

Introduction

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Translating comics is as old as the comics genre itself. The dating of the translation activity thus depends on how one defines comics.¹ The definition adopted here is quite standard; a comics is: « a story using sequential images with words » (McCloud 1-23; Hague 11-18) The umbrella term “comics,” therefore, includes comic strips, comic books, graphic novels, French *bandes dessinées*, Japanese *mangas*, but also Italian *fumetti*, Brazilian *quadrinhos*, Korean *manhwas*, and Chinese *manhuas*, to cite only the most famous types of comics in the globalized twentieth and twenty-first centuries.²

And yet, it is only very recently that academia has shown interest in the study of comics and comics in translation. In the 2000s, the number of university courses offered on comics or that included comics has exponentially risen in the world, especially in North America (Tabachnick). Although less frequently than in the U.S.A., some courses in France, taught in English departments, include comics taught in translation. It should be mentioned that the success of those courses tends to increase the demand and thereby the offer for more and more comics materials, and has an impact, albeit indirect, on the quality of published titles. This relatively new academic interest in the genre of comics can find its origin in the obvious comicsmania that has been spreading around the world in the last few years, a phenomenon that is boosted even more by blockbusters adapted from all kinds of comics from *Superman* to Satrapi's *Persepolis* and Clowes' *Ghost World*. In France, for instance, graphic novels like *Batman Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *Maus* sold very well in their translated French versions, while, in the U.S.A., Satrapi's *Persepolis* is very popular on many campuses in its English translation.

Over the last few years, academic research has also shown increasing interest in multimodal texts and their translations. In 2008, the Italian scholar Federico Zanettin collected a series of essays in *Comics in Translation* that could probably be presented as the beginning of a serious academic investment in issues surrounding the translation of comics. More recently, a 2015 special issue of the British journal *New Readings* came out with six articles edited by Tilmann Altenberg and Ruth Owen.

¹ For instance, in the U.S.A., the birth date would be 1895 with *The Yellow Kid* (a comic strip that made a systematic use of speech balloons); in the French tradition, it would be between 1827 and 1837, with *Les Amours de Monsieur Vieux Bois* by the Francophone Swiss Rodolphe Töpffer (where the speech balloons were not used).

² It should be noted that the meaning of each term may shift slightly in each respective language/culture of origin: e.g. *bande dessinée* [drawn strips] is not the exact translation of comics.

In France, not much has been published regarding issues of comics translation, except for a few theses, articles or books, all of them mainly connected to the two very popular series of *Tintin* and *Astérix*.³ More specifically, since the new millenium, the Audio-Visual Translation (AVT) subfield, which has been developing at a very fast pace, has shown a growing interest in comics translation issues.

Until the 1990s, scholarship on the translation of comics has mainly focused on the interlinguistic aspect of the activity, as if translating comics was not much different from translating literature. Some articles were occasionally published to call attention to issues of visual translation, in particular to the lack of intercultural value between drawn gestures or facial “expressions”. For instance, the thumb up can connote victory in one culture but can be an offensive sign in others (Frias 267; Celotti 44); similarly, nosebleeding has a very specific connotation in Japanese manga that it does not have in other cultures, since it refers to “lust”. Other visual aspects were also investigated, such as the various possible codings in terms of the layout of a page. One aspect, for instance, is the treatment of frames and human presence and their impact on the rhythm of the story; one famous example being the Japanese manga tradition in which some frames are empty or without a human presence, therefore slowing down the pace of the action. Another aspect that has been analyzed is the different shapes that bubbles can have—round, square, jagged, etc.—and the resulting connotations of such a choice (Forceville 56). In the same vein, another notable item of interest is the representation of speed through speed lines (e.g. when a car drives by) either subjectively (i.e. seen through the eyes of the person driving the car) or objectively (i.e. seen through the eyes of the onlooker outside the car); the first perspective is more common in Japanese manga, the other perspective, in the Western tradition of comics.⁴ Despite this focus on the visual aspects of the genre, it is only very recently that one of the main specificities of comics, namely the interaction between text and image, has attracted the attention it deserves. Researchers have started to concentrate on the economic and formal constraints that are specific to this format (the limited space available for the text in the bubbles-balloons, the cost of having a multimodal text translated, the interconnectedness between texts and visuals), constraints that are much stronger in comics than in literature.

The progressive evolution of the position of comics and comics translation in the cultural system, from the margins to a more central position, is also visible in a cultural movement known today as “scanlation”. The phenomenon started first as an undercover, piracy movement by non-professionals in the 1980s, much before the contemporary recent professional movement. The

³ For *Tintin*, see Bentahar; for *Astérix*, see Delesse.

⁴ One of the first researchers to emphasize these formal differences was Scott McCloud in his now famous *Understanding comics*, first published in 1993 (see in particular the pages where he compares the Western traditions and the Japanese one: 75-82; 112-114).

history of repeated ‘fanslation’, often called ‘scanlation’, has been thoroughly documented.⁵ Well before crowd-funding or crowd-research projects like *Wikipedia*, fans collaborated to find solutions to problems beyond linguistic issues; for instance, the creation of flopping pages to accommodate the fact that reading is opposite in Japanese and Western languages. Fans also imposed the Japanese way of writing outside fan communities, replacing printed text by hand-lettered dialogues (McCloud 134). More broadly, this fan movement also enabled more women to participate and therefore promote more female comics (made by women, for girls and women). This also meant creating or accepting genres read more often, although not exclusively, by female readers, such as romance or *yaoi* (Rampant 221-232) since the comics world has been male-dominated until very recently.

The central position the translation of comics and translated comics have come to occupy in the cultural space call for further study. With this special issue of *TranscUlturAl*, we are hoping to initiate an interdisciplinary dialogue between “traditional” literary translation studies and audiovisual translation studies on one hand, and between translation studies and comics studies on the other hand. Translation and translation studies can benefit from comics studies in the sense that the latter can open new perspectives about translation (for instance, emphasizing new types of constraints) and help in improving the translation of comics, and it is our belief that translation studies can be beneficial to comics studies, given that it highlights some specificities of the comics medium and art.

The articles selected for this issue attest to this interdisciplinary and intercultural dialogue and present the latest findings in this respect that the translation of comics initiates. Researchers are looking for fruitful connections to analyze translated comics and the process of comics translation, while respecting the specificities of their object of study, i.e. multimodal works. In this perspective, the selected articles show how some concepts and notions are borrowed from translation studies and are applied to the translation of comics. Érico de Assis, for instance, in his article “The Concept of Faithfulness in Comics Translation,” puts to good use the notion of faithfulness for the translation of comics. In his analysis, he moves away from the binary conception underlying the phenomenon of faithfulness to propose a continuum that allows him to take into account the multifacetedness of his object of study; thus, in the theoretical framework he proposes, linguistic and non-linguistic signs, spatio-topia,⁶ typography and format are included. The concept of faithfulness is also central to Cristina Huertas Abril’s article, “Análisis de los rasgos lingüísticos de *Maus* y sus interferencias en la traducción al español”. In her analysis the author concentrates on the concept of verisimilitude, a core aspect of the source text under study, both on the level of the diegesis and on the level of the language used by the main character. Huertas Abril investigates the extent to which the target text reproduces this aspect, which she sees as the “intention” of the original text. The notion of faithfulness is also of interest to Alice Ray in her article “Traduire et retraduire les

⁵ See Schodt.

⁶ For the concept of spatio-topia, see Groensteen, 31-119.

superhéros marginaux d'Alan Moore,” on the basis of the two translations she analyzes. The two works did not have the same appeal for the public, which leads the author to question the faithfulness of the two translations in light of the characteristics of the original text. Furthermore she concentrates on an aspect that is key in literary translation studies, the notion of “retranslation”. In this perspective, her analysis also challenges the reasons behind the phenomenon of retranslation in the context of comics translation compared to literary translation.

In the same vein, methods developed in AVT, in particular subtitling, are applied to the process of translating comics. Michal Borodo, for example, in his article “Exploring the Links between AVT and Comics Translation,” points to the fruitful connection between the process of translating comics and subtitling. More specifically, the author concentrates on the phenomenon of textual concentration in link with the special constraints of the genre and its multimodal nature. The sub-field of subtitling is also used by Matteo Fabbretti in his article “The Translation Practices of Manga Scanlators,” to analyze the phenomenon of scanlation. His study also incorporates methods developed within translation studies, in particular translation annotations, in order to investigate the practice of scanlation and its specificities. In doing so, Fabbretti emphasizes the cultural value of the activity of scanlation.

More generally, the authors in this issue are interested in the cultural value of the translation of comics. Gaetano Falco in his article, “Econocomics: Teaching Translation of Economic and Financial Texts through Comics,” concentrates on the pedagogical value of the translation of comics. Using two case studies and grounding his analysis in cognitive linguistics and visual grammar, Falco analyzes how the translation of comics dealing with economic topics can prove challenging, particularly for MA students in specialized translation. Further the author highlights that the genre allows for non-experts to gain expertise in Languages for Specific Purposes, such as economics. One difficulty is, for example, the blending of different linguistic registers: An informal register in the balloons and a more formal one in the narrative boxes. In both case studies he uses a method inspired by genre studies and functionalist approaches to translation. As for Sabrina Araújo, she is interested in cultural items and how those can reveal identities and values. In “La Imagen y el texto en *Le Photographe*: una reflexión sobre fotoperiodismo, cómics y traducción,” she uses a French graphic novel taking place in Afghanistan and its translation into Portuguese to demonstrate, on the one hand, how the original text is already a translation of the Afghan reality through the lens of French cultural values, and on the other hand how the interlinguistic translation of the French text into Portuguese reflects in turn the identity of the translating culture. More generally, she highlights how the original and the translation contribute to the formation of the cultural identity of the Other (i.e. the Afghan) differently in two non-Afghan cultures. Her article paves the way for Nadine Normand-Marconnet’s and Jason Jones’s “From West to East to West: A Case study on Japanese Wine Manga Translated in French”. Basing their analysis on mangas about wine, which are extremely popular both in Japan and in France, the authors remind us that the language of wine is

key in French culture (as part of the larger discourse of gastronomy) but also in the globalized world. They show how the language of wine and its particularities have been successfully imported into Japan. They also point to the cultural implications of such an import and argue that Japanese-French translations of wine language allow the French to see their own culture through a lens provided by the Japanese sommelier, which indirectly reveals, to some extent, a partial shift of power from France to Japan. The cultural value of translation is also at the heart of the article by Sadegh Kenevisi and Mohammad Saleh Sanatifar that closes the issue. In “Comics Polysystem in Iran: The Translation of Linguistic and Visual Culture into Persian,” the authors show the types of difficulties in translating *Tintin* in Iran. Relying on the methodological framework of Even-Zohar’s Polysystem Theory, the authors compare three translations of one work, published at three different periods by three different translators: one was produced before the Islamic Revolution (1979) by a mainstream publisher, another during the 1990s by fans through scanlation, and the last and most recent one in the 2000s by a mainstream publisher. The study highlights the impact of the Islamic revolution on the cultural activity of translation in the country. It also shows through the analysis of the three translations in terms of foreignization and domestication how comics translation has been moving from a central position to a more peripheral one in the Iranian cultural polysystem.

With these nine original articles, we hope to contribute to the exciting and productive dialogue between translation and other fields of study, including comics studies and cultural studies, which is one of the main goals of *TranscUlturAl: A Journal of Translation and Cultural Studies*.

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