

M.^a Carmen África Vidal Claramonte, *Translating Indigenous Knowledges: Toward a Sensuous Translation*, Abingdon and New York, Routledge, 2025, 212 pages.

Reseña de acceso abierto distribuida bajo una [Licencia Creative Commons Atribución 4.0 Internacional \(CC-BY 4.0\)](#). / Open access review under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC-BY 4.0\)](#).

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24197/xta72r13>

Following her previous works—*Translation and Contemporary Art* (2022), *Translation and Objects* (2024), and *Hypertranslation* (2024, co-authored with Tong King Lee), professor M.^a Carmen África Vidal Claramonte continues her critical intervention into translation studies by extending its boundaries to materiality and experientiality. In *Translating Indigenous Knowledges: Toward a Sensuous Translation*, she introduces a vital new dimension: inter-epistemic translation, particularly in the context of indigenous cultures and in doing so, engages with the recent paradigmatic shift in translation studies spearheaded by the EPISTRAN Project.¹ Responding to the epistemological monoculture perpetuated by Western science and its complicity with global capitalism, Karen Bennett (2024) has called for an “ecology of knowledges”—a recognition that no single epistemic system suffices to explain the complexities of our world. As Bennett (2025, p. x) urges in the preface she wrote for this book, translating indigenous cosmologies is not only a political and ethical act but also a means of developing new grammars for perceiving the world—grammars that refuse to objectivize nature and instead grant it agency and voice. Building upon Bennett’s appeal, Vidal Claramonte proposes a model of “sensuous translation”—an approach grounded not in words alone but in the unification of intellect, affect, the body, and sensory experience. Knowledge, in this view, is not merely verbal or textual but deeply enmeshed in semiotic and somatic forms, and manifests in the broadest cultural practices and artifacts. Importantly, Vidal Claramonte anchors these theoretical innovations in the artistic expressions of indigenous women, whose creative practices offer powerful alternatives to dominant paradigms.

¹ <https://www.epistran.org>

The book is divided into four parts. The first part of the book examines the tension between Western and non-Western epistemologies. Western anthropocentrism, grounded in logocentrism, privileges language as the sole bearer of knowledge, often dismissing nature and non-human entities as “unscientific” and thus “inferior” in knowledge construction. However, Vidal Claramonte underscores that both human and non-human entities participate in a cosmic-mythological reality. To break through the prevailing homogenizing cultural hegemony, it is critical to recognize knowledge as constructed in non-hierarchical and diversified ways. Vidal draws upon Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of “conocimiento” to propose a mode of knowing that is rooted in connections with nature, body, and praxis (Vidal Claramonte, 2025, p. 28). This argument resonates with many ancient East-Asian philosophies like Daoism and Zen Buddhism, which are embedded in harmony with nature, knowing-through-doing, and non-binary transformations. Through examples like Don Juan and Davi Kopenawa, Vidal Claramonte illustrates indigenous translational practices where feeling is the most complete form of knowing, reliant on the indivisible connection between humans, animals, objects, and the natural world, thereby echoing the “sensory turn” in anthropology championed by scholars like David Howes and Constance Classen (Howes, 2022, 2023, 2024; Howes and Classen, 2014). The “sensorial revolution” conceives of the understanding of senses as culturally mediated and distributed, offering a critical lens for translation studies to more comprehensively grasp the locus and process of meaning-making and communicative exchanges. Because it is resolutely interdisciplinary, *Translating Indigenous Knowledges* is also featured in the “Books of Note” section on Howes’s website (<https://www.sensorystudies.org/books-of-note/>). Readers interested in sensory studies may find further relevant resources there.

Chapter 2 reviews anthropological theories of sensuous knowledge. Anne Taylor’s investigation of shamanic translation in the Upper Amazon is used to illustrate how shamans move between different worlds through bodily communications rather than words alone. Similarly, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s concept of “translation as equivocation” reframes translation as a process that emphasizes difference rather than representational equivalence, advocating a pluriverse as opposed to a world that is shared and universal. These perspectives reinforce Boaventura de Sousa Santos’s idea of “intercultural translation” as a way of avoiding epistemicide. Translation here foregrounds the reciprocal incompleteness of cultures and therefore the necessity of engaging in dialogue with one another. Through Jerome

Rothenberg's idea of "total translation" and his performative ethnopoetry, the author highlights the multimodal nature of language and its embodied emotional depth. Such approaches dismantle the hierarchy between oral and written, sensory and intellectual, thereby validating alternative literary cultures foregrounded in the indigenous context.

Chapter 3 applies the previously foregrounded "tangible translatio" to an original case study of the Chilean poet and artist Cecilia Vicuña, whose work exemplifies perspectivist and total translation in search of *conocimiento*. Influenced by Rothenberg, Vicuña regards words as living beings, intricately linked with nature, emotion, and embodiment (Vidal Claramonte, 2025, p. 117). Her poetry and visual works disrupt logocentric conventions and foreground the materiality of language. A compelling example is her poem *Instan*, where multilingual and multimodal wordplay and the spatial textual organization guide the reader not only to read but also to feel, touch, and observe how the words transform and unfold (p. 124). The second section of the poem, *el poema cognado*/the poem, visually mimics a quipu string, where each stanza acts as a knot. This evokes the indigenous Incan method of recording knowledge through quipu, reviving the textile origins of "text" where meaning is woven and felt, not written. This textile modality is revisited in Vicuña's quipu installations, which recover ancestral Andean methods of knowledge transmission. For Vidal Claramonte, these works also exemplify a feminist, anti-colonial discourse inscribed not only in content but also in material form, where knowledge is transmitted through somatic, tactile engagement.

The final chapter synthesizes the preceding discussions to elaborate the concept of "sensuous translation" as a slow, opaque, situated, somatic, and rhizomatic process (Vidal Claramonte, 2025, p. 4). Sensuous translation is a mode of becoming, of transformation, of collaborative and embodied knowing (Vidal Claramonte, 2025, p. 168). This conception reframes knowledge as lived experience rather than an abstract construct. Quoting Donna Haraway's "situated knowledge", Vidal Claramonte contends that indigenous epistemologies generate relational and locatable knowledges, rather than universal, totalizing truths. This approach resonates with Édouard Glissant's "right to opacity", where knowledge is produced through diverse systems, challenging the smoothness assumed by conventional translation and rendering the untranslatable or unknowable as an ethical invitation and necessity to engage with otherness. In a world obsessed with speed, efficiency, and clarity, Vidal Claramonte advocates for slow translation embedded in patience, humility, and vulnerability. True intercultural

engagement, she argues, requires actual immersion in cultural otherness and recognizing opacity not as an obstacle, but as a condition of respect. This repositioning challenges readers to rethink the the pace, purpose, and ethics of translation.

Translating Indigenous Knowledges is an ambitious and timely contribution to translation studies that combines current developments in translation (Blumczynski, 2023; Robinson, 2017), experientiality (Campbell and Vidal, 2019, 2024; Vidal and Campbell, 2025), and inter-epistemology (Bennett, 2024; Cronin, 2017) in translation studies with anthropology and art criticism. It situates translation as a lived, sensuous, and ethical practice, and its emphasis on non-linguicentric, non-binary, and multi-sensory translation expands the field's methodological horizon. The detailed case study of Cecilia Vicuña adds empirical richness and artistic specificity to the theoretical framework, effectively demonstrating the praxis of sensuous translation. Vidal Claramonte's work on sensuous translation exemplifies a model that engages with indigenous cultures and their ways of knowing which, as commended by Bennett (2025, p. ix), resist falsification, exoticization, or subsumption into dominant epistemological frameworks. The density of long quotations, however, while often providing detailed and accurate information, at times crowds out the author's own analytical voice and could benefit from tighter incorporation into the narrative flow. For instance, those concerning the commentary on Vicuña's work could be more concisely integrated into the main text.

Overall, the book's clarity of structure, intellectual ambition, and deep engagement with non-Western epistemologies make it a significant scholarly contribution. Vidal Claramonte continues to challenge the boundaries of translation as a field, and in doing so, affirms its power to engage with urgent questions of cultural survival, epistemic justice, and inter-human and inter-being solidarity. As a researcher from a non-Western background, I found the book not only intellectually generative but also personally transformative. It enables me to see surprising resonances between geographically distant indigenous epistemologies and my own cultural heritage, which prompts me to reflect on the locality of my cultural heritage within the global circulation of knowledge, again underscoring the need for and relevance of inter-epistemic translation in the current context. Future research could extend this sensuous, inter-epistemic framework to explore indigenous cultural practices from other regions to enrich the understanding of cultural phenomena guided by non-binary and perception-oriented principles. Ultimately, Vidal Claramonte's vision of inter-epistemic, sensuous translation is not merely a

theoretical model, but a practice of becoming. Her work calls on us to translate with our whole body, to see, listen, and feel our way through opacity, and to build connections not through domination but through reciprocity and respect.

REFERENCES

- Bennett, Karen (2024). Epistemic translation: towards an ecology of knowledges. *Perspectives*, 32 (1), January, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676x.2023.2294123>.
- Bennett, Karen (2025). Preface. In M.^a Carmen África Vidal Claramonte (Ed.), *Translating Indigenous Knowledges: Toward a Sensuous Translation* (pp. VIII.X). Routledge.
- Blumczynski, Piotr (2023). *Experiencing Translationality: Material and Metaphorical Journeys*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003382201>
- Campbell, Madeleine and Vidal, Ricarda (Eds.) (2019). *Translating across Sensory and Linguistic Borders: Intersemiotic Journeys between Media*. Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-97244-2>
- Campbell, Madeleine and Vidal, Ricarda (Eds.) (2024). *The Experience of Translation: Materiality and Play in Experiential Translation*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003462538>
- Cronin, Michael (2017). *Eco-Translation: Translation and Ecology in the Age of the Anthropocene*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315689357>
- Howes, David (2022). *The Sensory Studies Manifesto: Tracking the Sensorial Revolution in the Arts and Human Sciences*. University of Toronto Press. <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781487528638>
- Howes, David (2023). *Sensorial Investigations: A History of the Senses in Anthropology, Psychology, and Law*. Perspectives on Sensory History.

The Pennsylvania State University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780271096261> ; <https://doi.org/10.5325/jj.5736154>

Howes, David (2024). *Sensorium: Contextualizing the Senses and Cognition in History and across Cultures*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009329668>

Howes, David and Classen, Constance (2014). *Ways of Sensing: Understanding the Senses in Society*. Routledge.

Robinson, Douglas (2017). *Translationality: Essays in the Translational-Medical Humanities*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315191034>

Vidal Claramonte, M.^a Carmen África (2025). *Translating Indigenous Knowledges: Toward a Sensuous Translation*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003528630>

Vidal, Ricarda and Campbell, Madeleine (Eds.) (2025). *The Translation of Experience: Cultural Artefacts in Experiential Translation*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003462569>

RUOYU DUAN
Universidad de Salamanca
ruoyu@usal.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2604-3490>