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Self-translation and Power: Negotiating Identities in European
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Comptes rendus

CASTRO, Olga, MAINER, Sergi, and PAGE, Svetlana, eds. (2017): *Self-translation and Power: Negotiating Identities in European Multilingual Contexts*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 302 p.

The sheer volume of publications on self-translation over the last decade, in the form of monographs, edited collections, and special journal issues, attests to how far we have come from the 2001 *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* entry which declared self-translation a phenomenon to which “translation scholars themselves have paid little attention” (Grutman 1998/2001: 17).¹ In carving out a space for self-translation as a field of study in its own right, scholarship often starts from the tacit position of valorizing self-translation for its uniqueness as a practice, for its aesthetic interest, or for its utility in enabling writers to reach a wider readership. In what ways, however, can self-translation also be understood as a potentially problematic enterprise? Can we study self-translation while also questioning the conditions that make it possible?

The volume *Self-translation and Power* broaches these questions directly and implicitly, aiming not just to situate self-translation as a theoretically rich field in its own right, but placing it in the direct lineage of current scholarship in translation studies. As its title suggests, the volume takes its cue from the 2002 collection *Translation and Power* edited by Maria Tymoczko and Edwin Gentzler, the latter of whom prefaces this volume, praising it as a “pioneering anthology” (Gentzler 2017: v). Following its predecessor, *Self-translation and Power* asserts that the act of translation is imbricated in power dynamics shaped by various cultural, institutional, and geopolitical pressures. Embedded as it is in multiple linguistic contexts, self-translation provides a “privileged position to problematise power and to negotiate identities” (p. 11), and even to challenge the very idea that, in practice, self-translation succeeds in “promot[ing] minorised cultures and nations” (p. 13).

On the whole, the volume draws strength from its breadth. It is comprised of twelve original essays (including the introduction) written by a range of contributors, from seasoned scholars of translation to current doctoral candidates, and which model various literary and sociological

approaches to the study of translation. It is also productively committed to a broad idea of Europe that extends beyond the borders of the European Union, with essays, for example, that focus on minorized European languages (such as Occitan, Basque, and Ladino), that connect Europe to other continental regions (South America, North Africa), and that bridge the divide between Europe and its neighbors (Turkey, Russia). As Olga Castro, Sergi Mainer, and Svetlana Page argue in their introduction, “This collection wishes to disperse an existing perception of Europe as a monolithic cultural and/or political space still largely pertaining to postcolonial critique” (p. 6)—an objective that the volume succeeds in achieving.

The first section of the volume, “Hegemony and Resistance,” includes three essays that ask how language policies and political pressures shape self-translation practices. Rainier Grutman traces Belgium’s history of national independence to demonstrate the entrenched power dynamics at stake between French and Dutch. Identifying seventeen active self-translators from the end of the 19th century to the present, Grutman argues that self-translation has been historically correlated with language policies “aimed at levelling the playing field between languages” (p. 45), and that, given the widening gap between regional identities in modern-day Belgium, self-translation seems to be in decline. Christian Lagarde’s essay examines four cases of Occitan writers in the mid-20th century and how the decision to self-translate, or not, reveals varying kinds of power dynamics—from pressures emerging from the literary field, from collective efforts to challenge French hegemony, and from personal aspirations towards literary autonomy. Lagarde does not ultimately advocate for one particular literary strategy, suggesting instead that the historical moment and literary skill of a writer require different modes for preserving Occitan linguistic and cultural heritage. In the final essay of the section, Mehtap Ozdemir reads Halide Edib’s collaborative self-translation, from English to Turkish, of her memoir *The Turkish Ordeal* to argue that the omissions and changes in the translation result from self-censorship in the face of ideological and political pressures in Turkey. Though the theoretical framework of the essay seems like an unnecessary add-on, Ozdemir’s insightful cross-linguistic textual readings and careful attention to the Turkish legal and political landscape make for a compelling analysis of the dynamics of censorship inherent in bilingual writing.

This essay leads naturally into the volume's next section, a series of four essays on "Self-Minorisation and Self-Censorship." Josep Miquel Ramis takes a broadly sociological approach in his study of Catalan literature from the Franco era to the present. His essay serves as a plea to save Catalan literature from "alarming trends" (p. 113) that point to the increasing pressures to write directly in Spanish, yet would benefit from a more nuanced approach both to self-translation and to texts themselves: why, for instance, would self-translation be necessary for Catalan identity, rather than writing just in Catalan? And why is "literature" in the essay conceived as a seemingly catch-all term to encompass both novels and newspaper articles? For Arzu Akbatur, in her study of Elif Shafak's polemical *The Bastard of Istanbul*, self-translation refers to the original English text as it translates Turkish culture for a western audience. Akbatur is interested in Shafak's "in-betweenness," both in her linguistic practices and her treatment of cultural and political issues in her novels, arguing ultimately that Shafak both challenges and reifies binary thinking. In his close reading of Juan Gelman's *Dibaxu*, Brandon Rigby contends that by "self-minorising," in the choice to write in Ladino, and by then self-translating into Spanish, Gelman resists the power, language, and rhetorical violence of the Argentine junta from which he escaped in emigrating to Europe. Rigby might want to think through how self-translation, and not just language choice, functions as an act of marginalisation, while also addressing the implications for a writer of Ashkenazi Jewish roots to learn and deploy Ladino, rather than Yiddish, as his language of resistance. The closing essay of the section returns us to Spain, in which Harriet Hulme examines the stakes of Bernardo Atxaga's self-translations from Euskera to Castilian Spanish. The greatest strength of the essay lies in its self-reflective critical stance: "What," Hulme asks as a non-Basque speaker, "does it mean *not* to read *Obabakoak* in Basque?" (p. 168). Her approach is a particularly fruitful one for writers, like Atxaga, who composed a version in a major language not to produce comparative readings, as is often the claim of self-translation criticism, but precisely to reach speakers (and prize judges) who cannot read in a minor tongue.

Two of the essays in the final section of the volume, "Collaboration, Hybridisation and Invisibility," center on collaborative self-translation projects. Elizabete Manterola Agirrezabalaga compares two Basque writers whose self-translations into Spanish were completed in close collaboration either with a spouse (in the case of Atxaga) or with a publisher (Anjel Lertxundi and his publisher-translator Jorge Gimenez Bech), in an essay that

is more descriptive than interpretive. Julia Holter, meanwhile, looks at the case of the Russian emigré poet Vadim Kozovoï whose collaborative self-translation into French, with the aid of famed poets Michel Deguy and Jacques Dupin, represented a strategic—and ultimately failed—attempt to gain a reading public in France. Holter's excellent bilingual reading of *Hors de la colline*, nuanced treatment of the relationship between French intellectuals and Soviet writers in the 70s and 80s, and convincing argument that Kozovoï's poetry in French lacked both symbolic capital and aesthetic quality, make the essay a stand-out in the volume. The other two essays of the section are concerned with texts that unsettle hegemonic forms of discourse. For Rita Wilson, the bilingual writing of the Algerian author Amara Lakhous, which Arabises Italian and Italianises Arabic, serves as a "counter-narrative, engaging in critical translational work that highlights the power of transcultural and ethnolinguistic solidarities" (p. 248); this compelling idea would be even stronger were Wilson to have looked not just at Lakhous' Italian texts, but those he wrote in Arabic as well. Marc Cesar Rickenbach's concluding essay offers a smart reading of Max Frisch's film "Zürich-Transit" in which the dual silencing of Swiss place names and dialect, in favor of high German, signals a bid to attain inclusion in a dominant culture.

For as much as the breadth of essay topics, cultural reference points, and methodological approaches across the volume provides a diverse array of perspectives, it also, at times, seems to inhibit a certain theoretical precision: while the essays range in effectiveness, as one might expect in any edited collection, there is a sense that contributors do not always mean the same thing by the term "self-translation." Rickenbach, for instance, understands self-translation as an act of spatial and psychic "displacement" (p. 266) for the Swiss-German writer who imagines her reader as a speaker of standard high German. For Akbatur, self-translation obtains less as a translational practice than as a metaphorical figure to capture Shafak's cultural positioning vis-à-vis a western audience. More work could fruitfully be done, particularly in the introduction, to theorize the terminological tensions and stakes in the very idea of self-translation. One wishes, too, that the volume had received more careful proofreading to avoid frequent spelling mistakes, infelicities of language, and unnecessary errors (such as Grutman's table with a double entry for Paul Verhaeghen, seeming to neglect the writer Michel Seuphor [p. 36]; or Wilson's reference to "Richard," not *Raymond*, Federman, [p. 251]).

Despite these concerns, *Self-translation and Power* succeeds in advancing the conversation in

self-translation by sharpening attention on the power structures that undergird the production of literary works in multiple languages. The volume instructs us to recognize that self-translation can be as much a powerful tool as a problematic instrument of power.

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NOTES

1. For such recent publications, see, for example, Hokenson and Munson (2007), Anselmi (2012), Cordingley (2013), Kippur (2015), Ferraro and Grutman (2016), and Falceri, Gentes and Mannerola (2017). A more comprehensive bibliography of publications on self-translation can be found on Eva Gentes' self-translation blog. GENTES, Eva, ed. (1 April 2018): Bibliography. Autotraduzione / autotraducción / self-translation. 31st ed. *Self-translation*. Blogspot: Blogger. Visited 19 June 2018, <<https://app.box.com/s/v97urfu8qzt6tl4fba2gwan-7wm872n6o>>.

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GALANES SANTOS, Iolanda, LUNA ALONSO, Ana, MONTERO KÜPPER, Silvia et FERNÁNDEZ RODRÍGUEZ, Áurea, dir. (2016): *La traducción literaria. Nuevas investigaciones*. Interlingua. Grenade: Comares, 339 p.

Cet ouvrage est édité par quatre professeures de l'Université de Vigo qui sont aussi membres du groupe de recherche BITRAGA¹ (Bibliothèque de traduction galicienne) et dont l'activité investigatrice est centrée sur la traduction littéraire. Ce livre s'inscrit dans une certaine continuité d'éditions antérieures, en 2012 et 2015, consacrées elles aussi à la traduction littéraire (Fernández Rodríguez, Galanes Santos, *et al.* 2012; Luna Alonso, Fernández Rodríguez, *et al.* 2015). Une continuité toutefois relative puisque ce livre, même s'il traite du contexte galicien déjà abordé dans les éditions précédentes, s'ouvre plus largement aux recherches en traduction littéraire au cours de ces dernières années au sein de l'État plurilingue espagnol.

Ce sont au total quatorze chapitres qui rendent compte de la situation de la traduction littéraire en Espagne, précédés d'un prologue de Francisco Lafarga. Tant l'introduction, qui permet en quelques paragraphes d'appréhender l'ouvrage dans son contexte, que la conclusion, sont rédigées par les directrices qui participent aussi aux chapitres de ce livre. Le lecteur pourra aborder une lecture divisée en trois ensembles de chapitres. Le premier ensemble permet une révision et une actualisation des principales théories et outils nécessaires à la recherche en traduction littéraire. Le second propose différentes analyses de la traduction littéraire au sein du plurisystème linguistique espagnol. On y trouve ainsi le cas du catalan, de l'aragonais², du galicien et du basque au cours de ces trente dernières années. Enfin, le troisième ensemble est une présentation de plusieurs études de cas concernant différents genres et sous-genres littéraires.

Dans le premier chapitre, Luis Pegenaute fait état de la traduction littéraire et aborde une tentative de définition. Sa réflexion se prolonge sur les relations entre création et traduction ainsi que sur le tournant culturel des études de traduction. Mais l'auteur se penche davantage sur les approches sociales. Il rappelle ainsi les théories de Bourdieu et de Latour et Caillon évidemment incontournables. D'autres approches auraient été aussi dignes de mention, par exemple la notion de «métissage» dans l'approche sociale chez Alexis Nouss et François Laplantine. Pegenaute aborde en fin de chapitre l'approche historique et stylistique, et ouvre le débat sur la littérature universelle. Il pose ainsi les bases théoriques sur lesquelles reposeront les différents chapitres de ce livre.