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[TITLE]

Translation and LGBTIQ+ cultures around the world

[LEADER]

In 2021 the University of Cordoba, Spain and University College London jointly presented their 5th E-Expert Seminar in Translation and Language Teaching. Titled 'LGBTIQ+ issues in modern languages and translation education', it included a presentation by British academic **Jonathan Evans** (right, top) on teaching LGBTIQ+ aspects of translation in a master's degree. When *In Touch* asked Jonathan if he would be interested in writing something on the topic for our readers, he put together the following article with his colleague **Ting Guo** (right).

[BODY]

When considering identity, opportunity and cultural appropriation in T&I, one area ripe for discussion is LGBTIQ+ culture in translation.

This is a growing area of interest within the field of translation studies, with a number of books (such as [Queer in Translation](#) and [Queering Translation, Translating the Queer](#), both from 2017), special issues (such as [this special issue of Translating and Interpreting Studies](#) from 2021) and articles being published in the last 25 years.

This scholarly attention reflects a growing visibility of LGBTIQ+ texts and media. Societal attitudes have also been changing over this time, at least in some parts of the world, with a growing number of countries legislating for same-sex marriage (including the UK in 2014 and Australia in 2017).

The situation is not the same the world over, however; in some countries homosexuality is illegal, and in some of those where it isn't, there are no legal protections for homosexuals. Translation can help to share awareness of how LGBTIQ+ identities function elsewhere in the world: this can both open up discussion about LGBTIQ+ experiences in places where homosexuality is criminalised, and also offer readers ways of understanding how such experiences can differ from their own.

Literature was, and is, central to a lot of the scholarship on LGBTIQ+ translation. From [Keith Harvey's](#) pioneering work in the 1990s on translating the language of camp in American gay novels, to [Brian Baer's](#) discussions of queer anthologies and queer autobiography, translation scholars have explored the ways in which literary texts can reflect and shape LGBTIQ+ communities, and how these texts are translated. Given the differences between LGBTIQ+ cultures around the world, including how they utilise their local languages, it's not surprising that when these texts get translated, changes are made in order to address local communities.

Translated LGBTIQ+ texts can, on the other hand, offer a glimpse into a different world: [Anton Hur's](#) translation of Sang Young Park's [Love in the Big City](#), for instance, gives English-speaking readers a chance to learn about queer Korea. Hur has said that he felt this was important, as 'no one had told this story before', and it was also his own experience as a Korean gay man. Translating more LGBTIQ+ fiction from around the world can, therefore, help to diversify images of queerness and to increase understandings of both similarities and differences between the experiences of LGBTIQ+ communities in different locations.

Translators of children's and young adult (YA) literature encounter different issues around LGBTIQ+ materials. Problems can arise if publishers or the local culture find such narratives unacceptable for children: [BJ Epstein](#) notes that LGBTIQ+ aspects of children's stories are often 'eradicated' in translation. A story (or part of it) might be altered, or simply not published at all. YA fiction tends to be more open to discussions of bi- and homosexuality, or more fluid sexualities, reflecting the exploration of sexuality by its teenage characters. Books like Becky Albertalli's *Simon vs. the Homo-Sapiens Agenda* (on which the film *Love, Simon* is based) [have been translated around the world](#), suggesting that queer topics pose less of a problem for translation in YA fiction than in writing for younger children.

The circulation of queer cinema is an important area where translation and queer media intersect, especially with the growth of LGBTIQ+ distributors like [Peccadillo Pictures](#) in the UK, who have worked to make

subtitled queer cinema from around the world available there. Queer film festivals are another site where international films are screened in translation. The internet, in the specific forms of community forums and video sharing websites, has made it far easier to access LGBTIQ+ materials.

In [our research](#), we've been exploring how Chinese [fansubbing](#) groups have been translating American and British queer cinema. The translation of Todd Haynes's *Carol* by the Jihua group, for instance, not only makes this film accessible to audiences in China, where an official translation would be unlikely, but is also used as a way of intervening in local debates about lesbian identities.

Fansubbing does, however, attract questions of copyright, and a [number of fansubbing groups have been closed down in China](#) recently due to copyright infringement. Such groups have also contributed to subtitling for film festivals, and remain as a space for community discussion; so even if their function changes – that is, they no longer produce unofficial subtitles – they can still play an important role in the local LGBTIQ+ community.

A growing area of research is the intersection of [transgender and translation](#). While there are obvious difficulties around translating novel pronouns and vocabulary, there is also a growing awareness of the complexity of translating texts that deal with transgender individuals, especially from different historical periods, when notions like transgender (or even lesbian or gay) did not exist in the way they do now. How can the experiences of such individuals be translated, and should current terminology be used or avoided?

Interesting questions also arise around the translation of non-Western ideas about gender – some of which include genders other than male and female – into English and other European languages. How can these ideas be understood outside of their local context?

It's clear from this discussion that there's a growing awareness of LGBTIQ+ texts in translation and the sorts of questions that they bring up for translators, publishers and LGBTIQ+ communities; however, some important gaps remain. Bisexuality, for instance, is often erased or elided. A more intersectional approach – including race, indigeneity, migration, class and disability, and their connections with LGBTIQ+ identity – would increase the understanding of the multiplicity of queer lives in a globalised world.

Within this, it would be important to consider how translation works in migrant communities, and into and out of minority languages.

Translators and interpreters can contribute to LGBTIQ+ cultures in lots of ways, whether as members of those cultures or as allies.

[BIOS]

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