TranscUlturAl, vol.5.1-2 (2013), 1-8.
http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/TC

Translating Peripheries

Anne Malena
University of Alberta

Introduction

Several of the articles in this issue of *TranscUlturAl* have been revised from earlier versions presented at the ninth St. Jerome's Day Annual Conference at the University of Alberta on September 30, 2011. Many others were submitted in response to a call for papers on the theme of *Translating Peripheries* and we are proud and very pleased to present a selection of articles that both come from and discuss diverse world regions. Translators may be positioned to bring peripheries into the centre, or the reverse, as well as to work within the peripheries. While the term "periphery" is admittedly problematic in many ways, it was chosen as the focus of the conference and of this issue to provoke response from translators and scholars who consider how peripheries are translated or how peripheries translate. The objectives are multifold: 1) to create an opportunity for productive exchange between practitioners, scholars and the public; 2) to learn from the experts about literatures, languages and translation practices that may not be easily accessible except to those with special skills in those areas; and 3) to question the validity of the term "peripheries" and explore various ways to use it, avoid it or replace it.

Kristina Silva Gruesz, whose book *Ambassadors of Culture: the Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing* (2002) juxtaposes major and peripheral Anglo and Latino writers within the US, argues in a later article that "translation is interesting precisely because it is a marginal activity, one that has been made to occupy a lesser and peripheral position in the hierarchy of expression" (Translation 89). To quote Lawrence Venuti: "In the case of translation, the peripheries are multiple, domestic and foreign at once" (*Scandals of Translation* 4; cited in Gruesz, "Translation" 89). Every "major" language/culture has its peripheries, often caused by colonial ventures or their long-lasting effects, and the already difficult task of translation may be further complicated, for example, by textual content and form deliberately expressing peripheral experience as a form of resistance to the dominant culture or, on the contrary, by celebrating the blend of domestic and

foreign. Whatever the case may be, translators are well-known to welcome challenges and to attempt achieving the impossible.

Jean Anderson is such a translator. A professor of French and specialist of Francophone Pacific literature, she was our distinguished keynote speaker at the 2011 conference and we are grateful for how generous she was with her time and expertise. In her opening contribution, entitled "Inside out or Outside in? Translating Margins, Marginalizing Translations. The Case of Francophone Pacific Writing," she discusses several Pacific authors, their works and translations. She deplores the general lack of knowledge about Pacific literature on the part of Europeans and North Americans, and argues that to read from the inside out is to suspend the naturalizing tendencies of readers to consider texts outside their own comfort zones as irrevocably foreign in order to understand them on their own terms. This same strategy is in fact necessary in the Pacific region as well, particularly for Francophone literature produced outside of Australia and New Zealand because those dominantly English-speaking countries are some 900 miles away from French Polynesia, Tahiti, the Marquesas and French Caledonia where only a handful of publishing houses share the local market. This means that writers seek publishers in France, a situation that creates a neocolonial context of *deterritorialisation*. Anderson argues that this notion is then re-appropriated by writers, such as the French Polynesian Chantal Spitz for example, to produce a form of resistance literature. The question then becomes: how is translation to function in such a context without the risk of betraying the deliberate deterritorialisation of these texts? Theoretically the answer may appear rather obvious: translators need to be familiar with the local conditions of production of these works and interpret them within their local frame. Pragmatically it is harder to accomplish since many decisions are imposed on translators by publishers' protocols. As an accomplished translator herself, however, Anderson is able to shed light on some of the strategies that translators can adopt to assist these writers in the sharing of their "experiments and innovations" with the world at large.

The articles that follow illustrate the exciting variety of responses the editorial team received to the call for papers: some directly address the problematics of the periphery from various theoretical standpoints (Medendorp; Zahedi); others discuss the work of translators in less than ideal conditions (Namukwaya) or the accomplishments of individual translators (McNeil; Di Giovanni; Priestly). Several offer analyses of case

studies from different genres (Mohammadi; Kristjanson; Des Rochers; McManus). This vast array of contributions speaks to the wealth of research that is being conducted on the overarching issue of the relation of peripheries with their centres and the important questions that this research brings to the forefront in the fields of translation and cultural studies: for example, in which direction do current theories, together with the concepts and metaphors they are based on and convey, need to go in order to further reflection and understanding of translational and cultural contact zones (Pratt)? Have binaries such as centre/periphery been sufficiently undone or are they instead too often or too simply bypassed? How can scholarship help producers and consumers of translations offer cultural products that preserve and convey the social, political and ideological characteristics of their own local contexts? These questions and many more inhabit implicitly and explicitly the contributions selected for this double issue of *TranscUlturAl*.

Liz Medendorp, in "The Power of the Periphery: Reassessing Spatial Metaphors in the Ideological Positioning of the Translator," closely examines familiar concepts used in translation studies to theorize the position of the translator. All these concepts use spatial metaphors, such as Bourdieu's notion of habitus, polysystem theory, justly recuperated here from its decades-long neglect as belonging to systems theory, Bhabha's concept of the Third Space, notions used in cultural anthropology and Pratt's formulation of contact zones. Medendorp's analysis of these notions and the approaches they inform does not dismiss them but rather considers their relative merit in theorizing the dynamic nature of cultures and the transcultural agency of the translator. She concludes that the translator can be viewed as a traveler between cultures that never exist as separate static entities but are themselves always subject to transformation and, therefore, constructed by translation.

In "L2 Translation at the Periphery: A Meta-Analysis of Current Views on Translation Directionality," Saber Zahedi provides a very useful survey of current views on translation directionality and questions one of the basic assumptions in this area, namely that translators work out of a foreign language and into their mother tongue. As Zahedi shows, the unfortunate result of these assumptions is that L2 translation, the term he adopts to designate translation into the translator's second language, is usually viewed as inferior to L1 translation, or translation into the translator's mother tongue. This generalized view overlooks the fact that L2 translation is practiced in many

countries whose native tongue is of limited diffusion. This is the case, for example, in Iran, where Persian is the dominant language and translations into English are done by L2 translators. Zahedi further argues that technology has greatly changed translators' work habits and increased access to resources and tools, such as dictionaries and corpora so much that it is today no longer inconceivable that L2 translators can produce quality translations. The current research shows a bias for L1 translation in the Western part of the world, a bias which can and should be addressed in new research aimed at discovering the socio-cultural issues affecting translation directionality.

In Uganda L2 translation, or non-native translation as it is referred to in the next article, is regularly practiced in an academic setting, as Harriett Namukwaya shows in "Beyond Translating French into English: Experiences of a Non-Native Translator." There are many reasons for this situation, ranging from the demand for translation into English to the need for teachers to supplement their income. The Makerere Institute of Languages (MIL) is an important institution in Uganda where English, French, German, Arabic, Swahili and local languages are taught as well as translation and interpretation in and out of those languages. Namukwaya's study focuses on francophone teachers of French translating into English. Since there is no professional training available to translators in the country, MIL teachers double up as translators by default. In that capacity they face many challenges: lack of training, resources and time as well as limited internet make it difficult for translators to improve their skills. The study provides examples of mistranslations resulting from these conditions and recommends that more research be conducted in translation training, specifically in the area of non-native translation.

Rhett McNeil next brings us to South America, more precisely Brazil, with the following question: "Just How Marginal Was Machado de Assis? The Early Translations and the Borges connection." Historical research uncovers a link between the Brazilian author and the Argentine Borges and debunks the myth of Machado's supposed peripheral status by showing that through translation his works were in fact well connected to the dominant literary cultures of the Americas and Europe. While McNeil does not argue the point, this may also be yet another striking example of the extent to which translation is ignored by literary critics, with unfortunate results. In this case, as McNeil cogently argues, it gave Machado the undeserved reputation of a marginalized author, disconnected even from the rest of Latin America in spite of evidence of his *Brás*

Cubas having been translated in Uruguay as early as 1902, therefore during Machado's lifetime. A French translation of a volume of Machado's short stories followed soon after his death and the Spanish writer and translator Rafael Cansinos-Asséns, whom a young Borges would later meet and befriend in Madrid, published some of those same stories in 1916. McNeil very convincingly shows that it was Machado's early translators who were his most enthusiastic admirers and who did a great deal to ensure his place within the Latin American literary canon.

From the Americas we then move to the Asian continent with Elena Di Giovanni's article, entitled "Translation as Craft, as Recovery, as the Life and Afterlife of a Text: Sujit Mukherjee on Translation in India." This contribution discusses the work of yet another writer/translator whose formulation of "non-theories" based on his own practice is highly worthy of recognition within the field of Translation Studies. Sujit Mukherjee produced two volumes on translation activities in India and explored with linguistic creativity and humour how they expand the Western-driven boundaries in order to let in borderline activities that merge into translation, such as "rewriting," "new writing," "transcreation," and "recreation," to name but a few. Covering the pre-colonial, the British and the postcolonial periods from this perspective, this article is enlightening about the turns that translation has taken in India and about evolving attitudes with regards to English.

The next article, "Translating Prešeren's 'Wreath of Sonnets': Formal Aspects," offers the point of view of the translator himself on a collaborative experience of poetry translation from Slovene into English. Issues of metre, rhyme and the translation of a challenging acrostic are discussed in detail. Tom Priestly offers a self-claimed peripheral perspective on his translation practice as a linguist untrained in literary criticism. Be that as it may, the author obviously welcomes challenges, since poetry is difficult enough to translate, but the particular case he discusses is an example of the very strict form found in Crowns of Sonnets, where each sonnet is related to the next through the repetition of the last line of the first poem as the first line of the second. The acrostic, by which the first letter of each line in the first sonnet spells out the point of the poem, is an interesting addition by the Slovene Prešeren that Priestly and his colleague managed to recreate.

This poetic venture is followed by another one into the understudied realm of pseudo-translations (PT) with "Pseudo-translation as a Subset of the Literary System: a

Case Study" by Maryam Mohammadi Dehcheshmeh. As the author points out, numerous examples of PT, generally referred to as translations that lack a source text, can be found in Persian literature, although some of these could also be defined as adaptations, instances of plagiarism, or imitations. The ambiguity surrounding the definition of PT is only one of its characteristics. More interesting are the conditions of production of such texts, which are often political. In certain cultures, it may be advantageous for a writer to publish a PT for economic gain or to avoid censorship. Mohammadi shows that this has long been the case in Iran, and through the analysis of the fascinating case of *Charlie Chaplin's letter to his daughter Geraldine*, a PT adopted by the Iranian powers-that-be as a vehicle for the doxa, she throws light on the ramifications of its historical, social and political context.

While Mohammadi explains that the peritext often provides clues as to the nature of a translation as PT, Gabrielle Kristjanson argues in "Meaning in (Translated) Popular Fiction: An Analysis of Hyper-Literal Translation in Clive Barker's *Le Royaume des Devins*" that ignoring its importance when choosing a source text for translation can have important consequences for the reception of the translation. Barker's *Weaveworld* marks a transition from the horror genre to dark fantasy, an important distinction since fans of popular fiction tend to identify authors by genre. According to Kristjanson, Barker's attempt at a new genre was not well received in France because fans knew him as a horror genre author and the translation would have needed more domestication to make the new genre more accessible. In addition, the French edition seemed to ignore visual cues given by the peritext on both the front and back covers. Interestingly, since one might have expected otherwise in the genre of popular fiction, the result was a culturally incommunicable translation because of its disregard of this genre's restricted standards.

Arianne Des Rochers' "Lorsque la traduction sert de frontière entre deux cultures: une analyse traductologique de la voix-over dans la version anglaise de *Léolo*" next addresses audio-visual translation in the award-winning Québécois film *Léolo* by Jean-Claude Lauzon. After defining the cinematographic notion of voice-over and basing her analysis of the film's English dubbing on this concept, Des Rochers finds that the Québécois accent used by the English-speaking omniscient narrator is rather problematic. At the very least, this accent runs the risk of conveying a caricatured idea of the Québécois social context. On the cultural level and within the Canadian context, this dubbing decision also ends up confirming Québec as a place of otherness from an

Anglophone perspective. Given the dark and pessimistic outlook portrayed by the film and the ideological debates occurring in Canada at the time of the film's production (1992), precisely about Québec's claim to be recognized as a *société distincte*, Des Rochers' study offers a very interesting and important interdisciplinary analysis of how audiovisual translation is influenced by and manipulates both the target socio-cultural context of its production and that of the source of its inspiration.

The final thematic article in this issue also deals with audiovisual translation while adding the music and dance of tango and its representation to the discussion. In "The Tango in Translation: Intertextuality, Filmic Representation, and Performing Argentine Tango in the United States," Emily McManus argues that tango has been and continues to be represented in twentieth-century popular culture as highly racialized and sexualized. Concerned with the notion of cultural translation as formulated by Tejaswini Niranjana, whereby a culture is, consciously or not, reconstructed by an outside translator, McManus proceeds to a very detailed analysis of tango representations in four major motion pictures and in a few less prominent audiovisual documents. Basing her arguments on field research she conducted among U.S. tanguera/os, she finds that these documents show Argentine tango to be translated into an exoticized cultural product more apt to be understood by a general North American audience. The result is a re-enforcement of stereotypes about Latin American culture and of the power relations existing between the dominant U.S. and postcolonial Argentina.

The editorial team hopes that readers will enjoy these varied and stimulating contributions to this double issue of the journal on the theme of translating peripheries as much as we did while preparing them for publication. I wish to thank the members of my team, the reviewers and most of all the authors for their hard work and their patience in seeing this project through.

Last but definitely not least, according to the editorial policy of *TranscUlturAl*, included in the creative section of this issue are "Language Snapshots," poems written by Renée von Paschen and self-translated into German. In the review section, Adrien Guyot comments on *Médée protéiforme* (2013) by Marie Carrière, and Cecilia Foglia provides a review article on *Political Discourse, Media and Translation*, edited by Christina Schäffner and Susan Bassnett (2010).

REFERENCES

Gruesz, Kristina Silva. "Translation: A Key(word) into the Language of America(nists)." *American*
Literary History 16.1 (2004) 85-92.

Pratt, Marie-Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge, 2013.

