights into the human dimensions of mediation that are often overlooked in policy-oriented discussions of peace operations. These perspectives resonate strongly with the journal's interest in bridging theory and practice, as they illuminate how conflict resolution is shaped not only by institutional design but also by the capacities, vulnerabilities and agency of individual mediators.

At the same time, the volume also points to areas where further research would be particularly beneficial for the field of conflict resolution. While many chapters address conflict management and peace processes through rich contextual analysis, the degree of explicit engagement with locally grounded peacebuilding practices varies across contributions. Future research could build on the *Handbook*'s conceptual frameworks by incorporating more sustained analyses of community-based mediation and locally embedded conflict resolution initiatives, particularly in African and other Global South contexts.

In addition, although the *Handbook* engages with technological change and emerging conflict environments, rapidly evolving forms of digitally mediated communication and remote language mediation receive relatively limited attention. Given the increasing reliance on digital platforms in contemporary peace negotiations, humanitarian coordination and post-conflict governance, this remains an important area for future interdisciplinary inquiry.

These observations, however, should be understood not as shortcomings but as reflections of the breadth and complexity of the field the *Handbook* seeks to map. As a comprehensive reference work, the volume succeeds in opening translation and interpreting to sustained engagement within conflict resolution research. Overall, *The Routledge Handbook of Translating and Interpreting Conflict* represents a significant and timely contribution to multidisciplinary scholarship. It can be confidently recommended to researchers, practitioners and advanced students interested in conflict management, peacebuilding and the communicative processes that underpin efforts to resolve violent conflict in multilingual settings.

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