



# Asymmetries in/of Translation: Translating Translated Hispanicism(s)

## Asymétries dans/de la traduction : traduire des hispanismes traduits

Rosario Martín Ruano and Carmen África Vidal Claramonte

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[See table of contents](#)

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Article abstract

This paper focuses on the hybrid writing of American authors of Hispanic descent in its double dimension as a process of translation and representation, and also as a process subject to other processes of translation and representation, including scholarly assessment and description. It examines the problems and ideological implications of translating these *translated* fictions, inasmuch as this writing calls into question both traditional visions of literature and hegemonic translation models.

# Asymmetries in/of Translation: Translating Translated Hispanicism(s)<sup>1</sup>

**Rosario Martín Ruano**  
**Carmen África Vidal Claramonte**

¿Una qué?

Una aplicación, güey, una solicitud de empleo, tú sabes, como allá en México. Eso es todo.

Pos es que la neta a veces nomás no te entiendo, mano, que la marqueta, que la aseguranza, que la carpeta, ¡que la chingada!

Ora, pues, pues qué quieres, aquí el español se está americanizando. Tienes que aprender, mano, no van a cambiar solo pa' que tú les entiendas, pos qué crees.

Carlos von Son, "Matorrales", *Qué de qué y otros cuentos*

Desde la torre de Babel, las lenguas han sido siempre una forma de divorciarnos del resto de la humanidad. Poetry must find ways of breaking distance. I'm not reducing my audience. On the contrary, I'm going to have a bigger audience with the common markets—in Europe—in America. And besides, all languages are dialects that are made to break new grounds. Me siento como Dante, Petrarca and Boccaccio, y como Garcilaso forging a new language. Saludo al nuevo siglo, el siglo del nuevo lenguaje de América, y le digo adiós a la retórica separatista y a los atavismos.

Giannina Braschi, "Sin pelos en la lengua"

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It can be argued that one of the most fascinating aspects of translation is that it is an activity in direct contact with the world, at the same time fully affected by whatever is happening and participating in any societal change, clearly engaged in the political transformations which are constantly taking place in every culture. Far from being an overstatement, this conviction is backed by merely recalling the enormous transformation the concept of translation has undergone in recent times. Just as Western society has become more and more heterogeneous and diverse (or is at least attempting to open itself to the new and highly interesting reality of multiculturalism and hybridity), translation has also begun to celebrate difference: from the search of absolute, pure equivalence or the orthodox mirroring of a sacrosanct, untouchable original, to the ideal of neutrally and univocally rendering an allegedly homogeneous text, translation has begun to realize that all texts, including original texts, are not unitary and invariable, thus impermeable, but unstable and multiple, and therefore heteroglossic. Translation, like society, has no option but to live up to the difference that inhabits texts, which are all the more enthralling the richer they are in diversity; otherwise translation may run the risk of irresponsibility.

In this regard, it should not be forgotten that language, the raw material of texts, also serves as an identity card. The way we use language says much about ourselves. We say things by means of language, and we also say things by means of what we do not say through (a) language. Language is an instrument of power that is never neutral. Language exchanges are also an actualization of the relations of symbolic power at work between cultures, which ultimately means that there are no neutral or innocent words. Language symbolizes the authority of the person speaking, or the authority that the speaker wishes to attain.

This is precisely the starting point of many representations of the reality created, by means of language, by many writers of Latin American origin who know the power of words, as well as the words of power. Like many other writers in our world, these particular authors referred to are torn by a complicated dilemma: whether to use the dominant language or that of their minor culture as a creative weapon. This dilemma is evident in the words of the Peruvian writer José María Arguedas, a native-speaker of Quechua who nevertheless chose to write in Spanish, the language of power: a language he did not like, and even infuriated him. In an article on language in which he reflects on the

contradictions of feeling in one language and writing in another, he states that “Quechua is the legitimate expression of the native of this land, as a creature of this landscape and this light. With Quechua the soul of this light and this land, both as beauty and residence, is told, described and spoken ... If we talk in pure Castilian, we do not talk about the landscape or about our inner world ... But if we write in Quechua, we produce a narrow literature condemned to obscurity.”<sup>2</sup> As a solution to this dilemma—a creative solution filled with anguish—, Arguedas creates an inclusive style encompassing both languages by writing in a variety of Spanish that nevertheless includes Quechua vocabulary, intonation and expressions, and reflects the indigenous attitudes and beliefs by means of syntactic modifications: a syntactically destroyed Spanish in which Arguedas recognizes the genius of the Quechua language; i.e., a dominant language that is nevertheless used as the expressive vehicle of a minority (Sales, 2001).

However, proving the relational nature of concepts like majority and minority (Venuti, 1998), Spanish sometimes appears as a minor language that competes but needs to collaborate with a dominant language to express a world view. This is certainly true of many authors of Latin American descent based in America, who, as is well known, use a special hybrid language, halfway *between* the strong and the weak, *between* the language of power (English) and that of their—in this case minor—Hispanic culture, to the affirmation of which they want to contribute. Literary criticism has widely studied this phenomenon, as is shown by the enormous amount of literature on the subject. However, research conducted from the point of view of translation is far more rare in spite of the fact that, in our opinion, this phenomenon is interesting for such an approach not only inasmuch as *translation* is a constant process in the current existence of many persons caught and writing in both interesting and stressing situations of *in-betweenness*, crossculturalism and hybridation, but also because the kind of hybrid literature which originated from these situations is undoubtedly on the rise in the hegemonic (English and North-American) editorial market, which in turn means that it is prone to

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<sup>2</sup> “El kechwa es la expresión legítima del hombre de esta tierra, del hombre como criatura de este paisaje y de esta luz. Con el kechwa se habla en forma profunda, se describe y se dice el alma de esta luz y de este campo, como belleza y como residencia [...] Si hablamos en castellano puro, no decimos ni del paisaje ni de nuestro mundo interior [...] Pero si escribimos en kechwa hacemos literatura estrecha y condenada al olvido.” (*apud* Sales, 2001, p. 679, our translation)

being translated into other languages. Thus translation-oriented approaches seem to be relevant and needed, all the more so if we consider that these new literary expressions challenge the principle of distinctiveness of languages presumed both in traditional conceptions of literature and, what is more important, in the dominant definition of translation, still conceived as the transfer of a text from *one* language into *another*. For, paradoxically, contravening its intercultural nature, translation as an institution still entertains and consolidates the illusion of monolingualism, which represents more than a dream for language purity: it conceals a wish for unity and identity in sameness; the search for stability and the upholding of the *status quo*. Needless to say, the type of literature referred to dissents from these long-standing ideals, which makes the revision of prevalent translation models all the more urgent.

In many works by authors living a cross-cultural existence, the situation differs considerably from classical multilingual novels, namely works by Tolstoy, Nabokov, Hemingway or Mann, which are interspersed with some fragments in a second language clearly differentiated from that of the original. On the contrary, in what some call a new type of literature (Sáenz, 2000), different languages are used *simultaneously and in combination with each other*, as a reflection of real situations which are very common in our *allegedly* and *seemingly* global world, in which languages and cultures fuse, mix and collide. Translators pick up a problematic gauntlet when confronted to this kind of celebration of contamination. Translation has traditionally acted at the service of the development of (national) languages (Nama, 1995) or the construction of (concrete) cultures (Bassnett and Lefevere, 1998). The challenge lies in how to transform while maintaining—how to recreate, then—such heteroglossia, such carnivalesque play of language(s), such Bahktinian dialogism, without yielding to the centripetal forces of the unitary language(s) or turning those orchestral, multivoiced compositions into monologic solos or arias. For this new type of literature, traditional translation models, constructed upon a binary logic, appear for some to be insufficient to explain and rearticulate this interstitial, ambivalent space that is fed on contamination and rejects any essentialist, hierarchical and centripetal vision. “To survive the Borderlands/you must live *sin fronteras*/be at a crossroads,” warns Gloria Anzaldúa (1987, p. 195).

As opposed to the (institutional) call to abandon the language spoken at home—a call that obviously promotes or results in

disinheritance and rootlessness (Dicker, 1996, pp. 142-176)—, these American-based authors of Latin American descent privilege the space of *in-betweenness* where languages mutually influence each other. The mixing of Spanish and English brings about a richer language reflecting the union, rather than safeguarding the separation, of cultures, which in the end flaunts the sacrosanct conception of *national* literatures and calls into question “the candid idea according to which literary traditions *coincide and can coincide only* with linguistic traditions and that all linguistic traditions would coincide with the principle of nations” (Lambert, 1995, p. 98). These authors in fact show that maps are far more complex than the cartographers’ representations of social and political realities. In this regard, in a plenary lecture in an International Congress on the unity and diversity of Spanish held in Valladolid, Spain, in 2001, Graciela Limón highlighted the difficulty and impossibility for displaced and deterritorialized individuals of obeying the poignant but ultimately contradictory mandate not to muddle cultures and languages, contradictory inasmuch as, to explain it graphically with Limón’s illustration taken from her own experience, the order at school was *Only English! Only English!*, whereas at home the imperative was the opposite: *¡Sólo español! ¡Sólo español!* Just like an important sector of American society, Limón soon discovered, in her own words, that the easiest way was to use words taken from both languages, even though that meant an insurrection against those laws:

- Me puse muy *nervous* cuando la *teacher* me llamó *today* en la *school*. Especialmente porque *I didn't know* la respuesta.
- ¿Qué es esta revoltura de palabras? ¿Quién puede entender? Niños, ¡no mezclen sus palabras! Hablen un lenguaje u otro. (Limón, 2001)

In the fictional representations of many Hispanic writers, languages merge into a third language that is itself an emblem of a whole existential condition marked by constant bordercrossing. In her introduction to the Spanish self-translation of *When I was Puerto Rican*, Esmeralda Santiago clearly affirms and celebrates such interlanguage as a form of self-expression, as the only way of articulating her unique translated identity, unable to fit into the straitjacket of normativeness:

... el idioma que ahora hablo, el cual yo pensaba que era español, es realmente el espanglés, ese dialecto forjado del español y el inglés que toma palabras de los dos idiomas, las añade a las expresiones familiares puertorriqueñas y cambia la manera en que se escriben para crear palabras nuevas. En mi casa, por ejemplo, lavamos el piso

con un *mapo*, compramos *tique* pa'l cine, *nos damos de cuenta*, leemos *panfletos*, *damos el OK*, y *llamamos pa'atrás* cuando estamos muy *bisi* pa' hablar por teléfono.

Años atrás, si alguien me hubiese indicado los muchos espanglícismos en mi vocabulario, el bochorno me hubiese dejado muda. Hoy en día tengo que aceptar que este idioma inventado por necesidad es el que me permite expresarme a mi manera. (Santiago, 1994a, pp. xvi-xvii)

Esmeralda Santiago's language is a clear reflection of a personal and social experience that can only be understood from the interstitial perspective of *in-betweenness*. In *When I was Puerto Rican*, she describes her childhood and her trip to "los Nueva Yorkes" (New York is so big that Santiago writes the name of the city in the plural) and also depicts how immigrants have to confront a new culture, another language. The novel was originally written in English, but Santiago frequently leaves Spanish terms for concepts for which she finds no English equivalent, and includes a glossary in the final pages of her book. Although autobiographical, the book recreates a social narrative: the author revealingly informs us that when she began writing the book she had no idea that it would become a dialogue on cultural identity. Talking to other people she could gather that, even though the culture she described was different from that of her interlocutors, the feelings and experiences described in her book were familiar to them, to the extent that some of the events recalled could have been taken from their own lives. Santiago found it especially moving to talk to other immigrants that had come back to their homeland only to discover how much they had changed during their immersion in the American culture. As the author informs us, these immigrants accept and understand the deliberate irony of using the verb 'to be' in the past in the title of the book: they all share the sentiment that, although there was a time in which they could not but identify with the culture in which they were born, after having lived in the United States their 'cultural purity' had been compromised. In this regard, Esmeralda Santiago recalls how her compatriots would not accept her as a Puerto Rican when she came back after seven years in New York on the basis of her rusty Spanish, her 'too-direct' gaze, her excessively resolute personality for a Puerto Rican woman, and her refusal to eat some traditional dishes like *morcilla*; although she felt as Puerto Rican as when she had left the isle, those who had never been abroad considered that she was contaminated by Americanism, which made her Puerto Ricanness dubious. Paradoxically, in the United States, her dark skin, her accented idiom, her frequent interferences between Spanish and English marked her as a foreigner: as a non-American. Her account promotes self-

understanding for a whole sector of population who no longer fits in its country of origin but neither has the feeling of being one hundred per cent American. It also fosters the understanding of the experience of exile and of the hybrid identity of nomadic individuals.

In this regard, writing in and, moreover, translating into an ‘invented,’ non-codified idiom, as in Santiago’s case, is an affirmation of this identity. Obviously, it is also an act of resistance. It is no coincidence that, in the case mentioned above, Graciela Limón states that to be a Hispanic writer is to be a rebel. “Escribir es hacer preguntas,” Sarah Cisneros confirms this same line in the curious disclaimer to her book *Caramelo*. Cisneros is an author who does not only question the normativeness of the ‘official’ English language with her transgressive, bicultural writing, but also questions other cultural codes which are deeply ingrained in the culture of her ancestors, such as machismo. To use the graphic images with which Kristeva defines her own writing, these writers create, in the crossroads of two languages and at least two periods, a monster characterized by a constant self-dissatisfaction and an inclination to exasperate the natives, both from the country of origin and from the adoptive land (Kristeva, 2000a, p. 72). Insofar as the blending of idioms and worldviews is conscious, deliberate and deeply political—these authors know that difference is an asset to transformation and change or, to use Even-Zohar’s words, that “heterogeneity allows systems to carry on” (2000, p. 43)—, translators should not close their eyes to the semiotics of defiance implicit in the coexistence of different languages and codes. In this regard, these works pose the ultimate challenge to maintain the translated status of originals in any potential translated version: as suggested by Joysmith (1996), these authors know that so-called ‘original’ texts only come into existence when completed with translation, with the translations that readers are forced to perform. Many of these Latino writers intend to raise the consciousness, as Salman Rushdie says in an authorial intrusion in his novel *Shame*, that “I, too, am a translated man. I have been borne across” (Rushdie, 1983, p. 29). By using a *mélange* of languages and cultural codes, the fiction of these Hispanic writers challenges the understanding of those readers who speak English or Spanish exclusively, but merely leaves aside those who refuse to make the effort to place themselves *in-between*, emulating the common idiom of these communities: “*marqueta*” (mercado, market), “*watchear*” (observar, to watch), “*yarda*” (jardín, yard), etc. reflect a reality in which contradiction and crossbreeding create an ideal zone to achieve the union of different sensibilities.

Perhaps the most ethical translation for these writings is that proposed by the late Derrida: the deconstruction of the centre and the emergence of the margin, the indecidability illustrated by ambivalent words like *pharmakon*, the dissemination of meaning, the non-presence of the original, the afterlife of translation: translation as a rewriting of a rewriting. This is a resistant translation committed to highlighting the Outside, le *dehors* (Foucault), the carnivalesque (Bakhtin), heteroglossia (Kristeva), the remainder (Lecerclé, *apud* Venuti). Translation thus appears as a weapon against exclusion that nevertheless does not produce new exclusions, and allows readers to straddle two cultures, two languages when they are reading just one text.

These authors carry the conviction expressed by Derrida in “Roundtable on Translation” to extremes, agreeing that there is impurity in every language, that in any linguistic system there are several languages or tongues. In a sense, they attempt to do justice to George Steiner’s reminder (1997) in his *Errata*: that the monoglot consciousness may well not be the historical and cultural exception but the norm. Translators face the challenge of allowing those works to remain in what Mary Louise Pratt labels *contact zones*: “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (Pratt, 1992, p. 4). In any event, translators should also be aware that a characteristic of these contact zones is that they are often traversed, as Pratt also points out, by “highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (*ibid.*). The fiction by authors such as Sandra Cisneros, Esmeralda Santiago, Julia Álvarez, Pat Mora, Ana Castillo, Rudolfo Anaya, Américo Paredes, Cristina García, Virgil Suárez, Gloria Anzaldúa, Victor Villaseñor, José Antonio Burciaga, Rolando Hinojosa, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Marcos Villatoro, Francisco Alarcón, Arturo Islas, Elena María Viramontes, Rosario Ferré and many others poses translation challenge: how to preserve *difference* without imprisoning it in the dangerous jail of “the different”; how to recreate the inherent subversion of this writing without fostering wholesale rejection; how to invent unique expressions of identity anew. Ultimately, there is a truly ethical dilemma in the position of the translator, which can be summed up in the question that Theo Hermans poses with this wording: “How can the ‘otherness’ of the other be described or represented to those who have not themselves experienced it?” (Hermans, 2002, p. 18).

In this regard, let us not forget that there will eventually be a collateral danger in approaching and trying to receive “l’Autre en tant qu’Autre” as Antoine Berman suggested in his paradigmatic essay “La traduction et la lettre ou l’auberge du lointain” (Berman, 1985, p. 89). The risk of reductionism and homogenization runs parallel to those discourses of Otherness that, for some authors, exert a fierce ontological violence. Edward Said warns us against oversimplification in the final pages of *Culture and Imperialism*:

No one today is purely *one* thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are no more than starting-points, which if followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly left behind. Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale. But its worst and most paradoxical gift was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively, white, or black, or Western, or Oriental. Yet just as human beings make their own history, they also make their cultures and ethnic identities. No one can deny the persisting continuities of long traditions, sustained habitations, national languages, and cultural geographies, but there seems no reason except fear and prejudice to keep insisting on their separation and distinctiveness, as if that was all human life was about. Survival in fact is about the connections between things ... It is more rewarding—and more difficult—to think concretely and sympathetically, contrapuntally, about others than only about ‘us’. But this also means not trying to rule others, not trying to classify them or put them in hierarchies, above all, not constantly reiterating how ‘our’ culture or country is number one (or *not* number one, for that matter). For the intellectual there is quite enough of value to do without *that*. (Said, 1994, pp. 407-408)

Accordingly, Guillermo Gómez Peña reminds us in *Warrior for Gringostroika* that terms like Hispanic, Latin American, ethnic, minority, marginal, alternative or Third World are inaccurate and loaded with ideological implications; their use in the end creates false categories and neocolonial hierarchies. Out of this same conviction, Gustavo Pérez Firmat ironically comments in *Cincuenta lecciones de exilio y desexilio*:

Si me dicen *globalization*, respondo: destierro.  
Si me dicen *diáspora*, respondo: exilio.  
Si me dicen *Hispanic*, respondo: cubano.  
Si me dicen *Latino*, respondo: la tuya. (2000, p.15)

Undoubtedly, *Latino* is popular and trendy, even though diluted into often stereotypical images, the epitome of which is that of passionate men and women or mysterious voodoo practitioners. The final goal of these

simplistic portrayals propagated by the media is to domesticate and make digestible the concept of multiculturalism, which is still perceived by the many as a potential threat to American society. A process of neutralization accompanies the creation of a consumer-good version of it, commercialized in the form of products like Ricky Martin or Jennifer López. Gómez Peña precisely questions the processes shaping a marketable image of Latino culture:

Today Latinos are being portrayed as the new ‘up and coming’ urban sofisticados. We are suddenly in, fashionable, and grantable, and our ethnicity is being commodified ... the Latino boom is clearly a media-produced mirage, a marketing strategy designed with two objectives: to expand our consumer power and to offer new exotica to the American middle class. (2000, pp. 50, 52)

The aura of this market-oriented patina hampers the perception of the richness and complexity of a culture that, although not statistically minor, is held in minor position by another one afraid of losing its hegemonic position. These products of macrocultural and macropolitical politics are a result of what Derrida calls “the hegemony of the homogeneous” (1998, p. 40). What should be borne in mind is that translation is not beyond the reach of this logic of cultural protectionism. In this regard, Pilar Godayol (2000, p. 60) reminds us that translating this type of writers means translating identities and engagements, and often requires struggling against simplification and annulment. This demands the avoidance of hierarchizing value judgments as well as an extreme care not to impose prejudiced cultural evaluations. If translating always implies, as Theo Hermans reminds us in an interesting essay, a superimposition and intermingling of another voice—the translator’s voice, the “other” voice—with that of the writer in order to make his or her work audible to another readership (Hermans, 1996, p. 8), the goal, in Godayol’s view, is to resist both arrogance in magnifying the voice of the translator and compassion aimed at amplifying that of the writer. For, in Godayol’s opinion, both superiority and indulgence extolling the voice of the writer are synonymous with communicative failure (Godayol, 2000, p. 60).

This approach demanding both a certain distance as well as an involvement of the translator is precisely the one put into practice by Carol Maier in her translation of the Chicana poet Ana Castillo’s work. Maier collaborates in Castillo’s struggle to have a voice, but makes no concessions in relation to words like “Lucha” or “Chicana.” In any event, Maier (1989) acknowledges that her effort to understand Castillo’s poetry and to make it understandable in English ultimately represented somewhat

of an interference, as well: translating her poems required getting inside Castillo's skin, occupying her place, and, despite the fact that she acted with extreme consideration and respect, both were aware that the very act of translation implied the mutual assumption of each other's identity. Apparently, they were both aware of the danger that Norma Alarcón pointed out in her seminal article "Traddutora, Traditora. A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminisms," i.e., that "[t]he act of translating introduces different concepts and perceptions, displaces and may even do violence to local knowledge through language" (1990, p. 62). In spite of all this, Maier creates a space in which she works *with*, she translates *with*:

I worked with her, instead of her, despite her, not because we were fused but because—for the task of translation—we agreed that one voice would speak for us both. As this sense of coalition became clearer, or, rather as I was able to speculate about translation as a possibly noncombative struggle occurring within a compact (agreement, small container), a construction analogous to the familiar attempt at a tantalizing present, I wondered if it would not also be possible to see it as analogous to [...] the "space for struggle between centripetal and centrifugal forces" as Castro Klarén suggests ... (Maier, 1989, p. 628)

In fact, it may well be the case that the creation of this space—both open and plural—in which two worlds, two traditions, intertwine is only possible when translators are fully aware of the dangers accompanying their task, of the risks running parallel to re-presentation, of the fact that translation gives a voice and at the same time may silence or distort it. The danger is even greater because "[t]hat bond of double voicing, however, is often not seen at all, for the translator's gesture of generosity, her enthusiastic embrace, tends to mask—despite the continual representation of translation as a struggle, a conquest, or even a murder—that gesture's inherently rapacious nature" (Maier, 1989, p. 630). This recognition of the double-edged nature of translation obviously problematizes and complicates the task of translators: should they use a language which sounds familiar to the receiving society, to facilitate the acceptance of these types of works? Or, as Carol Maier wondered when faced with the translation of Ana Castillo's poetry, would it be better "to strive for an English reflecting the Spanish of the original" (Maier, 1989, p. 631)? Or could an intermediate solution be found? Maybe the only solution is to achieve *understanding*, *com-prehension* in the sense Hannah Arendt, in *Essays in Understanding*, confers to the term, as "being with" (1994, p. 3): as Kristeva explains (2001, p. 26) the *com-prehender* is the person who "waits, accepts, and welcomes"; "an open space" who "allows herself to be used, [who] sets forth, [who] is with"; however "at the same

time, the *com*-prehender apprehends; she selects, tears down, molds, and transforms the elements; she appropriates and re-creates them.” Paraphrasing Kristeva we could say that the *com-prehending* translator is one “who gives birth to a meaning that harbors, in altered form, the meaning of other people.” It then falls upon us to unravel the process that turns thought into action, that constructs and deconstructs.

Indeed, Maier allows us to peek at the processes of this “thinking in action” insofar as she offers up to five versions of a poem by Castillo entitled “El sueño.” The most notable difference among them is the translation solution offered for rendering the first person singular subject speaking: Maier hesitates between the use of a capitalized “I” or lower case “i.” In fact, Maier informs us that, when Ana Castillo writes in English, she always chooses the lower case letter; however, being faithful to this principle could lead, according to Maier, to an erroneous perception of her poetry as “folklorica.” In any event, an additional aspect must be taken into account: this “I” is, in fact, an addition, an imposition on the original Spanish text, where the pronoun is not needed and is indeed absent. For this reason, Maier perceives that translation is, inevitably, visible and interventionist. True, this visibility of the translator can be viewed as a legitimate form of resistance in the line advocated by Venuti, in the sense that the particular rewriting and interpretation resulting from this “translating *with*” is undertaken with the objective of opening the doors of new worlds to the reader. In any event, the coercive and imposing potential of translation should not be forgotten. Maier’s reflections on the ideological load of a word that is important throughout the poem and on the implications of her own decisions reveal her *savoir-faire* as a translator. Maier strenuously strives to honour the author’s ideology, guided as she is by the main purpose to achieve inclusive translation(s).

The limits between collaboration and imposition are, nevertheless, fragile. In this same article, Maier alludes to Elizabeth Burgos’ rewriting of Rigoberta Menchú’s story of her life, published both in Spanish, with the title *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*, and in English, bearing the title *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*. Burgos is credited as the author of both versions, but not so in the Spanish case, in which the Guatemalan Nobel Peace Prize is denied the recognition of authorship, in spite of the fact that the book consists of the biographical account of Menchú, related to Burgos in conversation. In other words, Burgos eliminates the *dialogue* with Menchú and appropriates her identity through her use of the first person singular. True, the reader takes for granted that the ‘author’ is

Menchú, but Burgos also makes it clear, as Maier tells us, that she has corrected Menchú's Spanish. For Maier, translation in this case does not take place in that intermediate space of *in-between*, not to mention the common space of the *with*: both women apparently share an objective, but Menchú is in fact as grateful to Burgos as she is distrustful of her work: on one hand, she wants to make known the repression long endured by her people, and for this purpose she needs Burgos; on the other hand, she is wary of Burgos' interpretation of her story and her words, to the extent that she even silences some relevant data in order to preserve her alterity (Godayol, 2000, p. 64).

In these cases, when subaltern identities are translated from/by the First World, it is difficult to strike a balance, as these writers who have long been marginalized strive for the recognition of the mainstream canon (in this case, the American canon), but they also and primarily wish to affirm their belonging to a culture essentially different from Western culture. This is why they can be said to be engaged in a process that Michel de Certeau ([1974] 1984) calls "poaching" in order to describe the subtle, persistent and resistant activity of groups lacking a space of their own and that have to make their own way into a preexisting network of influences and power relations. It is important, then, that their voice not be distorted and alienated. In this regard, Gloria Anzaldúa asks for "freedom to carve and chisel my own face, to staunch the bleeding with ashes, to fashion my own gods out of my entrails. And if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space" (1987, p. 22). Moreover, in *Haciendo Caras/Making Face, Making Soul: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color*, she insists on the necessity of marginal communities to enter in and transform the space of theory, a set of knowledges from which they have been excluded, a territory so far forbidden that needs to be invaded. For this purpose, "the dominant culture's interpretation of 'our' experience" and "the way they 'read' us" must be analyzed with suspicion. For Anzaldúa, it is vital to articulate "teorías that will rewrite history using race, class, gender and ethnicity as categories of analysis, theories that cross borders, that blur boundaries—new kinds of theories with a new theorizing method" (1990, p. 25).

This is precisely the purpose of a relatively recent work entitled *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*, coedited by Gloria E. Anzaldúa and Analouise Keating (2002). It was also the purpose of its preceding work, the renowned anthology coedited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa under the title *This*

*Bridge Called My Back*, a heterodox compilation of texts and reflections by women of color, including both heterosexual and lesbian Chicanas, African-Americans, Asian-Americans and Native Americans belonging to minority groups and living in the space between two cultures. It might not be coincidental that the translation into Spanish of this anthology was carried out by Ana Castillo and Norma Alarcón, both equally belonging to minority groups and well aware of the meaning of living *between* and writing *between*. The Spanish version, entitled *Esta puente, mi espalda* shows from the very title, with the use of the feminine form of *puente*, a decision to break with conventional syntax and grammar (Valenzuela, 2001).

In any event, this does not mean, in our opinion, that a version from a member outside the community is impossible or inevitably stifles a voice in the process of affirmation. In fact, this would amount to denying the possibility of *understanding* that is at the basis of cultural pluralism, and reinstalling barriers precisely against which nomad identities fight. To the extent that this conception legitimizes action on the basis of nature, this moreover would amount to depriving the minority group of the possibility of engaging in positive self-critique. And it would certainly deprive the hegemonic subjects of the possibility of approaching the Other, of *living with* the Other, of being transformed by him/her. Establishing an ethical relation with the Other, Spivak points out, does not only require a desire to *learn*, but also a willingness to follow a path in the opposite direction: it requires a process of *unlearning*, of self-interrogation (Spivak *apud* Landry and MacLean, 1996, pp. 4-5 and 293), both in relation to the Other and to the Self. To know the Other, to translate the Other, demands a deep and critical knowledge of ourselves, of our language and of the established representations embedded in it. Translating the Other implies undertaking a translation of ourselves. This is why in *Imaginary Maps*, Spivak insists on the importance of rethinking the concept of ethics beyond a binary logic, and thus argues for an understanding of the cultures involved in the translation act, far from *different* and opposed, but rather the *différance* of the other one (1994, p. xiv). The goal, from this perspective, is again to prevent the abandonment or disregard of any of the cultures involved, and to search for inclusive formulae that are based neither on paternalism nor benevolence.

The idea that translating demands a loyalty not only to the culture(s) in the original text but also to the receiving culture prevents us from arguing for a naïve concept of fidelity. Of course, fidelity is owed to the original work and to the linguistic and political agenda it represents; in

any event, we cannot forget, as Maier reminds us, that our fidelity “is itself refracted through [our] ideological formations as ‘subjects’ in the ‘First World’” (Dingwaney and Maier, 1995, p. 313).<sup>3</sup> Difference is not merely to be preserved, but, given that translation is a transformative operation and a communicative act, also to be transmitted and metamorphosed. Just as with the original works, translation cannot forget the context in which difference will be received and judged, or welcomed. As Spivak acknowledges in her preface to *Imaginary Maps*, translators and commentators have to “imagine” their readerships as they write. If its ultimate goal is to promote cross-cultural awareness, translation should be careful, to use Paul Ricoeur’s expression (2004, p. 20, p. 42), to practice and foster a “linguistic hospitality” towards the Other: a hospitality *in* the host language and *through* the host language itself.

Given the state of the art at the level of both research and practices, it would seem that, in relation to multicultural, hybrid, subaltern texts, translation theory and practices have before them the challenge of taking into account the social dimension accompanying the production, distribution and reception of the cultural products of the periphery. As an alternative to opaque theoretical discourses exclusively intelligible for the initiated (Carbonell, 1999, p. 273 for a critique of the elitist slant of post-colonial critique) and to the often arduous minoritizing translations argued for from the academy as panaceas, translation theory and practice are in need of new, more diversified theoretical and pragmatic proposals well aware of the social conditions in which difference is both enunciated and

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<sup>3</sup> This statement is coincident with Talal Asad’s conviction that translation is neither a neutral nor an innocent process, even though not necessarily a politically subversive act:

The process of translating always involves discrimination, interpretation, appraisal, and selection. It calls for a constant awareness of the limits and possibilities of translating adequately from one language to another. And, of course, one translates texts for a variety of purposes, some benign and some hostile to the producers of the original texts. But none of this implies that the *practice* of translation can’t be distinguished from the practice of critique.

Translation is one of the things that ethnographers undertake ... in order to give readers an understanding of the beliefs and practices of unfamiliar peoples. Such an understanding is likely to be impaired if the task of translation preempts that of moral and political critique. (Asad, 1995, p. 326)

re-enunciated. In this regard, it is in our opinion urgent that we aim for more nuanced and richer models than those constructed upon the dichotomy revitalized by Venuti, currently opposing *foreignizing* translations vs. *domesticating* translations. If translation is about transforming a text from a different culture so that another one may have access to it, it seems that a domesticating dimension is inherent in the nature of translation or, to put it in other words, that only a relative, gradable *foreignizing* of the text is possible if we are to avoid the complete foreignizing strategy of repeating the original text with its original foreign wording. Moreover, some authors lead us to think that there is a need to combat the perhaps too expeditious current identification between, on the one hand, *foreignizing* translations and *destabilizing, ethical* translations and, on the other hand, *domesticating* and *fluent* translations with *ethnocentric, unethical* practices. Kwiecinski (1998, p. 203), for instance, perceives that, when foreignizing strategies are applied in translations following the opposite direction to that pointed out by Venuti (i.e. from major languages into minor languages), translation does not counteract the existing power imbalance, but merely aggravates it. Carbonell (1998, p. 65) also suggests that foreignizing strategies are not always destabilizing, as the exoticization of Otherness is often not a transgression of the norm, but the norm itself. For the same reason, as previously discussed, marking the difference is not always an invitation to crosscultural awareness, as it may result in the (re)construction of barriers. Highlighting Otherness, in fact, may contribute to imprisoning the Other in the stereotypical imaginary of the distant, the primitive, and the wild. These are the paradoxes that Malika Embarek, who has experience translating the hybrid fiction of authors like Tahar Ben Jelloun, Edmond Amran El Maleh, Mouloud Feraoun or Rachid Nini, has in mind when she wonders “how to treat these voices perturbing orthodoxy that dwell in the texts of these writers that have become naturalized in the territory of European literature, where frontiers have been abolished?” She answers with a stream of questions that unearths the conflictual nature of every translation solution:

[Should we] assimilate them, integrate them, distinguish them with the humiliating mark of the asterisk, a typographical star of David that compulsorily has to be exhibited before the Aryan neighbour; differentiate them in bold type or in bowed italics, subjugated like the wetbacks; to exclude them in the ghetto of the Translator’s Note or gloss them in the back door of the book?<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “Cómo tratar esas voces perturbadoras de la ortodoxia, que anidan en los textos de esos escritores naturalizados en el territorio de la literatura europea

Embarek is aware that goodwill is not enough to make the authors' difference accepted. Language is the instrument that helps the translator convey the voices of minority discourses; it is also a *locus* where cultural and political asymmetries may arise or be generated (Venuti, 1998, p. 36). We should ask ourselves, as suggested by Homi K. Bhabha (1994, p. 224), "What does the narrative construction of minority discourses entail for the everyday existence of the Western metropolis?" Translations are always inscribed in particular contexts, and their production and reception is thus inevitably influenced by the prevailing expectations in those contexts. This ultimately means that no decontextualized, wholesale evaluation can be applied to a version independent of its circumstances.

This conviction prevents us from arriving at hasty verdicts based on easy comparisons. For instance, the existing translations of Sandra Cisneros' *Woman Hollering Creek* into Spanish differ immensely: Enrique de Hériz's version, published by the Spanish publishing house Ediciones B neutralizes the phenomenon of code-switching that characterizes the original; whereas Liliana Valenzuela's, published in the New York-based Vintage Español, maintains and almost recreates bilingualism. Nevertheless, is this sufficient to declare that the first translation stifles difference in comparison with the other? Are these decisions merely attributable to the translator's personal ideology and poetics, or do the expectations of the potential readership predefine and shape the translations? Why does the Barcelona-based Ediciones Destino correct the orthographical slips in Rosario Ferré's self-translated *Vecindarios excéntricos*, while the Vintage Español series does not? Is this an intrusion upon the author's voice, a centralist imposition of the standard variety, or is it a considerate gesture promoting her acceptance? Does the fact that Valenzuela's version into Spanish of *Caramelo*, Cisneros' recent book, has been distributed in Spain point to an evolved sensitivity in Spain towards Spanglish, or does the editor's initial note warning the readers that they are

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donde ya se han abolido las fronteras: ¿Asimilarlas, integrarlas, marcarlas con el sello humillante del asterisco, tipográfica estrella de David de obligada exhibición ante el vecino ario; discriminarlas con la negrita, la ilegítima bastardilla o la inclinada cursiva, sometida como los espaldas mojadas; arrinconarlas en el gueto de la nota del traductor o glosarlas en la puerta trasera del libro?" (Embarek, 2000, p. 206)

confronting a non-standard variety<sup>5</sup> of Spanish reveal the prevailing normativeness of the use by default of standard, ‘orthodox’ language in translated Spanish versions? Is intelligibility a factor that fosters comprehension and, thus, sales? Do economic considerations influence translation poetics? How can the translator’s performance, then, be judged merely as *domesticating* or *foreignizing* without taking all these factors into consideration?

On the other hand, can a translation be judged on the basis of merely one variable? And what are the criteria used for the assessment? Let us take, for example, Rolando Costa Picazo’s Spanish version of *In The Time of the Butterflies*, a work by Julia Álvarez, an American writer of Dominican descent. In fact, even though Picazo refuses to maintain bilingualism, his rendering reveals the foreignness in their own language to readers from Spain, as it includes language varieties with which these readers are probably not familiar. However, would the assessment be different in the case of Latin American readers? Could the same version, then, be *domesticating* for the latter, whereas *foreignizing* for the former? A set of similar paradoxes is posed by Jordi Gubern’s version of Julia Álvarez’ *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent*, marketed by Barcelona-based Ediciones B under the title *De cómo las chicas García perdieron su acento*. This version of another hybrid, bilingual work counteracts translations’ proclivity to monolingualism by marking the words originally in Spanish with the use of italics, by retaining certain English expressions, and by including cultural exegesis in translator’s notes. However, are these strategies sufficient to proclaim this translation as subversive? Or will it be determinant in the assessment of the fact that the translator uses the Peninsular variety of Spanish for the characterisation of figures of Dominican descent, a decision (or default strategy) in which the hegemonic centre of the old colonial power can be also seen to “maintain ... its fantasies of transnational domination” (Irizarry, 2001)? All these questions highlight a factor that is often forgotten when assessing translations: the position from which the observer is talking, a position overdetermined with pre-existing expectations. Theo Hermans argues for the explicitation of this position by introducing a narrative voice in traditionally impersonal scholarly research (Hermans, forthcoming). This is one of the characteristics of “thick translation,”

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<sup>5</sup> “La presente edición reproduce la forma en que los habitantes de las comunidades fronterizas sintetizan un lenguaje formado de palabras en inglés y español, el llamado ‘lenguaje de la frontera’” (*apud* Cisneros, 2003, p. 6).

an alternative “self-critical form of intercultural and historical translation studies” named after Geertz’ “thick description” that Hermans sees as a strategy to avert the dangers of ethnocentrism and the universalistic ambitions of theory. Inasmuch as it acknowledges the interpretive and constructed nature of the descriptions of the phenomena under study, Hermans sees “thick translation” as an instrument with which to “counter the flatness and reductiveness of the prevailing jargon of translation studies and its structuralist lineage, and foster instead a more diversified and imaginative vocabulary” (*ibid.*). In fact, we need to take into account that theorizing about translation is itself a form of translation, a partial account, a personal—but socially and historically determined—interpretation.

In this regard, the writers and translators referred to here can teach us much about, as we said above, the collateral dangers of translation. Lilita Valenzuela, for instance, tells us that “any strategy implies risks and responsibilities,”<sup>6</sup> the fact that these fictions are like embroidery work, and translating (and theorizing about translation) is but offering the wrong side of the embroidery, *el revés del bordado*. We need to take into account that the colour range of the thread we use for these refractions is limited and conditioned by its context, but never neutral, always a different hue. This is the very germ of the (im)possibility of any translation. This is also the basis of crosscultural understanding, of inclusion. For, to use one of Elizabeth Martínez’ bilingual titles, *De Colores Means All of Us*.

**Universidad de Salamanca**

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<sup>6</sup> “Toda estrategia implica asimismo riesgos y responsabilidades” (Valenzuela, 2003, p. 544).

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**ABSTRACT: Asymmetries in/of Translation: Translating Translated Hispanicism(s)** — This paper focuses on the hybrid writing of American authors of Hispanic descent in its double dimension as a process of translation and representation, and also as a process subject to other processes of translation and representation, including scholarly assessment and description. It examines the problems and ideological implications of translating these *translated* fictions, inasmuch as this writing calls into question both traditional visions of literature and hegemonic translation models.

**RÉSUMÉ: Asymétries dans/de la traduction: traduire des hispanismes traduits** — Cet article analyse l’écriture hybride de certains écrivains américains d’origine hispanique dans sa double dimension: comme processus de traduction et de représentation, et comme un objet qui obéit à d’autres processus de traduction et de représentation, notamment l’évaluation et la description faites dans un contexte de recherche universitaire. Cet article étudie les problèmes et

les enjeux idéologiques posés par la traduction de ces fictions *traduites*, dans la mesure où cette écriture remet en question tant les visions traditionnelles de la littérature que les modèles de traduction établis.

**Keywords:** translation, hybrid literature, multiculturalism, hispanicism, women's fiction.

**Mots-clés :** traduction, littérature hybride, multiculturalisme, hispanisme, écriture féminine.

**Rosario Martín Ruano: Facultad de Traducción y Documentación,  
Universidad de Salamanca, Francisco de Vitoria, 6-16, 37008  
Salamanca  
E-mail: mrmr@usal.es**

**Carmen África Vidal Claramonte: Facultad de Traducción y  
Documentación, Universidad de Salamanca, Francisco de Vitoria,  
6-16, 37008 Salamanca  
E-mail: africa@usal.es**