

## Translating Sex(uality) from English into Spanish and Vice-versa: A Cultural and Ideological Challenge

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Much has been written on gender and translation over the last two decades with an emphasis on feminist translation, on the translation of woman's body or on the (re)discovery of a growing genealogy of translating—and translated—women in diverse languages and cultures. In this paper I wish to focus on the translation of sex-related language. Without a doubt, sex—and more specifically, sex-related language—is overwhelmingly present in our daily lives, in our texts, in our symbolic projections. Though traditionally proscribed for a number of reasons, the study of the translation of sex is nowadays more openly dealt with, though it has been given little attention in the field of translation studies (Larkosh 2007, 66). Translating the language of love or sex is a political act, a "*cas limite*" (Flotow 2000, 16) with important rhetorical and ideological implications, and is fully indicative of the translator's attitude towards existing conceptualisations of gender/sexual identities, human sexual behaviors and society's moral norms. Here I explore the fluid, two-way relationships between sex and translation: first we explore the sex of translation, which might prove to be an essentialist search; and then we deal with the translation of sex, focusing on the treatment of love and sex in the Spanish or English translations of the works of John Cleland, Almudena Grandes and Mario Vargas Llosa. This is a privileged vantage point from which to explore the complex construction of women and men in different languages and cultures, and to gain ideological and discursive insights into the constitution of gender and sexual identities.

Keywords: gender; sex(uality); translation; sex/gendered-related language; John Cleland; Almudena Grandes; Mario Vargas Llosa

## La traducción del sexo/sexualidad del inglés al español y viceversa: un reto cultural e ideológico

En las dos últimas décadas, mucho se ha escrito sobre género y traducción, con especial atención a la traducción feminista, la traducción del cuerpo femenino o el (re)descubrimiento de una creciente genealogía de mujeres traductoras (y traducidas) en diversas lenguas y culturas. En este artículo quiero centrarme en la traducción del lenguaje sexual. Sin duda, el sexo —y, más concretamente, el lenguaje sexual— se halla presente en todos los aspectos de nuestra vida diaria, en nuestros textos, en nuestras proyecciones simbólicas. Aunque tradicionalmente proscrito por una serie de razones, en la actualidad el estudio de la traducción del sexo se acomete de una manera más abierta, aunque ha recibido escasa atención en el campo de los estudios de traducción (Larkosh 2007, 66). Traducir el lenguaje del amor o del sexo es un acto político, un “*cas limite*” (Flotow 2000, 16) con importantes implicaciones retóricas e ideológicas, y constituye un índice certero de la actitud del traductor(a) frente a las conceptualizaciones existentes en torno a las identidades de género o sexuales, a los comportamientos sexuales humanos y a las normas morales de la sociedad. En este artículo exploro las relaciones fluidas, biunívocas, que unen sexo y traducción: en primer lugar, exploro el sexo de la traducción, que puede constituir una búsqueda esencialista; para pasar a continuación a la traducción del sexo, centrado en el tratamiento del amor y el sexo en las traducciones (al español o al inglés) de las obras de John Cleland, Almudena Grandes y Mario Vargas Llosa. Se trata de un observatorio privilegiado para explorar la compleja construcción de mujeres y hombres en diferentes lenguas y culturas, de la que podemos extraer conclusiones ideológicas y discursivas para una mejor comprensión de la formación de identidades sexuales y de género.

Palabras clave: género; sexo/sexualidad; traducción; lenguaje sexual; John Cleland; Almudena Grandes; Mario Vargas Llosa

## I. SEX(UALITY) AND TRANSLATION: A GENDERED DOMAIN

Sexual language is perhaps one of the best sources of identity construction, of ideological metaphors, of narratives which revolve around the self and try to define it. Sex originates complex discourses (in the Foucauldian sense) at a multiplicity of levels—personal, social, textual, cultural, historical, etc.—which strongly determine our language and our attitude. Needless to say, sex (and sex-related language) is overwhelmingly present in our daily lives, in our texts, in our symbolic projections. Though traditionally proscribed or ignored, the study of the translation of sex is nowadays more openly dealt with (see Larkosh 2011 or Rao and Klimkiewicz 2012). Translating the language of love or sex is a political act, with important rhetorical and ideological implications, and is fully indicative of the translator's attitude towards existing conceptualizations of gender/sexual identities, human sexual behavior(s) and society's moral norms.<sup>1</sup>

When attempting to analyze an interdiscipline—e.g., sex and translation—we are faced with a definitional problem. Both *sex(uality)* and *translation* are far from being transparent terms. As for the former, we are likely to find a mixture of categories: male vs. female; the feelings resulting from sexual gratification; reproductive properties; the activities surrounding sexual intercourse; the qualities distinguishing males from females; the capacity of fertilizing or being fertilized; and so on. As for translation, it has been undergoing serious revision over the last few decades, thus challenging traditional dichotomies such as production vs. reproduction, original vs. copy, fidelity vs. manipulation, and many others (see Vidal 1998).

Both sex(uality) and translation are extremely sensitive fields, whose conceptual boundaries and revolutionary potentials are rapidly expanding. As they evolve from marginal to mainstream positions, they become constrained (and enabled) “by the rules and conventions, the categories and definitions, the conflicting stories and the competing arguments” (Cameron and Kulick 2003, 43) which surround them, as well as by the ongoing power struggles over who is allowed (or not) to define and categorize sex(uality) and translation, what their accepted meanings should be, what practices should be socially accepted or censored. In fact, through language and discourse, society tries to impose moral and ethical boundaries on both fields, thus establishing what is decent, appropriate, acceptable, moral, original, derivative and so on.

In 1972, Ann Oakley established the crucial distinction between *gender* and *sex*, the former being defined as a powerful construct which is not the immediate consequence of one's biological sex, but rather the result of a complex cultural and socio-ideological process. After that, gender was widely discussed and theorized about, with sex lagging somewhat behind as though it had acquired an unproblematic biological or *natural*

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category. The work of Judith Butler (1990, 1993), however, came to destabilize the whole system from which both gender and sex stem, by focusing on visibility and repetition. For Butler, gender is “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural ‘kind of being’” (Butler 1990, 32). Gender identities, then, are the result of repeated—and more or less strategic—performances, thus revealing the unstable and artificial nature of the social norms that gave rise to them. Likewise, sexual identities are no longer stable ontologies but rather the results of repeated and conscious imitation.

Today gender researchers have a broader understanding of what sex(uality) is. For Bucholtz and Hall, for instance, sexuality is made up of “the systems of mutually constituted ideologies, practices, and identities that give sociopolitical meaning to the body as an eroticized and/or reproductive site.” (2004, 470). For many, sex(uality) is above all a discursive construct, a rhetoric that has a regulatory effect on human and social bodies. While sex(uality) is one of the most profound indicators of our identity—“the primary organizing variable in thinking about (“processing information” about) other human beings” (Thorne and Henley 1975, 6)—language (or discourse) is the deepest, most intimate way of expressing/manifesting our sexual experience(s). Sex is, without a doubt, a key locus of anxiety in contemporary Western societies, a source of fears about (un)acceptable sexual identities and behaviors: as Ríos-Font puts it, “[f]rom syphilis to AIDS, the dangers of sex polarize societies around the issues of knowledge, access, and pleasure” (1998, 356).

Translating sex(uality) tends to be an activity in which gender-related prejudices and configurations are routinely reproduced and projected. Through translation, social norms defining what is (im)moral or (in)decent are usually reinforced but may also—at least potentially—be challenged or defied. No translator is ever a neutral agent, but this is even more the case when dealing with sex-related language—when s/he needs to make decisions as to social attitudes or interdictions, to the existence (or absence) of (self-)censorship, political or ideological constraints, to economic or institutional pressures, and other factors. In the pages that follow, I wish to explore the fluid, two-way relationships between sex and translation. In section 1 I explore the sex of translation or, rather, whether translation has a sex or is actually a gendered (or sexualized) activity. Though the exercise is a challenging one, we seem to be led into a blind alley. Much more positive is a focus on the translation of sex (section 2) free of any *a priori* attitudes—sex is (re)constructed through translation in a diversity of linguistic, cultural and historical contexts. Examples are provided in relation to the treatment of love, romance and sex in the Spanish and English translations of the works of John Cleland, Almudena Grandes and Mario Vargas Llosa. Though sex(uality) is arguably only one of the several variables involved in the constitution of self—along with race, social class, power and gender, among others—the analysis of its translation is a privileged vantage point from which to explore the complex construction of women and men in different languages and

cultures, and to derive ideological and discursive insights into the constitution of gender and sexual identities. Though the reconstruction of sexuality through translation may seem transparent and unproblematic, important translation effects (Flotow 2000) are discernible. As we are dealing with a highly sensitive area of human concern, a delicate balance is struck between the competing demands of the translator's intervention, social interdictions and the power of patronage (see Lefevere 1992).

## 2. FROM SEX TO TRANSLATION: A BLIND ALLEY

Let us consider these two literary excerpts:

### Text A

I did not know how a man asks a woman to become his wife. There is generally a parent, whose consent must first be given. Or if no parent, then there is courtship, there is all the give and take of some preceding conversation. None of this applied to her and me. And it was midnight, and talk of love and marriage had never passed between us. I could say to her, bluntly, plainly, 'Rachel, I love you, will you be my wife?' I remembered the morning in the garden, when we had jested about my dislike of the whole business, and I had told her that I asked for nothing better than my own house to comfort me. I wondered if she could understand, and remember too.

### Text B

She would wake up swimming in her bed, screaming and drowning in the flood of sheets. On the other side of the room, the bed that was meant for her brother floated boat-like in the darkness. Slowly, with the arrival of consciousness, it sank, seemingly into the floor. This vision didn't help matters, and it would usually be quite a while before the screaming stopped. Possibly the only good to come out of those nightmares was that it brought Hans Hubermann, her new papa, into the room, to soothe her, to love her.

A popular and revealing exercise would be to ask students to decide whether text A and/or B had been written by a man or a woman. This would trigger the usual expectations, stereotypes and beliefs about men, women and writing; and it would be thrilling to guess which text (if any) is *masculine* and which (if any) is *feminine*. Then would follow a binary logic whereby women's writing is archetypally characterized by its exploratory nature, its subjective and emotional descriptions, its focus on inner states and personal relationships, and so on. In contrast, men's writing is archetypally characterized by aggressive and linear sentences, objective descriptions, logical connections,

intellectual pursuits. Or, in Virginia Woolf's classic formulation, a man's sentence is "too loose, too heavy, too pompous for a woman's use" (Woolf [1909] 1966, 145).

The idea that there is an *écriture féminine* or a *woman's sentence* (as opposed to a default *man's sentence*) is, undoubtedly, an attractive one, which consists of a series of abstract traits that are thought to characterize all women (and all men) and that reinforce the belief that sexual differences are inscribed in language. And while most of us have felt at times that specific traits—i.e., sensitivity, emotion, intimacy—can be applied to a large number of women, it becomes increasingly difficult to accept that *all women* should follow the same standard. What is especially noteworthy is that this logic leads us to the inescapable fact that there *must* be differences between women and men writers. What if texts A and B had been written by the same author? What if both A and B had been written by women—or men, for that matter?<sup>2</sup> Sex is today seen as plural and multidimensional, constrained by numerous social and ideological factors. *Masculine* or *feminine* are no longer singular (and opposed) concepts, but rather fluid, unstable, and ambiguous entities.

While an absolute, systematic identification between text and sex seems untenable, another entirely different thing is a woman's voluntary identification with the literary, artistic or personal characteristics represented by individual women writers, usually referred to as *symbolic mothers*, in the sense that they embody the strength, courage, generosity and pride to fight against women's adverse circumstances, discrimination or neglect. Here Virginia Woolf is a case in point, as she has been adopted as symbolic mother by practically all writers (and *translatresses*) and woman readers alike. Among the many others are Marguerite Yourcenar, Susan Sontag, Sylvia Plath and Simone de Beauvoir. In this adoption there is a special fascination with the life, work and ideas of the symbolic mother, as well as a profound intellectual affinity, and even a devotion for her (see Godayol 2011). Spanish writer Lucía Etxebarria claims that she has always been attracted to stories by women and about women, and that she is grateful to many women writers (like the Brontë sisters, Jane Austen, Colette, Jean Rhys, Doris Lessing, Ana María Matute) for making her stick to her principles (Etxebarria 2003, 104).

In Santaemilia (2005) I ventured into the risky territory of the sex of translation, following the (possibly naïve) assumption that translation has a sex, that translation is *sexed*, and that, accordingly, male and female translators deal differently with the material they translate. Along the lines of Woolf's feminine sentence, I examined four Spanish translations of John Cleland's *Fanny Hill* (1748-1749, henceforth FH), three carried out by men—Frank Lane (1977), Enrique Martínez Fariñas (1978, henceforth MF) and José Santaemilia and José Pruñonosa (2000)—and one by a woman, Beatriz Podestá (1980, henceforth P), in an attempt to discover whether translating the sexual

<sup>2</sup> Text A belongs to *My Cousin Rachel* ([1951] 2009, 253) by Daphne du Maurier (biologically, a female writer), and text B to *The Book Thief* (2005, 36) by Markus Zusak (biologically, a male writer).

language and imagery contained in this erotic book suggested different strategies for either male or female translators. I came to identify three main general tendencies in the work of the woman translator (Podestá), in opposition to the male translators:

1. Softening or downplaying of sexual references.
2. Desexualization of sexual references.
3. Tendency towards dysphemism and moral censure when women's status is at stake.

However, after going through the said translations again, textual evidence to support these three tendencies seems scarce and even anecdotal. Here is a short list of examples:

Example 1

... amidst the whirl of **loose** pleasures I had been tossed in. (FH 39)

... dentro del torbellino de placeres **relajados** en el que me vi envuelta ... (P 7)

... en el centro del torbellino de placeres **desatados** al que me habían arrojado ... (MF 19)

Example 2

I wanted more society, more **dissipation**. (FH 103)

... necesitaba más sociedad y más **disipación** (MF 78)

... anhelaba más compañía, más **diversiones** (P 93)

Example 3

... that brutal **ravisher**, the author of my disorder, ... (FH 59)

... aquel brutal **estuprador**, causante de mis males, ... (MF 38)

... ese brutal **violador**, el culpable de mi enfermedad, ... (P 34)

Examples 1 and 2 are representative of a tendency of the woman translator to soften or eliminate sexual innuendoes, and a few more examples can be found throughout *Fanny Hill*. But replacing the original sex-related terms 'loose' and 'dissipation' with the Spanish equivalents 'relajados' [English *relaxed*] and 'diversiones' [English *fun*] (P) is unlikely to constitute solid empirical evidence of a tendency to downplay sexual references. It would be, however, consistent with the stereotype of women as speaking a hesitant, deferential and powerless language (see O'Barr and Atkins 1980). Certainly, Beatriz Podestá's options are much more neutral and even asexual than Martínez Fariñas's, which are much more literal, though we are still a long way from the popular belief according to which male and female translators are thought to deal differently with sensitive material such as love, intimacy or sexual behavior (see Leonardi 2007). Example 3 may be a good instance of moral censure: with the use of the term 'violador' [English *rapist*], the woman translator (P) shows in her translation moral and human contempt for those who abuse women. A few similar cases can be found in her version

of Cleland's book in relation to questions connected with women's status as sexual objects—in those cases, Podestá's versions (far more explicit in her references to women as “prostitutes” or “mercenaries”; see Santaemilia 2005) seem to throw a fiercer moral comment on the unpleasant reality of women's lives in the eighteenth century, thus eschewing questions of power and authority.

Though examples 1-3 may be revealing—see also Santaemilia (2005)—no definite evidence emerged in my search as to divergent or distinctive strategies which characterize female and/or male translators. Sometimes, however, a single example is more revealing than countless others, and leaves us with the shadow of a doubt. Almost at the end of the book, *Fanny Hill* broods over the importance of the male sexual member for women:

Example 4

... under the pressure of that peculiar scepter-member which commands us all, ... (FH 219)

... bajo la presión de ese miembro-cetro peculiar que nos dirige a todos ... (MF 182)

... la presión de ese miembro coronado que manda en **todas nosotras** ... (P 243-244)

This example is probably somewhat irrelevant in English (a natural gender language) but is extremely relevant in Spanish (a grammatical gender language), which is forced to identify whether ‘us all’ refers to a male or a female pronoun. The default rendering in Spanish would be the masculine generic ‘todos’ (found in MF's translation), but only the woman translator (P) has been able to grasp the immediate, intuitive solution: ‘todas nosotras’ [English *all of us women*]. In a way, some feminist translation scholars seem to support diverging performances of male and female translators, since “[t]ranslators live between two cultures, and women translators live between at least three, patriarchy (public life) being the omnipresent third,” which leads them to an “ambivalence of identity” (Flotow 1997, 36).

In spite of example 4, which seems to identify a female translator unproblematically, our adventure into the field of the sex of translation has left me with the ambivalent realization that, on the one hand, the sex of the translator alone was not as relevant as might have been expected and that, on the other hand, the reference to love, sex and intimacy in *Fanny Hill* was powerful enough to provoke important *translation effects* (see Flotow 2000) that tend to destabilize the assumed transparency of the source text. That is why we decided to go on to the next stage, the exploration of the translation of sex.

### 3. FROM TRANSLATION TO SEX: A CULTURAL AND IDEOLOGICAL CHALLENGE

Interesting as it may be, the analysis of the sex of translations is easy prey to essentialism—the “belief in essences, that is, the conviction that there is some essential, fundamental and fixed property or set of properties which all members of a particular category must share, and by which they are distinguished from the members of other



categories” (Cameron 1998, 15). However, examples 1 to 4 and others (see Santaemilia 2005) reveal a productive area of research into the complexities of identity, and into questions of power and authority, of legitimation and intervention, of (self)censorship and ethics. In this section we will change the direction of our analysis and venture instead into the translation of sex, an ideal site—we believe—for testing the complex rewriting(s) of identity in sociohistorical terms. Since sex(uality) is an integral factor in the construction of a human being, the need today to translate sex(uality) is therefore unavoidable. Sex permeates our lives and our discourses, our symbols and our texts. But when dealing with sex or sexuality in literary or creative texts, we are dealing fundamentally with a socio-cultural construction as the category of sex is, according to Wodak “a purely cultural product of discourse” (1997, 12). Although sex-related language is not the same as sex or sexuality, language is still

... arguably the most powerful definitional/representational medium available to humans, [it] shapes our understanding of what we are doing (and of what we should be doing) when we do sex or sexuality. The language we have access to in a particular time and place for representing sex and sexuality exerts a significant influence on what we take to be possible, what we take to be ‘normal’ and what we take to be ‘desirable.’ (Cameron and Kulick 2003, 11-12)

Language is a privileged means through which we display or reveal our sexual identities or inclinations, our love or hate, our attitudes to love or sex. It is through language that we construct a sexual narrative. The sexual idiom is ritualized differently in the different languages and, consequently, demands highly conscientious translators to turn it from one language into another. The language of sex is, in any type of text, a highly sensitive one, and demands an accurate rendering of words, expressions, innuendoes and associations.

### 3.1. The translation of sexually explicit language: *Las edades de Lulú* (1989), by Almudena Grandes

What happens when translating sexually explicit language? Let us see an example. Spanish writer Almudena Grandes is seen today as the originator of a boom in erotic literature, which started more than two decades ago. *Las edades de Lulú* (henceforth EL) [*The Ages of Lulu* (henceforth AL)] was her first novel, published in 1989. Since then, this novel has not ceased to generate polemical reactions and has been a privileged locus to test the limits of Spanish contemporary literature and society in terms of their sexual mores. The novel is part of a tradition of *feminine* erotic writing—the then young novelists Almudena Grandes, Lucía Etxebarria, Mercedes Abad and María Jaén, among others, chose to describe in graphic detail the desires and sexual practices of their female protagonists, in order to “implicitly dismantle the inherited models both of eroticism and of literature” (Ríos-Font 1998, 362).

Over time, however, Almudena Grandes's acclaimed book has undergone a rapid process of institutionalization and of commodification, thus transforming a marginal novel into a canonical novel. In an ironic twist, *Las edades de Lulú* was republished in 2004 in an edition where Grandes herself corrected the original version, eliminated short passages and removed "a number of pretentious and affected excesses" (Grandes 2004, 17; my translation), though she did not eliminate the sexual passages. Within a few years, then, a novel which was considered immoral by many when it came out was assimilated by the publishing industry and the book market. In fact, *Las edades de Lulú* is a brave book breaking new ground and challenging the literary and gender hierarchies of its time, which has finally entered the circuit of academic books worthy of university study and research.

*The Ages of Lulu*, the 1993 English-language translation made out by Sonia Soto, may help us reveal the intricate processes involved in the translation of explicit sexuality. A few examples are worth quoting:

Example 5

Estaba **caliente, cachonda** en el sentido clásico del término. (EL 54)

I was **hot, turned on** in the true sense of the word. (AL 36)

Example 6

Estaba **muy salida** y se frotaba con la mano. (EL 154)

She was **very aroused** and was rubbing herself with her hand. (AL 111)

Example 7

Estaba **encoñado con** Marcelo por lo visto ... (EL 138)

Seemed he was quite **taken with** Marcelo ... (AL 99)

The characters in *Las edades de Lulú* boldly verbalize their sexual urges, in an extremely colloquial register. Typical instances are bold statements by or about female characters as in examples 5 and 6, in which the English renderings are reasonable, though milder, options for the sexually explicit Spanish terms. There are other examples, however, which would seem to indicate that there are terms or turns of phrase which are either untranslatable or at least highly idiomatic. When in prison, "the Portuguese guy," a sort of *girlfriend* to all the prisoners, "was quite taken with [Spanish *encoñado*] Marcelo," Lulú's brother. *Encoñarse* or *encoñado* are terms which are extremely sensitive and thus problematic when it comes to translating them, for a variety of reasons. Firstly, they are derived from the female pudenda, *coño* [English *cunt*], arguably one of the strongest taboo words in the Spanish language. Secondly, they point to a traditional, unconscious association between a woman's sexual organ and passing, capricious infatuation. And thirdly, they refer to a gay man. These examples seem to reaffirm women's bodies and sexuality as the main

sources of verbal hostility and abuse in Spanish. All this, however, is markedly lost in Sonia Soto's translation. When trying to relay the sexual vulgarity present in the Spanish original, English proves less physical, less colloquial. *The Ages of Lulu* deletes crude references to body parts, to sexual acts and to the frenzy Grandes's women experience in wild sexual activity.

The Spanish language (over)exploits body parts, sexual organs and erotic activities to convey a wide range of emphatic meanings or euphonic associations. Example 8 is highly revealing:

Example 8

Se lo ha pasado de **puta madre**, en serio ... (EL 47)

She had a **fucking brilliant time**, I mean it ... (AL 31)

Here, Lulú is 16, and a powerful triangle “solidly entrenches itself as Pablo has sex with the virginal Lulú while simultaneously speaking with Marcelo on the phone” (Mayock 2004, 244). In this scene, Pablo's cynicism is foregrounded as he is having sex with Lulú while he simultaneously denies it emphatically on the phone. He informs Marcelo that this evening Lulú “had a *fucking brilliant time*” (AL 31) [Spanish *de puta madre* (EL 47)] while caressing her nipples; the expression *de puta madre*—impossible to convey literally, as it would be something like an adjective linking the terms *whore* and *mother*—links two of the strongest socio-sexual taboos (prostitution and motherhood) in one single expression of abuse, which is much more difficult to convey in English (see Santaemilia 2008a: 17).

Another favorite emphatic intensifier in the novel is *coño* [English *cunt*], in stereotypical retorts like the example below:

Example 9

¿**Qué coño** le importa a Lulú que yo le ponga los cuernos a mi novia? (EL 49)

**What the fuck** does Lulu care if I'm cheating on my girlfriend? (AL 33)

There is a systematic overexploitation of female genitals to articulate anger or contempt in Spanish colloquial conversation (see Santaemilia 2008b). Fixed expressions like ¿qué coño...?, ¿dónde coño ...? or ¿cómo coño ...? [English literally *what the cunt...?*, *where the cunt...?* and *how the cunt...?*] are heard everywhere in Peninsular Spanish, which quite often brings about a certain accumulation of sex-related emphatic resources. In example 9, the emphatic values of ‘coño’ are reinforced through alliteration and the cultural cliché of ‘cuernos’ (*horns*, indicative of cuckoldry). The examples are explicit and emotionally charged but surely, for many Spanish readers, this excessive repetition is likely to lead to a certain de-sensitization.

The phrase *hijo de puta* [English *son of a bitch*] is one of the building blocks of colloquial or vulgar texts in Spanish. One night, when Pablo and Lulú are driving

through the red-light district, a man punches Pablo in the face. Lulú, a contradictory character and narrator, reacts in a stereotypically male fashion, shouting and behaving in a verbally violent way:

Example 10

Tú, hijo de la gran puta, cómo te has atrevido tú a pegar a mi novio ... (EL 109)

You bloody bastard, how dare you hit my boyfriend! (AL 76)

While source text (ST) and target text (TT) are similar in terms of lexical meaning, they may not be in terms of pragmatic force. Some Spanish-speaking readers or speakers might feel greatly offended by example 10, which is situated far beyond the line of decency in Spanish culture, as they include a reference both to the illegitimate child and to his mother. In highly colloquial contexts there is some ambiguity as to whether these terms are used as (strong) insults or to add extra emotional emphasis, or both. The English renderings of examples 8 to 10 seem linguistically correct, if only rather conservative in terms of sexual imagery. *Las Edades de Lulú* contains a catalogue of sexual vulgarities in Spanish which involve the repeated overexploitation of women's sexual organs and activities. The "translation effect" advocated by Flotow (2000) seems to drive the English-language version of Grandes's novel into comparatively less sexualized territory, where issues of restraint and propriety are more important than the subtleties and transgressions which make *Las Edades de Lulú* stand way above other erotic novels. In particular, the Spanish examples repeatedly focus on the woman's body as the main site of erotic writing and of literary subversion; in contrast, the English versions shy away from women's bodies and resort once and again to the morphological variants of the f-word. The translator, Sonia Soto, is a woman, but I doubt whether this simple fact is a reliable lens through which the treatment of love and sexual activity in translation can be analyzed. In the Spanish language and culture, "men are most intensively insulted through their women" (Fernández Dobao 2006, 230), far more so than in English, and translators—whether men or women—can do little about it.

### 3.2. The translation of sex as euphemism and irony: Mario Vargas Llosa

Sometimes sexual language is not so bold or direct. What happens when there is an unabashed—though ironic—glorification of masculinity? Or when sex turns into ambiguity and euphemism? We can find it by analyzing the English translations of the novels of Peruvian author Mario Vargas Llosa, among which we can cite *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* (1973, henceforth PV), translated into English by Gregory Kolovakos and Ronald Christ in 1978 as *Captain Pantoja and the Special Service* (henceforth CP), and *La tía Julia y el escribidor* (1977, henceforth TJ), translated by Helen R. Lane in 1982 with the title *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter* (henceforth AJ). For Olga Caro (1990, 167), sexuality undeniably plays a key role in the works of Vargas Llosa, who considers love and sex integral elements in any good novel, especially if it aspires to reflect reality. Life

is full of eroticism, as it is full of violence, tragedy, frustration. As a consequence, his view of human sexual behaviors is quite often one of the organizing principles of his writing, a source of style.

Particularly recurrent in Vargas Llosa's novels is the use of gallantries and turns of phrase to represent love as an elegant game. In the English translation of TJ, terms like "enamorar" and "galanterías finas" (TJ 29) are freely rendered into "flirt with you" and "sweet nothings" (AJ 12), which convey a negative picture of love as a mere game of seduction. While in TJ love can be identified with ease and joy, the English version emphasizes love as a mere physical, slightly negative activity.

Diminutives are also paramount in Vargas Llosa's stylistic project. Diminutives are most often euphemisms adding an emotive, almost childlike tone to the rhythms of love. PV is set in the realm of euphemism, puerile if corrosive. However, while "hacer cositas" (PV 70) is childish and joyful in Spanish, the English version ("doing it" CP 50) is transformed into an empty verb, similar to countless other examples such as "making it," "our business," "do a little business" and so on. The English target text is perhaps more formal, but much less colorful. Spanish diminutives are, without a doubt, very difficult to translate into English, as their emotive (and moral) dimensions are routinely obscured in the translation process. Diminutives are excellent vehicles for Vargas Llosa to indirectly refer to sexual organs and caresses, or to any form of sexual activity. In the English translations, these diminutives are correctly rendered from a purely grammatical point of view, but lacking the emotive and comical undertones of the original.

Humor, in Vargas Llosa, comes very often from euphemisms, from half words or the unsaid. Euphemism and irony, for instance, constitute ways of transgressing the linguistic-social rules over what to say and not to say (see Santaemilia 2005). A strong comical view focuses on those characters who are deficient, marginal or represent sexuality as deviation. As an example, in PV, we read the words of Paiva Runhuí, the mayor of a village in the Amazonian rainforest, asking the army to stop the soldiers' sexual abuse:

Example 11

Me **perjudicaron** a una cuñadita hace pocos meses y la semana pasada casi me **perjudican** a mi propia esposa. (PV 12)

Just a few months ago they **molested** my dear sister-in-law and last week they almost **raped** my own wife. (CP 4)

In Spanish, 'perjudicar' is both ambiguous and ironic, and refers to the scourge of rapes observed in the rainforest over the previous months. Once again, Vargas Llosa projects a kindly look at men's disorderly sexual behaviors. The translation of example 11 is revealing: while 'molested' may refer to an imprecise range of sexual abuses, 'raped' is definitive, absolute.

Euphemisms are effective as long as they remain euphemisms; when we disambiguate, what is modified is not so much the meaning of a term (which was obvious since the very beginning) as the primary pleasure of playing a linguistic game. Translations tend to privilege meaning over form, unambiguous over ambiguous terms. In TJ, aunt Julia complains about her aunt Hortensia and her uncle Alejandro, as they tried to punish her for marrying the young Mario, and how on the day before the wedding they had not greeted her and even:

Example 12

Me miraron con un desprecio olímpico, sólo les faltó **decirme pe** ... (TJ 418)

They looked at me like something the cat dragged in, and I wouldn't have been at all surprised if they'd **call me a whore** to my face ... (AJ 277)

The English translation is transparent, far from euphemistic, but perhaps too excessive, and surely deprives the whole sentence of the original's sex-as-forbidden-game allure. Though in this example we are faced with a clear instance of dysphemism, perhaps Lane's explicitness is, once again, in tune with her translating practice throughout this novel: one characterized by conservatism and formality.

In Santaemilia (2010) I analyze more examples from the novels of Mario Vargas Llosa, who quite often shows a preference for the negative or ironic elements of love and sex. Sex constitutes, for Olga Caro (1990, 170), a first-rate testimony of the ills of a society. At times, sex in Vargas Llosa is a lyrical game, which in English becomes denser, more unhurried, slightly negative. In particular, his diminutives shift from joyful euphemisms into tasteless, neutral renderings, devoid of a moral and emotional dimension. In works such as *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* (1973), which casts a sarcastic look at men's sexual appetites, the English translation seems intent on destroying euphemisms, in order to produce a fully explicit, contextualized text. The result is, unsurprisingly, that all ambiguity and linguistic experimentation has been eliminated. At other times, by contrast, the world of Vargas Llosa's novels is a profoundly sexist male universe, which conveys a patriarchal morality. Men's disorderly sexuality is often glorified while women's sexual objectification is looked at patronisingly, even with condescension.

#### 4. FINALE: SEX(UALITY) IN TRANSLATION

Do all these translating traits have (necessarily) to do with the sex of the translator? We seriously doubt it. The (translated) examples in this paper come from both men and women translators. Almudena Grandes's *Las edades de Lulú* (1993) was translated into English by Sonia Soto, in 1993. Mario Vargas Llosa's *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* (1973) was translated in 1978 into English by Gregory Kolovakos and Ronald Christ, while the English version of *La tía Julia y el escribidor* (1977) was made by Helen R. Lane in 1982. Each individual translator, whether a man or a woman, has his/her own

trajectory, background, prejudices, and so on. I will not deny that, generally speaking, a woman might be better equipped to spot or deal with sexist or patriarchal passages, as sexism and patriarchy are discourses that have traditionally affected women much more than men. But that is only in theory, since we cannot assume an absolute identification between sex and gender. There are other factors that may be much more relevant: the commercial imperatives at a given moment, the translational norms, or the translator's attitude towards gender and sexual configurations at the time.

The new focus on gender and sexual identities is socially and discursively constructed, in a continual process of negotiation and modification. This constructionist, post-modernist view of gender, as mentioned earlier, owes much to the philosopher Judith Butler's conceptualization of gender and sex as performance. Gender and sex, then, emerge from practice, from what people do rather than from their essential, immutable selves—they are articulated in discourse, and are contingent and performative, diverse and contradictory. Very much the same happens in translation—the more aware we are of the differences among women (and men), the more we should recognize the existence of a multiplicity of ways in which women (and men) translate.

But this new social constructionism cannot prevent a more primary phenomenon. In fact, references to sexism, rape, prostitution, women as sexual objects or pornography are not likely to be dealt with in a dispassionate way by either male or female translators. Most particularly, the presence in any text of such topics as sexism, women's subordination or prostitution will surely affect the task of the female translators. Though we cannot always equate sex with gender, one feels a certain identification between oneself and the rest of the members of one's sex. On the one hand, we are aware that there is not a single *female* (or *feminine*) way of translating; and on the other, we cannot avoid feeling affected *as women* (or *as men*) by certain sex-related words, actions or displays. There are certain actions or topics that are likely to trigger a primary identification between the said action or topic and the translator *as part of a sexual group/category*. This is more clearly seen in the case of women (translators), as they have shared a long history of subordination and exclusion—this has given rise to important areas of research such as *feminist translation* (see Flotow 1997).

Today, women translators claim a new textual/sexual authority over language and discourse; for themselves, translation becomes a legitimizing process which accords them social power, cultural prestige and authorial status. But it would be a serious mistake to forget *men* (and *man*) as part of the analysis. Both categories (man/woman and men/women) are relational and plural (i.e., encompass heterosexual, homosexual, lesbian, bisexual identities, and so on), and we should not analyze them in isolation but rather consider "the full range of sexualized identities, ideologies, and practices that may emerge in specific sociocultural contexts" (Bucholtz and Hall 2004, 490). Though lately relentlessly vilified for the exclusion of women from the (writing and translating) canon, men (translators) are as plural and contradictory as women (translators) are; at times they have clearly benefitted from circumstances and accrued a "symbolic capital"

(Bourdieu 1992, 166) usually accorded to males. But at other times, men translators have also been ignored, censored or burned at the stake. But the analytical category of *men* (and *man*) should be restored to gain a fuller picture of the dialectics between men and women in and through translation, thus offering a key to the exclusion and subordination of women across literary, philosophical or translational traditions.

Without a doubt, further research is needed into the interplay between sex and translation, in a variety of texts and languages. We need combined analyses of the macro-context (the socio-cultural background of publishers, translators, writers, etc.) and of the micro-level textual data to get a fuller picture of the complex operations involved in translation. Sex-related language is a privileged area to study the cultures we translate into, a site where “issues of cultural sensitivity are encumbered by issues of gender stereotyping and cliché” (Flotow 2000, 31), where each culture places its moral or ethical limits, where we encounter its taboos and historical dilemmas. Through the translation of sex, we are able to analyze and bring to light the complexities of the configuration of gender/sexual identities, of the social contradictions and prejudices affecting women (or men), of the subordination of women in/through language and translation, of the mechanisms of gender discrimination—and, ultimately, of how all these factors are transmitted (or challenged) when travelling into other cultures. In this crucial endeavor, all three categories (women, men and translation) are of paramount importance. Certainly, the translation of sex can be a fruitful epistemological site for the study, promotion or rejection of gendered discourses and stereotypes.

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