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Translating and (Re)creating (Cultural) Identities: A Review Article of New Work by López Sáenz and Penas Ibáñez and Vidal Claramonte

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Nuria BRUFAU ALVIRA

Tanslating and (Re)creating (Cultural) Identities: A Review Article of New Work by López Sáenz and Penas Ibáñez and Vidal Claramonte

In this review article I discuss two books dealing with intercultural aspects: *Paradojas de la interculturalidad. Filosofía, lenguaje y discurso*, edited by Carmen López Sáenz and Beatriz Penas Ibáñez (my review article is of the Spanish-language version of the editors' volume also published as *Interculturalism: Between Identity and Diversity*) and M.C. África Vidal Claramonte's *Traducir entre culturas. Diferencias, poderes, identidades*. While both volumes tackle the implications of cultural interactions, intertextuality, the problematics of the creation and defense of identity, and the notion of communication as cultural transfer, they do so in different ways. On the one hand, *Traducir entre culturas* (Translating In-between Cultures) not only proves the ideas defended in *Paradojas de la interculturalidad* but it also provides notions with which to crown the conclusions of the other text and it does so to such an extent that if one reads Vidal Claramonte's book first, one might find it difficult not to notice the notion of translation "missing" in the other book. In this sense, *Traducir entre culturas* epitomizes the paradoxes of intercultural exchanges. On the other hand, Carmen López Sáenz's and Beatriz Penas Ibáñez's volume seems to be the perfect introduction to an understanding of Vidal Claramonte's volume as it deals with philosophical, linguistic, and discursive concepts useful when reading about translation strategies employed in multicultural and multilingual contexts and applied to multicultural and multilingual texts as shown in the latter.

Generally speaking, the twentieth century has witnessed Western culture's compromise to recognize the existence of the other, equally "universal" cultures. Since then, a game of power and resistance between cultures has been in play. While it is true that, at the beginning, the notion of the "same" obfuscated the notion of the "other," new forms of resistance have been devised and now the Other-s defend their dissimilar identities, too. Meanwhile, the inexorable globalization process is making this multiculturalism the most common characteristic of an increasing number of countries and peoples. Authors in the books at hand offer insightful reflections both mirroring and examining the states of art from different perspectives. López Sáenz and Penas Ibáñez's collection begins with an important introductory note written by the editors. In it, they reflect on the philosophical and discourse-related aspects of interculturality by exploring the concepts of identity and diversity, as well as their communicative dimension. From both a philosophical and a philological perspective, cultures are seen as dynamic realities which interact (communicate) in order to differentiate themselves from the others while they are variably open to foreign ideas. In this sense, discourse always implies the transfer of identity and difference. As a consequence, languages are no longer seen as independent codes or as coherent linguistic structures but as processes where meaning is formed and interpreted according to textual, co-textual, and contextual factors. Hence the idea that meaning is not pre-established. Intercultural contact and the intercultural approach is, then, inevitable in communication today.

For this approach to be successful, linguistic diversity should be understood from two different points of view: internal and external. Variety also exists within languages and within cultures. Once we know this, we are ready to understand intercultural and interlinguistic differences. According to López Sáenz and Penas Ibáñez, given that it is not common to be as familiar with another language and another culture as with one's own, translation appears as a means to ease dialogue (which, to my view, implies the idea of translators as cultural mediators discussed in-depth in *Traducir entre culturas*). The way we translate might influence the way intercultural communication is produced, the editors argue, and, although no examples or other references to translation appear in the book, it does focus on some notions which are key to translation studies (identities, discourse, narratives, languag), as will be shown in Vidal Claramonte's work. The volume includes ten articles which have been organized in three parts: "Identidad y diferencia en diálogo" (Identity and Difference in Dialogue), "Identidades en conflicto" (Identities in Conflict), and "Identidades discursivas" (Discursive Identities). The first part is more philosophical than the other two with a sociological stand. While the first part focuses on the notions of identity and diversity, it does so by linking them as if they were interdependent. Based on works by philosophers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Edmund Husserl,

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the three articles in this section explore the intertwining of sameness and difference displayed in human relations. The first article, "De la expresividad al habla. Un modelo diacrítico de interculturalidad" ("*La Parole* as a Gesture of Originating Differentiation") by Carmen López Sáenz focuses on Merleau-Ponty's concept of *chair* (flesh) used to establish a diacritical relation between identity and difference allowing for both reunion and deviation at the same time. Dichotomies can be well substituted by a continuum in which subjects (as bodies in context) participate in the creation of meanings. López Sáenz defends phenomenology as the theory that best understands meaning as intersubjective instead of clinging to favor either the subject or the object; language is not only referential, but also contextual and open. Gestures equate *parole* as they both channel those differences diacritically and they both add new information to the creation of meaning. The relation between Fernand de Saussure's *langue* and *parole* is, thus, dialectical. Following the notions of style and intersubjectivity, it is suggested that otherness and sameness are also diacritical identities. We are all "flesh." When we deviate, we acquire an identity, which could only exist because of what differentiated it from another in the first place. The fact that Merleau-Ponty believes signs are almost flesh (to speak is to make a gesture in my linguistic world) implies that subjects create spaces between them which allow for communication. For this reason, meanings, like identities and cultures, are never completed. Their interdependence makes them unstable, in M.T. Ramírez words: "a locus for interaction" (307; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine).

Javier San Martín's "Mundo de la vida: lo común y lo diferente" ("The Life-World: What is Common and What is Different") addresses that same topic: discovering whether differences share a common ground. He reflects on Husserl's notion of *Lebenswelt* as the pre-existing world underlying each culture. Given that all human beings are animals (in a physical way), that preliminary (non-cultural) world is the common space from which to differ when acquiring (creating) a culture (an identity). According to San Martin, that common ontology could be used not only to discover, with hindsight, shared elements in human development, but it could also help us think of development guidelines for the future. This is his message of hope. Katarina P. Trilles Calvo, too, revisits Merleau-Ponty's theory of intersubjectivity and her article "Dialogar con el otro. Algunos apuntes desde Maurice Merleau-Ponty" ("Dialoguing with the Other: Some Notes from Maurice Merleau-Ponty") she offers a critical view of contemporary communication technologies. For her, the desired *dia-logos* has now become a *di-alogos* (a senseless discourse, a monologue), which prevents real intercultural dialogue. Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of intersubjectivity appears as the basis for a dialogue between different beings and with regard to language it should not be seen as a capsule for thoughts but as a thought in itself. Speech is the body of thought; in this sense, when one speaks to others, one relates to them, one is influenced by them, and words become "others" through this interaction. Not only have words their own (diachronic) meaning as a result of intersubjective sedimentation (Merleau-Ponty's spoken language), but they also generate meanings, express gestures (Merleau-Ponty's speaking language). Contrary to a rational view of language, like the one defended by structuralism, this philosophy implies a circular dialogue in which two different people (the same and the other) relate to each other. This is intersubjectivity: a circular dialogue taking place in a shared world thus not focusing on the inter-personal but in what lies between us. According to Trilles, this notion allows for a less problematic intercultural dialogue. She claims that "speaking language" can solve the problems which might happen when using the "spoken language".

The second part of the volume, entitled "Identidades en conflicto" ("Identities in Conflict") includes three articles which focus on the difficulties and risks which accompany the maintenance of identities. In the first article, "Feminismo y multiculturalismo" ("Feminism and Multiculturalism"), Celia Amorós criticizes the synchronic perspective which, based on Claude Lévi-Strauss's anthropological structuralism, is applied to the conception of cultures as if they could not (and should not) be altered. According to Amorós, from a gender studies perspective this view has led to relate women to identity and thus to the defense of that supposedly unchangeable idea of culture, while men have been linked to subjectivity, i.e., to citizenship. This does not only reinforce gender differences but it also prevents development within cultures. However, the application of a diachronic view to the idea of culture, which implies understanding identities as constructions, allows us to revise both our culture and the culture of others, as it allows others to revise theirs and ours. If we want women to overcome gender discrimination and injustice, we should fight for the possibility to question identities. Jesús M. Díaz

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Álvarez's "Querer ser más que humanos. La desmesura del sentido y el fundamentalismo" ("Wanting to Be More than Humans: The Excesses of Sensibility and Fundamentalism") is about the excesses which might be linked to the construction and maintenance of identities. Setting over-ambitious targets may lead to various levels of fundamentalism. Díaz Álvarez argues that the two most classical ways of going too far are based on the human need to give sense and meaning to events and religion and philosophy represent the two most common human sources of meaning and sense. The author provides analyses of how philosophy and religion give answers and how they might end up blinding people and concludes that all discourses implying overindulgence in human self-esteem may lead to fundamentalism. And thus it would be the values of the Enlightenment which provide, still, the solution to the problem. However, he ends up reflecting on the possibility of a rationalist fundamentalism and reaches the conclusion that a resolution happens only when reason is seen as a dogma. The search for truth (lest there be [just] one) is a never-ending search. The third and closing article of this second part is entitled "Identidad como negación de la diversidad" ("Identity as a Denial of Diversity"). In his article, Jef Verschueren focuses on the possibility of defending the status quo of identities and diversity at the same time and he applies techniques of discourse analysis to study texts related to the Canadian Metropolis Project. He reflects on dichotomies such as individual rights *versus* collective rights, individual identities *versus* imposed identities, redistribution policies *versus* recognition policies, etc. The ideas discussed in his article are related to Vidal Claramonte's volume, in which the notion of mixed identities is also studied. Verschueren alerts about the risks of recognizing group identities without applying redistribution policies and suggests that a critical perspective should be applied when dealing with research on processes of identity formation.

In the third part of the book, "Identidades discursivas" ("Discursive Identities") there are four articles with focus on the role discourse plays in the creation and construction of identity / identities and special attention is on gender identities as they epitomize the struggling of resistance against power(s) which impose identities. In the first article, "Identidad vulnerable y capacidad de acción: Judith Butler" ("Vulnerable Identity and Agency: Judith Butler"), Elvira Burgos questions the notion of gender by Judith Butler. Based on the post-structuralist ideas of authors such as Althusser, Foucault, or Derrida, Burgos emphasizes the power of language in the processes of (gender) identity acquisition as proposed by Butler. Although the performative capacity of gender implies a certain amount of vulnerability because processes are never concluded nor definitive and it can be seen as an oppressing control mechanism, it is also true that it allows for agency, for some sort of Foucauldian resistance. The idea of gender as a performative act implies gender being a cultural construction and the absence of identities as prior to culture. Burgos exemplifies this with the notion of performance as carried out by drag queens. Performativity is re-thought as a reiterative practice through which discourse creation acts are completed. For instance, with regard to insults, repetition might work as a resistance practice against stigmatization by producing new meanings (as is the case of the word "queer"). Next, Ángeles de la Concha's article "El cuerpo como encrucijada de discursos sobre la identidad femenina" ("The Body as Discursive Locus of Female Identity") is about the historical connection between body (nature) and the idea of the feminine, as well as the important role of literature in the construction of female-stereotyped identity. Narratives appear, then, to be powerful social instruments and tools. De la Concha discusses literary examples of female characters based on the ideas of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and explores gender differences and the idea of minorities as instruments capable of eroding homogeneous notions of identity. For women, that open "becoming women" process allows for a recreation of women's identities. According to de la Concha, a new language of flexibility, interchange, and resistance is needed. This takes us again to Claramonte's volume in which there is a chapter devoted to the study of a flexible language of resistance: the hybrid language of (bicultural, bilingual) Latino writers living in the United States.

The third article, José Ángel García Landa's "Narración, identidad, interacción: relectura" ("Rereading, Narrative, Identity, and Interaction") addresses the role of language and memory in the creation of discourses. García Landa studies narratives not only as cognitive instruments, but also as identity chisels which help sculpt subjectivities, and for that he explores the interrelated notions of identities, interaction, re-reading, repetition and narratives. He goes back to Hume to recover the idea that repetition constitutes identities. And repetition comes along with narratives which are re-read. With regard to interaction, he uses Clifford Geertz's notion of thick description (which we might think

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relatable to the Theo Hermans's notion of "thick translation") to explain how important context is for the construction of meaning, and thus, for the construction of identities. What he calls resistance writing implies participative reading practices and invites us to analyze (con)texts from an ideological point of view. This is one of the articles in which one most misses the inclusion of the notion of translation as re-writing, especially when the author states that one of the main tasks when critically analyzing texts implies making visible what is invisible, i.e. giving new meanings to texts. In this sense, re-reading critically appears as a form of textual (intercultural) interaction. The closing article corresponds to one of the editors of the book, Beatriz Penas Ibáñez. It is entitled "Sociopragmática de la diversidad linguística y de la construcción discursiva de las identidades. El estilo como significante del sujeto" ("The Signifiers of Self: A Sociopragmatic Account of Linguistic Diversity and Discursive Construction of Identities") and it examines the social and pragmatic perspectives undertaken in philological studies. Based on Bakhtin's notions of language, literature and culture, she studies linguistic diversity and the discursive construction of identities. According to the author, under the influence of phenomenological and hermeneutical approaches, linguistics has abandoned the idea of a structured system and defends now the concept of a complex polysystem (Even Zohar) in which intersubjective, intertextual and interdiscursive factors are included. The assumption of the existence of social and discursive diversity implies the recognition of a myriad of identities amongst which subjects can choose depending on the circumstances. Similarly, linguistic diversity implies the existence of a set of linguistic styles available. This variability may lead to conflicts which might imply a change in identities. In this sense, how we speak shows who we are. This linguistic phenomenon has been called identity function (see Finegan and Biber). The author reminds us that Bakhtin thinks of each verbal action as a social intentional action. This heteroglossia (324) allows for dynamism and identity changes. Heterogeneity is a carnival where everything is possible, where inclusion is possible. Penas Ibáñez concludes by going over the many textual manifestations of this carnival in which identities and their corresponding texts are intertwined and by reminding us that "freedom and responsibility are closely linked to creativity" (221).

Throughout the compilation, the ideas of difference and diversity are studied from very different perspectives. Many solutions are given to the conflicts which identity creation processes and identity contacts may bring with them. The recurrent notions of discursive interaction, uncompleted meanings, unstable cultures, etc. question the hitherto dogmatic view of identities. Moreover, they also offer the possibility of enjoying a successful intercultural interchange, the possibility of questioning our cultures and identities and the other's also(particularly with regard to gender issues, which are tackled in various articles of the book), the possibility of making the most of human diversity, as well as the opportunity to escape identity and cultural impositions. It could be said that the conclusions of these ten articles are linked to discourses (because they create, and thus can also alter, identities). Texts appear as spaces where identity negotiations can take place. In this sense, when it comes to cultural identities, very often it is through translation that these negotiations occur. This is the subject of Vidal Claramonte's book. *Traducir entre culturas* begins with an introduction by Rosario Martín Ruano: "Hacia nuevas éticas de la traducción en la era post-babélica" ("Towards New Translation Ethics in the Post-babelian Era"). Martín Ruano emphasizes the use of concepts coined in translation studies to understand social changes and cultural differences today. We live in a globalized world where more and more people cross frontiers or live in them, in between two languages, two countries and two cultures, and where identities are in fact (and increasingly often) a mixture of identities (lest there be completed homogenous identities at all). In such a world, all texts, understood as manifestations of identities, are translations too. As Michael Cronin suggests, translation can be seen "as a way not only of thinking but of being and acting in the world" (10) and Martín Ruano justifies the importance of the volume by concluding that it tackles one of the most problematic issues that challenge theories about human beings today (diversity and difference) while offering both possible strategic solutions to the problem and ethical reflections on the matter.

The first chapter of the volume focuses on the notion of difference, a reflection alerting the reader to the dangers of stereotyping, of understanding cultures as monolithic institutions, of believing that difference is always based on dichotomies (i.e., on opposed pairs). Vidal Claramonte claims the need to situate ourselves in a third space, that of hybridization (Bhabha). This movement implies rethinking our principles and rules. She also revisits Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's notion of the subaltern to show

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how difficult it is to listen to the other, for when the same tries to help the other, it usually talks about it (or on its behalf) instead of listening to it. In this sense, based on a Foucauldian notion of decentralized power, she warns us that the danger lies not on the direct action of the same, but on the imposition of the same's norms. This universalizing process does not allow for the existence of the other (nor does it imply its existence as the other). She uses Foucault's counter methodology to prevent this blinding homogenization from happening. In this sense, language (discourse) plays an important role.

The second chapter is about the processes of identity construction, linked to the role of language and the notion of difference and Vidal Claramonte questions the idea of (pure) identities. In the words of Edward Said, "No one can deny the persisting continuities of long traditions, sustained habitations, national languages, and cultural geographies, but there seems to be no reason except fear and prejudice to keep insisting on their separation and distinctiveness, as if that was all human life was about" (407). This chapter relates to López Sáenz and Penas Ibáñez's volume as it explores a more open notion of identity, far from other existing and more essentialist concepts. This idea is very similar to the one defended in most of the papers dealing with the topic in *Paradojas de la Interculturalidad*. Vidal Claramonte suggests adopting a nomadic attitude which will allow us to be in-between cultures, in-between languages. Translation appears as an activity easily linkable to those spaces in between. With regard to the construction of identities, translation can be of help in this reciprocal interaction between the same and the other. But it can also contribute to the stigmatization of the foreigner: it all depends on how texts are translated. Various translation examples are given in order to show how the other is conceived, while many interesting translation concepts are displayed throughout these pages, most of them coined either by bicultural, subaltern, other people, or by translation scholars who are familiar with hybrid spaces. This might be what differentiates this chapter from López Sáenz and Penas Ibáñez's book, where a more philosophical and linguistic approach is taken. For Vidal Claramonte translation appears as the key perspective.

In the third chapter, focus is on the links between language and power by examining the hybrid language used as a means of resistance by (mainly female) Latino writers. These people are bicultural in that although their families and traditions are Hispanic (Latin American), they live in another country and have (thus) inevitably acquired another culture: US-American culture. However, they are neither one nor the other. They are both and none at the same time. They feel bicultural and bilingual but they don't speak any of the languages "perfectly," nor do they belong purely to any of the two cultures. For that reason they are rejected on both sides of the frontier, where they finally feel forced to stay. They use a hybrid language to show their emotional state, and in so doing they create a new (hybrid) identity through language. This touching chapter shows with easy and well chosen examples this complex situation.

The fourth chapter deals with all the difficulties encountered when translating these hybrid texts in this globalized, *mestizo* world we inhabit. In this case translators have to take into account these power battles, these bicultural and bilingual texts, and also the translation norms which they are supposed to apply. Vidal Claramonte reminds us what is at stake when handling these texts: much more than words. As Martín Ruano reminds us in the introduction with reference to the subtitle of the book: "Translating in between cultures is, among other things, translating differences, translating powers, translating identities" (20). The possible solutions are based first on questioning all (con)textual factors, and second, on finding a hybrid space, a third space where negotiations can happen: hybrid translations. Language can also be a *locus* for resistance. As Michael Cronin suggests, "it is in this context that the contribution of translation is paramount to describing both how certain forms of identity have come into being and how they are being shaped. Equally important is the manner in which translation theory and practice can point the way to forms of coexistence that are progressive and enabling rather than disabling and destructive" (3). Vidal Claramonte's *Traducir entre culturas* can be said to be one of the best current examples of work in translation studies dealing with the role of identities in writing and translating strategies. It is also one of the books that most clearly include an ethical perspective. These ideas seem to complete and confirm those presented in López Sánez's and Penas Ibáñez's volume. Two different perspectives have been applied to the study of cultures and identities. In my opinion, translation as purported here appears as the metaphor which best defines a possible practical solution to avoid the dangers these complex interactions might entail.

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The reflections on discourses and identities shown in *Paradojas de la interculturalidad* appear as the perfect basis to better understand the implications of these translation theories. Both books are complementary in that sense, too, and they both shed light on such complex matters as those related to (the textual creation of) identities and cultures.

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