

*Routledge Advances in Translation and Interpreting Studies*

# **QUEERING TRANSLATION, TRANSLATING THE QUEER**

**THEORY, PRACTICE, ACTIVISM**

Edited by  
Brian James Baer and Klaus Kaindl



# Queering Translation, Translating the Queer

This groundbreaking work is one of the first book-length publications to critically engage in the emerging field of research on the queer aspects of translation and interpreting studies. The volume presents a variety of theoretical and disciplinary perspectives through fourteen contributions from both established and up-and-coming scholars in the field to demonstrate the interconnectedness between translation and queer aspects of sex, gender, and identity. The book begins with the editors' introduction on the state of the field, providing an overview of both current and developing lines of research, and builds on this foundation to look at this research more closely, grouped around three different sections: Queer Theorizing of Translation, Case Studies of Queer Translations and Translators, and Queer Activism and Translation. This interdisciplinary approach seeks not only to shed light on this promising field of research but also to promote cross-fertilization between these disciplines toward further exploring the intersections between queer studies and translation studies, making this volume key reading for students and scholars interested in translation studies, queer studies, politics, activism, and gender and sexuality studies.

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Theory, Practice, Activism

Edited by Brian James Baer  
and Klaus Kaindl

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To Keith Harvey,  
whose groundbreaking scholarship made this volume possible



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# Introduction

## Queer(ing) Translation

*Brian James Baer and Klaus Kaindl*

Since de Lauretis introduced queer theory as “another discursive horizon, another way of thinking the sexual” (1991: iv), which moved away from the reification of essentialist identities to focus on desire and performance, this approach has played an important role in the analysis of sex and gender in literary, film, and cultural studies. Despite its claim of interdisciplinarity, however, translation studies have been slow to integrate fully the concepts and theoretical instruments of queer theory. To the extent that queer theory problematizes the representation of otherness, and translation studies highlights the otherness inherent in representation, bringing together queer theory and translation studies should productively destabilize not only traditional models of representation, understood as mimesis, reflection, and copying, but also the authorial voices and subjectivities they project.

For reasons not entirely clear, translation and interpreting studies scholars have reacted to queer theory with some delay, and research focusing on queer aspects of translation and interpreting have, until only recently, been rare, rather uncoordinated, and often marred by conceptual confusion—so that not all works dealing with issues of sexuality and specifically homosexuality can be considered queer.<sup>1</sup> For many years, Keith Harvey’s groundbreaking work (2003a, 2003b) was like a voice in the desert. But scholars in the field appear now to be making up for lost time:<sup>2</sup> Following the publication of a special issue of the journal *In Other Words* (2010) dedicated to issues of translation and sexuality, edited by B.J. Epstein, and Christopher Larkosh’s edited volume *Re-engendering Translation* (2011), which includes three chapters dealing with the translation of sexuality across languages and cultures, there have appeared in rapid succession a special issue of the journal *Comparative Literature Studies* (2014), edited by William J. Spurlin; the collected volume *Sexology and Translation* (2015), edited by Heike Bauer; a special issue of the *Transgender Studies Quarterly* titled *Translating Transgender* (2016), edited by David Gramling and Aniruddha Dutta; and *Queer in Translation*, edited by B.J. Epstein and Robert Gillette (2017).<sup>3</sup>

While all these works contribute to the ongoing project of establishing a relationship between queer theory and translation studies, Bauer’s volume and Gramling and Aniruddha’s special issue stand apart for their theoretical

## 2 Brian James Baer and Klaus Kaindl

sophistication and their focus on the relationship between queer theory and translation studies as mutually productive and mutually interrogating. As Bauer states,

While translation thus serves as a framework for analysing how sexuality travelled across linguistic boundaries, and the politics of this process, it can also help to conceptualize the construction of sexual desires and bodies. Many of the studies included here explore specifically how observations of the body and its desire were translated into new knowledge formations and disciplinary practices.

(2015: 8)

While Bauer's collection is focused primarily on demonstrating the role of translation in transnationalizing the science of sexology, and Gramling and Aniruddha's special issue, on demonstrating the role of translation in transnationalizing the concept of transgender—with most of the authors in these collections working outside of translation studies—our focus will be primarily on the ways in which queer theory can support an interrogation of the dominant models of the theory and practice of translation, with most of the authors in the volume working as practicing translators, teachers of translation, and translation scholars. In other words, if confronting the fact of translation can help to transnationalize sexuality studies, then what can an engagement with queer theory do for translation studies? Let us begin to answer that question by defining what is meant by queering translation.

Commenting on the term *transnational*, Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan remark, “[translational] has already become ubiquitous in cultural, literary and racial studies that much of its political valence seems to have been evacuated” (2001: 663). The same could be said of the profligate use of queer; and so in order to recover the political valence of the concept, which informs all the contributions to this volume, let us begin by tracing its mixed origins. In the spirit of queer theory, however, the goal here is not to disentangle those strands to create independent genealogies but rather to map the complex conceptual overlapping and entangling—the term's “mobility” (Jagose 1996: 2)—that allows queer to connect the theoretical, the political, and the experiential. First, it should be noted that queer in common parlance is often used as a synonym for ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ but may also denote any nonnormative experience or expression of sexual desire. As the revaluation of a derogatory term, queer also circulated during the AIDS crisis to index an unapologetic, in-your-face activism, as evident in the activist organization Queer Nation and in the organization's slogan “We're here and we're queer!” At the same time queer indexes a theoretical model or positioning, one that rejects the organization of sexuality on the basis of the binary opposition of homosexual/heterosexual, which Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes as a minoritarian model, in favor of a more fluid conception of sexual desire, described by Sedgwick as universalist (Sedgwick 1990). As

Annamarie Jagose describes it, “Queer theory’s debunking of stables sexes, genders and sexualities develops out of a specifically lesbian and gay reworking of the post-structuralist figuring of identity as a constellation of multiple and unstable positions” (Jagose 1996: 3). And so, when queer is included as part of the acronym LGBTQ or LGBTQI, it appears as one in a list of identificatory labels while eschewing or questioning identificatory labels; when read queerly then, the Q in LGBTQ would render the other terms suspect, under erasure, to use the Derridean term. As a critical positioning, queer theory challenges the status of dominant regimes of knowledge/power as natural and universal by focusing on the constructedness of those models, on their historical contingency, and on the politics of those models (who is empowered by them and who is left out?). Hence the use of queer as a verb to describe this critical work. Moreover, by demanding the interrogation of dominant practices of knowledge formation itself, queer scholarship has developed as a highly reflexive practice.

It is this dual directive—to address queer phenomena, that is, phenomena that are typically ignored, marginalized, or domesticated by the dominant regime(s) of knowledge/power, and to do so queerly—that we attempt to model in this volume in relation to translation studies. In other words, how might the rendering of queer phenomena across languages and cultures challenge our understanding of translation as theory and practice? At the same time, attention to translation can keep queer scholarship honest—that is, true to its anti-hegemonic orientation, by forcing researchers to interrogate deep-seated Western, and, perhaps specifically Anglophone, biases, as elaborated by Jagose:

Whether queer’s transcendent disregard for dominant systems of gender fails to consider the material conditions of the west in the late twentieth century; whether queer simply replicates, with a kind of historical amnesia, the stances and demands of an earlier gay liberation [and, we would add, its progressivist teleology]; and whether, because its constituency is almost unlimited, queer includes identificatory categories whose politics are less progressive than [or, we would add, simply different from] those of the lesbian and gay populations with which they are aligned.

(Jagose 1996: 5)<sup>4</sup>

The general editors of *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, Susan Stryker and Paisley Currah, make this point in their introduction to the special issue *Translating Transgender*:

How better to put pressure on the anglophone biases of the field of transgender studies than to explicitly explore the languages through which “transgender,” as an analytic lens or identitarian label, does and does not reproduce itself, how names and concepts change in the translation

from one context to another, or how they remain incommensurable and untranslatable? (Of course, we recognize that this replicates at another level the very anglonormativity we seek to contest.)

(2016: 331)

Bauer makes a similar point, “that attention to translation—understood in the broadest sense as the dynamic process by which ideas are produced and transmitted—offers compelling new insights into how sexual ideas were formed in different contexts via a complex process of cultural negotiation” (Bauer 2015: 2), and in so doing, lends new, more concrete relevance to the term transnationalism.<sup>5</sup>

With the goal of promoting a mutually productive and mutually interrogating relationship between queer theory and translation studies, this volume offers various points of departure that stand at the queer intersection of translation, sexuality, and gender in transcultural contexts. The subtitle “Theory, Practice, Activism” defines the tension-filled areas covered by the contributions, and while the chapters have been divided according to these three designations, it is done with the understanding that in both queer theory and translation studies, the three are thoroughly entangled, and so the three sections of the book should not be seen as strictly separate as the volume aims not only to bridge the gap between translation studies and queer studies but also to mediate the tensions between theory, practice, and activism by highlighting their interconnections.

The five chapters in section one offer theoretical approaches to an understanding of queer translation. They are based on a questioning of binary structures, such as the contrasting pairs of source and target text, and involve other disciplines in order to develop a queer translational approach and to expand the largely Anglophone discussion of queer issues to other linguistic and cultural contexts. In the first chapter, José Santaemilia discusses the question of how translation and sexuality are connected or potentially inter-related. He identifies two fundamental research perspectives: questioning how (queer) sexualities are translated, on the one hand, and examining the theoretical potential represented by the sexualization of translation. While the first question, which is concerned with the linguistic, ideological, and political implications of the translation of sexuality, has received considerable attention in research since the 1990s, the second perspective remains largely under-researched. It is precisely in this context that a queer approach opens up possibilities for both sides to sharpen their analytical view on identity-formation processes, to unmask essentialist ideas, and to utilize the subversive potential inherent in the fluid concepts of translation and sexuality in order to understand the practices and discourses involved in negotiating identities.

A concrete example of the sexualization of translation is given by Elena Basile. Her starting point is a self-translated text by transgender writer Nathanaël. Through a close reading of this text, Basile develops her own

conceptualization of the intimate scene of translation, which differs greatly from Spivak's view of translation as the "most intimate act of reading." Basile is not concerned with idealized intimacy, but with violent aspects, which she vividly terms the "fuck" of translation. With the help of queer theorists Lauren Berland and Lee Edelman, Basile demonstrates the analogies between sex and the scene of translation: just as sex bears witness to a "coming undone" of the corporeal self, translation manifests the coming undone of the linguistic body as an independent, sovereign, and territorialized entity.

Brian James Baer offers another approach to the sexualization of translation, employing translation as a mode of queering global sexuality studies and a tool for calling into question the illusion of the universal prerogative of (Western) theories. Based on a critical reading of Jon Binnie's *Globalization of Sex*, Baer first demonstrates the invisibility of questions of translation in global sexuality studies, which is surprising given the central role of translation in the deployment of sexual symbols and images from the West. He then investigates, through analysis of translations in the Russian gay journal *Kvir*, how non-Western queers can negotiate identities in translation, which do not conform to the binary concept of "the West and the rest," and how translation in post-Soviet Russia is used to "provincialize" the Western minoritarian model of homosexuality is provincialized. Translation thus becomes a space in which identities are negotiated, where the local critically engages with the global.

Serena Bassi also looks beyond English to other languages to examine how Western discourses about sexual subjectivities are shaped. On the basis of the Italian localization of the American online campaign *It Gets Better*, which vows to combat transphobic and homophobic bullying, the author tries to capture the translational elements of contemporary sexual transnational formations. Her aim is to provide building blocks for the development of a queer epistemology, capable of engaging sexuality as a modern discursive formation alongside other modes of difference such as race, gender, and nationality. For this purpose, she employs attempts in queer studies to study sexuality as a modern secular discursive formation and argues that the multiple refractions of metaphysical and religious discourse may have intervened in the Italian localization of the *It Gets Better* project.

While Baer's and Bassi's research is strongly embedded in the context of cultural studies, Evren Savci proposes ethnographic research methods for the translation of the queer. Both translation studies and ethnology assume that meaning—whether it be textual or social—is not a fixed variable to which recipients have direct access. In both disciplines norms, which are either reproduced or challenged amid asymmetrical power relations between languages and cultures, play a central role. Savci demonstrates how an ethnographic viewpoint can capture the many different processes involved in the translation of nonnormative genders and sexualities into the context of present-day Turkey. By embedding the investigation in an ethnographic

context, it becomes clear that the local is also heterogeneous. Moreover, understanding these complex ethnographic connections also enables us to undo binaries such as “Muslim versus secular.”

In section one, the theoretical reflections are often based on real-life examples and, similarly, the five chapters in section two, which includes primarily case studies, also link practical application to theoretical questions. James St. André examines Frederick Marryat’s *Pacha of Many Tales* as a queer translation, in which various textual modes such as pseudo-translations, real translations, and imitations co-exist. In order to analyze the interaction of these textual modes St. André introduces the metaphor of cross-identity performance, which offers a non-essentialist understanding of translation. This umbrella metaphor covers various techniques that St. André refers to as masquerade, blackface, passing, slumming, and drag. St. André reveals the possibilities offered by these queer metaphors for the understanding and interpretation of translations by examining a translation identified as drag appropriation, which Marryat produced based on an existing translation.

Leo Tak-Hung Chan investigates the representation of transgenderism in Japanese manga translations of a Chinese classic by employing the concept of radical translation. He links this concept of a parodistic appropriation of the original, developed by Reuben Brower and Andrew Riemer, to queer theories, thereby opening up investigative avenues similar to those of St. André’s concept of cross-identity performance. This contribution also explores translatorial boundaries by examining the multimodal translation of a classic Chinese short novel into the visual language of manga, where the main character, a monk, is queered and graphically represented as a woman. The chapter discusses how to understand gender-bending in the Japanese translation and how to interpret China’s fierce reaction to the queer adaptation of this Chinese classic.

Sergey Tyulenev explores translation as a site of expression of homosexual desire in the works of Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich Romanov. Using the theories of sexuality proposed by Eve Sedgwick and Lee Edelman, which see same-sex desire as an affective force that interacts with modes of writing, Tyulenev analyzes the complex combinations of speech and silence in K.R.’s translations, which, in line with Edelman, are described as a special mode of homographesis (writing of homosexual identity). For this purpose, the translations are juxtaposed with other writings of K.R., specifically his diaries and his original poetry. Through a comparative analysis of these three modes of writing, Tyulenev describes K.R.’s homographesis in terms of speaking silence and silencing speech.

Clorinda Donato examines a case in which the English translation attempts to control and contain the queerness of the Italian original. Giovanni Bianchi’s novella *Breve storia della vita die Catterina Vizzani* presents a transgender life story as a quasi-scientific case study, in which gender markers are used flexibly, depending on whether the protagonist appears as Catterina or as Giovanni. Taking into account the scholarly, literary, and socio-cultural

context in which the narrative was conceived, the strategies and motifs of the translator of the English version, the writer Henry Fielding, are analyzed. Fielding replaces the natural queerness and shifting gender constructions of the original with a discourse that brands the transgender figure as morally dubious and aberrant.

While Donato offers an example of self-censorship on the part of the translator, Zsófia Gombár discusses government censorship of translated queer literature in Portugal and Hungary. Portugal under Salazar and Hungary under Kádár were both authoritarian regimes where discussion of homosexuality was considered taboo. According to Gombár, however, the ideological differences between the two regimes were a decisive factor in determining the nature of censorship regulation. Taking into account agents in politics and publishing, Gombár presents a detailed picture of the works translated, illustrating the subtle differences in dealing with homosexual themes between the two countries.

The four contributions in section three discuss issues of activism and the possibilities of a queer translation practice. In this context, activism is seen as a special form of practical application, which combines the theoretical insights of queer theory and post-structuralist translation theory with the aim of imagining a future for queer writing. Marc Démon provides an example of what such a future might look like by distinguishing among three strategies for handling queer desire in translated texts. According to Démon's typology, a misrecognizing translation takes a hegemonic standpoint vis-à-vis the original and seeks to un-queer the text or to conceal its queerness. In contrast, a minoritizing translation attempts to freeze the fluidity of gender roles and sexual desires in the form of equivalents, thus domesticating the multilayered nature of queerness. A queering translation, which Démon underpins theoretically with Appiah's concept of "thick translation," transfers the disruptive force inherent in queer representations into the target language, opening up new interpretive possibilities for the reader.

Eva Nossem calls for the development of a queer approach in the area of lexicography. She begins by challenging the popular notion of an objective, purely descriptive lexicography, and discusses the social norms and values underpinning lexicographical work. In line with Foucault, she assigns a discursive function to lexicographers, through which they play an active role in the production of knowledge. In bilingual dictionaries, the heteronormative ideas conveyed are further exacerbated by requirements of equivalence. Nossem advocates for an anti-normative approach and seeks to lay the foundations for a queer lexicography that establishes the very conditions of possibility for a queer translation practice.

Michela Baldo demonstrates how closely the circulation of theory is tied to activism by discussing queer translation as a performative and affective undoing. Based on her analysis of the Italian retranslation of Judith Butler's *Undoing Gender*, Baldo explores the possibilities that concepts such as performativity and affectivity offer for translation. While the former refers to

translation as situated between creativity and productivity, the latter points to relationality and corporeality, which makes translation into a precarious space. The controversy surrounding the translation of *Undoing Gender* shows how issues related to translation can also serve as a call for rethinking welfare and social justice in the actual political climate of neoliberal austerity.

The political dimension of queer translation is also evident in Mark Addison Smith's contribution. Smith describes his process of queering—translating?—a speech by AIDS-activist Larry Kramer into a handwritten visual-art abecedarium of 24 grayscale eye charts, drawing a link between theoretical insights on translation and artistic activism (which also refutes the romantic presumption that theory is anti-creative). Not only does the contribution fit into the current debate of translation as (queer) activism, by transposing text into a work of art, it also questions current categories—such as Jakobson's famous distinction between intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic translation—and challenges queer translation studies to examine more closely the queer potential of non-verbal semiotic resources, such as the visuals of Smith's drawings, and to understand artistic processes as part of an activist queer translation practice.

## Notes

- 1 The lack of attention to queer sexuality in translation is also surprising given the sexuality of James Holmes, one of the founding figures of the field of Translation Studies. As Larkosh notes, "Perhaps precisely because he was an out, gay-identified man active in the burgeoning leather scene of Amsterdam of the mid-20th century, a foundational figure in a second academic discipline, known in Dutch as 'homostudies', and a co-founder of the Amsterdam gay and lesbian bookstore Vrolijk (Keilson-Lauritz 2001), Holmes was hardly someone who needed to be 'outed' by his fellow scholars in more explicit terms. This may shed some light on what now appears as a somewhat disquieting silence about his sexual orientation by translation studies scholars who have written on his contribution to the field" (Larkosh 2011: 2). Holmes himself, however, rarely addressed his sexuality or sexuality in general in his translation studies scholarship, while in his translation practice, he often translated queer texts and authors, such as Catullus, and wrote sexually explicit verse under the pseudonym Jacob Lowland. For a discussion by Holmes of his translations of queer poetry, see the published extracts of a talk given at the Iowa Translation Workshop in January 1984 (Holmes 1989).
- 2 For a fairly comprehensive list of publications on the subject of translation and queer sexuality, see (Baer and Kaindl 2015).
- 3 One should also mention here the collected volume *Import—Export—Transport: Queer Theory, Queer Critique and Activism in Motion* (2012), edited by Sushila Mesquita, Maria Katharina Wiedlack and Katrin Lasthofer. The volume is a theoretically sophisticated treatment of transcultural exchange as it relates to queer theory with a few chapters dedicated specifically to issues of translation. See, for example, the chapters by Kulpa et al. (2012) and Möser (2012).
- 4 Incidentally, Translation Studies has been accused of similar Western biases. See for example van Doorslaer and Flynn (2011) on the eurocentrism of translation studies.

- 5 The urgency of such an interrogation of queer is underscored by Bauer's decision to eschew the term queer in her study of sexology and translation (see Bauer 2015: 6).

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# 1 Sexuality and Translation as Intimate Partners? Toward a *Queer Turn* in Rewriting Identities and Desires

*José Santaemilia*

## Sexuality and Translation: Questions for a Common Exploration

In this chapter I tentatively explore the research potential of combining two disciplines—sexuality and translation—that seem to have been progressively coming together over the last few years. A number of questions have already begun to be addressed—What happens when sexuality is translated? Why is Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* more polite, “less descriptive, more scholarly and detached” (Flotow 2000: 22) than *Le deuxième sexe*? How can we describe Bridget Jones, Helen Fielding’s archetypal *chick-lit* character, as assertive and skeptical (in English) but as a prude (in French)? Why does the dubbing into Spanish of Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rebecca* suppress any reference to the (possible) lesbian relationship between the first Mrs. de Winter and her housekeeper, Mrs. Danvers? What is the role of translation in mediating (the construction of) sexuality? Why are references to sexuality, male or female, (mis)understood, under- or over-represented, in a variety of languages? How do sexual-related terms (*gay*, *lesbian*, *queer*) travel across languages and cultures—or, to put in Masiello’s (2004: 2) terms, “[c]an sexuality be translated and represented, with terms that move from nation to nation?” Do the terms for gender/sexual identities have “equivalents” in other languages and cultures, and to what extent are Anglophone borrowings never equivalent? How does translation contribute to confirming or challenging sexual ambivalence? Does our biology (male vs. female), sexuality (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, etc.) or gender lead us to translate differently? What is the role of translation in the processes of identity formation in foreign sexual minority cultures? How do feminist writers and activists (e.g., Carmen de Burgos) approach the translation of a misogynistic piece of writing, such as Möbius’s *Über den physiologischen Schwachsinn des Weibes* [On the Physiological Mental Deficiency of Woman] (1900)? Can translation and sexuality become “a space of discursive conflict and negotiation between different ideological positions” (Sánchez 2011: 326)? Why is a piece of erotica more or less daring depending on the language/culture into which it is translated? Are there ethical issues involved in the

translation of explicit (or euphemistic) sexual scenes? Does censorship or self-censorship affect the translation of sex? Are four-letter words (im)possible to translate? Is an erotics of translation the only way to recover the voice and the body present in any text, as suggested by Loffredo (2003)? Have the metaphors for the process of translation been “highly sexed, and indeed, heterosexed” (Livia 2003: 154); or, in Chamberlain’s (1988) famous formulation, is there a gendered (or sexual) metaphoricity at play that renders both translations and women as subordinate while original texts and men are considered superior? And, finally, are queer theorizations likely to inform translation practice and, in so doing, transform translation into a *queer*—or a *queer-conscious*—praxis?

### The Translation of Sexuality versus the Sex/ualization of Translation

As can be seen from this list of topics (and from others that will surely be raised in the future), two complementary perspectives can be considered—the translation of sexuality and the sex/ualization of translation. Both are well worth exploring as they address key aspects of cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural research, ranging (in very general terms) from the translators’ main challenges in rewriting human sexual experience to the consideration of translation as a sex- or gender-related activity. These two perspectives, which define a rather large and complex area for reflection and research, are likely to be explored from either practical or theoretical perspectives, with both running the risk of generating essentialist positions. And so, while an interest in *either* sex *or* translation has been evident since the beginning of time, an interest in *both* sexuality *and* translation is much more recent and demands greater documentation and evaluation in order to avoid biased or essentialist analyses.

When we revise any type of research to combine sexuality and translation, we discover that the most common perspective is that translation projects itself onto sexuality (the *translation of sexuality*), rather than the opposite (the *sex/ualization of translation*). In fact, translation studies has been incorporating sexuality as an analytical category since the 1990s, with sexuality understood as “a field that is notoriously difficult to translate for reasons of cultural and generational differences—a *cas limite* that in some ways serves as a test of translation” (Flotow 2000: 16). Its importance is obvious: first, sex/uality—as manifested in acts, desires, identities, and, especially, discourses—is everywhere in our daily lives, in our texts, in our symbolic projections; and, second, when translating sexuality, there is necessarily a *translation effect* (Flotow 2000) having unpredictable consequences. Translating the language of sex or pleasure, therefore, is not a neutral affair but a political act, with important rhetorical and ideological implications, registering the translator’s attitude toward existing conceptualizations of gender/sexual identities, human sexual behavior(s) and moral norms. In this

sense, translation and sexuality can together form a powerful interdiscipline uniquely capable of unveiling the most intimate textualizations of our identities and desires for queering translation; in particular, it demands “critical attention to the transgressive, anti-normative spaces where contradictory or deferred meanings may emerge” (Spurlin 2014a: 300), bringing to the forefront “the heuristic power of translation to navigate and linger in the ambiguities and gaps woven into the asymmetrical relations between languages and cultures” (Spurlin 2014b: 213), between sexual performances and identifications. Queer theory has adopted Michel Foucault’s post-structuralist notion that “sexuality is not an essentially personal attribute but an available cultural category” (Jagose 1996: 78).

Across history, sexuality has generated a wealth of discourses (e.g., erotic or pornographic writings, and swearwords), moral phenomena (e.g., obscenities and taboos), and pragmatic reactions (e.g., censorship and self-censorship) that are amplified or silenced, confirmed or perverted, in translation. Whether applied to language or translation, queer theory has been especially effective in “calling into question conventional understandings of sexual identity by deconstructing the categories, oppositions and equations that sustain them” (Hennessy 1994: 94), revealing them in their various textualizations to be fictitious, incoherent, contingent, and ultimately performative (Butler 1990).

### **Sexuality and Translation: Toward a *Queer* Turn**

Perhaps the first step in bringing together insights from *both* disciplinary fields is to make sense of the current research combining sexuality and translation studies. One of the first realizations in doing so is that many of these studies fail to interrogate basic sex-related (or translation-related) categories or the conceptual bases of these categories, but simply take sex/uality and translation as unproblematic givens. Progressively, however, and as a consequence of what we may call a *queer turn* in translation studies and in the humanities in general, both categories have come to be treated more critically, illuminating the textualization of our identities and desires while offering analytical tools and approaches for understanding those specific textualizations. For reasons of space, I will focus in this section on two recognizable strands of this research: the translation of erotic literature; and the analysis of censorship and self-censorship of sexual content in translation. In the following section, we will focus on specifically gay/lesbian and queer translation.

*Erotic* literature, defined as “works in which sexuality and/or sexual desire has a dominant presence” (Brulotte and Phillips 2006: x), represents perhaps the most ancient and sustained manifestation of sexuality in language. Classic works of erotic literature have been repeatedly printed and reprinted since their initial publication. Works by Sappho, Catullus, Boccaccio, Aretino, Delicado, Casanova, Cleland, de Sade, Sacher-Masoch, and many

others, have been (and will continue to be) translated into innumerable languages, forming part of a world canon of erotic literature. Printings and reprintings, legal or clandestine, pirated or expurgated editions, are part and parcel of this age-old tradition of erotic writing. The monumental *Encyclopedia of Erotic Literature* (2006), edited by Gaëtan Brulotte and John Phillips, deals extensively with the literary representation of sexuality and desire, but treats translation as invisible, with only brief references to the first translations into major European languages (German, French, and English) of the works analyzed. While erotic literature has turned sexuality into a powerful social discourse, scholars have largely ignored questions related to the translation of erotic literature.

New research, however, is emerging that shows an explicit orientation and a more integrated approach to both sex/uality and translation (Bou-langer 2008; Louar 2008; Santaemilia 2005, 2009, 2011; Rao and Klimkiewicz 2012; Henry-Tierney 2013). These publications deal almost exclusively with contemporary (especially French language) authors of erotic (or pornographic) literature, such as Canadian author Nelly Arcan; French authors Virginie Despentes, Catherine Millet, Georges Paillet “Espace,” Mohamed Leftah and Anaïs Nin; British authors Ian McEwan and Nipper Godwin; and Spanish writer Almudena Grandes.

For example, Louar (2008) analyzes several versions of Virginie Despentes’s erotic novel *Baise-moi* (1996), including the English translation by Bruce Benderson (1999) and the French-language film adaptation (2000), thus leading to a reconsideration of translation (or adaptation) in terms of alterity and identity. A careful analysis of its different texts and paratexts shows that *Baise-moi* serves, in French and in English, two different moral projects: the vulgarization of the literary text carried out in the English version, and the rendering of the French film version into a more pornographic and violent text. In Santaemilia (2009, 2011), we see how translation serves the purpose of sanitizing sexually explicit language in the works of “canonical” authors. The book *Las edades de Lulú* (1989), by Spanish writer Almudena Grandes, for example, a marginal, bold and explicitly *erotic*<sup>1</sup> text, has generated polemical reactions and has become a privileged locus to test the limits of Spanish contemporary literature and society in terms of its sexual mores. Its publication initiated a boom in erotic literature in Spain. Young Spanish novelists like Lucía Etxebarria, Mercedes Abad or María Jaén have chosen to follow Grandes’s example by describing 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). An analysis of *The Ages of Lulu*, the 1992 English-language translation of Grandes’s novel by Sonia Soto, reveals the intricate processes and the contradictions involved in the translation of explicit sexuality. The example that follows can be illustrative:

### Example 1

“Estaba caliente, cachonda en el sentido clásico del término.” (1989: 54)  
 [I was hot, horny/randy in the classical sense of the term]  
 “I was hot, turned on in the true sense of the word” (1992: 36)

As in many other passages, the English renderings are reasonable, though milder, options for the sexually explicit Spanish terms. When trying to relay the sexual vulgarity present in the Spanish original, the English version proves less physical, less colloquial. *The Ages of Lulu* deletes crude references to body parts, sexual acts, and to the frenzy Grandes’s women experience in wild sexual activity. As these and other examples show, it could be said that the English translation has transformed a bold text about the limits of women’s desire into a somewhat desexualized and sanitized one.

Although *Las Edades de Lulú* is a daring, frenzied book that crudely depicts—among other things—woman’s sexual agency, it also resorts to the traditional misogyny and homophobia still pervading the Spanish language.

### Example 2

“Estaba encoñado con Marcelo por lo visto, . . .” (1989: 138)  
 [Apparently he was pussywhipped with Marcelo . . .]  
 “Seemed he was quite taken with Marcelo . . .” (1992: 99)

Example 2 is an instance of those sexualized terms or turns of phrase that are highly idiomatic, and require an explanation in order to inscribe them within the context of Spanish cultural prejudices or taboos. In this instance, in prison, “the Portuguese guy,” a transvestite who acts as a sort of girlfriend to all the prisoners in a period of political unrest, “was quite taken with Marcelo” [Sp. *encoñado*], Lulú’s brother. *Encoñarse* or *encoñado* are terms that are extremely sensitive and thus problematic when it comes to translation, for a variety of reasons. In the first place, they are derived from the female pudenda (*coño*, Eng. ‘cunt’), possibly the strongest taboo word in the Spanish language. Second, they point to a traditional, unconscious association of a woman’s sexual organ with a passing, capricious infatuation. And third, they refer to a (gay) man. These examples seem to reaffirm women’s bodies and sexualities as the main sources of verbal hostility and abuse in Spanish. All this, however, is markedly lost in Sonia Soto’s translation. Sexually explicit language is, undoubtedly, a privileged space for understanding cultures we translate into insofar as it is a site where “issues of cultural sensitivity are encumbered by issues of gender stereotyping and cliché” (von Flotow 2000: 31), where each culture establishes its moral and ethical limits, where we encounter its taboos. A queer approach would lead us to focus on “mismatches between sex, gender and desire” (Jagose 1996: 3)

present in both cultures, which might justify the provisional, contingent, strategic constructions of sexuality in the original and translated texts.

Another popular topic is the study of censorship and self-censorship in translation. Defined as “the suppression or prohibition of speech or writing that is condemned as subversive of the common good” (Allan and Burridge 2006: 13), censorship is understood as an external constraint on what we can publish or (re)write. By contrast, self-censorship is an individual moral/ethical struggle between the individual and society. In all historical circumstances, translators tend to censor themselves—either voluntarily or involuntarily—in order to produce rewritings that are ‘acceptable’ from both a social and a personal perspective. (See Gombár’s chapter in this volume for a comparative study of censorship and self-censorship.)

Particularly well researched is censorship in twentieth-century European dictatorships (Italy or Spain under fascist dictators Mussolini and Franco, or Nazi Germany under Hitler), which imposed tight censorship measures, such as pre-publication or editorial censorship, and favored the systematic exercise of self-censorship. Sexual morality, political orthodoxy, religion and racism are among the most popular issues (Merkle 2002; Vega 2004; Gallego 2004; Billiani 2007; Seruya and Moniz 2008; Chuillenanáin et al. 2009). Linder (2004) exposes the complexities, and interrelations, between translation (and particularly, the translation of homosexual slang) and censorship in his study of the censored material in the Spanish versions of Raymond Chandler’s *The Big Sleep* (1939) during the Franco dictatorship in Spain (1939–1975), while Schmitz (1998) studies the suppression of references to sex and bodily functions in the Portuguese translations of J.D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951). Ziman (2008) has shown how foreign novels dealing with sexuality are typically sanitized in Chinese translation through archaism, generalization or omission/deletion, while Baer (2015: 142–153) has documented how such works are made publishable in post-Soviet Russia through the strategies of erasure, aestheticization, and Russification.

An especially fertile ground for research into issues related to translation and sexuality has been censorship in audiovisual translation. Lung (1998), for example, shows how sexual references in English-Chinese subtitling on Hong Kong television are routinely mistranslated or omitted. Scandura (2004) carries out a general survey of audience awareness of censorship in subtitling, though just a few examples focus on sexuality. More recently, works by Marcella de Marco (2006, 2009) offer a promising avenue for the study of audiovisual works from a gender perspective, which also involves issues of sexuality. De Marco’s *Audiovisual Translation through a Gender Lens* (2012) is a most valuable contribution. In this respect it is well worth mentioning the work of Delia Chiaro (2007), who has embarked on a study of the Italian translations of references to sex and sexuality that are found in imported English-language TV series such as *Sex and the City*. Her main thesis is that despite the fact that Italians are seen as liberally using sex-related