



Baldo, M., Evans, J. and Guo, T. (2021) Introduction: LGBT/queer activism and translation. *Translation and Interpreting Studies*, 16(2), pp. 185-195.

(doi: [10.1075/tis.00051.int](https://doi.org/10.1075/tis.00051.int))

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Deposited on: 10 June 2021

INTRODUCTION: Translation and LGBT+/Queer Activism

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This special issue focuses on the relationships between LGBT+ and queer activism and translation. It has been a long time in the making: we started working on it in 2018, in what seems like a different world. The coronavirus pandemic of 2020-21 looms large over the editing of this volume, as well as the growing effects of global heating such as 2020's wildfires in California and New South Wales, and other events such as the Black Lives Matter protests that took place in the summer of 2020, the women's protests against the ban on abortion in Poland in November 2020 and January 2021, and the legalization of abortion in Argentina in December 2020, the result of five years of mass protest marches by the Latin American grassroots feminist movement *Ni Una Menos* (Not one woman less) that fights against gender-based violence. None of these events is specifically LGBT+ related (although lesbians, trans* people and transvestites came to the *Ni Una Menos* marches following the 2017 International Women's Strike; Gago 2020), but all have had effects on LGBT+ and queer people, and highlight the importance of understanding LGBT+ and queer activism intersectionally, in other words, in relation to other positions, be that gender, race or location. In these difficult situations, queer activism also demonstrates solidarity and offers signs of hope in a difficult time: a recent story that comes to mind is the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, an LGBT group based in San Francisco who dress as nuns, who have been handing out facemasks in order to prevent the spread of Covid (Herrera 2020). At the same

time, LGBT+ rights have recently been under attack in some places: the USA has launched a series of attacks on transgender rights, for instance, and Poland, which has been attacking LGBTQI* rights activists for peacefully protesting, has declared some areas ‘LGBT free zones’, an action which has brought censure from current head of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyden (Rankin 2020).

In this context, LGBT+ and queer activism in their various forms remain important and necessary. What we wanted to explore in this volume is the ways in which translation can and does contribute to activism around gender and sexuality. We take a broad understanding of LGBT+, to include not only lesbian, gay, bi and trans*, but also intersex, asexual and other allied movements, and all forms of activism that support the rights of LGBT+ people. These groups sometimes, but not always, engage in queer activism, which emerged out of the AIDS campaigns of groups such as ACT UP and Queer Nation in the late eighties and early nineties in USA. Rather than mobilizing for the extension of legal rights to sexual minorities, queer activism has sought to undermine the reproduction of heterosexual social norms, using the concept of queer to destabilize dominant models of knowledge and power (Baer and Kaindl 2017). More specifically, queer activism, since its inception, has sought to challenge the limitations perceived in the traditional identity politics of LGBT+ groups. While the queer activism of the early nineties focused more on the violence against sexual minorities, later strands of queer activism that emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s developed close links with the alter-globalization movement (Shepard and Hayduk 2002), putting more emphasis on antiauthoritarian, anti-capitalist practices and transnationalism (Brown 2015), and on the concept of the body, against the theoretical excesses of the first-wave white Anglo queer theory (Espineira and Bourcier 2016). In relation to the differences between LGBT+ and queer activism, the work in this volume highlights the problems of using ideas and notions from the English-speaking world – and indeed, more often from the USA – to discuss

issues in other locations, where histories, legal environments and cultural practices often differ (see Dominguez Ruvalcaba 2016, 7). Anglo-American theory and terminology do not always fit local conditions, and elsewhere we find terms like queer and LGBT+ being used synonymously, in addition to notions such as ‘sexual minorities’, which is widely used (in Chinese) in China, and which short circuits the differences between queer and LGBT+. We therefore use the terms LGBT+ and queer in inclusive ways to incorporate the various related movements around the world, as do many of our contributors, though at the same time the tension between these terms can be fruitful and explain differences of approach.

Our aim in this introduction is to position the volume in relation to the work on queer and LGBT+ translation and activist translation, as well as currents in recent queer theory that invite a global and intercultural understanding of non-heteronormative sexualities and non-binary notions of gender. It seems clear to us that such understanding can help to develop queer theory away from its Anglo-American focus, and indeed away from the elite university bias that Matt Brim accuses it of in his *Poor Queer Studies* (2020). In fact, when we started this editing project, two of us were not based at elite institutions, although we have subsequently moved to more research-intensive universities. The papers in this volume address the translation of queer and LGBT+ texts in China, Poland, Turkey and elsewhere: not countries that are best known for their acceptance of LGBT+ individuals and cultures (as the authors discuss). This discussion of queer cultures outside of the Global North helps to expand understandings of queer theory away from the privileged production of scholars based at elite North American institutions – whose work is still important and relevant, but who are only part of the global picture of queer theoretical production, and its relationship to LGBT+ and queer activism.

Translation studies has been addressing queer topics since the mid-1990s. Keith Harvey’s work in the field, culminating in his *Intercultural Movements: American Gay in*

French Translation (2003), offered an understanding of how various aspects of American gay culture were translated and negotiated, such as camp talk or the covers (and other paratexts) of gay novels. While Harvey may have written the first monograph on the topic, many others have also worked on queer topics in translation studies; another early contribution to the field is Eric Keenaghan's 1998 essay on Jack Spicer's *After Lorca*, which examines Spicer's adaptive translations as part of the creation of a queer politics. Alberto Mira's 1999 essay "Pushing the limits of faithfulness: A case for gay translation" makes a similar argument for the role of translation in gay politics.

Discussions of sexuality in translation have appeared in volumes on gender and sexuality in translation more generally. While José Santaemilia's 2005 collection *Gender, Sex and Translation* contains a few papers that deal with sexuality in translation, none of these explicitly deal with queer topics. Christopher Larkosh's *Re-engendering Translation* from 2011 contains several essays dealing explicitly with queer sexualities: a chapter by Annarita Taronna on the translation into Italian of a corpus of African American feminist writers addresses issues of non-heteronormative sexualities and homoerotic affection. Larkosh's own chapter explores common themes in the writings of Argentine gay activist poet Néstor Perlonger and Brazilian novelist and journalist Caio Fernando Abreu, such as male homosexuality and AIDS. Another queer-oriented chapter by Loc Pham focuses on the Vietnamese translation of *Brokeback Mountain*. It is worth noting here that the works mentioned so far tended to focus mainly on gay male sexuality, rather than a broader queer framework. Indeed, Luise von Flotow could write in 2007 that there was almost no work in translation studies that dealt with lesbian sexuality (von Flotow 2007, 102), evidencing the invisibility of lesbians that can be found more widely (Jagose 1994, 1).

However, the field of queer translation studies witnessed significant development in the 2010s. The first key publication in the area was a 2010 special issue of the British Centre

for Literary Translation's journal *In Other Words*, edited by B.J. Epstein (2010), called *Translating Queers/Queering Translation*, which focused on practical elements of translating queer texts using a queer approach in translation. Further theoretical work, beyond Larkosh's (2011) collection, appeared in the special issue of *Comparative Literature Studies* titled *The Gender and Queer Politics of Translation* (Spurlin 2014) and the special issue of *TSQ Transgender Studies Quarterly* with the title *Translating Transgender* (Gramling and Dutta 2016). These special issues focused, respectively, queer and trans* related aspects of translation. They were complemented by two collected volumes published in 2017, *Queer in Translation* (Epstein and Gillett 2017; reviewed in this issue) and *Queering Translation, Translating the Queer* (Baer and Kaindl 2017). These volumes cement the place of queer approaches in translation studies, although it should be noted that many of the case studies within them were focused on literary texts in translation, with fewer works focusing on film, performance, autobiography, and queer theory or queer theoretical concepts. Importantly, they moved the field on from the consideration of gay male sexuality to take into account a wider range of queer sexualities, and there has been more work addressing lesbian and trans* texts in translation and translators. Transgender texts or concepts in translation have been analyzed, as the title suggests, in the special issue of *TSQ* dedicated to transgender studies and translation (Gramling and Dutta 2016) mentioned above, and sporadically elsewhere (see, for example, the chapter on transgender issues and the translation of Japanese manga in Baer and Kaindl 2017). Articles analyzing lesbian texts in translation can be found in *Queering Translation*, touching for example on the German translation of American lesbian cartoonist Alison Bedchel, on the translation of Wittig, and on queering lesbian cinematic representations in the film *Chloe*. More recent work on the topic has also appeared in edited collections and handbooks dedicated to feminist translation, such as *Feminist Translation Studies: Local and Transnational Perspectives* (Castro and Ergun 2017), where there are

chapters on LGBT+ activism and translation (Bassi 2017) and on postcolonial queer translation (Gairola 2017), and the *Routledge Handbook of Translation, Gender and Feminism* (von Flotow and Kamal 2020), where there is an entire section dedicated to the convergence of feminism and queer translation, with articles on queer transfeminist translation and on the translation of lesbian feminist writers. The work of one of the editors of this special issue has studied queer transfeminist translation in Italy and to the notions of performativity and affect in those scenarios (see Baldo 2017; 2019a and 2019b and 2020).¹

Returning to volumes that explicitly address the topic of queer translation, those discussed above have been complemented recently by the arrival of monographs on queer translation by Antonio Martínez Pleguezuelos (2018; reviewed in this issue), James St. André (2018), Douglas Robinson (2019; reviewed in this issue) and Brian James Baer (2020).² Martínez Pleguezuelos' study focuses on the translation into Spanish of LGBT+ related language in American TV, widening the focus away from the translation of literature and theory, but with still a USAmerican focus to the texts being translated. Baer, on the other hand, complicates notions of translation and queerness in his work, while still focusing on literary texts (anthologies, poetry and autobiography). St. André's book applies the perspective of cross-identity performance to the translation of a wide variety of Chinese texts into English and French and draws on scholarship in cultural studies, queer studies, and anthropology to argue that many cross-identity performance techniques, including blackface, passing, drag, mimicry, and masquerade, can offer useful insights into the history of translation practice. Robinson's book is the most theoretically ambitious, drawing not only from trans* theories, but also from Naoki Sakai's work on hetero/homolingual address, to

¹ For further writings on lesbian translation see also, among others, Bradbury-Rance 2017; Gillett 2017; Oberman 2017; Guo and Evans 2020. For more work on trans* related translation, see also, among others, Basile 2017 and Spisiaková 2020.

² Christopher Larkosh was working on a monograph on queer translation studies when he passed away in December 2020. We want to recognize here his pioneering work in the field of queer translation studies.

highlight the relevance of trans* theories of embodiment for translation scholars as well as the importance of incorporating translingual forms of translational writing into trans* and queer theories.

However, as Remy Attig notes in his review essay in this issue, there still remain significant lacunae in the coverage of LGBT+ and queer issues in translation studies: bisexuality seems to be erased or ignored, and there is less engagement with race and queerness, or indeed queerness in the Global South. This comes at a time when queer theory has been developing an international awareness, whether in relation to specific locales, such as Latin America in Héctor Domínguez Ruvalcalba's *Translating the Queer* (2016), or in terms of the internationalisation of sexualities (Altman 2001, Binnie 2004, Schoonover and Galt 2016). This global view of sexuality has demonstrated the ways in which USAmerican models of homosexuality have travelled internationally, as well as the ways in which they have been resisted or adapted by local LGBTQ+ communities.³ Awareness of this work in queer theory can help develop the theoretical sophistication of translation analyses through greater understanding of the complex relationships between local and imported models of homosexual and queer behaviour, which are often shaped by local legal and cultural traditions as much as international media, literature and scholarship.

This volume develops the discussion about queer translation through a focus on translation in and as activism. Activism can be a somewhat nebulous term (Baker 2018, 453), so to clarify this, activism is for us an activity that aims for social or political change. There has been a growing body of work in this area, as noted by Michaela Wolf (2012); the recent *Routledge Handbook of Translation and Activism* (Gould and Tahmasebian 2020) highlights the importance of the topic in translation studies. However, almost none of the chapters in

³ See, for example, Boellstorff 2006 on Indonesia. Baer (2020, 59-65) discusses this agency in relation to translation.

that volume focus on LGBT+/queer activism (with the exception of Baldo), and the time seems ripe for a volume that engages both queer translation and activism. The editors have been working on this topic, independently and together (see Baldo and Inghilleri 2018, Baldo 2017; 2019a, 2019b and 2020, and Guo and Evans 2020), in various forms, from activist translation of queer theory to the use of subtitling as part of queer community building.

In launching the call for papers for this volume we were interested not only in the themes translated by LGBT+/queer activist groups and individuals but also in how activist translation is understood and performed. We wanted to know how, in contexts of activism, “queerness” affects translation methodologies and translation reception. In doing so we placed great emphasis on the impact of translation in society at large, its capacity to produce transformation and on the way in which activists use translation in their political agenda. When selecting articles for this special issue, we thus focused on work that dealt with translation in relation to social and/or political change for LGBT+ and queer people. This limited the range of the papers that we included, but has allowed, as you will see when reading this issue, a range of topics that highlight the important social and political functions of translation, especially for sexual minorities. Importantly, the authors in this volume move away from solely Global North translation practices, highlighting the variety and creativity of practices in the Global South. Several focus on theory and the fruitfulness of translating complex academic arguments for popular consumption, thus expanding notions of ‘translation’ away from solely interlingual forms (while still analyzing interlingual translation). Others move the discussion forward by exploring dance as translation, or the translation of news. As such, they challenge established knowledge in translation studies and open up the field to more queer translation and activist practices.

The special issue begins with Vanessa Montesi's article. By examining how Marie Chouinard's choreography *Jérôme Bosch: Le Jardin des délices* (2016) interprets and represents Hieronymus Bosch's painting *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1490–1510) on stage, Montesi explores how the binary division of gender and sexuality can be subverted and questioned via non-verbal modes such as contemporary dance, and how translation can operate as “an embodied, situated, dialogic practice.” As she argues, through incorporating post-human bodies and highlighting gendered identity as discursively constructed in her choreographies, Chouinard recovers the complexity, ambiguity, and contradictions embodied in Bosch's painting as well as underscoring its queerness. In doing so she shows that translation is an aesthetic and political practice, as it introduces new corporealities and discourses into the regime of the visible.

Hongwei Bao's article examines how western queer theory was introduced to the Chinese audience via competing translations by two Chinese scholars, Fengzhen Wang and Yinhe Li, in the early 2000s. Rather than evaluating the quality of the translations, Bao focuses on how queer theory was presented and framed differently for an academic audience and the general public through paratexts such as book covers and translators' prefaces. The different receptions of Wang's and Li's translations can be associated with these two scholar-translators' different symbolic capital and positioning. Bao argues that the journey of queer theory to China is not a simple, linear process of knowledge transfer, but has been conditioned by many factors including the translators' mediation and publishers' marketing strategies. Bao is interested in exploring how the translation of queer theory participates in China's social change in the post-Mao and postsocialist era (1978 to present).

Taking up the question of the translation of queer theory as an activist practice, the self-reflexive article by Karolina Krasuska, Ludmiła Janion, and Marta Usiekniewicz examines how they, as members of a feminist scholar-translator collective, resist the

dominant anti-LGBT+ discourse in Poland and misconceptions of Judith Butler's theory through their Polish translation of Butler's *Bodies that Matter* (1993). Rather than adopting neutral gender-exclusive language or radically 'de-familiarizing' Polish, they explored alternatives to balance retaining the subtlety of Butler's text and ensuring the translation's accessibility for the general public.

In a similar vein, Nesrine Bessaih's article discusses how La CORPS Féministe, a Quebec women's group, experimented with an inclusive strategy in their translation of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (2011), a major reference on women's sexual and reproductive health, in order to enhance the inclusion of sexual and gender diversity. Their practice empowers women while using neutral neologisms to deconstruct the association between anatomical characteristics and gender identity, highlighting gender fluidity. Translation, as Bessaih demonstrates, can play a role in fostering the development of political intersectionality and building solidarity among marginalized groups in the feminist movement, including trans and non-binary people.

While a majority of articles in this issue focus on the translation of LGBT+ related texts from English into other languages, Jasmin Duraner's article explores how Turkish LGBT+ related texts have been translated into English. Taking LGBTI News Turkey, an online portal run by volunteers, as an example, she discusses how their English translations of LGBT+ related local news, articles, and personal stories have been used to construct a counter-narrative against the dominant queerphobic discourse. Conceptualizing translation as a form of 'intellectual activism,' Duraner argues that through their translations and paratexts, these activist translators have enhanced the collective visibility of marginalised sexualities in Turkey at a global level, while also helping Turkish LGBTI people connect with the international community and exerting pressure on the Turkish government to engage with the global dialogue on LGBTI rights.

The special issue finishes with Remy Attig's review of three recently published books on queer and LGBTQ+ translation. Attig reflects on the emerging interest in translation and queer sexualities, as well as areas for development in relation to current work in queer theory, as there remain significant gaps to fill, and topics, and sexualities, to explore in translation studies.

The articles included in this issue therefore foreground the role of translation as a tool for sociopolitical change for LGBTQ+ subjects, the role of the translator as a queer activist and the fact that in LGBTQ+ activist scenarios, as it is the case in other scenarios, translation is often a collaborative enterprise.

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“Translating for change: Anglophone queer cinema and Chinese LGBT+ movement” explores new ways to visualize subtitling practices by Chinese queer fans and how Anglophone queer culture has been translated into Chinese in films.