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Translation and Authenticity in a Global Setting



Santaemilia José & von Flotow Luise (eds.),
Woman and Translation: Geographies, Voices and Identities / Mujer y traducción: Geografías, voces e identidades.

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José Santaemilia & Luise von Flotow, eds. *Woman and Translation: Geographies, Voices and Identities / Mujer y traducción: Geografías, voces e identidades*. *MonTI* 3 (2011). Pp. 486. €18.

Woman and Translation: Geographies, Voices and Identities problematises the binomial ‘women and translation’ —and more broadly ‘gender and translation’— in the twentieth-first century. This relationship has been approached and explored from a myriad of perspectives in the last twenty years, and the fertile discussions which have been taking place within academic circles, as well as the number of publications which have been produced so far, demonstrate that the interest in such relationship is still vivid.

What does it mean to write on women and translation in the twentieth-first century after so many intriguing and useful contributions have already been made? Why is the need to explore this link still strong? And in what direction(s) should we move to persuade that the study of this kinship is still relevant? The editors and contributors to this volume address these questions and, through their case studies, attempt to meet the “need for further studies and their innumerable intersections,” as put forward by Santaemilia in his prologue (10).

Before launching into new research approaches and developments, it is always necessary to look back and take stock of what has been said and done up until now. In this respect, *Woman and Translation: Geographies, Voices and Identities* is a volume which follows in the wake of the early studies on ‘feminine/feminist translation’ but, at the same time, promotes new discourses. Its distinctiveness lies in the range of papers selected which helps to contextualise the analysis of women and translation in specific geographical, cultural and identity spaces. In doing so, it shows how deeply interdisciplinary, intercultural and embedded with ideology(ies) this topic has become. At the same time, it brings to the reader’s attention the fact that the exploration of women’s writing and translating is not a homogeneous strand of research although, in many cases, it still follows the paradigms of the Anglo-American feminist wave.

Due to this manifold focus, the book is structured in three main parts. The first one, entitled “Geographies,” outlines what has happened, and is still happening, in precise geographical areas where the study of women and translation still seems in need of research, namely Catalonia, Galicia, Russia and Turkey. Sergey Tyulenev provides an interesting overview by travelling across different historical periods and identifying similarities and differences between Russia and most Western European countries in the ways in which women have contributed to literary processes and social changes by means of translation. For example, although women were forced to publish under pseudonyms or their initials due to the scarce consideration that translation has commonly been given, they nevertheless contributed, along with men, to the westernisation of their country.

In slight contrast with Tyulenev and his view on women translators’ positioning in Russia, is Olga Castro who points out the importance of identifying women’s translation as a discourse of its own in Galicia. In her analysis, it is worth noticing the ‘post-colonial’ approach adopted by most Galician women translators who used Castilian —the ‘normalizing language’— to assert themselves and the Galician literature —the ‘normalized objects.’ At the same time, she also speculates that for Galician women, translation was a tool of liberation but also of control and oppression as, through this activity, they were seen as the symbol of nationalism, not as independent political agents.

Patricia Buján Otero and María Xesús Pereira offer another Galician perspective and identify two opposite tendencies. On the one hand, the tendency to use Castilian to access the Galician literary production is ascribed to the great majority of readers not being used to read in Galician. On the other hand, the increase in number of Galician translations of the classics reflects the need to claim the independence of the Galician literary system.

A similar picture to the one given by Castro in terms of double discrimination suffered by women translators is offered by Arzu Akbatur, who sheds light on the limited number of translations of Turkish women’s writing into English due first to Turkish being a ‘minor’ language and second to the reviewers’ scant interest in this kind of literature. This, according to Akbatur, has resulted in women’s lack of recognition, and therefore, visibility in the Anglophone world.

A more positive picture of women's contributions and recognition in the social and educational contexts can be found in Pilar Godayol's chapter where she provides a comprehensive overview of the developments of the studies on women and translation in Catalonia. Although she stresses the absence of women's translations in Catalan until the nineteenth century, she proudly highlights the presence of a great deal of writers, translators, activists and academics who throughout the twentieth century contributed to enhancing the status of Catalan language and, incidentally, Catalan women's visibility.

At the end of this survey of different geographical realities, we are offered an interesting insight by Nuria Brufau Alvira who interrogates the idea of feminist translation in the Spain of today. She refers back to the impact that Anglo-American feminist translation practices have had on Spanish writers/translators, as well as to the increasingly promoted social initiatives aimed at fighting androcentric and sexist language usages, and wonders whether implementing more inclusive forms of writing will ensure the success of the feminist project. Her conclusion is that translating in the feminine—or in an inclusive way— makes sense insofar as we reflect upon the specificities of the context in which we are operating, the readers we are addressing and the purpose(s) we are serving. In other words, when feminist translation becomes more self-critical, in the same way intercultural translation has become self-critical.

This final contribution of the first section builds the bridge to the next sections, entitled respectively "Voices" and "Identities." Here attention is placed not on translation as a geographical space in which the feminine/feminist voice comes to the fore, but rather as a political/ideological arena where male and female translation strategies are compared and contrasted. This can be perceived clearly in the analysis of the translations of specific textual genres such as sacred texts, more particularly the Quran (Rim Hassen), drama (Jorge Braga Riera), poems (Madeleine Statford), political essays (María del Mar Rivas Carmona; Zhongli Yu), chicana texts (Assumpta Camps) and novels (Vanessa Leonardi and Annarita Taronna; Carmen Camus).

These chapters share a common ground: they show that translation has become a positively unstable means of expression, a blurred interspace where languages and identities intersect, collide and eventually fuel dialogue. As a result there is a shift of attitude in the way translation is metaphorised: from the sexualised and sexist metaphors which have populated the Translation Studies debates in the late 1980s, we have moved to more positive ones depicting translations as "travelling concepts" (Federici 362) and translators as mediators and shaping forces.

In line with the more critical awareness claimed by Brufau Alvira is the contribution by Leonardi and Taronna, who highlight the importance of implementing "feminist strategies" not as if they were sets of devices to be used to assert the feminine subjectivity at all times, but rather as a "means of decoding subjectively the meaning of the text" (399) in order to construct messages and values which may respond, if necessary, to a feminist agenda. Positionality and agency are for these scholars the key concepts which shape and consolidate the (male and female) translators' sense of responsibility.

In the context of translation seen as an expression of the translator's identity and ideology, we cannot forget the shift of focus which, in recent years, has brought translation much closer to the sexual aspect of identity. In this respect, Pascal Sardin and Zhongli Yu provide us with an interesting view of the fears and stereotypes reflected in strategies of (self-)censorship adopted by translators (mostly men) when dealing with works with dense sexual and homosexual content such as *Passion simple* (1921), *L'événement* (2000) and *L'occupation* (2002) by Annie Ernaux and *Le deuxième sexe* (1949) by Simone de Beauvoir.

At the outset of this review, I stressed the importance of recovering the past before entering new areas of enquiry which will contribute to widening the study of the woman-translation relationship. This book certainly responds to this need. All the authors seem to weigh the contributions brought about in the past twenty years in this field, and measure the impact of such contributions on their own territories, be these geographical, cultural or identity-related. The tripartite organization of the volume helps us appreciate the richness of the developments which have originated from the exploration of woman and translation from many different angles. As a result, this book successfully

demonstrates that what used to be a dual area of research —woman *and* translation— has become a proper discipline, or to use Santaemilia’s words, an “interdiscipline” (11). As an interdiscipline, however, it needs to go beyond its own borders, merge more confidently with its cognate area to which it is often affiliated (that of *gender* and translation) and embrace all the interstices that the concept of ‘gender(s)’ discloses. Gender is still perceived by many as a ‘woman issue’ but, in fact, it has to do with women, men, their ethnicities, their beliefs, their sexual orientations and, above all, the intersections among all these aspects. This book is entitled *Woman and Translation* and as such its focus must be on women, both as subjects and as objects of study. However, with the intercultural and hybrid perspective it offers, it is also a promising launching pad for the current and newer generations of researchers who are about to embark on researches which intend to “adopt a more complex definition of ‘gender’” (25).

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