

## XI COLÓQUIO DE OUTONO

# Estudos Performativos

## Global Performance · Political Performance

### ORGANIZAÇÃO

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(Revisão de textos de Bernarda Esteves)

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ESTUDOS PERFORMATIVOS  
GLOBAL PERFORMANCE/POLITICAL PERFORMANCE

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as a threat to family values. And progressives could construe pornography as incorporating a view of human relations which should not be promoted, because it is too hedonistic, disabused and instrumental.

For non-perfectionist liberals, who believe that the State should be neutral between controversial conceptions of the good life, as it is between religious beliefs, these arguments can't be used as political arguments to support a legal ban on pornography. And for moral minimalists, who believe that the only moral rule is to avoid harm to others, these arguments can't be used as ethical arguments to support a moral ban on pornography.

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## "Doing Things with Words" Feminist Performative Translators

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The title of my essay conjugates J. L. Austin's well-known work *Doing Things with Words* (1962), feminist translation and performative acts. The direct allusion to the title of the famous linguist's book is united to the idea of women translators shaping words, moulding them and creating new ones. As a matter of fact, feminist translators play with language considering it a performance, they regard their practice of translation as a performative utterance and a battleground for a linguistic, cultural and gendered identity. It is a practice that aims at deconstructing the myths of objectivity and transparency in language. If Austin affirms: "To say something is to do something" (Austin 1962: 12), Douglas Robinson goes further and talks about a 'Performative linguistics' where translation is a use of language and the decision-making process a performative act. Feminist translators opt for a practice of translation where the translator's traces in the text are clearly visible and therefore her agency fully acknowledged; they signal the sexism of the text and demonstrate that translation is not a neutral act but takes place in a specific socio-cultural ideological context where language is deeply marked by categories of gender, race/ethnicity and class. One of the main scholars in feminist Translation Studies, Louise Von Flutow, affirms that "translation is always a representation, a performance of another author's

work” (von Flutow 1999: 282).<sup>1</sup> If this could be an acceptable starting point for any translator, analysing Barbara Godard’s translations von Flutow outlines how feminist translation practice brings to a reconstruction of meaning which changes the translated text: “translations *perform* what the source text does in the source culture. Such theory moves the text into a third dimension, the dimension of performance. It conceptualizes translation as a three-dimensional activity that not only operates between two languages but performs the first language *in* the second language, bringing it to feminist life.” (von Flutow 1997: 44). Both theorists effectively express the “Canadian factor of feminism in translation”,<sup>2</sup> in fact the debate on gender and translation has been very fruitful in Canada since the mid-80s. The phenomenon of Canadian feminist translation has been due to a specific ideological, political and cultural environment, a social conjuncture developed partly as a result of the diglossic situation in the country united to a major concern about language in Québec where the feeling of political powerlessness in the 70s and 80s was strong. These concerns inspired Québec authors from the late 1970s to begin innovative ways of writing; language was used in a disruptive way to visualize gender and cultural differences. A major example is Nicole Brossard whose texts were translated as examples of feminist writings.<sup>3</sup> As von Flutow underlines, the translation of Québec writers involved shaping the ‘materiality of language’, its deconstruction and the creation of a new idiom to express women’s experiences.<sup>4</sup> Their strategies were many and not easy to translate: the fragmentation of language, of its grammatical and syntactical structures and the creation of new words. Instead of looking for equivalence the feminist translator aims at ‘transformation’, the translating practice becomes a political operation based on the multiplicity of women’s voices. If for these authors “writing is rupture and plurality” (Godard 1990: 88) translation becomes part of a feminist discourse which “works upon language, upon the dominant discourse, in a radical interrogation of meaning” (Godard 1990: 90). Meanings surface on the translated text and “though traditionally a negative *topos* in translation, ‘difference’ becomes a positive

<sup>1</sup> See also C. Maier (1984).

<sup>2</sup> Von Flutow (2006). Canadian Feminist Theorists on TS are known world-wide. See von Flutow (2006) and Whitfield (2006).

<sup>3</sup> Nicole Brossard’s works have been admirably translated by Barbara Godard and Susanne de Lotbinière Harwood.

<sup>4</sup> See von Flutow (1991).

one”. Like parody, feminist translation is “a signifying of difference despite similarity” (Godard 1990: 93).

Focusing on the issues of identity and gender as retraceable social constructions in language, feminist translators also outline the specificity of female authoriality. It is clearly an ideological position which emphasizes the importance of the translator’s visibility and agency. In the so-called ‘transferential process’ suggested by Barbara Godard, the reading subject becomes the writing subject and the distinction between them is blurred. Like the author, the translator uses disjunctive strategies, breaking through with ‘a unified language’. It is a practice derived from a poetics of identity described as ‘transformance’ (translation and performance) where feminist writing and translation merge to foreground female subjectivity in the production of meaning: “the focus on the process of constructing meaning in the activity of transformation, a mode of performance” (Godard 1990: 90). Translation is not a carrying across but a reworking of meaning, the continuation of meaning creation:

The feminist translator affirming her critical difference, her delight in interminable re-reading and re-writing, flaunts the signs of her manipulation of the text. *Womanhandling* the text in translation would involve the replacement of the modest, self-effacing translator. [...] Hers is a continuing provisionality, aware of process, giving self-reflexive attention to practices. The feminist translator immodestly flaunts her signature in italics, in footnotes – even in a preface” (Godard 1990: 94).

The traces of the translator flaunts like flags in a textual territory whose cartography is continuously explored and rewritten. The importance of paratextual elements as means of deconstructing and re-appropriating the text and as performative acts, is in fact central in feminist translation practice where devices such as supplementing, prefacing, footnoting and ‘hijacking’ (that is the appropriation of a text not overtly feminist where the ‘feminine is made visible through language’)<sup>5</sup> are frequently used and abused. With this practice of translation the reader takes part in a feminist activity which reveals the gendered discourses implicit in texts. Translators, “communicate, re-write, manipulate a text in order to make it available to a second language public. Thus they can use language as cultural intervention, as part of an effort to alter expressions of domination, whether at the level of concepts, of

<sup>5</sup> See L. von Flutow (1991 and 1997).

syntax or of terminology” (Simon 1996: 9). This attention to the translation process emphasises the practice as a creative form of re-writing.

Translation as a “fluid production of meaning, similar to other kinds of writing” (Simon 1996: 12) and a locus of creativity is also clear in Susanne de Lotbinière Harwood’s text *Re-Belle et infidèle la traduction comme pratique de réécriture au féminin/The Body Bilingual Translation as Rewriting in the Feminine* (1991). The French part of the title recalls to mind *l’écriture féminine* and the works of French theorists like Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous which have strongly influenced women’s writings since the 70s, while the English part underlines how women’s body has always been considered as the site of difference. It is a body that speaks, and as Nicole Ward Jouve reminds us, “with a forked tongue”:

translation is an activity by means of which the ‘natural’ bond ‘meaning-language’ can be transgressed. It is a state of continued suspension – a living process, ever beginning anew, allowing, in Walter Benjamin’s words, ‘the post-maturation of the foreign speech, the birth throes of one’s own speech’. The process, therefore, is eminently ‘feminine’. When you translate, the absolute status of nouns, the Name-of-the-Father’, is shaken. Exchanges between words are no longer ‘full’, that is, guaranteed by the law of significance. Identities cease to be stable. You escape from definition, from the law which rules and partitions women, which prevents femininity from coming into being. Translation = no man’s land = woman’s land? (Ward Jouve 1991: 28)

Translation, for de Lotbinière Harwood, is a feminine activity, it is a re-writing. If the *écriture féminine* is a poetics born from the fluidity of the body so is de Lotbinière Harwood’s re-écriture. The parallel between women’s bodies, writing and ‘mother-tongue’ is thus reiterated in translation. The translator here talks about a translating body, a “body is lost in translation” (de Lotbinière Harwood 1991: 83):

Un corps traduisant. À la fois corps lisant, corps écoutant et corps ré-écrivain, il circule sans arrêt dans le mots du texte à traduire, il parcourt les dictionnaires et l’intertexte, fouille son propre imaginaire, interroge l’auteure, se penche vers les lectrices... En mouvement perpétuel, le corps traduisant performe le passage entre le sens de départ à décoder et le sens d’arrivée à encoder, toujours en tenant compte du rapport d’adresse, de la relation à l’autre – comme sur une scène” (De Lotbinière p. 48)

As de Lotbinière Harwood affirms recalling Luce Irigaray’s ‘parler n’est jamais neutre’, “traduire n’est jamais neutre” (De Lotbinière 1991: 18), translation is a performance, a *mise en scène*, an acting out of difference. Translators are not invisible presences in the target text, ‘shadows’ echoing the author’s words but active agents in the process of cultural transmission. The French and English sections of De Lotbinière’s text are not the same, they are not translations of each other; they interconnect but they are different. De Lotbinière’s text is subjective and emotional, her autobiographical style of writing reinstates the authority of the personal register for the translator, giving content and positionality to the translator’s voice.

Feminist translation refers both to André Lefevere’s definition of translation as ‘rewriting’ and to the feminist notion of ‘location’,<sup>6</sup> all theories which renewed the notion of authority. Rewriting in the feminine means to affirm the translator’s critical difference while re-reading and re-writing the source text. In the awareness that translation is a discursive act, the translator subverts the linguistic codes of the text and transmits different cultural values. What is remarkable about this explanation is that the signature of the translator is given authority equivalent to that of authorship.

Moreover, because the translating subject’s position is a gendered one, the “need to resex language” (De Lotbinière Harwood 1991: 117) is fundamental. Feminist translation theory is partly grounded in the feminist critique of language. Since Lori Chamberlain’s famous essay “Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation” (1988) where the author clearly referred to Jacques Derrida’s philosophy of difference, many theorists have discussed the issue of patriarchal language to be translated and have raised questions about the perceptions of translation and how these reflect society’s conception of gender relations.<sup>7</sup> The many connections between language and gender are also discussed by Judith Butler who also drawing from Austin’s *How to Do Things with Words*, theorizes how gender is an act that brings into being what it names. Gender identities are thus constructed and constituted by language; male/female gender is a production, a performance: “consider gender, for instance, as a *corporeal style*, an act as it were, which

<sup>6</sup> See Lefevere (1992). Since Adrienne Rich’s famous essay “Notes Toward a Politics of Location” many theorists have dealt with this issue, for an overview on feminist theories and ‘location’ see Federici (2007).

<sup>7</sup> Many have been the studies on gender and language, among them Poynton (1989), Weatherall (2002) and Litosseliti (2006).

is both intentional and performative, where ‘performative’ suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning” (Butler 1990: 81). According to Butler in fact, performativity is an account of agency, “to say that gender is performative is to say that it is a certain kind of enactment” (Butler 2009: 1).

Similarly feminist translators outline how translation can be a performative act of gendered individuals that give to the reader a critical perspective on the ‘difference’ between original and translation. The ‘correction’ of the text is carried on in the name of ‘feminist truths’ which aim at the deconstruction of archetypal feminine images and gendered discourses. From this perspective feminist translators reframe the key issue of ‘faithfulness’ in translation: “for feminist translation fidelity is to be directed towards neither the author and the reader but toward the writing project – a project in which both writer and translator participate” (Simon 1996: 2). It is a notion of fidelity subject to variation, or echoing Roman Jakobson’s definition, an ‘equivalence in difference’.<sup>8</sup> It is the manipulation of the text by the feminist translator that lets language speak for women. From this perspective the translator’s role becomes overtly political, ‘difference’ is explained and rewritten on the page. It is not an easy task for a translator, it means to be able to juggle between texts and cultural worlds.

However, the translator’s ability to mediate between languages and cultures creating a continuous and challenging dialogue is an important one, and not only in feminist translation.<sup>9</sup> As Susan Bassnett affirms advocating the ‘Cultural Turn’ in Translation Studies,<sup>10</sup> “translators negotiate the relationship between the known and the alien, the self and the other” (Bassnett 2005: 90) and,

Otherness is reconceptualised as something that can be negotiated in a contact zone, an in-between space. The translator today is increasingly represented as negotiator, as inter-cultural mediator, as interpreter. The role of the translator is so much more that the word ‘translator’ used to imply, with its traditional associations of linguistic fidelity and fealty to the powerful original (Bassnett 2005: 87).

<sup>8</sup> See Jakobson (1959).

<sup>9</sup> See Federici (2006).

<sup>10</sup> See Bassnett and Lefevere (1990).

Translators have become interpreters, intercultural mediators functioning as bridges between linguistic and cultural worlds. Skilled translators handle the discrepancies between languages and cultures and exercise a central role in connecting two literary worlds through a challenging interchange between them. From this perspective translation is a relational act that can be envisaged as a web of connections between texts, cultures, authors and readers; it is a discursive mediation.

We have seen how in feminist translation the notion of otherness and difference acquire positive connotations and the practice of translation itself is seen as an act of ‘bridging’ both side of the linguistic and cultural divide, a meeting across a liminal, border space. Interestingly, discussing the ‘borderlands’ of translators’ notes and prefaces as spaces between underlying text and translated text, where the “translator can address readers in her own voice, supply information about the author, comment on the text and on her translation strategies” (De Lotbinière Harwood 1991: 157) De Lotbinière cites Gloria Anzaldúa, the Chicana writer and scholar and her notion of ‘borderlands’<sup>11</sup>: “from these spaces on the ‘borderlands’ between underlying text and translated text, a translator can address readers in her own voice, supply information about the author, comment on the text and on her translation strategies, credit her sources and suggest further reading” (De Lotbinière Harwood 1991: 157). Using paratextual elements the translator creates “a metaphoric stage, performing directly for her audience as acting writer. When translating her body bilingual is constantly in motion between the source text, the target-language text-in-progress and the readers she is ‘entertaining’ with her work” (De Lotbinière Harwood 1991: 160). Translation and performance are thus ‘creative forms’ and images and metaphors of border crossing illustrate very well the performative nature of translation in the process of intercultural encounter.

Notions of hybridity and liminality have been outlined also by postcolonial scholars like for example, Homi K. Bhabha, who talks about “the performativity of translation at the staging of cultural difference” (Bhabha 1994: 228) and who considers translation as the performative nature of cultural communication. Translation is connected to displacement, to what Bhabha calls the ‘third space’, the space of hybridity and resistance, a space that must be

<sup>11</sup> A recent work on Anzaldúa is Keating (2009).

kept in the translating process.<sup>12</sup> Hybridisation becomes a positive element the translator should engage with. The connections between feminist translation and postcolonial translation are quite a few, the ideological markers of gender and race/ethnicity linked to the practice of writing/translating influence and question the notion of identity and self-representation. Translators in the 'contact zone' are always political/cultural agents 'of difference'.<sup>13</sup>

The writers/translators/scholars I have referred to all emphasize how translation is a border crossing activity and an act of communication not only between two languages/cultures but also within the same community.<sup>14</sup> If De Lotbinière Harwood puts on the page her experience as a Quebecoise with strong links with the Anglophone world, so Gloria Anzaldúa outlines how the many levels of stratifications of languages are part of her identity as a Chicana. Anzaldúa's most famous work *Borderlands/La Frontera* is a negotiation within the problematic limits of language, the liminal space of/for language and writing as a 'crossing over'. English, Spanish, Mexican Spanish, Tex-Mex, Chicano Spanish, Pachuco (caló, the secret language of the barrio) are used by Anzaldúa to visualize her Mestizaje, her in-between space as a chicana, a *tejana*. Her work demonstrates how "languages are always imbricated in relations of superiority or inferiority, asymmetrical relations which are agonistic and stratifying" (Godard 1997: 58) but also that standard and vernacular can merge in the same work. If language is "a collective force, an assemblage of forms that constitute a semiotic regime" (Venuti 1996: 91), language use is a site of power relationships. Here the switching of codes reflects the reaction to power relations and visualizes a new language, 'the language of borderlands': "There, at the juncture of cultures, languages cross-pollinate and are revitalized" (Anzaldúa 1987: 20).

In Anzaldúa's terms "The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes un *choque*, a cultural collision" (Anzaldúa 1987: 100); but ambiguity and contradictions become positive patterns. The image of collision recalls to mind the inevitability of crashing between differences, the place of unreconciled multiplicity and in fact, the 'mestiza' is conscious of the borderland and its struggle: "Because I, a *mestiza*, continually walk out of one culture and into another, because I am in all cultures at the same time" (Anzaldúa 1987: 99).

<sup>12</sup> See Bhabha (1990).

<sup>13</sup> See Wallace (2002).

<sup>14</sup> An interesting volume on the subject is Lesser (2004). See also Kellman (2003).

Nonetheless differences are connected through 'bridging' (bridges made of writing, naming and categorization) because writing is a means to achieve order, to give a name to things; to write is to act, it is another formative action: "Bridges are thresholds to other realities, archetypal, primal symbols of shifting consciousness. They are passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives" (Anzaldúa and Keating 2002: 1). The image of the bridge illustrates well how difference can be maintained through contact, the bridge is just a connector which keeps distances while permitting the recognition of the other. Likewise, the translator can be seen as a bridge-builder between two literary/cultural worlds. If as Bassnett outlines, "translation is about wanting to cross boundaries and enter into a new territory" (Bassnett 1997: 119), practices of translation can be considered possible bridges to pass from one territory to another.

But Anzaldúa goes further, she is not a translator, she is a writer in-between languages/cultures and she discusses writing as translation of the self, made of a series of transformations which "occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious always in-transition space lacking clear boundaries" (Anzaldúa and Keating 2002: 1). Writing therefore, becomes an act of translation, identity is on the page left untranslated: "I am my language" (Anzaldúa 1987: 81) she asserts. The use of eight languages and the act of writing/translating the self are strategies and performative acts. In her "tolerance for contradictions [...] for ambiguity" (Anzaldúa 1987: 101) the chicana displays a Latino socio-ethnic performance of identity because:

"Identity is an arrangement or series of clusters, a kind of stacking or layering selves, horizontal and vertical layers, the geography of selves made up of the different communities you inhabit [...] identity is a process-in the making" (Anzaldúa 2000: 238).

Writings and translations – linguistic, cultural and 'metaphorical' translations - of writers/translators in-between two or more cultures like De Lotbinière and Anzaldúa, envisage the richness of hybridity and multilingual/multicultural identities and outline how the categories of gender and ethnicity are central elements still to be discussed. Writings and translation become performative acts of feminist consciousness and self-creation, because after all, they are both identity works. Translators and 'writers-in-translation' play a social role, are active cultural agents that use multilingual words as a battle-

ground for a performed linguistic, cultural and gendered identity. Texts become objects of potential social change, or at least, the means for a re-discussion and problematization of gender and ethnic issues. In this sense the page becomes a space for performativity, a *mise en scène* for identities in-between.

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