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TRANSFERRING U.S. LATINO POETS INTO THE SPANISH-SPEAKING WORLD[1]

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Translation is slippery art that compounds the problems of the inherent instability of language with the unruly process of duplicating it in another system. The sliding that occurs in the translation of multicultural poetry is even more pronounced since the distance from "the norm" becomes greater and greater. This is true firstly because poetry is a genre that strives for verbal concision and innovation in a playful defiance of norms that pique the reader's imagination; and secondly because the multilingual poet often involves a second language —either in its original form or as a translation into the language of composition—to enhance sound and cultural imagery. Latino poetry generally glides along on the linguistic and cultural tension inherent in both its poeticity and its English/Spanish and Latino/Anglo dualities that challenge normative discourse. Therefore, the translation of this verse must also produce for the reader a similarly slippery tension, a task that Fabián Iriarte and I constantly grappled with in the editing of a recent bilingual anthology, *Usos de la imaginación: poesía de l@s latin@s en EE.UU.*

This book began as an experiment in heterolingual translation in general, and after selecting eleven Latino poets for an anthology —Rafael Campo, Judith Ortiz Cofer, Silvia Curbelo, Martín Espada, Diana García, Richard García, Maurice Kilwein Guevara, Juan Felipe Herrera, Pat Mora, Gary Soto and Gloria Vando—we spent two years researching and rehearsing versions in readings and seminars offered in the universities of Mar del Plata and Córdoba in order to test the success of our translation strategies.[2]

There were many aspects to be considered before deciding on the best approach to translating this verse. To begin with, different modes of hetero-glossia had to be analyzed. Then, it was necessary to examine the tradition of multicultural and multilingual literature in general and investigate various attempts to translate it, understanding that each period and each poet is unique.

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Finally, we had to define the ideology behind different usages of multilingualism in our Latino texts in order to emulate each poet's strategies. This meant locating the heteroglossic particulars of Latino poetry, or poetries—the Latino categorization is, admittedly, a dubious umbrella in many ways— in order to determine how these features could be kept visible in the Spanish versions.

Walter Mignolo uses the term "languaging"[3] to discuss this process which he defines as: "[…] that moment between speech and writing, before and after language, that languages make possible" (253). He goes on to theorize that bilanguaging "as a condition of border thinking from the colonial difference, opens up to a postnational thinking" (254). It is important to note that diglossia is frequently a very personal and creative use of languages, ruled by on-the-spot production and aimed at wordplay. It is, precisely, the creativity and the ethnic marking of a "bilanguaging" that has, within the last few decades, inspired many authors to engage in diglossic representation with the intention of reasserting the power of their first or second language. In this fashion they are able to regenerate their bicultural identities.

Furthermore, conceived in a country that tends to subsume the foreign, this poetry must be understood, to use Nicolas Bourriaud's term, in its "garden of errancy," of an "altermodern," globalized world where postnational land can become a place of fertile transplantations, where the soil of chance may translate and regender the original cultural roots of these authors, as the "radicans" or "creepers" such as trumpet vines or ivy reroot and become transformed in each new medium. These active vines perform as translations, and a translation of this poetry must also perform as vines, rooting and entwining in sometimes random fashions.

Citing the power of a "migratory vision" derived from heteroglossic strategies, Indian theorist Homi Bhabha has generated a highly suggestive argument in favor of heterolingual techniques in his book *The Location of Culture*. Suggesting that one can wrest the canonic meaning from "narratives of originary and initial subjectivities," it is possible to resignify with innovative combinations of discourse through an incommensurable and insurgent "unpicking" and relinking that can be produced by retranslating normative discourses (185).

In this sense, Latino poetry shares this tendency to retranslate and relink in its use of Spanish elements, so it not only is heteroglossic in the friction present between different linguistic and cultural strata, but is also "heterolinguistic."

[3] "Languaging" is a notion coined by linguist Alton Becker, and the second term, bilanguaging comes from "Amour bilingue," written by Moroccan poet Abdelkebir Khatibi.

Forming an essential ingredient, this heterolingualism derived from the mixing of English and Spanish must be rendered in a successful translation, but how can this be accomplished in a Spanish version?

According to Canadian critic Rainier Grutman in his article "Refraction and recognition: Literary multilingualism in translation," there exist two basic ways to translate these texts: either they are domesticated by creating a homogeneous monolingualism, or they become what some label "an atrocious bilingual hybrid".[4]

One method for resolving this problem is to leave the foreign word and place a translation of it in parentheses or in an appendix, but in the case of Latino works translated into Spanish, leaving the Spanish word in Spanish erases the heterolingualism and homogenizes the texts. Although one of the ways to ensure the visibility of heterolingual strategies in translation has traditionally been to use italics or boldface print, quotations marks or footnotes, the new reading process is not equal to the original process since the idiomatic tension may appear neither in the same form nor at the same time during the reading process, and, therefore, the harmony or dissonance of this tension may be neutralized.

The intermingling of Spanish and English in the U.S., despite attempts to legitimize "Spanglish" as a language, does not constitute a stable creolization since the bilanguaging is both creative and spontaneously improvised for the most part, and its vocabulary depends on the national roots of the speaker. Therefore, it is useful to consider Spanish words in U.S. Latino literature often as metonymic or synecdochic, as the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* discuss. Latino writers employ parts of the language—sounds, words, textures—as "power and presence of the culture they signify" (52). There is a crafting of the two languages, rather than a representation of authentic discourse, and this underscores issues of cultural identity because the heteroglossic expression perplexes the English-speaking reader and thus presents a meaningful resistance.

Though Hispanic voices in the U.S. vary greatly since this community arises from different geographic, economic, professional and political origins, they represent an "otherness" within the ambiguity and ambivalence of a bilingual and bicultural reality. In their poetry, this often appears as a translation in a broad sense—mistranslation, retranslation, and/or zero translation—used in order to liberate and flaunt a bilingual imagination. Some consider this bicultural situation as a contradiction, as a "colonization of the mind" (Ngugi wa Thiongo) imposed by U.S. educational practices, while others take advantage of it in order

[4] In this article, Grutman cites, Keith Garebian in his reference to a translation by Ray Ellenwood (38), *Target,* 18: 1, 2006.

to "bilanguage" reality and so destabilize the monolingual vision of the U.S and highlight the incommensurability of the different cultures as political commentary.

Geographic migratory movements are reflected in works of these poets: from California to the Carolinas in the harvests and canneries or mills, steel and factory jobs from Chicago to Detroit, political exile to Florida and the economic emigration to New York. Many second and third generation Latinos have university degrees, and in their verse, they tend to juxtapose their realities with those of their parents. Although the physical movements and realities are different, certain common topics emerge from their bicultural situations—the immigrant's poverty, the color of their skin, their Catholic legacy and general culture clashes and misunderstandings. Also, there exists a preponderant, underlying humor in most poems that serves as an antidote for possible sentimentality. Their poetics are largely based on orality, dialogism and montage. In fact, much of the poetry is written for recitation. To achieve this level of orality, they often represent the linguistic tension that stems from their bilingualism by recreating imagined dialogues with Anglos or their immigrant relatives. These poets tend to reproduce their different registers in their use of both Spanish and English, and in doing so, they intensify the heteroglossia of the texts.

Another common problem encountered in the process of cultural transfer lies in the nature of the transfer. This is of particular significance in the case of these Latino poets, firstly, because this transfer may be intra or intercultural, depending upon its classification as part of a specific Hispanic or U.S. tradition; and, secondly, because the intention of the works may vary from scholarly to popular or even to the dramatic forums of actual performance. Our edition of these poets was directed to a non-academic audience, though most Argentine readers of poetry are college educated. Our mode of translation was not based only on semantics, but rather on the flow and wit of each poem in order to find a way to emulate the overarching dialogism of the poetry. Though an original trope may "get lost in translation," we endeavored to compensate with a new brilliance and playfulness that the Spanish language may permit. Being colloquial in expression, these poems were, in most cases, rendered in Argentine idioms since our readers will mainly be "*Rioplatenses*," living in the major cosmopolitan areas of Argentina and Uruguay. We believe the intimacy produced in the conversational tone of the poems is best conveyed with a spoken language and not some artificial "Panhispanic" approach. Therefore, we used Argentine vocabulary and the characteristic "vos" instead of "tú" for the informal second person singular. In translating instances of heteroglossia, we

often had to judge how to compensate according to each poem: in some cases, the original words were placed in italics, particularly in titles; while in others, English words were used within the poems to emulate the bilingual tension. Furthermore, in making the anthology bilingual, we challenged the monolingual mode of publication, offering *en face* typographic evidence that actually displays the differences and invites a comparison of versions. It is our hope that the reader will enjoy the possibility of detecting the shifts and locating the original heterolingual strategies.

The problem that arose from this orientation is that the other culture present in these poems is never Argentine; therefore, in the cases where heterolingualism dominated, we decided that the vocabulary required a register different from that of the River Plate region and, thus, we utilized terms from the Caribbean or Mexico as well as the informal singular you—tú—instead of the Argentine "vos" in those particular poems.

The poetry of Cuban-born Silvia Curbelo,[5] serves as an example of this "radicant" poetry. Though most of the poets of our collection mark their works with synecdochic heterolingualism, as a resident of Florida like many Cuban immigrants, her work produces few of the patterns characteristic of Latino bilanguaging—perhaps due to a suppression of Spanish in her Florida upbringing. Yet, she has been included in various Latino anthologies and her surrealist juxtapositions are often present in Latino poetry. Another Cuban-American living in the area, Dionisio Martínez, chose to not be a part of this anthology, citing little in common with the Latino writer community in the States, though he does engage in heterolingual expression. Therefore, we see that Latino poetics also emerge from the willful exclusion or inclusion in this grouping. By the same token, Curbelo along with Richard García were two of the keenest supporters if the anthology project because of its creating the possibility of reconnecting their works with the Spanish-speaking community.

Turning now to an example of the problems involved in bilanguaging translations, Chicana poet Pat Mora provides particularly useful insights regarding the intermingling of language and culture. Born in the El Paso/Juárez zone of Texas, this borderland poet grew up in a Hispanic life in a bicultural area of an "other" country; that is, she lived as a Hispanic ruled by U.S. hierarchies. Our Spanish version makes use of both italics and English to represent the bicultural situation. The title is in Spanish, and as such we placed it in italics to signal the foreignness. In a rich display of sensual and sensorial imagery, Mora often addresses feminine issues surrounding the workplace and home to probe

[5] See poems by Silvia Curbelo in this issue of *Transfer*.

maternal and amorous relationships. Her main focus is on the multicultural and ecological diversity of the U.S., and she tends to situate her poems in desert, Indian and/or Latino spaces within a dialogical style of conversations and intertextualities using graphical placement to enhance the hiatic phenomenon of her reality:

Bilingual Christmas

Do you hear what I hear?

Buenos días and *hasta luego*
in board rooms and strategy sessions.
Where are your grateful holiday smiles,
bilinguals? I've given you a voice,
let you in
to hear old friends tell old jokes.
Stop flinching. Drink eggnog. Hum along.

Not carols we hear,
whimpering,
children too cold
to sing
on Christmas eve.

Do you see what I see?

adding a dash of color
to conferences and corporate parties
one per panel or office
slight South-of-the border seasoning
feliz navidad and *próspero año nuevo,* right?
Relax. Eat rum balls. Watch the snow.

Not twinkling lights
we see but
search lights
seeking illegal aliens
outside our thick windows.

In this poem, one can clearly observe how the spacing indicates a confrontation, and how the heteroglossia is produced not only through the use of English and Spanish, but also through the different registers of English. The basic translation problem is evident: how does one transfer these bicultural elements created for an English reader into a version to be read by a monolingual Spanish reader? There are translations that use italics or boldface print to represent the bilingualism; Mora herself employs italics for the Spanish she includes, but the linguistic tension is not the same. A simple inversion of the Spanish and English cannot suffice because it would lose the entire bilingual speech act's veracity. Here, the decision to leave specific words in English responds to our desire to reaffirm the compelling bicultural dynamics and hierarchies that constitute this poem, which is not a process of code switching but of synecdochic configuration. Furthermore, in this particular text, there is an intertextuality arising from a popular Christmas song in the epigraph, which both establishes the holiday setting and poses the ontological problem dramatized by the poem: "do you hear what I hear?" suggesting that significance is in the mind and culture of the beholder.

The first line is a common greeting and farewell in Spanish, and in the third there is an interpellant voice directed to those who have spoken in Spanish: "Stop flinching. Drink eggnog. Hum along." After this there is a greatly indented strophe, written in an unusual register to represent the Latino voice in English: "Not carols we hear", which would normally be, "we aren't listening to carols." With this new voice, Mora establishes a heteroglossia that signals the cultural conflict between the "Anglos" and the "Latinos" in their divergent appreciation of Christmas, particularly in this frosty and alien environment.

The third stanza incorporates another line from the same song, "Do you see what I see?" so as to question the attempted integrative atmosphere of the office: "slight South-of-the border seasoning" which is the token gesture of the Anglo, who will then try out a few phrases in Spanish. However, his/her suggestion that they enjoy the snow and traditional fare of rum balls and eggnog is answered by the *other* voice once again. In our version, we tried to capture the stilted speech in the hope that the unusual character of the register might be conveyed in these two indented strophes, which sound much like a soliloquy of thoughts murmured under one's breath:

> Nada del titilar de lucecitas
> sino reflectores
> vemos

a la busca de ilegales
más allá de este doble vidrio.

The idiomatic strain represented in the poem demands careful selection so as to produce the same effect on the Spanish reader. Thus, the decision to leave "eggnog," "rum balls," and "snow" in the Spanish version is the result of our desire to reaffirm the culture clash with elements "other" to the Mexican sensibility since these words are essential and exclusive to the U.S. Christmas tradition: "No sean cobardes. Tomen *eggnog*. Tarareen con nosotros." "Relá-jense. Coman *rum balls.* Miren, *snow*."

Of course, the intertextuality of the song gets lost, even if the words are understood, which is most probable since they are quite elementary. However, the melody does not form part of the popular Hispanic imaginary, save those Latinos living in the U.S. Food, nicknames, idiomatic phrases and songs are precisely highly charged cultural factors in literature, which place an accent on identity and often defy translation. In representing their bicultural reality, Latino poets constantly include these elements in their works. Placing the lines of this song in italics and in English helps to deepen the linguistic fissure, but one finally must ask: are all instances of heterolingualism transferrable? Is it enough to add an artistic "seasoning" to mark the duality present? When the discourse is a crafting of the two languages rather than an attempt at actual speech, as one finds in this poem, it would seem to suffice.

The speaker finds herself standing in the doorway between two very different worlds, as she configures in the poem "Sonrisas." (20):

I live in a doorway
between two rooms. I hear
quiet clicks, cups of black
coffee, *click, click* like facts:
budgets, tenure, curriculum,
from careful women in crisp beige
suits, quick beige smiles
that seldom sneak into their eyes.

I peek
in the other room señoras
in faded dresses stir sweet
milk coffee, laughter whirls

with steam from fresh *tamales*
sh, sh, mucho ruido,
they scold one another,
press their lips, trap smiles
in their dark, Mexican eyes.

Our Spanish version makes use of both italics and English to represent the bicultural situation. The title is in Spanish, and as such we placed it in italics to signal the foreignness. However, in the English version, the title works as a conceit that has to be poetically reasoned out by the monolingual reader. For this reason, as first we considered changing the title to "laughter," but later judged the English word short on sound as it lacks the rich, nearly onomatopoeic quality of the Spanish word that invokes the hearty laughter of the *señoras*:

Sonrisas

Vivo en el lintel
entre dos salas. Escucho
el clic de tazas de café
negro, clic clic como datos:
presupuestos, *tenure*, planes de estudio
de cautas mujeres trajecito sastre
color beige, ligeras sonrisas color beige
que pocas veces llegan a sus ojos

de reojo veo
en la otra sala, a señoras
con vestidos desteñidos que revuelven
el azúcar en su café con leche, risas
en remolinos del vapor de tamales caseros
sh sh, mucho ruido,
se retan una a otra,
dedo contra labios, atrapan sonrisas
en sus oscuros ojos mejicanos.

After analyzing our decisions and dilemmas and admitting our failures, we come to yet another question: should all heterolingual texts be translated?

David Colón maintains: "The poetics of the other is the modality of confusion; it is a blurring of the dimensions and domains of language. Latino poetics are conducted in *otherhood*. […] *[T]he voice of the other is the voice of unintelligibility.*" (284,269). As an example of this "unintelligibility," the now emblematic work of Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La frontera* has been cited by so many postcolonial critics to illustrate successful practices of hybridity. This Chicana writer creates an attractive, but extremely privileged vision that juxtaposes languages and genres in order to represent the interstices of the border. Here, the angle of privilege has been shifted to favor the polyglot reader, but this text has not and, perhaps, could or should not be translated.

Other critics maintain, nevertheless, that it is essential to translate these texts into Spanish since it is the best way to reunite them with their cultural roots and thus perpetuate the migratory visions of these writers.[6] Moreover, the translation of these ex-centric works has become a profitable enterprise owing to their present popularity and relevance. The poets of our compendium demonstrated great enthusiasm regarding their reentry into the Hispanic domain; in fact, Curbelo, has given readings that include our versions of her works.

Yet, a large problem remains: can a translator arrive at a recognizable convention, a translation norm to reproduce the negation of normative discourse? Lyrical expression tends to twist normative discourse, reinventing it so as to expand and play with reader perception; in the case of many Latino poets, there is a double twist since they often deterritorialize the Spanish and reterritorialize the Spanish. While representing their bicultural experience through intentional linguistic transfers they undermine the monolingualism imposed by the U.S. Therefore, a Spanish translation of this verse is forced to participate in a multifarious rendition in order to retranslate the normative discourse being challenged, as was seen, for example, in Mora's "Bilingual Christmas."

Does a newly invented heteroglossic synecdoche or conceit always suffice? During our work with these Latino poets, we had hoped to arrive at systematic solutions to translating heteroglossia—omission in lines of self-translation, italics in titles, the recreation of dialogic modes, Caribbean or Mexican usage in actual dialogues— but we soon found that each poem demanded its own solution. Perhaps the proliferation of similar mixed-technique translations will function in a intercalated fashion akin to that of the original and will thus be judged as successful in the future.

[6] See Raquel Merino Álvarez.

We have deemed the heteroglossia of these poets to be, in the end, as much an artistic ploy as an ideology portrayed. Their discourse may reflect real world usage, but they use a technique of synecdochic interpolation or conceits in most cases, which are, for the most part, understandable for the English reader since there is neither indigenization of the English nor an overriding use of Spanish. Their diglossic strategy does not participate in the elitist bias of Modernism or the untranslatability of Anzaldúa's text. Perhaps this method can be viewed as a sign of their striving to communicate with the Anglo establishment, but it is also a common convention of multicultural expression. Nevertheless, the general move in literature from a non-factional to an artistic factionality derived from a postmodern/postcolonial use of heteroglossia bespeaks both the subversive and the artistic bias of heterolingual poetry, as can be observed from this Latino verse. One can only hope that both the artistry and the social commentary of the language politics are captured in the translation, a process that depends as much on the translation as the new readership. Therefore, both translators and readers need to be molded so they may understand and enjoy the multicultural experience in lieu of relegating it to the realm of "minor" literature.

The transfer of this Latino poetry into the Spanish-speaking world is essential to its survival and to the emulation of its vine-like development. Translation is the perfect instance of the precariousness and unpredictability of the radicant, "altermodern" process: it is a phantasmagorical bridge we traverse, loaded down with words stuffed into the knapsacks of our imaginations, where our cerebral magicians convert our cargo into something that looks and sounds entirely different from how it seemed before; though, once again on the solid ground of a new culture, these recontextualized words can often reroot to create scenes that will arouse astoundingly similar human responses. Thus, in our work on this compendium, we have attempted to enact a "transformance" of these poets' interanimation of languages using many different strategies: italics, bilingualism, a preface and *en face* bilingual printing, all in search of a dynamic, bilanguaged presentation of the works that would provoke new uses of the imagination, as slippery and winding as the going may be.

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