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Book Review of *The Rhetorical Mediator: Understanding Agency in Indigenous Translation and Interpretation through Indigenous Approaches to UX*: Nora K. Rivera, Utah State University Press, 2024.

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The Rhetorical Mediator: Understanding Agency in Indigenous Translation and Interpretation through Indigenous Approaches to UX.

Nora K. Rivera, Utah State University Press, 2024.

<https://www.upcolorado.com/utah-state-university-press/item/6531-the-rhetorical-mediator>

Summary

Nora K. Rivera's book, *The Rhetorical Mediator: Understanding Agency in Indigenous Translation and Interpretation through Indigenous Approaches to UX*, explores the integration of Indigenous perspectives and methodologies within the domains of technical and professional communication (TPC), user experience (UX) research, and translation and interpreting studies (TIS). In the book, through investigating how Indigenous interpreters and translators navigate their roles within professional spheres, Rivera argues that mainstream TPC, TIS and UX research frameworks often sideline or misrepresent Indigenous voices and cultural understandings, failing to accommodate the unique perspectives and needs of Indigenous communities. By foregrounding equity over usability, she proposes a solution through integrating Indigenous approaches to UX, aiming to enhance agency and acknowledgment of Indigenous translators and interpreters in technical fields. The book addresses the problem of systemic neglect of Indigenous knowledge and practices in the existing frameworks of TPC, UX, and TIS, advocating for “Indigenous rights, sovereignty, and visibility” (p.107).

In the Introduction, Rivera introduces the central theme of integrating Indigenous methodologies within TPC, UX and TIS. She sets the stage by providing a historical overview of interpretation and translation in the Americas, emphasizing the rich and complex pre-colonial traditions that influenced contemporary practices. The chapter outlines the book’s purpose: to realign current translation and interpretation practices with more culturally responsive methods that respect Indigenous epistemologies and languages. It delineates the ongoing challenges faced by Indigenous interpreters and translators, such as the lack of professional recognition and the need for frameworks that incorporate Indigenous worldviews, and emphasizes the importance of incorporating Indigenous methodologies into UX research to support the professionalization and agency of Indigenous translators and interpreters.

In Chapter 1, titled “Intersecting Theories and Disciplines,” Rivera examines the intersection of Indigenous, decolonial, TPC, UX, and TIS theories that underpin her research framework. She critiques both Indigenous and non-Indigenous decolonial theories and discusses the limitations of current models of TPC, UX, and TIS, highlighting how Indigenous epistemologies can enrich and expand our understanding of translation and interpretation and the need for integrating these perspectives to better support the professionalization of Indigenous language specialists. The chapter establishes the groundwork for applying Indigenous theories to practical and scholarly challenges in the fields of TPC, UX, and TIS.

In Chapter 2, “Designing the Research,” Rivera outlines her research design, combining design thinking with Indigenous research methodologies. She introduces the concept of design thinking adapted to Indigenous contexts, which serves as the backbone for her analysis and proposals. In this chapter, she details the collaborative nature of her research, emphasizing the importance of community-based participatory research. She also reflects on her positionality as a Mestiza

researcher and its implications for her work with Indigenous communities. The research design is presented as a model for conducting respectful and impactful research that addresses the needs of Indigenous translators and interpreters.

In Chapter 3, “Empathizing,” focused on the first phase of her adapted design thinking model, Rivera uses empathy maps to delve into the experiences of Indigenous interpreters. This chapter presents detailed analyses of these maps, illustrating how they help capture the complex emotional and cognitive landscapes of the Indigenous interpreters. Rivera argues that understanding these experiences is crucial for addressing the systemic issues within translation and interpretation practices. This chapter challenges conventional notions of empathy in research, proposing a more nuanced approach that respects and incorporates Indigenous emotional and cultural dimensions.

In Chapter 4, “Defining the Issues,” Rivera uses the data collected during the empathizing phase to define the core issues faced by Indigenous interpreters. She employs testimonios, or personal narratives, of the Indigenous interpreters to define the specific and complex challenges these professionals encounter. The chapter highlights how these testimonios reveal systemic injustices and personal struggles, providing a powerful insight into the lived experiences of the interpreters. The chapter emphasizes the need for frameworks that recognize and address these critical issues, advocating for changes in how interpretation and translation are taught and practiced.

In Chapter 5, titled “Synthesizing Needs and Issues,” Rivera synthesizes the primary needs and issues identified in the previous chapter. She discusses the systemic barriers and personal challenges that Indigenous interpreters face and analyzes how these factors impact their professional lives. She proposes concrete steps, such as the development of new training programs, resources, and professional networks that are informed by Indigenous perspectives for improvement. This chapter highlights specific strategies to intervene, enhancing the visibility and authority of Indigenous interpreters within the broader professional communities.

In Chapter 6, “Ideating and Re-Designing,” Rivera discusses the ideation and redesign phase. It centers on case studies of three successful intervention projects and examines the outcomes and impacts of these projects, using them to illustrate the potential for broader systemic change. This chapter also discusses the development of new training programs, the redesign of existing practices, and the advocacy for policy changes and emphasizes placing equity at the core of UX research. The focus is on creating equitable and effective environments for Indigenous professionals. The chapter serves as a practical guide for applying Indigenous-centered design thinking in various professional contexts.

The book concludes with a discussion on the implications of Rivera’s research for the fields of TPC, TIS, and UX research. Rivera emphasizes the critical need for the continued integration of Indigenous perspectives and methodologies into these disciplines to promote more inclusive and equitable practices. She argues that such integration can lead to significant systemic changes, enhancing the effectiveness and fairness of these fields. Rivera also highlights the importance of ongoing advocacy and collaborative research involving both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and practitioners. By working together, they can create more culturally sensitive approaches that recognize and value the unique contributions of Indigenous knowledge systems.

Analysis

In *The Rhetorical Mediator*, Rivera sheds light on the profound impact that prevailing translation and interpretation systems have on Indigenous translators and interpreters. These systems, largely grounded in Western ideas and interfaces, systematically disenfranchise Indigenous worldviews, leading to a range of critical issues. Rivera highlights specific challenges faced by Indigenous professionals, including a lack of professional recognition, insufficient training tailored to their cultural contexts, systemic barriers within legal and educational frameworks, and the broader marginalization of Indigenous languages and cultures. She contends that conventional methodologies in TPC, UX, and TIS are inadequate for addressing these challenges because they often fail to consider the unique cultural needs and contexts of Indigenous communities. She advocates for a paradigm shift towards an Indigenous approach to UX research, which prioritizes equity and inclusivity. According to Rivera, such an approach would not only facilitate the recognition of Indigenous translators and interpreters as professionals but also significantly improve their working conditions and promote greater recognition of their languages and roles. By integrating Indigenous methodologies into UX research, Rivera argues that we can develop more effective systems that respect and enhance the agency of Indigenous professionals. This would lead to better outcomes not just for the individuals directly involved but also for the preservation and appreciation of Indigenous languages and cultures in broader societal contexts.

With a blend of conventional and innovative research methods, prominently featuring interviews and testimonios alongside design thinking processes adapted for cultural sensitivity, Rivera builds a compelling case that showcases the need to reconceptualize how research and practice in the fields of TPC, UX, and TIS, are approached in contexts involving Indigenous languages. Specifically, the book is structured around the phases of Empathizing, Defining the Issues, Ideating, Prototyping, and Testing with the incorporation of Indigenous epistemologies and emphasis of community-based participatory methods and collective testimonios. In the book, Rivera suggests several changes and interventions. These include redesigning training programs to be culturally relevant and accessible for Indigenous interpreters, advocating for policy changes that recognize and support Indigenous languages, and creating more inclusive professional practices that consider the unique challenges faced by Indigenous interpreters. She emphasizes placing equity at the core of UX research, proposing that such a focus will lead to better-designed systems and services that are more effective for the users they are meant to serve. Rivera's proposals aim to create a more equitable and inclusive field by directly tackling the systemic inequities that Indigenous interpreters encounter.

Rivera argues for a transformative shift in UX research models, moving away from individualistic and efficiency-driven approaches towards methodologies that emphasize collective healing, social justice, and cultural respect. She illustrates practical ways UX researchers can incorporate Indigenous methods, such as utilizing testimonios. This technique allows for deeper understanding and engagement by capturing and reflecting the lived experiences of Indigenous communities. Rivera's approach complicates and extends the existing body of work in TPC by building on previous scholarly endeavors with Indigenous groups in the Americas (Gonzales 2021; Gonzales et al. 2022; Haas 2012; Itchuaquiyaq & Matheson 2012,

Rivera 2022b). Moreover, Rivera openly discusses her positionality as a Mestiza researcher, stressing the significance of self-reflection and ethical engagement in conducting research. By sharing her own experiences and the introspective process she undertook in understanding her role and influence, Rivera underscores the need for researchers to critically examine their positions and the power dynamics that influence their interactions with research subjects. She encourages other researchers to adopt a similar level of transparency and ethical consideration, aiming to enhance the integrity and impact of their work. This book, therefore, serves not only as a guide for integrating Indigenous methods into research but also as a call to action for more conscious and responsible research practices.

The Rhetorical Mediator offers a transformative approach to integrating Indigenous perspectives into the fields of TPC, UX research, and TIS. This book is invaluable for scholars, students, and practitioners, especially those focused on social justice, language rights, and community-engaged research. It challenges readers to critically reassess conventional methodologies and promotes the adoption of more inclusive and respectful practices in TPC, UX research and TIS. This work is particularly beneficial for those working with multicultural communities or within Indigenous settings, providing essential insights into incorporating equity and cultural sensitivity into practical research and design efforts. Educators will also find it useful for expanding their curricula to include a broader range of epistemological perspectives. Ultimately, *The Rhetorical Mediator* is an essential read for professionals in TPC, TIS, and UX research, urging a fundamental reevaluation of how these disciplines can better meet the needs and uphold the rights of Indigenous communities. It stands as a call to action, pushing for transformative changes that prioritize inclusivity and respect in technical and professional practices.

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