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## Between translation and semiotics and into artistic transduction<sup>1</sup>

DOI: 10.23817/strans.15-16

Received: 14.02.2024

Accepted: 6.06.2024

Dinda L. Gorlée is one of the leading scholars who may be given credit for introducing semiotics into translation studies. She has published extensively on semiotranslation, transduction, Roman Jakobson's intersemiotic translation, Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics, Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy or opera and singable translation. Steconi (2007: 16) regards Gorlée as one of "the founding mothers" of translation semiotics. Indeed, the monograph *From mimetic translation to artistic transduction: A semiotic perspective on Virginia Woolf, Hector Berlioz, and Bertolt Brecht* most likely belongs to translation semiotics; however, it is also a seminal contribution to translation studies, as Gorlée provides ample evidence of translation being "one of the major shaping elements in the processes of ideas, texts and cultural practices", thus exemplifying the Outward Turn (Bassnett/ Johnston 2019: 183) and highlighting the recently emphasized materiality of translation (see e.g. Littau 2016 or Haapaniemi 2024). The reviewed book extends Gorlée's previous publications on the topic of transduction (especially her 2015 book *From translation to transduction: The glassy essence of intersemiosis*) and proves how well-versed she is in Peircean semiotics, Jakobson's linguistics and artistic translation.

The monograph consists of four chapters, a short epilogue, an impressive list of references and an index. What one does not find is an introduction, which should help the reader navigate through the book. An introduction would also help to situate the semiotic perspective of the book onto the map of translation studies.

Chapter 1 entitled *Forked tongues: Theory from translation to transduction* introduces the main ideas discussed in the book. Gorlée defines the main object of interest, i.e. transduction, as a means of expanding "informational (that is, highly meaningful) language into an inventory of the literary dialects, idioms and jargons of other fine and applied arts" (p. 1), something more than

1| Gorlée, Dinda L. (2023). *From mimetic translation to artistic transduction: A semiotic perspective on Virginia Woolf, Hector Berlioz, and Bertolt Brecht*. London/ New York: Anthem Press. Pp. 202.

the “ordinary’ translation” (p. 17), a transenergising process of creativity. She views transduction as an act of reworking, improving or extending a literary translation over ages. In the chapter she makes references to some of the most prominent linguists, semioticians, philosophers and translation scholars, including Eugene Nida, Jacques Derrida, Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Morris, Thomas A. Sebeok or Roman Jakobson. In addition to Peirce, both Jakobson and Sebeok appear as the main inspirations behind arguments that buttress Gorrée’s theorising. Having discussed the traditional tripartite division of translation introduced by Jakobson (pp. 19–20), Gorrée moves on to draw the reader’s attention to his earlier concept of hypertranslation (Jakobson 1956/1971), which “transforms an object into the same object but with a poetic quality” (p. 21) and consists in “the poet interacting lyrical words with music” (p. 22). Jakobson, as maintained by Gorrée, is an individual who “liberated the sign from Saussure’s fixed codes of grammar to reveal the dynamic codes of Peirce’s three interpretants” (p. 29). Sebeok, on the other hand, is the main inspiration behind the concept of transduction, which is defined by him as a process of transformation from one form of energy into a different one (p. 43). Gorrée’s insightful exegesis of Jakobson’s writings, including the seminal article on linguistic aspects of translation (Jakobson 1959), is certainly worth highlighting. What is also worth mentioning is how she draws parallels between translation and/or transduction and some of the Peircean triads, including the one of trope, type and token, or the less quoted one of ellipse, parabola and hyperbola. The latter triad illustrates “the three-dimensional effects of transduction applied to the arts”, that move like waves, which Peirce considered “degenerate” signs (p. 10).

The ellipse–parabola–hyperbola triad (p. 12) is the central focus of the reviewed book. The three shapes represent departures from a simple circle of meaning in literary translation: though still one shape, an ellipse clearly differs from a circular pattern of moving from the ST to the TT. A parabola consists of two independent parts, which may mean imitating one the one hand, and being significantly different or defective, on the other. A hyperbola means two approximating shapes brought together by a common point, a kind of logical connection and interaction. Thus, Gorrée demonstrates that translation (or rather transduction) does not mean imitation of the same shape: instead of creating a perfect circle of informative linguistic signs, transduction results in flexible shapes of ellipse, parabola or hyperbola, combining different arts (p. 44).

In the three following chapters, Gorrée offers a rich discussion of the three case studies, which are signalled in the subtitle and which prove the transformation of the translator from a plain “conductor to metalinguistic transductor” (p. 46), exemplifying the ellipse–parabola–hyperbola triad. Chapter 2, entitled *Wave after wave: Wagner’s waves eclipsed by Virginia Woolf*, presents an in-depth

analysis of potential links between Woolf's revolutionary novel *The Waves* (1931) and Wagner's operas, especially *The Rheingold* (1869). Arguing that the opera served as a source of Woolf's inspiration, Gorlée contends that Woolf's writing was actually a form of ellipse, or "elliptical half-circle" (p. 52). As claimed by Gorlée, Woolf "expressed the leitmotifs in the wavy language of sound-signs inspired by the high voltage of the linguistic speech of the speaking artists as represented in the characters of her novel" (p. 57). As such, the writer moved to transduction.

The next chapter, i.e. *War and love: The parabolic retranslation in Berlioz's opera*, discusses the attempt at transduction made by the French composer Hector Berlioz, who transformed Virgil's *Aeneid* into the five-act grand opera *The Trojans* (1863). Berlioz challenged himself with the task of "vocal gymnastics, squeezing words into music" (p. 99). Thus, the composer moved one step ahead of Woolf's retranslating Wagner in that he "applied the half-modern figure of the parable to recode the intercode of music-with-words" (p. 100).

The final case study, elaborated on in the chapter *The threepenny opera: Jakobson's poetics retranslated in the spirit of Brecht's work-plays*, presents a move from traditional and conventional opera to an alternative new song-play genre of Bertolt Brecht. According to Gorlée, the Brechtian song-play from 1928 consists of "a half-singing, half-speaking recital of lyrical texts which were similar to the twentieth century's harmonic, but dissonant, arias" (p. 129). By breaking the convention of the Singspiel and introducing his *Verfremdungseffekt*, Brecht managed to create a special form of "epic" theatre, which Gorlée describes as "an electrified 'conduction'" inspired by John Gay's *The beggar's opera* (p. 170). Brecht was a "hyperbolic poet", using the German language and theatrical forms in an unexpected way to express his politically-coloured ideas.

Tracing the links between Wagner and Woolf, Gorlée indicates how Woolf reflected the rhythmic movement of waves through retranslating or reliterating Wagner's musical verse in her own poeticized verbal sounds (pp. 76–77), creating an elliptical and logocentric version of the former. Gorlée explains how Berlioz managed to use a canonical hypotext and merged it with his own theory on orchestration and opera creation although he failed to "redact" the poetic verse of Virgil, concentrating on music instead and arriving at a music-centred parable (p. 127). Brecht was, according to Gorlée, *the* hypertranslational poet, who managed to combine both words and music, creating "the perfect hyperbole of transduction" (p. 172).

In the short epilogue, Gorlée summarises the argumentation and defines transduction by referring to Sebeok's understanding of the concept. Transduction, meaning transfer between different forms of energy, is guaranteed by "intersemiotic transmutability", i.e. by the possibility of translating linguistic signs into signs of other semiotic systems (p. 171).

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The highly detailed analyses of the case studies are one of the greatest merits of the book. Gorlée meticulously examines the correlations between vowel qualities and emotions; stress patterns and musical phrases; stylistic tropes and meanings; lexical phrases and particular voices; genres and dynamics of music; ways of articulating sounds and onstage movements. Thus, she embraces the concepts of singability, multimodality and materiality of translation even though she does not mention these terms explicitly. This is the point at which the book may become of interest to song translation scholars, serving as an inspiration and an example of an erudite analysis.

Through her analyses, she draws the reader's attention to the extralinguistic dimension of translation, underling once again the links between the three Jakobsonian types of translation and culture, confirming her previous claim that "language-and-culture must be joined together" (Gorlée 2015: 108). The link between language and culture has been emphasized in translation studies since the cultural turn (Snell-Hornby 2006); however, it is Gorlée's concept of transduction and its underlying quality of intersemiotic translatability that should be of particular interest to translation scholars, as it provides an avenue of promising research.

Still it may not be perfectly clear, at least to this reader, how to demarcate definitional boundaries of some of the concepts used in the book, including, e.g. transmutation, transduction and hypertranslation, all of which seem relevant for translation studies. That terminological complexity together with frequently metaphorical parlance and lengthy digressions (which can make the main point unnecessarily obscure) may in places work against the intratextual coherence of the argumentation. The monograph may therefore be challenging to an inexperienced reader, especially the one with no background in semiotics or translation studies.

Another criticism may centre on the fact that the author refers to only few sources from general translation studies (mainly Nida's monograph from 1964 and Nida and Taber's follow up from 1969, Holmes's papers from the 1970s and 80s or Steiner's 1975 book). This may create a fallacious impression as if not much had happened in translation studies. Therefore, some observations concerning translation may come across as evident, especially the ones concerning the subjective manipulation of literature, a concept well-established in the discipline since its introduction in the mid 80s. That is why in places the arguments may lose their potency and impact.

Despite these imperfections and idiosyncrasies, the book is certainly worth reading. With a strong focus on semiotics and the creative "remainder" introduced through the process of transduction, the monograph underlines the pertinence of semiotics for translation studies and as such may help to rectify some of the contemporary conceptual dilemmas of the latter.

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