

CHAPTER ONE

GENDER AND TRANSLATION: A NEW EUROPEAN TRADITION?

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Gender and Translation: An Overview

A Question of Names

Gender and translation is a very active, increasingly diverse field. It is expanding its theoretical tenets as well as the range of its applications into a diversity of fields and disciplines, and prompting a significant redefinition of the concepts and areas involved. If we compare seminal papers like Maier (1995) or Chamberlain (1988) with more recent publications in Palusci (2010, 2011), Flotow (2011), Federici (2011) or Santaemilia & Flotow (2011), we become aware of a change in perspective or, rather, of a widening of perspectives. A few questions quickly spring to mind: Are we dealing today with the same issues as three or four decades ago? Does the *gender and translation* field have the same academic (or popular) presence as four decades ago? And the same geographical boundaries?

We are still in an ambiguous territory, difficult to define or delimit, yet at the same time full of possibilities and dangers too. Both gender and translation have proved to be flexible, courageous fields going far beyond their disciplinary boundaries and searching hard for new horizons and affinities. Although it may seem that *gender and translation* is an apt label for the field, the reality turns out to be more complex and the name of the discipline is still an unresolved question. There is not a single concept – to the exclusion of all others – that is accepted by all researchers. This can be an index of – among other things – academic instability or lack of agreement, and even of a growing field that has not found its definite shape or direction. Yet, at the same time, we can affirm that it has acquired some sort of institutionalisation, as conferences, research projects or edited

volumes proliferate. Without a doubt, the field is growing, acquiring new overtones and developing specific strands. Little by little it is becoming recognisable – in its origins, in its main objectives, in its truly cross-disciplinary character, in its recognition of woman's central role, in its commitment to justice and sexual equality, and even in its language and rhetoric, in its idiom. A cursory look at the different labels used to name the field reveals a variety of interests and the growing popularity of a discipline which, though sometimes pulling in different directions, seems to offer ways towards the elimination of subordination and prejudices. A tentative 'word cloud' elaborated statistically from a small number of published papers will graphically show us the relative importance of a series of phrases that are becoming increasingly lexicalized:

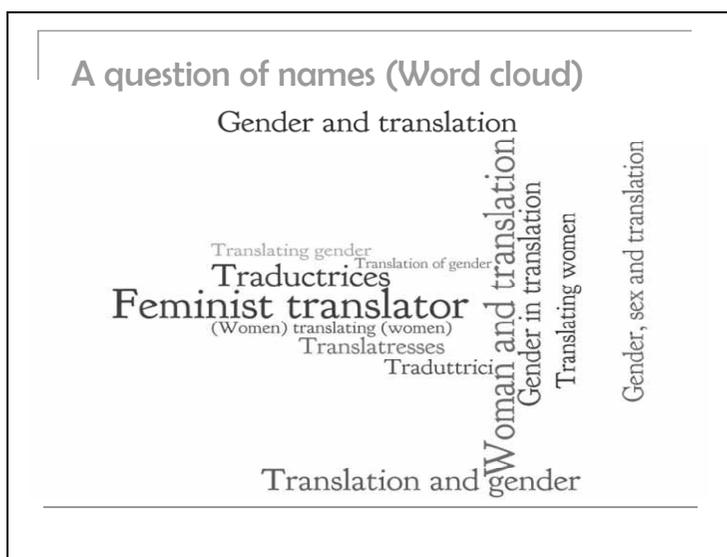


Fig. 1. The 'gender and translation' field (word cloud)

Main theoretical concepts

Though incomplete, Fig. 1 is interesting in that it shows the important lexical density of certain catch phrases. A number of conclusions can be put in place. Firstly, the growing presence of women in translation studies, to the point that some phrases ('Woman and translation', 'Translating women') sometimes stand for the whole area of study. Secondly, the

importance of feminism as an essential driving force (e.g. ‘Feminist translator’) which brings about a (re)feminisation of the translation profession (‘Traductrices’, ‘Traduttrici’ or ‘Translatress’). Thirdly, the unstable relationship between ‘gender’ and ‘translation’, with the existence of several phrases that have some currency (‘Gender and translation’ ‘Translation and gender’, ‘Gender in translation’, ‘Translating gender’, ‘Translation of gender’), perhaps indicative that the grammatical and/or conceptual relationships between both are far from clear-cut. And fourthly, the appearance of ‘sex’ as complementary to ‘gender’ as part of the contemporary feminist theorizing of identities. I know that this analysis is rather limited, as it is based on a small number of papers in the field, but I believe that in a rapidly expanding field, it would be worth analyzing what we mean when we say i.e. *gender and translation*, as well as what future developments are likely to be. A more rigorous analysis would be more than welcome.

A more inclusive list of widely used terms can help us reveal the origin of a series of terms of art which are progressively being identified as the (common) idiom of gender-and-translation publications. As it is recognized today, the field – though perhaps lying dormant for centuries – was initiated in Quebec, in Canada, more than three decades ago, with a group of feminist, experimental writers (Louise Bersianik, Nicole Brossard, Denise Boucher, and many others) who attempted to subvert the dominant patriarchal language, and with a group of feminist translators (Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood, Barbara Godard, Luise von Flotow and others) who worked closely with the authors they translated. This phenomenon – which we now know as *feminist translation* – was a fortunate result of a crossroads which brought together the Canadian *écriture au féminin*, the second wave of feminism (Anglo-Saxon feminism coupled with French feminism which centred on *écriture féminine*), the cultural or ideological turn in translation studies, post-structuralism and deconstruction. These origins have left traces in the main theoretical concepts dealt with in most gender and translation publications, making the field a complex interdiscipline bringing together a number of heterogeneous traditions and terms of art, thus giving the impression – sometimes – of a variegated and inarticulate language.

Second-wave feminism is, then, one of the main sources of inspiration for gender and translation scholars, and this is clearly felt in terms like *écriture féminine*, *difference*, *identity* or *woman* (as a singular and unified concept). Feminist translation, in the same vein, added absolute terms like *womanhandling*, *transformance*, *hijacking* or *manipulation*. Gender studies has been contributing many concepts and dichotomies, among

which we can mention *domination*, *sex/gender*, *gender/sexual identities*, *nature/culture*, among others. Some of these terms, however, may seem outdated today, as they do not reflect the plurality of identities and discourses of our age. The theory of *performativity* (Butler 1990, 1993) gradually gains more currency in understanding the notions of gender and sex, which are basically conceptualized in terms of performance or display. Feminism and gender studies themselves have to go periodically through a process of redefinition and adaptation to new social, cultural and ideological realities. A revision of their critical idiom is needed in order to open up meanings and identities to a plurality of configurations and influences.

Deconstruction and post-structuralism have also been influential in the gender/ translation interdiscipline. From a deconstructionist point of view, translation can be used to challenge the limits of language, writing, reading or identity. Poststructuralism has directed attention “away from the authority of the author towards the role of the reader, as well as undermined the notion of the “original” as a stable, objectively transferable entity”.¹ Both paradigms have proved highly influential in the language of gender and translation researchers, with the incorporation of terms such as *original/originality*, *(re)writing*, *author/authority* and many others which have been essential in contemporary theories of translation that reclaim the *visibility* of translators (and translatresses). Terms like *archaeology* or *genealogy* are derived from the poststructuralist work of Michel Foucault, who views subjectivity and identity as dynamic, discursive and historical constructions.

All these terms – and others like *resisting reader* or *positioning*, which come from feminist-oriented stylistics – are instrumental to the main objectives of gender and translation studies, which can be summarized like this:²

1. Rereading the traditional, misogynist metaphors of translation
2. An ideological transformation of texts
3. Claiming a new authority over source text and translation
4. Translation as ‘feminine’/‘female’ solidarity and genealogy

¹ Wallmach, “Feminist Translation Strategies: Different or Derived?”, 5-6.

² See Santaemilia, “Feminists Translating: On Women, Theory and Practice”, 2011a.

A Wealth of Metaphors

Translation is an ideal breeding ground for a multiplicity of metaphors – in fact, translators have been compared to travellers, discoverers of intertextual maps, nomads by obligation, creative artists, puzzle solvers, musical arrangers, honest brokers, magicians of illusions, and many others.³ In particular, the connection between translation and women has generated a wealth of metaphors in the past, and an intense re-reading in the present and – presumably – in the future. What Chamberlain (1988) calls ‘gender metaphors’ in translation is a sort of ‘metaphorical trap’ which subverts all gender-related or sex-related identities, and condemns women to sexual/textual subordination and derogation. Such a popular paradigm as *les belles infidèles* reflects “widely held beliefs and stereotypes about fidelity, both in marriage and in translation, and long centuries of double standards during which only women and translators, not men and “original” texts, could be guilty of the crime of infidelity”,⁴ thus delineating the metaphorical boundaries set by tradition on women in many areas of life and creativity. In recent years, however, feminist-oriented scholars working with translation have been:

subverting and deconstructing some old metaphors, but also inserting a web of connections with the act of translation. Translation is a way of writing/reading/interpreting women’s voices. In their theoretical discussions, feminist scholars have created new metaphors for translation and translators: translation has become a practice of translation/performance, ‘transformance’, a performative act, a daring act which requires courage and faith, ‘a living process, ever beginning anew’, an act of skilled ‘manipulation’, an assertive practice. Feminist translators have visualized metaphors of territory, translators working in the ‘contact-zone’, translations as political acts, and translations as archaeological works.⁵

While in the past two millennia the metaphors that defined women and femininity were deeply sexist (see Chamberlain 1988), in the last two decades the association between gender and translation studies is generating new metaphors that see women as a positive force: translation as a feminist practice that lies at the margins, at the border (Godayol 2000); Pandora as a multiplicity of meanings (Littau 2000, von Flotow 2007); translation as a ‘metamorphosis’ that, in the form of a female matrix, allows difference, creativity and interdependence (Shread 2008, von Flotow 2008). Thus translation can help either to consolidate an identity or to demolish it, either to reinforce a stereotype or to disclose its artificial

³ See Federici “The Visibility of the Woman Translator”, 2011a.

⁴ Garayta, “(M)othering the Text or The Feminist Critique of Translation”, 71.

⁵ Federici, *Translating Gender*, 17.

and contingent nature. Today translation is, undoubtedly, emphasizing the agency of women in every text or creative act.

A Gender and Translation ‘Map’

The gender and translation field shows a split between, on the one hand, a well-defined theory or *discourse*, and on the other hand, a more or less heterogeneous practice, which is mainly based on the use of certain paratexts (book covers, prefaces and introductions, footnotes, and others).⁶ Nevertheless, in spite of this gap – which seems only obvious, with theory usually being more articulate and homogeneous than practice –, the gender/translation interdiscipline, with its ups and downs, its advances and its contradictions, has been generating a new, dynamic map over the last few years. Although the connection between gender (or woman) and translation has existed since the beginning of time, it was not made explicit until the 20th century. In this regard, a key role was played by Canadian women authors and translators, who reclaimed a more central role in the culture of both translation and women, both underrated throughout the centuries. Lori Chamberlain (1988) denounced the traditional sexualization of translation *and* women, and challenged the “patriarchal notions of translation”⁷ that had been put forward until late in the 20th century. Other Canadian translators – such as Barbara Godard, Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood or Luise von Flotow, to cite just a few – also became researchers of their own overtly feminist project, and explained and justified the right to intervene in the texts they were translating. They coined a new tradition (‘feminist translation’), with a strong commitment to both writing *and* translating, that vindicated translation as (re)creation, manipulation, and (woman)handling. After significant books by de Lotbinière-Harwood (1991) or Krontiris (1992), this Canadian focus (impulse) became more than apparent when two key publications appeared in the late 90s: *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission* (1996), by Sherry Simon; and *Translation and Gender: Translating in the Era of Feminism* (1997), by Luise von Flotow. In a way, both texts inaugurated the *gender and translation* discipline, as they provided both a theory and a practice of identity issues in translation, from a feminist perspective and focusing particularly on women translators.

⁶ See Santaemilia, “Virginia Woolf’s *Un cuarto propio*: Feminist Translation, from Practice to Theory”, 2011b.

⁷ Arroyo, “Fidelity and the Gendered Translation”, 153.

The contribution of Canadian authors and translators – particularly from Québec – to the emergence of a *new* field of practice and research has been fundamental. Since the late 90s, though, this presence seems to have vanished or lost its momentum. With the new (21st) century, the focus has shifted to Europe, where a number of initiatives have taken up and extended the initial research. After review articles by Nikolaidou & López Villalba (1997) or reconceptualizations of the ethical limits of feminist translation by Vidal (1998), I would like to underline the appearance of *Espais de frontera: Gènere i traducció* (2000), by Pilar Godayol, who adopted a post-structuralist approach to translation and generated new metaphors that considers woman and femininity as positive and regenerative forces. The 2010s saw a series of conferences and seminars that gave rise to publications by Grbic & Wolf (2002), Santaemilia (2003, 2005), Palusci (2010, 2011) or Federici (2011). Particularly relevant is the case of Catalan, a national language without its own state, with leading research by Pilar Godayol and colleagues, and where a complete genealogy of women translators has been unearthed over the last decade. Over the last three or four years, it is in Italy where we find a renovated impulse that is interrogating writing and translating at a European level. Two very recent projects (Flotow 2011, and Santaemilia and Flotow 2011) originated in a proposal I made to the new *MONTI* periodical – a joint initiative of the universities of Alicante, Valencia and Castellón – and that has fuelled a rediscovery of a new and rapidly expanding (European) gender-and-translation geography that leads us to hitherto unknown territories such as Galicia, Turkey or Russia, and even China (Santaemilia and Flotow 2011). Though in many places of the world, both women and translation studies are still subjected to prejudices and taboos, it is also true that a clearer, less fragmentary map (particularly, a European map) of the field is emerging.

A New European Tradition?

I will devote now a few lines to elucidate (or rather to pose) the question of whether there is or isn't a *new European tradition* in gender and translation studies. Lack of time and perhaps perspective prevents a more definite answer.

Tradition?

Gender and translation has existed ever since translation was born – it is a clear example of a discipline *avant la lettre*, mainly because of the special

and privileged connection of males to translation and the absence of women. Though translation has historically been considered a ‘feminine’ profession, women have accessed it in a position of subordination; or, as Chamberlain put it, “in some historical periods women were allowed to translate precisely because it was defined as a secondary activity”.⁸ Gender and translation, then, as a field, bears witness to a long, unrecognized tradition of women (as translators, and also as writers) neglected, ignored or censored.

European?

As mentioned earlier, the 2010s have represented a definite focus on Europe as a rich and heterogeneous area of research for a new generation of young women and men who believe in equality and are ready to approach the discipline with clear and unprejudiced eyes. A number of European universities (Graz, Valencia, Vic, Napoli, Calabria, Málaga) have been home to meetings and seminars that are giving visibility to women, men and translation. We may not be able to speak of a *European* tradition, but at least we can speak of a renovated impulse – one which is shifting from an exclusively feminist concern to a wider, less political interest perhaps, but which involves a more widespread interrogation of the categories of *woman*, *man*, *gender* and *translation*. This (new) European thrust is offering now a dynamic panorama, with a synthesis of literary and non-literary traditions, and with a variety of critical paradigms that have progressively empowered women and women’s work (i.e. gender studies, translation studies, deconstruction, postcolonial studies, and so on).

New, Really?

What is new, then? The fact that there are women translating? Or women translated? Neither. Women have been translators and translated for a long time. Whereas Chamberlain’s 1988 seminal paper hinges on a basic opposition between writing (“original and masculine”)⁹ and translating (“derivative and feminine”), and derives a political interpretation from it, gender and translation studies, in contrast, makes explicit the bond – or the continuity – between writing and translating. It is not clear or obvious where translation stops and original writing begins; the only sure thing is

⁸ Chamberlain, “Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation”, 470.

⁹ Chamberlain, “Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation”, 454.

that both belong to a common category ('texts') whose main existential trait is that they depend on previous texts and are the origin of unending future texts.

As for women, they were virtually non-existent *in translation* until very recently, with just a few having entered the canon; what is *new* nowadays is the unprecedented scale in which women are translating and being translated, and, what is more, the strong identification between women translated and women translators (Santaemilia 2011a).

Finale

The association of gender and translation, and the consolidation into an academic discipline, has proved useful in many ways. Firstly, women have become more visible, and so have the dialectics between men and women. Secondly, women have been progressively reclaiming an authorial space, be it as writers or translators, or both. Thirdly, this association has brought about a positive, full-scale re-reading of the traditional misogynistic metaphors about translation. Fourthly, it has generated a wealth of positive metaphors focusing on women's bodies or skills. Gender and translation studies has definitely broken away from the traditional dichotomies that have stalled Western life and thought for centuries. As a result of this, women gain a new authority – i.e. on the one hand, they acquire the status of *authors*, (co)creators of meaning, and on the other hand, they can show their *authority*, that is, their social and cultural power. One immediate consequence of this visibility process is the discovery of a genealogy of women (whether translators or not) who, for at least three or four centuries, have used translation to claim varying degrees of presence in social, literary, cultural or political scenarios.

This paper also claims that Europe is gaining ground in the field of gender and translation, as exemplified in – *inter alia* – Godayol (2000, 2011), Santaemilia (2003, 2005), Castro (2009), Palusci (2010, 2011), Santaemilia & Flotow (2011), or Federici (2011). That does not mean denying the initial impetus from Canadian women writers and translators ('feminist translation') or the impressive work that has been carried out by researchers and/or practitioners such as Luise von Flotow, Barbara Godard or Sherry Simon. This *new* European thrust is offering enthusiasm, seriousness and a growing richness of perspectives. We should look attentively at what the future has in store for us.

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