

Translator celebrity: Identifying what factors create fame for translators?

The discipline of translation studies has focused on translators' lack of visibility following Venuti (1995), and argued that this must be challenged if their status is to be improved. Yet translators worldwide are not universally or uniformly invisible; indeed, some are known as celebrities. For example, in Japan, world-renowned novelist Haruki Murakami is a famous translator who can be called celebrity. This paper identifies celebrity translators in multiple contexts, and the range of factors that contribute to their fame, particularly in certain cultures.

This paper posits the hypothesis that translator celebrity is created via contexts in which translation is valued, for its role in importing ideas from the West, particularly during cultural and industrial development. It further argues that translators' own roles in this process determine the nature of their fame.

Discussions of translators' status in translation studies typically centre on their notional invisibility in European and North American contexts, such as under-recognition of their names and work by readers and publishers alike. However, translators in China, India and Israel, where translation has played important roles in cultural development, attain prominence as cultural contributors and educators. Similarly, translators in Japan attain high prominence for their writing skills.

This paper focuses on these previously under-considered contexts to argue that the value ascribed to translation, and translators' roles, determine the factors that create their ultimate celebrity. It offers a new perspective on celebrity through its focus on translation, an increasingly important world industry.

Biography

Motoko Akashi is in her second year of doctoral research at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK. Her research, which is partially funded by the Sasakawa Great Britain Foundation, focuses on the phenomenon of celebrity translators, and asks how their celebrity status affects their translation and translation practices.