

Porosity in translation for different women: living métissage as Practice as Research

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Abstract

In this article two feminist Adult Educators reflect on what they learned around translation as a vital process characterizing their daily lives, a strategy to become more daring knowers in relation to others and the world, as well as more caring beings in between the lands where they pass.

Keywords: translation, practice, identity, women

Research as Practice

We are two feminist Adult Educators based in Milan (Italy) where we work as independent researchers and practitioners in social work. In academia, we have experienced how thinking is disconnected from daily living, and words are abstracted from bodies. As Adult Educators, we try to interrogate the language we use for exploring new degrees of freedom.

We [now do the academic thing and] present a reflection on “the more visceral, embodied, and experiential aspects of language and identity” (Ros i Solé, Fenoulhet and Quist, 2020, p.401) starting from a research project on Experiential Translation (Campbell & Vidal, 2019) we conducted in Italy in 2021-2022, Ospitare/Hosting others (Del Negro et al., 2022). The project involved a group of adult educators in the collaborative translation of a performance (Delorenzi, 2019, <http://www.teatrodellemoire.it/ospitare-lavoro-divenire/>) and of two poems in a public park in Milan.

In July 2021, eight participants met twice in Parco di Trenno on a Sunday morning. After a practice of experiential anatomy (about 40 minutes) in perceiving our body (immune system/border, from the skin to the digestive system) for exploring coexistence inside our own bodies, in relation to space and others, we constructed a personal safe space with unrolling wool strings and small personal objects (translating Object 1-the solo performance). Finally, the participants translated the two poems (Object 2) by writing significant lines on cardboard, placing them in the space and doing a voice performance.

After the events, we collected texts on the relationship with translation written by three women: Cinzia Delorenzi, the choreographer, our partner in the project, a participant translator, and the poet Antonella Anedda, author of the poems (Anedda, 1999). We analysed them asking: “How does a concept of porosity emerge from engagement in translation of

different women?” framed in a Practice as Research approach (Tarantini, 2021, working from Kershaw et al., 2011).

We became curious to reflect on the dimensions of entanglement (in the environment), embodiment (experience in the body), and material interaction that emerged in translating in the park, and on how they suggest a creative strategy in a time of crisis, for professional life and academic research.

We engaged in a feminist *métissage* (Bishop et al., 2019) with the women's texts and photos from the park – a method for selecting and assembling materials guided by personal resonance and sensory engagement, through steps of writing and dialogue. In the process of uncovering new patchworks, we enjoyed making visible the potential “prismatic” multiplication of meanings latent in any act of translation (Reynolds, in Gould and Tahmasebian, 2020, p. 50) as a resource for living [no more academic parenthesis for a while, promise].

By performing *métissage* to reflect translation from the lived experience of three different women, and our own, we take back the idea of a “practice-based” research approach that began to emerge in Art & Design in the UK in the mid 70’ and early 80’. Like Carol Gray (1996) [ok we did, but this is a manifesto!], “By ‘practice-led’ I mean, firstly, research which is initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of practice and practitioners; and secondly, that the research strategy is carried out through practice” (p. 3).

Our *métissage*: Practice of research

In our *métissage* the idea of ‘trans’ emerges as a form of passage:

“We all write in a language of passage, living is passing, passing, will pass. Nothing is certain, precise, and yet as we pass, we also let pass in the sense of leaking a dampened, subterranean trust precisely in something that passes, that can pass like a liquid pass through a cloth.”

(Extract from Silvia’s *métissage* about materiality)

The idea of movement in translation reminds us of the reflections by cognitive science researcher and professor of Work and Organisational Psychology, Ugo Morelli (2022), about landscape and identity processes that continuously evolve through interaction in social and environmental relationships. On the value of porosity to regenerate a sense of community, by lowering walls and defences in a safe and vital way, he writes:

“The fact is that we have difficulty thinking in terms of relationships and insist on not investing in them. Not even education deals with it as it could and should. We continue to think and speak in terms of entities, as if we were autonomous islands. Every autonomy is defined in the dependence of its sources. It therefore emerges from the relational porosity it allows itself and of which it is capable.” (Morelli, 2022, p. 19, our translation). [I am still thinking about the liquid that passes through a cloth]

The boundaries between verbal and nonverbal communication are porous. During activities in the park, our bodies, by moving, communicate with each other without speaking. What are we saying to each other? We are practising an ecology of relationships in which human beings communicate not only with each other but are in constant connection with all (non-human) beings and the environment.

This porosity during translation allows the emergence of new points of view and new ways of acting, by experiencing displacement - “In fact, translating text is not just moving the words into another language” [straight to the point the different women speaking from experience!].

(Extract from Silvia’s métissage about materiality).

Translation is porous in reminding us that we live in bordered countries. Our very life is embodied, and what we know is created through conflict, and creativity. In our métissage, the porosity of language is evoked by the metaphor of soil:

“The language, [...], a soil, like a skin, absorbs but also transpires. Only with this awareness, that it is not 'smooth', innocent, indifferent, 'pure', can it perhaps resist. I think of language as a living organism, precarious, mobile, full of potential. Poetry does not cure, poetry does not save, but by writing we preserve the species-poetry.”

(Extract from Gaia’s métissage about materiality, our translation)

[this Poetry-Animal thing is taking us towards environmentalism! PEACE! AWARENESS!] At the same time, this dimension of translation in social life as well as in literary endeavour is like an open land where we see no end. To inhabit the uncertainty of not knowing and being lost in translation, multimodal translation (Campbell and Vidal, 2019) offers to fill the gap between languages by introducing other expressive languages. We do it all the time: we make gestures, faces, we introduce objects, we use space, voice, and touch. We tell stories. We slide into artfulness.

In conclusion, the porosity of language and identity which emerged in our research inspired us as a liberating dimension, however always contradictory and open, that different women including ourselves explore. In a patriarchal society, there persists a rigidity of language and sense- and self- making that defy the porosity and becoming of all social institutions [oh it sounds familiar]. And still we dance, for us that means, we can be “strange” and open to multiple voices speaking inside us, and outside! We want to bring explorative sensitive practices in everyday institutional spaces. Experiential collaborative translation, as well as feminist métissage, are approaches to construct knowledge that is intentionally open to in-habit the world with others [try it out!].

About the author

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