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Teaching the Translation of Crisis: Climatic and Pandemic

There is an intracultural, intralinguistic translation problem when it comes to climate change. As George Marshall asks in his 2014 book *Don't Even Think about It*: “no scientist will ever be able to say with complete certainty that any particular weather event is caused by climate change. But why does this prevent all discussion?”

We are currently in the midst of a public health crisis that has people turning to information on daily risk levels. This kind of reporting has such a direct bearing on our ability to plan our day – to – day lives that it has come to be as important to staying informed as checking the weather report.

And yet reports of extreme weather usually come too late for us to plan around – making them the great exception to the urgency of weather reporting. But even if extreme weather were predictable, we would still respond to it the way we respond to other weather reporting: as something out of our control. Not so with the pandemic. The discourse around the global pandemic is charged with calls to solidarity (and dissenting cries for individual freedom). But while the pandemic has created a sense of urgency surpassing the weather and a sense of personal responsibility that was bound to be politicized, climate change continues to look like a faceless problem of the future.

This paper will compare the two crises from the perspective of teaching, having taught courses that put these two topics front and center, both of them in the context of a translator training department at the University of Mainz. Translator training is a matter of attunement to rhetorical nuance and cultural context – every bit as it is about foreign language abilities and intercultural competence.