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# Translating cultures, cultures in translation

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Among its several definitions, *translation* can be understood as 'a rendering from one language into another', probably the most immediate sense, as 'a change to a different substance, form, or appearance' and as 'uniform motion of a body in a straight line' (Merriam Webster, 2020: online). The works exploring translation as the process that facilitates the travel of a given text from one language to another and as the product of such a journey are countless, from all sorts of perspectives. On this occasion, however, the focus is put on 'translation' understood in a much wider, more flexible manner, closer to those conceptions of 'translation' as 'change' and 'movement'. From that viewpoint, 2019 witnessed the celebration of the *19th Conference of the International Association for Languages and Intercultural Communication (IALIC)*, held at the Universitat de València (Spain). This special issue stems from that conference, in which four keynote speakers and over 90 speakers gathered to exchange their thoughts on the topic of *Translating Cultures, Cultures in Translation*.

The conference also engaged with the diversity of cultural narratives and texts – fictional and non-fictional, poetic and prosaic, imaginary and autobiographical, visual and performative – through which (inter)cultural encounters can be critically engaged with, reflected upon and interpreted. In so doing, the different formats and platforms which can be used for communication, including images, performance, media, film, performing arts and music were explored. As people shaped and reshaped their own culture(s), novel theoretical, methodological and pedagogical approaches to intercultural communication arose. All in all, it was a forum that sought to embrace not only the reassuringly conventional, but also new forms of intercultural expression that are emerging.

Hence, this special issue's theme, 'Translating Cultures, Cultures in Translation', just as the aforementioned conference did, emerges principally from the idea that it is people who co-construct their culture(s) through intercultural communication and everyday encounters. Cultures are therefore not static but are always on the move; nor are cultures homogenous, rather they are diverse and multifaceted. In other words, cultures are always 'in translation' or moving from one location to another; similarly, cultural frameworks are always permeable and subject to change under the mutual contact that takes place between individuals.

This issue, therefore, explores the relationship between cultures and translation understood not only as encounter, co-construction, negotiation change and movement, but also as a means of explicating and interpreting the world. Intercultural interactions take place both in ordinary circumstances such as school, the workplace or everyday life, and in exceptional situations such as those brought about by forced or voluntary displacements. In these circumstances, cultural difference can be signified by the language used in relation to gender, sexuality, age, food, dress, social mores or other characteristics which become salient in these interactions. In this, structural agents of power and change, such as educational institutions, governmental and other administrative agencies, as well as political regimes and agendas – forces which can be both productive of and resistant to diversity, difference and individual agency – can also be subject to scrutiny. In these circumstances, the conflicting demands of intercultural exchange and intercultural difference

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might lead not only to the flaring up of clashes and misunderstandings, but also, in the worst scenarios, to the silencing of individuals' voices and the denial of their identities. Thus, intercultural communication, dialogue, negotiation and mediation are all necessary in order to overcome and resolve confrontational situations that might give rise to intolerance and injustice of all persuasions.

The eight papers selected for this special issue reflect a myriad of perspectives in tune with such multifaceted notions as culture, on the one hand, and translation, on the other. Despite this heterogeneity, there are many shared issues underpinning the debates and case studies presented by the different authors, in particular themes such as mediation, ideology, gatekeeping vs. censorship, intercultural contexts within communities, the role of creative arts in intercultural research, and interculturality in higher education.

One of the core concepts related to both intercultural communication and translation is that of 'mediation' and consequently it is extensively addressed by two of the papers in this issue, although from diverse angles. In 'Revisiting Mediation: Implications for Intercultural Language Education', John Corbett reconsiders the notion of mediation with the aim of untangling the various senses of the word as it has become increasingly visible in intercultural language education. Proof of this visibility would be, for example, how the idea of mediation has gathered momentum since the publication of the *Common European Frame of Reference* (2001) and that of its successive *Companion* (2017), in which references to mediation activities and strategies are almost all-pervasive in the revised descriptors. At the same time, the intercultural language learner is seen more and more as a mediator as the focus has moved from the role given to the 'native speaker' in the traditional language curriculum to that of the intercultural speaker. The increased significance given to mediation in intercultural language education is influenced by the use of this term in some related disciplines such as translation studies, mediated discourse studies and conflict resolution strategies, although they do not always help to shed light about how it can be applied in the classroom, especially in contexts of conflict. As illustrated by Corbett, some successful attempts have been made, though, through the research network project *Building an intercultural pedagogy for higher education in conditions of conflict and protracted crises: Languages, Identity, Culture*. By means of five small-scale, local, although internationally based, pilot projects, a group of committed educators and teacher-trainers have blended language education with a form of critical pedagogy by using creative arts, as well as giving voice to a number of participants.

In turn, Roberto Valdeón's paper, 'Translation: From Mediation to Gatekeeping and Agenda-Setting', explores mediation in the field of translation studies and challenges the idea that this concept has traditionally been attached to translation and its allegedly conciliatory role contributing to resolving conflicts. On the contrary, the author argues, translation is inextricably related to ideology and often part of a broader political agenda, thus sometimes prompting separation and dispute rather than harmony. Valdeón also emphasises the gatekeeping function that translation repeatedly plays, as the act of translating inevitably entails selection, which can be considered from two different perspectives: what is omitted – and this would be related to censorship – and what is allowed to be present in the text. And he wonders why researchers have always been more interested in studying what has been excluded rather than what has been allowed to pass the gates, thus exerting some kind of soft power. As Valdeón proves by presenting a case study regarding some recent examples in the Spanish press, gatekeeping is particularly relevant in journalistic translation as it works at a macro-level, by deciding what news stories will be translated, and at a micro-level, by selecting which parts of the original articles will be retained and/or altered. Gatekeeping is closely related to the theory of agenda-setting, which has been a central issue in communication studies in the last decades, thus further proving the ideological implications of translation.

Ideology and censorship are two of the issues at play in Gora Zaragoza Ninet and Sara Llopis Mestre's paper '*The Unlit Lamp* (1924): Translation, Reception and Censorship', and whereas Valdeón emphasises how important it is to explain why certain elements are retained in a translation, these authors delve into the reasons why some parts of an original text have been omitted in its translation into another language. Zaragoza Ninet and Llopis Mestre examine the reception in

Spain of Marguerite Radclyffe Hall's novel *The Unlit Lamp* (1924) about a lesbian relationship, which was first translated and published in Spain in 1950, during Franco's dictatorship, and was again rendered into Spanish in 1982. By retrieving and analysing the censorship files, the authors contend that *The Unlit Lamp* is just one example of the many key works by women which were partially censored to adapt to the ideology and value system of Spanish society at the time. The censors, however, seem to have failed to spot some of the lesbian elements of the novel and found no offence to contemporary morality in the text, with most of its censored contents being based on religious grounds. In turn, the 1982 version in Spanish openly presents the novel as a lesbian love story and a critique of patriarchy, thus exposing the changes that have come about in Spanish society as well as those in the practice of translation.

Another set of papers engage with the idea of 'communities', international or local, as sites of translation. In 'Cultures in Translation, Complexity and Development Inequalities: Cultivating Spaces for Shared Understanding', Jane Woodin, Lena Hamaidia and Sarah Methven address the complexities of translation and intercultural studies especially in the area of international development for which the Sustainable Development Goals established by the United Nations in 2015, with an emphasis on leaving no one behind, are paramount. By drawing on international development project experiences the authors stress the relevance of the adequate exchange of information between those leading the projects and those benefitting from them and consequently the importance of establishing good and flexible channels for intercultural communication. Taking into account that languages do not have equal status and that those working for cooperation agencies and NGOs tend to use a reduced number of what the authors refer to as 'colonial languages', the need to translate both languages and cultures across different parts of these organisations so that everybody can be listened to is prevalent and, so the authors assert, is something that would improve their outcomes. The authors also draw attention, on the one hand, to the position the translator/interpreter may assume as gatekeeper by deciding what information is exchanged and how it is transmitted and, on the other, how ethnographic work can contribute to the development of new skills in translators and help them to adopt the perspectives of the other.

By using an ethnographic approach as a participant observer, Haynes Collins' paper 'Mermaids, Knitted Costumes and Pink Carbolic Soap: Making Meaning and Translating Social Space in Community-Led Pools' explores how three British, community-led, historic swimming pools become inclusive sites for translation understood in a broad sense, that is, a dynamic process affecting our speech, perceptions, ideas or movements in which we are all constantly engaged (Schulte, 2012). Publicly accessible swimming pools are an example of social infrastructure in which people experience everyday interculturality by means of encounters with a range of different people, meanings and discourses. Pools are also places of small culture formation which occur through negotiated practices and need to be analysed by using multiple lenses, hence the pertinence of an ethnographic approach. At the same time, a place, in general, and a swimming pool, in particular, can also be analysed as a kind of text at different levels: the building itself, the possibilities of organisation and movement within that building, and the experience the users have. To keep this kind of swimming pool running, Collins stresses the importance of community making among their users, and argues that fostering engaging, creative, artistic activities proves a suitable means. As with Corbett and Woodin, Hamaidia and Methven above, Collins also emphasises the importance of listening to others and giving the users an opportunity to participate in the everyday management of the pool space by continual dialogue in regular meetings, thus achieving some kind of bottom-up inclusivity.

In the following paper, 'Intercultural Personhood: A Non-Essentialist Conception of Individuals for Intercultural Research', Zhuo Min Huang also turns to creative-arts methods, as Corbett and Collins have done in their respective papers, in order to explore the concept of 'intercultural personhood', as distinct from cultural identity, to refer to the first-person meaning-making of who one is in intercultural experiences. This concept allows for a more pluralistic and transformative view of individuals in an increasingly diverse but integrated world; and it also allows us to move from an

essentialist to a non-essentialist or more 'liquid' (Bauman, 2006) nature of intercultural learning. Huang carries out a small-scale research project at a culturally diverse university, in a multicultural urban setting in the United Kingdom, with four post-graduate students with mixed international backgrounds. A series of creative-arts methods such as cartoon painting, collage production and art-gallery visiting were used with the participants to individually render data which included a set of individual images as well as accompanying audio recordings discussing them. Even if the results cannot be generalised taking into account the small scale of the project, Huang contends that intercultural personhood can be conceptualised as a personalised hybrid construct of change and exchange that is negotiated through the multi-polarised tension of being, and opens new ways in intercultural research.

In her paper 'Lexical-Semantic Configuration of Ordinary Relational Identities in Multicultural Groups of University Students', Rosa Giménez Moreno argues that although relational identities (those referring to the family, social or professional spheres such as 'mother', 'friend', 'neighbour' or 'colleague') may seem easy to learn and translate in intercultural contexts, they actually convey complex mental constructs and are affected by different variables involved in human communication, most particularly, cultural variation. In order to prove her argument, Giménez Moreno presents the *Prag-me Project*, a task-based language learning methodology piloted at the Universitat de València based on a series of telecollaborative activities for the study and development of pragmatic-semantic and intercultural competencies. The participants in the project were 24 students, native speakers of 15 different languages, coming from more than 20 different cultural backgrounds, and the aim of the project was to develop their awareness about the complexity of conceptualising, expressing, defining and classifying ordinary relational identities in a multicultural forum of discussion by means of task-based telecollaborative language learning. The results showed how the conceptualisation of these relational identities is not something static but keeps changing and adapting to all kinds of conventions: cultural, social and ideological. A better understanding of the nuances involved in these relational identities will definitely help students with their use and translation in intercultural contexts.

The last article in this special issue, 'Refocusing the Development of Critical Intercultural Competence in Higher Education: Challenges and Opportunities', by Sandra López-Rocha, intends to revise the development of critical intercultural competence in higher education institutions in relation to their internationalisation programmes. Since the acquisition of intercultural competence cannot be assumed as something happening automatically with the introduction of international elements via student mobility or providing an internationalised university environment changes should be introduced in the curriculum encouraging the development of skills across different levels in the higher education institutions. Despite the fact that resistance and challenges set up by 'blockers' (Beelen & Leask, 2011) can be found at different levels in these institutions, there are attempts in some universities, as shown in the case study presented by López-Rocha, to work towards an internationalised curriculum by engaging administrators, instructors and students in the process, and paying special attention to contents, methods and assessment. Our responsibility as interculturalists working in higher education institutions goes beyond teaching our students and must extend to our colleagues and administrative staff, as well as the community at large. That is, we should become intercultural mediators.

On a final note, we would like to thank all the scholars who showed an interest in publishing their work in this special issue but could not be accepted as it was beyond the scope of the theme. And we want to thank especially the contributors to this issue as their varied perspectives in the topic of cultures and translation, translation and cultures have helped us to expand our views on these areas of study. We have learnt something from them all. Special thanks go to the reviewers who, with their insights and comments, have greatly helped to improve the contents of this special issue. Our thanks also to the Department of English and German and to the members of the CiTrans research group, at the Universitat de València, for their wholehearted support. We would like to thank as well the editorial and production staff at Taylor and Francis and finally, we

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