
TRADUCCIÓN COMO CULTURA.

Lisa Bradford. Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo, 1997, 184 pp.

Traducción como cultura compiled by Lisa Bradford, is a collection of thirteen essays written by members of a research group called “Problemas de la Literatura Comparada” (“The Problems of Comparative Literature”) from the Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata in Argentina.

The essays, stemming from a series of workshops, are divided into several categories, all of

which relate to Rainer Schulte’s theories on translation. The prologue to the book, written by Schulte, the former President of the American Literary Translators Association (ALTA) based in Dallas, Texas, is in itself a translation.

For Schulte, as for the contributors of this collection, “translation cannot be simply the transference of words through the dividing borders of languages, but really the transplanting of cultural and emotional situations” (translation mine throughout). Lisa Bradford states in her introduction that translation is part of every culture because any type of communication, be it written,

spoken, or read, is in essence a transference of definitions from one context to another. Based on these defining principles of translation, the articles in this collection are divided in the following matter.

The first two essays, by Fabián O. Iriarte and Lisa Bradford, explain to the reader the general position of translation in the Argentinean context. The essays by Adrian Bocchino and Ana Porrúa discuss intralingual translation through a movement in time and place. Nicolás Dornheim and Patricia Willson also write about translation through time but in a historical analysis of German influence to Argentina and the practice and attitudes of translators. As the result of the round-table discussion "Translating Difference", Diana Bellesi contributes with an article in which she discusses her personal approach to feminine poetry and its translation. John Timothy Wixted writes about two Japanese poets and translators and their works. Since translation requires individual and editorial decisions, Mária Averbach and Miguel Wald explain their perspectives on translating Native American texts and screenplays respectively and their reasons for

the decisions they make. And lastly, David William Foster, Miguel Ángel Montezanti, and Susana Romano-Sued contribute with essays on translation in a multicultural context with regard to the interrelationship between English and Spanish in the US, domestication of Borges in English translations, and the use of fiction as a way of studying language, culture, and communication.

In her essay "Género y traducción" ("Gender and Translation"), Diana Bellesi, an important Argentine feminist poet, describes her experience as a translator of other feminist poets from the US. She believes that the life of a poet is one of constant learning, reflexive writing, and translation of poetry. For her, translation is the closest activity there is to the actual writing of poetry, since it is, for her, an intuitive matter more than a derivative or logical process. When she begins a translation, she focuses first on the rhythm of the poems, the music of the other language moves her to meditation on her own language. She becomes attached to the poems she translates, and experiences feelings of betrayal and also of joy when she reconstructs the author's ideas. In keeping with many feminists, she feels that only a woman can

translate poetry written by a woman. A male translator reads the poem in a different way, which may not be the one intended by the poet. Her inspiration comes from what she calls the "written woman", her "revision of the given cultural world, her effort to obtain personal humanity, and the right to humanness of the others, those who remain outside the visible or invisible centers of power".

When thinking of translation as part of the construction of culture, the two-way influence of one language over another comes to mind, especially in the U.S. In his essay "The Politics of Translations of Spanish in the United States", translated by Rossana Álvarez, David William Foster explains the unstable status that the Spanish language has in the U.S. According to Foster, those who control or manipulate the media cause this instability. Because they are trying to appeal to a bilingual population, whose mastery of the language is not at a native speaker's level, they perpetuate the misuse of direct translation, the borrowing of words and phrases, and the confusion of lexical constructions. The Spanish spoken in American media is not that of those educated in the language

since it simply uses the Spanish words in an English lexical context. To make translation a more difficult task, Foster states that Spanish, like English, is an abstraction; there are so many dialects of both languages that attempting to find unity for Spanish speakers in the U.S. cannot be done. As advice to translators, Foster describes his politics of translation as: "the development of a series of specifications that will include multiple variables involved in the act of making a text accessible to readers of a different language and (by definition) another culture".

Within the same context, Miguel Wald, in "Translators: Trapped by their Own Destinies", warns the reader that it is not as easy as one thinks to translate dialogues in screenplays. He explains that there are specific constraints to this kind of translation that are not present in literary translations. This essay may make it difficult for anyone to ever complain about a bad translation in a movie. When translating a script, says Wald, one must think of the dialogue as not essential, but interchangeable, that it represents images, future images. Subtitles, which are usually preferred over dubbing, must be

short enough to allow the viewer to read and look at the image; they must not distract or frustrate the moviegoer. Thus, certain conventions or unspoken set translations must be used and regionalisms not be translated as such; the translation should be understood by all those who speak the language no matter where they learned it. Wald uses the word *shit* as an example. He states that this word may be translated into Spanish in many ways depending on the context, but if, in his translation, he were to use synonyms, this would distract the viewer who might end up reading instead of watching the movie. So instead of using different words, he must use a predetermined translation: “mierda”, because viewers know the word *shit* and know it literally means “mierda”.

Although several of these essays are interesting and their level of difficulty is one that I, as an undergraduate student, had no problem with, I detected an inexcusable flaw in the introduction written by Lisa Bradford. When she gives the reader a brief description of the essays in this collection, she divides

them by the general themes that I have mentioned before. She groups Bellesi’s article on gender-specific translation with that of Wixted explaining that both explore the voice of women and the interrelationship between writing poetry and translating. The problem is that she treats the Wixted article on two Japanese poet/translators as if they were women, yet Wixted very specifically states in his essay that they are both men. As director of the collaborators’ research group called “Problems with Comparative Literature”, Bradford should have been more careful.

The workshops that inspired these Argentine writers to analyze translation in their personal fields of interest and to write these essays are based on the general view of translation as a necessary process in the construction of culture. They thereby allow the reader of the translation to understand, as Schulte explains: “not just the semantics of a text, but also the underlying music and rhythm that shape the aesthetic atmosphere of the imaginative reality of the other language” and its culture.

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