



THE FEMALE BODY AS A TRANSLATION IN HYBRID LITERATURE: THE CASE OF A SPANISH-MOROCCAN WOMAN WRITER

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ABSTRACT

In a highly interconnected world, processes of translation take place constantly. Due to the increase of migration, people from different cultural backgrounds live in the same spaces. This new reality is portrayed by hybrid writers, who combine more than one language in their writings. Their aim is to give voice to those people who live between two cultures, and who must find their own identities there. These writers describe some of the different translation processes that take place nowadays, such as the translation of the body. The Spanish-Moroccan writer Najat El Hachmi, who combines the Catalan and Tamazight languages in her books, shows that the body is a place of conflict for every woman, and especially for those who live in a reality where two different cultures are in contact.

KEYWORDS : translation, body, conflict.

We currently live in a society of constant movement. The revolution in communications and transports has triggered an overwhelming increase in migration movements and cultural exchanges. Over the past few years, 'globalisation' has been the term used to describe this reality. However, 'globalisation' has been one of the worst employed and defined terms of recent years, although very politically effective (Beck, 1998, p. 40). For some, it means 'westernisation' and 'homogenisation'. Therefore, it excludes, marginalises and stereotypes those who do not follow western codes. In order to confront this term, the term 'cosmopolitanism' has been created (Appiah, 2006). This new term embraces the connections and social exchanges, and treats difference as an important piece of the rich puzzle of society.

Hybrid writers, also known as 'hyphenated writers' (Vidal, 2012, p. 1041) were born in the context of 'cosmopolitanism', to give voice, from a respectful but also a rebellious point of view, to those people who live in and between two cultures. These people, usually immigrants or children or grandchildren of immigrants, have been raised in a multicultural context where they have had to implement strategies of translation. This is the reason why they have been called 'translated beings' (Cronin, 2006, p. 45). They belong to both cultures and, at the same time, to neither of them, and they are in a constant quest of their own identity. People from all over the world have experienced this situation, due to the increase in migration. However, hybrid literature describing this situation has not appeared in every country. Hybrid authors portray the reality of these people, a reality that they have very often experienced themselves as well. They create hybrid texts where two or more languages are combined in order to expose and defend their own identities (Vidal 2012, p.1041). This is the case of the Moroccan-Spanish writer Najat El Hachmi, author of the novel *The Foreign Daughter*, which will be the object of study for this paper. The processes of translation that people in between perform take place in many areas. The particular area that will be analysed in this paper will be the female body, which has been always at stake.

METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVES

Considering the latest research in translation studies and sociology of translation, our first aim is to open the door to new insights in the connection between translation studies, women studies and studies on the body. We will focus on hybrid literature, which is a translated genre in itself, because it portrays very accurately the cultural conflicts our society has to face. Our hypothesis is that, in these days of cultural communication and cultural clashes, we experience processes of translation in every area of our lives and, for women in particular, the body is very often the centre of this social and cultural conflict. Every time two cultures (or, by extension, two ideologies) get in touch, translation takes place. The field where these processes take place can be linguistic or not; however,

language will usually be the means to convey the meaning in these processes.

The methodology that will be implemented in the analysis of the aspects regarding the female body in the hybrid novel *The Foreign Daughter* will be interdisciplinary. Translation studies are a field of study in direct contact with social reality; this means that any analysis carried out in the discipline must take into account all other fields that interact with it. In this case, we will analyse both linguistic and non-linguistic elements, as well as the ideology they convey. We will show that the female body is a place of power, social pressure, docility and transformations (Vidal, 2003, p. 44), and that it has always been seen as imperfect, weak, unreliable, uncontrolled, unpredictable and heinous (ibid, 2003, p. 44-45). We will put our focus in body weight, as it is the main issue at stake in the novel. We will also discuss the concept of beauty and the connections between food and the body.

PRELIMINARY REMARKS REGARDING THE FOREIGN DAUGHTER, BY NAJAT EL HACHMI

Najat El Hachmi is a Spanish novelist from Catalonia who emigrated from Morocco when she was 8 years old. She combines Catalan and Tamazight (a language spoken in Morocco) in her writings to show the cultural reality of Moroccan immigrants living in Catalonia (Spain). The novel *The Foreign Daughter* is the second novel of Najat El Hachmi. It portrays a mother-daughter relationship in a very particular context: the Moroccan immigration in a small village of the inner part of Catalonia. The author focuses on the mother-daughter bond because it is very tight and intense, and because it contains a very powerful emotional conflict: the daughter has been raised in Catalonia and has internalised the Catalan culture, while the mother, who has lived half of her life in Morocco, is still very close to Moroccan traditions. The novel takes place in a moment of controversy for both: the daughter must travel to Morocco to marry the man her family has chosen for her. This event intensifies all the cultural struggles that both women have gone through during their lives. In this particular moment of her life, the daughter must look for her own identity, conditioned both for the Spanish and the Moroccan cultures. In the novel, the author addresses several topics that are objects of cultural conflict for both women. Besides the body, the main topics are food, religion, sexuality and social behaviour. In this paper, we will analyse the body aspects, as the study of the body as a translation is our main domain of research in this paper. However, the other topics mentioned also interact with body issues; therefore, we leave the door open to further research on them.

CASE STUDY: THE BODY AS A TRANSLATION IN THE FOREIGN DAUGHTER

The main issue at stake regarding the body is the weight. The main

character of the novel, the daughter, is very worried about her appearance. She is constantly trying to lose weight and, although it is not explicitly mentioned in the novel, the reader concludes that she has a food disorder. The origin of the disorder in the novel has to do with the social conflict the daughter experiences: the idea of beauty for Moroccans is that of a curvy woman; while for Spaniards it is that of a skinny woman. In the book, the mother wants the daughter to gain weight, while the daughter does everything she can to lose it. There are many passages where the body weight is at stake. For instance, when she is back in Morocco for her marriage, her cousin draws attention towards her thinness, telling her off for being too skinny (El Hachmi, 2015/ 2015, p. 60-61). Therefore, it is concluded that the body is not a finished object, rather something we must shape in order to have success in life (Vidal, 2003, p. 49). Furthermore, for this woman, the body is an object of constant translation. As she lives in a hybrid context, she must choose between succeeding in the Spanish society or in the Moroccan society. As stated by Vidal 2003, in the Spanish context (and, by extension, the western context), a skinny and firm body means control and self-discipline, even richness and high social status; in contrast, fat people are supposed to be those who eat worst, maybe due to their lower purchasing power and their poorer culinary education (p.53).

On the other hand, the daughter must choose very carefully the food she eats, and translation processes also take place in these choices. Therefore, we can see that, in Spain, she constantly struggles to avoid high-calorie meals, despite the insistence of her mother to do it. When she travels to Morocco, she is forced to eat high-calorie food (chips with bread), and she feels terribly guilty about it (El Hachmi, 2015/ 2015, p. 46-51). Therefore, the daughter must translate her body depending on where she is, whom she wants to please and, ultimately, who she wants to be; in summary, she must translate her identity.

CONCLUSIONS

We have argued in the first part of the paper that we are living in an increasingly interconnected society, due to the development of transports and communication, leading to the increase of migration flows. This situation has triggered the increase of translation processes in every sphere of life, due to the constant cultural and ideological encounters. Hybrid writers, such as Najat El Hachmi, have portrayed this interconnected reality focusing on the lives of people who have more than one culture, for instance, immigrants or children or grandchildren of immigrants. These people must negotiate constantly their own identities, becoming this way 'translated beings'.

In the second part of the paper, we have focused on the female body as object of translation. Because of the society we live, women have to adapt their bodies to the different social requirements of multicultural areas. This is the case of the main character of the novel of Najat El Hachmi, *The Foreign Daughter*, who struggles to fit at the same time in Moroccan beauty standards and in the Spanish beauty standards. Therefore, her body becomes a translation in itself and a way to express her own fragmented identity.

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