



## Presentation

Anne Malena

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## Presentation

Although translation and migration have always been intimately connected, their relationship is only beginning to attract the attention of translation scholars and cultural theorists. Migrants are translated beings in countless ways. They remove themselves from their familiar source environment and move towards a target culture which can be totally unknown or more or less familiar, depending on factors such as class and education as well as reasons for migrating; they most likely will have to learn or perfect their skills in another language in order to function in their new environment; their individual and collective identities will experience a series of transformations as they adjust to the loss of their place of birth and attempt to turn it into a gain; they may be expected to leave their history behind so as to fit better into the socio-historical context of their place of adoption; the new versions of their selves may be “perfect” translations, creating the illusion that they are native to the target culture, or retain traces of the foreign, proclaiming their difference and forcing transformation on the target culture. While some migrants achieve a high degree of translatability—hence of invisibility—most remain visible because they carry along many untranslatable components, ranging from visual appearance to cultural practices and beliefs. The title chosen for this special issue endeavours to illustrate these difficulties of insertion by bracketing off the prefix in “immigration”. In other words, immigrants always remain migrants at some level since they continue to belong to at least two cultures, often in problematic ways.

As many of the essays included here show, the concept of space is central to understanding the phenomenon of migration. Early voyages of exploration created what Mary Louise Pratt terms *contact zones* between explorers and natives where, in spite of uneven power relations, negotiation and interpretation had to take place in order to make sense of each other’s language and customs. This hybrid space gave rise to the *métier* of interpreter and to the genre of travel writing, respectively addressed here in different contexts by Ginette Demers and Paola Smecca. Throughout history migration has led to the creation of what Homi Bhabha has called a “Third Space” (Bhabha, 1994). In today’s age of globalization it has become particularly pressing to

theorize about what happens within this space in terms of cultural transformations and linguistic tensions. The question which Ovidio Carbonell was asking in 1996—“What does it mean to migrate into another tongue?” (Carbonell, 1996, p. 81)—still needs to be carefully examined from a translation perspective. Bhabha has convincingly written about the third space as “a contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation” which “though unrepresentable in itself, ... constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 37). According to Carbonell, who borrows from Bhabha, a close examination of the translational process within that space is necessary because “[w]riting in postcolonialism, an age of constant definition, contention and ambivalence, requires that the motives, the processes and the outcome of all translation activity be defined by translation theory, as one of the most relevant fields of any cultural project” (Carbonell, 1996, p. 94). In addition to the very productive metaphorical treatment of migration, as illustrated by Bhabha’s formulation, translation studies can investigate the harsh realities of the difficulty of insertion into a new context, the learning of another language, the loss of a mother tongue and of one’s own history, the necessity to construct a new identity in order to fit in and the danger posed by the tendency on the part of receiving cultures to minimize the heterogeneous (Carbonell, p. 83).

Our call for papers aimed at addressing a broad spectrum of these issues: translation and (im)migration throughout history (famous figures; travelogues; contact zones; the discovery, disappearance and transformation of cultures; etc.); linguistic issues (emprunts, calques, code switching, second language programmes, etc.); difficulties associated with cultural transfer in (im)migration; literary issues (writing from a migrant point of view, representation of translation in migrant writing, writers who write in a second language, etc.); institutions (services for immigrants, interpretation, language policy, national and international law, education, etc.); ideology (imperialism, nationalist discourse and immigration, non-translation situations, etc.). Perhaps the fact that the majority of the submissions we received privileged the literary side of things is a sign that the field of Translation Studies still needs to expand and diversify in order to venture into most of these areas; perhaps it is also a sign of the phenomenon of (im)migration itself inasmuch as “diaspora groups are typically over-represented in the arts, in the cinema and in the media

and entertainment industries (Cohen, 1997, p. 170). This is truer in today's globalized world than ever but, as Robin Cohen explains, "diaspora groups", and the special social functions which characterize them, have always been linked to international migration. She writes:

Many members of diasporic communities are bi- or multilingual. They can spot "what is missing" in the societies they visit or in which they settle. Often they are better able to discern what their own group shares with other groups and when its cultural norms and social practices threaten majority groups. Such awareness constitutes the major component of what the Jews call *sechal*,<sup>1</sup> without which survival itself might be threatened. (Cohen, 1997, p. 170)

Migrating individuals then become bi- or multicultural along a complex translation process which, while ensuring their survival, also transforms their collective identity. Over time, however, "the contact zone has become more jagged" and old translation models are being challenged by migration (Papasterdiadis, 2000, p. 129). Emphasis is no longer placed on a relatively unproblematic transfer of meaning because migration disrupts and transforms the very concept of original. Migrants are by definition fragmented beings and, just as Benjamin saw it, make "both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language" (quoted in Derrida, 1988, p. 119). Without presuming to offer yet another interpretation of Benjamin, this juxtaposition of the fragments of original and translation in the context of migration seeks to express the loss of stable rootedness and the subsequent acceptance of multifarious connections. One is reminded of Derek Walcott echoing Benjamin in his Nobel Prize lecture:

Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces is the sealing of its original shape. (Derek Walcott, 1992, no page numbers)

Walcott speaks here of a performance of *Ramleela*, the epic dramatization of the Hindu epic the *Ramayana*, in a Trinidadian village named Felicity. His point is that the broken, fragmented Caribbean people are recreating their own history through such a performance and distancing themselves from the Eurocentric notion of History as tragic, or from what Nietzsche called "monumental history".

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<sup>1</sup> "*Sechal* is Yiddish for intuitive knowledge, being quick witted or streetwise" (Cohen, 1997, p. 207, n7).

Thus the experience of migration suggests that translation occurs not simply between one culture and another but between fragments. As Papastergiadis puts it, this also “draws attention to the fluidities of difference in the process of cultural transformation” (Papastergiadis, 2000, p. 158). Migrants forever occupy an in-between space but their presence in a given context has a dramatic effect on their surroundings: the notion of difference indeed becomes fluid by subverting the norm through the sheer multiplicity of newcomers. Robert Edwards writes about the nearly hallucinatory nature of exile where new images are superimposed upon those of the homeland:

The eidetic structure of exile is an uprooting from native soil and translation from the center to the periphery, from organized space invested with meaning to a boundary where the conditions of experience are problematic. For historians and critics the affective component of this change proves the central concern. The fact of exile tests the notions of self and social order, and as it does so each of the terms transforms. (Edwards, p. 17)

This collection of essays is somewhat representative of the evolution of translation theory as well as the notion of meaning and its transfer. Denise Merkle and Savoyane Henri-Lepage deal with the migration of literary works in the nineteenth century between Great Britain and France; Natalia Teplova writes about the individual experience and literary production of a power house such as Nabokov and Albert Waldinger, Nathalie Ramière and Anne Malena examine how the theme of migration is represented in more recent works. There is a need for many more studies of this sort and for considering the intersection of translation and (im)migration from many more perspectives and disciplines. We know, because they write about it, that for Milan Kundera the writer “doit mobiliser toutes ses forces, toute sa ruse d’artiste pour transformer les désavantages de cette situation [emigration] en atouts (Kundera, 1993, p. 116) and for Joseph Brodsky that for the writer “the condition we call exile is, first of all, a linguistic event: he is thrust from, he retreats into his mother tongue” (Brodsky, 1995, p. 32). But what of the countless boat people and migrants throughout the world having to deal with new bureaucracies, interpreters, translators, lawyers and other intermediaries in order to transform themselves sufficiently to be able to accept change, living in a Third space and the fluidity of difference? Translation Studies seem well-placed to conduct investigations into the intricacies of their

experience as well as that of the translators helping them. Let's get to work.

**Anne Malena**  
**University of Alberta**

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