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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## Translation and Rights: A Practical Grid for Protection Settings

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**ABSTRACT**

This article proposes a three-part grid – reliability, verifiability, equity- as an interdisciplinarity tool for reading translation in protection settings. The grid is borrowed from two well-established traditions: global governance and international protection law. For decades, governance scholars have judged institutions by three questions: Are they effective, accountable, and legitimate? (Archibugi and Held, 1995; Buchanan and Keohane, 2006). International protection law asks much the same thing in its own terms: It requires accurate information, procedural safeguards, and fair treatment for vulnerable people (Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951; UNHCR, 2019). The article brings these traditions together and adapts them to translation studies, so that very different kinds of research can be placed within an emerging protective turn. The grid is not a theory. It is a reading tool: it makes studies comparable, shows where scholars have focused their attention, and points to the gaps that remain. Three illustrative readings, all drawn from the existing literature, show the grid at work, and a set of proposed instruments is added in the appendices for future testing. The article argues throughout that translation in protection settings cannot be studied well without law, political science, and sociolinguistics. Here, interdisciplinarity is structural.

**KEYWORDS**

Translation studies, protective turn, global governance, international protection regimes, reliability, verifiability, equity, interdisciplinarity

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**1-Introduction**

Translation studies is often described through its ‘turns’ – names given once a body of work has formed around a new question. The cultural turn moved attention from word-for-word equivalence to the cultural settings of translation ( Bassnett and Lefevere, 1990). The sociological turn used Bourdieu and systems theory to show how translators sit inside social fields ( Wolf and Fukari, 2007). The narrative turn treated translation as part of how people tell and negotiate shared stories ( Baker, 2006). The technological turn showed how digital tools reshaped both practice and research ( Cronin, 2013). Together, these shifts form a wider translational turn in the humanities ( Bachmann-Medick, 2016). Each one widens what translation studies can look at, without erasing what came before.

This article argues that another shift is now emerging, which it calls the protective turn. The work is varied: sociological studies of asylum interpreting ( Inghilleri, 2003, 2005), ethnographies of asylum interviews ( Maryns, 2006), research on crisis and humanitarian translation ( Federici and O’Brien, 2020), legal projects on institutional translation ( Prieto Ramos, 2018), studies of translation and social justice ( Tesseur, 2023), work on translation and migration ( Maher et al., 2024), and research on interpreting for survivors of gender-based violence ( Tipton, 2017). Yet, across all of it, scholars increasingly see translation not as a neutral relay but as central to whether people actually receive protection. When translation fails, the protection system can fail with it.

To read this body of work together, we need a simple, shared tool. This article proposes a three-part grid: reliability, verifiability, and equity. The grid is not invented from nothing. It adapts well-known criteria from global governance (effectiveness,

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accountability, legitimacy) and from international protection law (accuracy, procedural safeguards, fair treatment). Its aim is deliberately modest: it is a reading tool, not a theory. It helps us compare studies that use different methods, see where researchers have placed their attention, and find the gaps the protective turn still needs to address. The rest of the article sets out the interdisciplinary method behind the grid (Section 2), traces its roots in governance and protection law and defines its three criteria (Section 3), shows it at work through three illustrative readings (Section 4), explains how to use it as a reading tool (Section 5), and draws out what it means for method, policy, and future research before concluding (Section 6-7).

## **2-An Interdisciplinary Methodology**

Translation in protection settings sits where several fields meet: law, political science, sociology, linguistics, and humanitarian studies. This is not just a turn of phrase. It is a diagnosis that shapes every choice that follows. The situations we study – asylum hearings through an interpreter, medico-legal records of torture, interviews with survivors of gender-based violence, humanitarian communication in crises – are legal, political, social, linguistic, and ethical all at once. A framework that used only the vocabulary of translation studies would describe such situations poorly. It would also hide the institutional forces that make translation part of protection itself.

### **2-1 Interdisciplinarity as a structural condition**

Here, interdisciplinarity is structural, not decorative, for two connected reasons. First, the criteria that matter in protection settings – effectiveness, accountability, legitimacy – come from political science and global governance scholarship (Archibugi and Held, 1995; Buchanan and Keohane, 2006; Held and Koenig-Archibugi, 2005). Second, the rules that govern protection – accurate information, procedural safeguards, non-discrimination – are written into international law and UN practice (Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951; UNHCR, 2019; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against women, 1979; Council of Europe Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979; Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, 2011). The grid, then, takes criteria that are already tested in those fields and carefully moves them into translation studies. It treats a translation not only as a transfer of text, but as an institutional act: one that helps create legal facts, produces records used as evidence, and shapes a person's access to rights.

### **2-2 A descriptive- comparative stance**

The article takes a descriptive-comparative approach, not a prescriptive one. It offers a way to read different kinds of work together. It does not force them into one single theory. The field is uneven. Legal-institutional and ethnographic work is well developed, while other areas – interpreting in gender-based-violence cases, for example- are still new. Keeping the method modest lets us preserve the range of approaches (corpus work, ethnography, Bourdieusian sociology, legal analysis) while still making their findings comparable, so they can be mapped and discussed.

### **2-3 How the grid was built**

The grid was built in three steps, so that it stays faithful to its source fields while remaining useful for translation research. The first step was to map the sources. Two three-part sets of criteria already existed: effectiveness, accountability, and legitimacy in global governance; accuracy, procedural safeguards, and fair treatment in protection law. The second step was to move these across into translation – friendly terms: reliability (effectiveness and accuracy), verifiability (accountability and safeguards), and equity (legitimacy and fair treatment). Each criterion was then defined at four levels – word choice, pragmatics, procedure, and ethics. The third step was to test the grid against existing studies (institutional corpus work, Maryns's ethnography, Inghilleri's Bourdieusian analyses, Tipton's trauma research). This confirmed that it captures real tensions: narratives broken up by trauma, mismatches between legal categories, and the problem of 'false verifiability' – a record that looks reliable but is not.

### **2.4 Triangulation**

Each criterion is best studied by the tools that suit it. Reliability calls for corpus analysis, terminology checks, and close comparison of texts, to test fidelity at the level of both words and discourse. Verifiability calls for ethnographic observation of procedures, discourse analysis of how records are made, and review of institutional documents, to see whether translations can be audited or challenged. Equity calls for sociological field work (including Bourdieusian methods), policy review, and legal assessments, to judge whether procedures make up for structural vulnerability. Using several methods together reduces blind spots. It also lets the grid capture the textual, procedural, and structural sides of a case at the same time.

## **2.5 Reflexivity and limits**

The grid is a heuristic- a working tool, not a finished result. It still needs to be tested across countries, languages, and institutions. The present mapping leans on English – and French language work, so more is needed from other scholarly traditions. These limits are part of the article's aim, not a side detail. A reading tool proves its value only through use, revision, and, in time, hands-on application by a wider community of researchers.

## **3. Roots of the Grid and Definition of Its Criteria**

The grid draws on two well-developed traditions before being defined in terms that belong to translation. This section traces each one, then states what the three criteria mean.

### **3.1 Roots in global governance**

Over three decades, political theory and international relations have settled on three basic questions for judging institutions: do they work (effectiveness), can they be held to account (accountability), and are they seen as fair (legitimacy) ( Archibugi and Held, 1995; Buchanan and Keohane, 2006; Held and Koenig – Archibugi, 2005)? These are not only technical checks. They are also normative: they ask whether an institution deserves the power it holds. Bringing them into translation studies is a structural move, not a metaphor, because translation in protection settings takes place inside institutions, and its quality affects how well those institutions work.

Effectiveness maps onto reliability. An institution can do its job only if the information it relies on is accurate and consistent. In protection settings, that means translations and interpretations must carry the facts, dates, relationships, and the full force of what was said. Accountability maps onto verifiability. To be accountable, a system needs records, review procedures, and a way to challenge decisions, so a translation must be checkable. Yet ethnographic work shows that written records often look like faithful transcripts while quietly reshaping the original speech (Maryns, 2006). Legitimacy maps onto equity. Legitimacy depends on whether decisions are seen as fair, which for translation becomes a question of procedural justice: do the arrangements recognize, and make up for, the weaker position of vulnerable people (Inghilleri, 2003; Tipton, 2017).

### **3.2 Roots in international protection regimes**

International protection law sets out a matching set of requirements: accurate information, procedural safeguards, and fair treatment. The 1951 Refugee Convention and UNHCR guidance insists that decisions rest on reliable facts, that procedures allow review and challenge, and that vulnerable people are treated fairly (UNHCR, 2019). These are practical rules, not abstract ideals. The Convention against Torture and the Istanbul Protocol call for careful, document medico-legal evidence, and they set standards for how such records are collected, translated, and kept (Convention against Torture, 1984; OHCHR, 2022). Instruments on women and children require procedures that recognize vulnerability and prevent discrimination (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979; Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989).

Put into the grid, accuracy becomes a matter of evidence. Translations often form the very documents on which rights depend, so a wrong date, a wrong relationship, or a wrong medical detail can change the outcome. Procedural safeguards ask institutions to keep clear records, track how a document was handled, and allow review. For translation, that means recording who interpreted how the encounter was captured, and what traces are left. Fair treatment asks for reasonable accommodation: gender-sensitive interpreters, trauma-informed practice, and child-appropriate procedures that lower the power gap. This tradition also brings real tensions into view. Legal categories are tied to culture, trauma narratives are often not linear, and confidentiality can limit what way be recorded – so there is a genuine trade-off between being able to audit a case and protecting the person.

### **3.3 The three criteria defined**

Reliability means that a translation or interpretation is accurate and consistent. This covers not only names, dates, and technical terms, but also the coherence of the story and the speaker's intended meaning. Because translations often become evidence, reliability is a requirement of evidence: two equally competent interpreters should produce the same essential content, keeping the legal and factual weight of what was said.

Verifiability means being able to check and audit what happened. It is about the system around the translation: recordings, written records, metadata (who interpreted, when, and under what conditions), and clear procedures for review and appeal. Without these, an interpreted encounter cannot really be challenged. And because a record can look like a faithful transcript while reshaping the speech, verifiability needs both the right technical tools and clear procedural rules.

Equity means procedural fairness that makes up for unequal positions. It is reasonable accommodation, not identical treatment. In practice, this includes trauma-informed protocols, gender-sensitive interpreting, child-appropriate procedures, independent interpreters or cultural mediators, and extra time when it is needed, so that vulnerable people can take part on fair terms.

Table 1

The grid as a transposition of two evaluative traditions

<b>Grid criterion</b>	<b>Global governance</b>	<b>Protection law</b>	<b>Translation question</b>
Reliability	Effectiveness	Accurate information	Is the rendering accurate and consistent under real conditions?
Verifiability	Accountability	Procedural safeguards	Can the mediated encounter be traced, audited, and contested?
Equity	Legitimacy	Fair treatment	Do arrangements compensate for structural vulnerability?

#### 4. The Grid in Action: Three Illustrative Diagnostic Readings

The following readings are illustrative, not empirical. Each one uses a situation already documented in the literature to show how the grid brings out tensions that a purely textual or purely legal view would miss. They are demonstrations of tool, not findings from new fieldwork.

##### 4.1 Reliability: the asylum interview

Take the kind of asylum interview documented in sociolinguistics ethnography (Maryns, 2006; Inghilleri, 2003). A claimant tells the story of persecution through an interpreter. Trauma breaks up the order of events. A key term has no clean equivalent in the other language. The interpreter's variety of the language differs slightly from the claimant's.

Read for reliability, three questions follow: can we verify the interpreter's qualifications, was the right language and variety identified, and did the conditions of the session allow a faithful rendering? The reading shows that reliability is not only about single words. It is also about narrative and pragmatics – and that plain questions and short turns lower the mental load under which reliability errors multiply.

##### 4.2 Verifiability: medico-legal documentation

Take the documentation of torture under the Istanbul Protocol (OHCHR, 2022). A survivor's account is interpreted and then written up, and the final report mixes the survivor's own words with the interpreter's rewording. Read for verifiability, the questions are these: are the rewordings traced, does the report separate the survivor's words from the interpreted version, and can the encounter be reconstructed from the file? The reading shows that verifiability belongs to the system around the translation, not to any single sentence. It also shows that clear, standard metadata can allow a sealed audit later, without putting the survivor's safety at risk.

##### 4.3 Equity: the gender-based violence interview

Take an interview with a survivor of gender-based violence, of the kind Tipton analyses (2017). The power gap, the sensitivity of the testimony, and the survivor's vulnerability all affect whether she can take part fairly. Read for equity, the questions are whether she received an informed explanation in a language she truly commands, and whether there is an accessible way to challenge the translation. The reading shows that having certain arrangements by default – independent interpreters, a same-gender interpreter on request, trauma-informed pauses- puts fairness into practice instead of just naming it.

##### 4.4 Synthesis

Read together, the three cases show the same pattern: a problem in translation becomes a problem in governance. A failure of reliability weakens the institution's effectiveness. An unclear record blocks accountability. An unfair arrangement erodes legitimacy. Each criterion also points to a concrete lever – qualifications and conditions for reliability, recording and metadata for verifiability, accommodation and the right to challenge for equity. The article offers as proposed directions, not as proven prescriptions.

#### 5. The Grid as a Reading Tool

As a reading tool, the grid does three things. It makes studies comparable, it maps where scholarly attention has gone, and it helps identify priorities for research and policy.

Research on translation in protection settings uses many methods – corpus studies, ethnography, sociology, legal analysis. The grid gives them a common language, so they can be read together without being forced into one theory. A corpus study showing terminological drift and an ethnography showing how interpreters handle trauma both speak to reliability, and both affect how institutions decide cases. The grid makes that link visible.

Applied across the literature, the grid shows where attention gathers. Legal and corpus work tends to cluster around reliability; ethnographic and discourse studies around verifiability; ethical and sociological work around equity. Seeing this pattern keeps any single approach from claiming too much, shows where approaches complete one another, and helps funders and trainers see which areas are under-served.

Using the grid is simple. Define the object- a specific procedure and interpreted encounter. Sort the evidence under the three criteria, using the method that suits each one. Compare across cases or research traditions. Then turn the weak points into concrete recommendations for method or for institutions. This simple routine makes the grid useful for both research and policy.

## **6. Methodological and Policy Implications**

Treating reliability, verifiability, and equity as working categories has consequences both for how research is done and for how institutions might be reformed. These are implications drawn from the reading. They are offered as directions for inquiry and debate, not as a settled programme.

Research should work at several levels at once: the text (corpus and close comparison), the institutions ( policies and archives), and the wider social field ( power and exclusion). It should pair textual analysis with ethnographic observation and with legal or policy review. It should also record procedural metadata – interpreter identity and qualifications, device, timestamps, instructions – because without these, verifiability cannot be studied at all. And it must stay ethically reflexive, weighing the value of verifiable data against the duty to protect vulnerable people through informed consent, anonymisation, and trauma-sensitive practice. In short, research here is multilevel, mixed-method, metadata-aware, and ethically reflexive.

If translation is a governance variable, then improving it is a matter of institutional design and human-rights compliance, not technique alone. Four directions follow. First, accreditation, so that interpreters and translators in protection-sensitive work are properly certified. Second, procedural reform, so that the rules for recording and archiving allow checks while still protecting confidentiality – for example, sealed – audit access on appeal. Third, resourcing, so that specialized services are funded beyond the major centres. Fourth, interdisciplinary oversight, so that review bodies include legal experts, translation professionals, sociologists, and representatives of survivors. These are proposed directions, to be tested and debated, in keeping with the grid's status as a working tool.

## **7. Conclusion, Limitations, and Next Steps**

This article has proposed a three-part grid – reliability, verifiability, equity- for reading translation in protection settings. The aim is a usable vocabulary, drawn from global governance and protection law and brought across into translation studies. Two claims follow. First, translation in these settings is not a side issue; it shapes outcomes. Poor translation, missing records, or invisible mediation can change legal decisions, block accountability, and erode trust. Second, because the stakes are institutional and legal, studying translation here needs an interdisciplinary toolkit.

The grid's limits are real, and the present article states them plainly. It is a working tool that must still be tested across languages, legal systems, and types of institution, and the present mapping leans on English and French language work. Ethical limits – above all the duty not to re-traumatise – will sometimes restrict what can be recorded or audited. So the balance between being able to audit a case and protecting the person remains a core challenge, not a solved problem. Three next steps stand out: testing the grid across different legal systems; piloting sealed-audit schemes with strict safeguards, and quantitative studies that link translation quality to legal outcomes.

The protective turn is best seen as an emerging, interdisciplinary horizon. If translation studies is to help protect vulnerable people, it must join disciplinary rigour with cross-disciplinary literacy – speaking the language of texts and the language of institutions at once. The grid is a first, practical step toward that goal. Its worth will be judged by one test: whether it leads to better research, and to institutional change that genuinely improves access to protection.



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