

# *Thinking Translation as Cultural Contact: The Conceptual Potential of “Transculturación”\**

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## **Abstract:**

“Transculturation” has been a recurrent notion in Latin American cultural analysis, particularly from the second half of the XXth century. The term, coined by the Cuban scholar Fernando Ortiz, has been taken up by critics such as Ángel Rama and, more recently, Gustavo Pérez Firmat, Mary Louise Pratt, and Walter Mignolo, to examine the dynamics of culture and the cultural dimension of center-periphery relations in Latin America. As it involves language and also goes beyond the boundaries conventionally attached to it, “transculturation” is a useful concept to explore the cultural negotiations and compromises in processes of linguistic and cultural contact in the Americas. This paper discusses the concept’s value to address translation and its relation to the institutions and “machines” of culture, as well as its potential to understand the tensions between the foreign and the vernacular in the configuration of a Latin American theory of translation.

*Key Words:* transculturation, cultural analysis, center-periphery relations, Latin America, foreign, vernacular.

## **Resumen:**

La noción de “transculturación” ha sido recurrente en el análisis cultural en América Latina, especialmente en la segunda mitad del siglo XX. El término, acuñado por el académico cubano Fernando Ortiz, ha sido retomado por críticos como Ángel Rama y, más recientemente, por Gustavo Pérez Firmat, Mary Louise Pratt y Walter Mignolo, para examinar las dinámicas de la cultura y la dimensión cultural de las relaciones centro-periferia en América Latina. Dado que el término “transculturación” tiene en cuenta el lenguaje y además va más allá de los límites convencionales que le son propios, el concepto es útil para explorar las negociaciones y concesiones culturales en los procesos de contacto lingüístico y cultural en las Américas. Este artículo trata sobre el valor de este concepto para la traducción y su relación con las instituciones y máquinas culturales, así como sobre su potencial para comprender las tensiones entre lo extranjero y lo vernáculo en la configuración de una teoría latinoamericana de la traducción.

*Palabras clave:* transculturación, análisis cultural, relaciones centro-periferia, América Latina, extranjero, vernáculo.

## **Résumé :**

La notion « transculturation » apparaît de manière récurrente dans l’analyse culturelle en Amérique Latine, particulièrement depuis la moitié du XXème siècle. Le terme, forgé par l’académicien Cubain Fernando Ortiz, a été repris par le critique Ángel Rama et, plus récemment, par Gustavo Pérez Firmat, Mary Louise Pratt y Walter Mignolo, pour examiner les dynamiques de la culture et la dimension culturelle des rapports centre-périphérie en Amérique Latine. Puisque le terme “transculturación” implique le langage et transgresse les limites conventionnelles qui lui sont propres, le concept est utile pour explorer les négociations et engagements culturels dans les processus de contact linguistique et culturel dans les Amériques. Il s’agit d’argumenter sur la valeur de ce concept pour la traduction, sur son rapport avec les institutions et machines culturelles, ainsi que sur son potentiel pour comprendre les tensions entre l’étranger et le vernaculaire dans la configuration d’une théorie latino-américaine de la traduction.

*Mots clés :* «transculturation», analyse culturelle, rapports centre - périphérie, Amérique Latine, étranger, vernaculaire.

\*Este artículo hace parte de la investigación que la profesora desarrolla en el campo de la traductología y el análisis cultural.

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Translation has participated in the construction of national narratives and in the development of national and transnational identities throughout the history of the Americas. Translation and translators are agents in the configuration of post, and neo-colonial geopolitical relationships and in the interactions among languages, literatures, traditions, knowledges. Language and translation interact with discourses of exchange and of conflict in the Americas. They are at one time instruments of domination and sites of resistance to hegemonic forms of textual and cultural production.

This paper explores the conceptual relationship between ‘translation’ and ‘transculturación’ for a translational historiography. It is based on the assumption that, as it involves language and also goes beyond the boundaries conventionally attached to it, “transculturación” is a useful concept to explore the cultural negotiations and compromises in processes of linguistic and cultural contact in the Americas. Translation—as a continuum of processes and products—partakes in the development of meaning production and knowledge construction, which is also bound to historical and geopolitical specificities.

I begin with a brief genealogy of ‘transculturación’ with particular attention to contemporary readings of the concept, and then focus on the conceptual potential of the notion for contemporary translation studies. The main goal is to investigate the concept’s value to address translation and its relation to the institutions of culture, as well as its potential to understand the tensions between the foreign and the vernacular in the configuration of a Latin American theory of translation. A more general goal of this conceptual exercise is to take up the possibility of expanding the scope of what Else Vieira calls “new Latin American registers” for translation studies, with an impulse to add a Latin Americanist perspective to current debates in the field.

“Transculturación” has been a recurrent notion in Latin American cultural analysis, particularly from the second half of the XXth century. The term *transculturación* was originally coined by Fernando Ortiz as an alternative to the borrowed term “acculturation” and emerged as an anthropological concept to describe and study Cuban cultural history in terms that would not entail assimilation, nor the effacement of the vernacular. It has been stated that while acculturation is “imprecise because it highlights only one aspect of a complicated, multifaceted phenomenon,” i.e., the complex dynamics of cross-cultural exchange, transculturación emphasizes the resulting “translational displacements that generate vernacular culture” (Pérez- Firmat in Maier and Dingwaney 13). As Mary Louise Pratt states in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturación*, ethnographers have used the term to describe how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or

metropolitan culture. “While subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for” (Pratt 4).

The term has been taken up by critics such as Ángel Rama and, more recently, Gustavo Pérez Firmat, Mary Louise Pratt, and Walter Mignolo, who propose possible readings and frame the concept to apply it to cases that lead to an examination of the dynamics of culture and the cultural dimension of center-periphery relations in Latin America. Ortiz’s notion of transculturation (as a cultural process) has largely influenced dominant trends in contemporary Latin American and Caribbean literature and arts, from the fifties to the present. From the perspective of transculturation, literature, or rather, narratives—including social scientific research—are perceived as an inclusive, creative praxis toward new forms of knowledge while exploring and revisiting the vernacular. The relationship between transculturation, language and writing is not only a result of reinterpretations of Ortiz’s work. Language and literature were crucial elements for Ortiz, and this can be partly seen in the self-reflexivity of his work. Examples such as the early *Un catauro de cubanismos* (1923), which resulted from his investigations of Cuban language, his rewriting of Galdos’s novel, turned into *El caballero encantado y la moza esquiva*, as well as the attention he gave to the materiality of his writing in *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* and in other works in order to displace it from the conventions of social scientific writing, are examples of Ortiz’s personal and scholarly interest in literature and language. In fact, he developed an ironic and irreverent tone through the twenties and wrote the *Contrapunteo* from this perspective (1940). Roberto Gonzalez Echavarría likens Ortiz’s writings to the experimentation of Julio Cortazar’s *Rayuela* and *La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos*, as well as to other avant-garde works of the time, even to Joyce’s contemporary text *Finnegan’s Wake*. (Gonzalez Echavarría 212). As Gonzalez Echavarría states, the *Contrapunteo* is a text in which Ortiz “produced more literature than science.” (212). The choice is not accidental: between poetry and scientific knowledge his work performs what it purports, namely, a critique of Eurocentric categories and modes of thinking, a way of appropriating and writing anthropology *en cubano* (in Cuban). As Gonzalez Echavarría also notes, through literature, Ortiz “realized what anthropology would only gradually later acknowledge: that as a discourse it was part of the modern and contemporary mythology from which it emerged, and that the expression, or the interpretation of that mythology was literature” (215).

Any discussion about the incorporation of the concept into translation thought needs to account for the criticisms that some scholars have articulated about cultural and literary readings of transculturation. This is the case of John Beverly’s view, who acknowledges Ortiz’s contribution and Rama’s ‘refashioning’ of it in literary studies, and considers the concept to be one of the most influential Latin American paradigms to think social processes of cultural contact accounting for questions of hegemony—Beverly calls “transculturation” a Latin American ‘ideologeme’. He also critiques the concept and lists its limitations, namely, the assumption that the end is a ‘new’ outcome as opposed to more radically local counterrationality, the difficulty of making generalizations about literature as cultural signifier, and the complex—at times contradictory—class positionings of those embracing ‘transculturation’ as a paradigm, especially in the academia. He calls the idea of transculturation a teleology and “a ‘fantasy’ of class, gender, and racial reconciliation” (47). Basing his critique on a framework from the Latin

American subaltern studies group, he states that transculturation “does not overcome subaltern positionality; rather, subaltern positionality operates and reproduces itself in and through transculturation” and, thus, there is no teleological movement toward a ‘national’ culture in which literacy and orality, dominant and subaltern languages or codes, are reconciled.

Beverly’s main criticism is the alleged impossibility to imagine a ‘transculturation’ from below. Nevertheless, I would argue that, although this objection is compelling, it seems to be rooted in the objects studied—e.g., avant-garde literature, perceived as an elite product—rather than in the paradigm or notion themselves. For one thing, there is indeed a problem with presenting ‘transculturation’ as a teleology of cultural production; and in this sense the criticism of the ‘homogenizing’ impulse of such a view would be justified. Nevertheless, as a notion transculturation may be used in a more descriptive vein, applied to speak of what is ‘transcultural’ and what ‘isn’t’—i.e. as an option rather than a goal in itself, or at least rather than the one legitimate goal. In this light transculturation would serve the purpose of delimiting the way in which a counterrationality or any other radical ‘counter’ movement or gesture would need to be or appear to be.

From a standpoint different from Beverly’s, Román de la Campa summarizes contemporary critiques and revisions of the term: “For some critics, transculturation belongs to the modern totalizing paradigm that often yields a Latin American tradition of identitarian longings, a will to cultural or racial synthesis all too willing to erase difference, or a structuralist approach to Latin American hybridity” as “homogenization” and “mestizaje”. There are, however, other postmodern readings that see transculturation in a more ambiguous deconstructive light. Some of these readings turn to Ortiz’s early writings—among other works—for a discourse that includes certain elements of literary free play. Here one finds “a recuperation of sorts, albeit one that will only understand transculturation discourse as a form of writing that betrays its ‘scientific aspirations,’ giving way instead to the inherent contradictions of any attempt to theorize the social sphere.” Yet, as De la Campa puts it,

other contemporary critics observe the possibility of new Latin Americanist theoretical engagements through transculturation, whether for a transnational cultural critique or in terms of a dialogue with a Foucauldian meta-narrative critique that complicates standard postmodernist approaches to cast literature as a deconstructive master code. (De la Campa 65)

Ortiz’s legacy is firmly ingrained in the Cuban and Latin American imagination. Even though contemporary critics discuss and acknowledge the limits and blind spots of ‘transculturation’ as a paradigm, most of them agree on the pertinence of the notion as a *vernacular* concept to address the complexity of local cultural production and discourse—which includes but is not restricted to the literary, while also questioning the very limits between the two. This legacy, as Román de la Campa notes, explaining the value of the concept at play in the work of many important Latin American theorists, is a theoretical search that belongs to a century-long tradition “for the nexus between knowledge and language, a quest that discovers, in different ways and at different times, the performative aspects of its object of study” (De la Campa 57). For De la Campa the term has current relevance as a different “anthropological, literary, and cultural studies

approach to transmodernity in Latin America, as well as that of the followers of the tradition such as Ángel Rama—for a literary redeployment of the term—and Nestor García Canclini—for a relationship with modern technologies, mass media, and questions of hybridity (64-65). Like Ortiz, Rama sees in transculturation a metaphor for inclusion and critical resistance. Together they constitute a genealogy of Latin American critical thought whose key formulations on history, culture, literature, modernization, discursive subjectivity, and the Other could still speak to some of the blind spots inherent in the postmodern, according to De la Campa (83).

It is not my purpose to advocate for ‘transculturation’ as the one way ‘out’ of a situation of extreme poles of cultural contact, or between the ‘foreign’ and the ‘domestic’ in translation. Rather, I am interested in examining its conceptual potential to speak ‘beyond dichotomies’ and to articulate the space, or “contact zone” of translation. *Contact zones*<sup>1</sup>, as defined by Mary Louise Pratt in her book *Imperial Eyes, Travel Writing and Transculturation*, are “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today” (Pratt, *Imperial eyes*, 4).

In the context of the Americas, the contact zone is often articulated as a site of translation, a space in a search for intelligibility in the negotiation of difference between agents in unequal relation. Hence the significance of foregrounding the space of translation: the move from a textual ‘exchange’ to an event among agents with particular roles in the colonial history, which condition their relation. Silviano Santiago also uses the metaphor of the “volcanic soil” to refer to these tension-ridden zones of contact. (6)

The notions of the original and the copy are seen as fundamental in this cultural process. The New World is referred to as a copy, a secondary product of a pure, pristine original. This articulation presupposes equivalence and identification. It may also denote extremes, i.e., from literal to transgressive, free translation. As Silviano Santiago puts it, the major contribution of Latin America to Western culture is to be found in its systematic destruction of the concepts of *unity* and *purity*; these two concepts lose the precise contours of their meaning, they lose their crushing weight, their sign of cultural superiority, and do so to such an extent that the contaminating labor of Latin Americans affirms itself as it becomes more and more effective. Latin America establishes its place on the map of Western civilization by actively and destructively diverting the European norm and resignifying preestablished and immutable elements that were exported to the New World by the Europeans.

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<sup>1</sup> Pratt also calls the contact zone the “colonial frontier”. For Pratt, the term ‘contact zone,’ refers to “the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict.” She points out that, in her discussion, contact zone is often synonymous with ‘colonial frontier’, differing from it in that it is “an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect.” She aims to focus on “interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination,” emphasizing “how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, or traverses and ‘travels,’ not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking of understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power (Pratt 7).

Therefore, the second “text” moves from the “original to the transgression” in a radical transformation that is the precondition for the affirmation of the self. The translation affirms itself in its difference.

The author that has articulated most explicitly and at most length the parallel between translation and transculturation, taking specifically the case of Cuba, is Gustavo Pérez Firmat. His starting point is the notion of writing-as-translation, “a common idea in contemporary criticism, but one of the goals of the discussion is to find a vernacular vocabulary with which to discuss the same range of textual phenomena.” For Pérez Firmat, transculturation is translation. His premise is that Cuban culture exists in translation and that Cuban style *is* translation style. He examines the specific ways in which the distance between the ‘original’ and the ‘copy’ meets in twentieth-century Cuban texts, and explores how translation/transculturation contributes to Cuba’s cultural and literary self-definition. He examines, broadly, how certain Cuban works emerge from the translation of exogenous models and forms (Pérez Firmat 5).

Pérez Firmat relates transculturation to a processual continuum, the ongoing ‘passage’ and lack of fixity in Cuban culture. He says that, contrary to what Ortiz said about transculturation as being ‘synthesis’ the word “properly designates the fermentation and turmoil that ‘precedes’ synthesis” (Pérez Firmat 23). He finds that the motivation behind the neologism is both empirical and, in a broad sense, political, the political aspect being the fact that the term is intended to replace ‘la voz anglo-americana’ as a gesture of intellectual autonomy and of questioning privilege, by means of a recognizable anticolonial, resistant strategy of creating a ‘native’ concept to observe and elaborate that which is local. One of the most significant insights in regard to this dimension is that transculturation involves cultural autonomy and that it is a strategy to find a Cuban “founding a vernacular *voz*,” in both senses of the Spanish-language word: a vernacular *word* and a vernacular *voice* (Pérez Firmat 26). For this author, transculturation can serve as a paradigm for a “Cuban theory;” it is thus a flexible notion, allowing Rama to apply it to an “Andean theory.”

Another recent reading of transculturation that relates the term directly with translation is that of Walter D. Mignolo. Mignolo suggests that transculturation is a necessary concept to think “all kinds of social and political relations of forces in a transnational world;” he also states that transculturation “is a necessary concept to remove translation from its linguistic conception” to think of contact and exchange of “cosmologies” and of all kinds of cultural practices.

One important point he makes is the need to ground the theory of translation/transculturation on particular specificities according to different loci:

Translation from Greek to Latin or from French to Spanish is one thing; translation from Aymara to Spanish is something different. From Hindi to English, it is still another thing. There is, of course, more translation from English to Hindi than viceversa. However, the question is not just translating from one language to another in some indeterminate history of humankind; translation is enacted within particular structures of power. (Mignolo 254)

Mignolo argues that the historical structure of the modern/colonial world had the complicity between translation/transculturation in making the colonial difference. He refers to larger questions of translation/transculturation as related to the larger “social life

of things” and that works in both directions: “It trans-lates objects that transform modes of being and thinking, which at the same time transform the ‘original’ uses and life of the object, like the transculturation of African drums when they got to Cuba” (Mignolo 269).

One of the most intriguing aspects of Mignolo’s take is this articulation of bidirectionality, and it is particularly pertinent for translation as it problematizes traditional dichotomies such as original vs. copy to emphasize process, relation; this view embraces reciprocity without presupposing equality. This bidirectionality, he states, “could help in thinking and moving beyond dichotomies, politically and ethically” (Mignolo 352).

Cultural critics of Latin America often refer to the historical colonial tensions in terms of the copy versus the original—Latin America being the copy of the original “West.” This analogy is clearly drawn from the notion of translation. According to its logic, transculturation is a form of ‘resignification’, thus signaling a way of problematizing ‘derivativeness’ and contesting the idea of translation as a pure, transparent copy. Since the “cultural turn” in translation studies, critical inquiry in the field—largely drawn from post-structuralist perspectives and from cultural studies—has shifted the attention from the discussion on texts and meaning as detached objects of observation to questions of translation in culture and of the translator as a participant in complex processes of cultural production.<sup>2</sup> Revisions of the notions of authorship and originality are at the core of these contemporary perspectives.

Undoubtedly, there is a conceptual relationship between translation and transculturation—i.e., between translational phenomena and transcultural phenomena. Translation, even in its most concrete and material sense, that is, as a *locus* of the production of texts and significations, is the enactment of cultural contact. The original and its copy, a basic translation dichotomy with its implications of derivativeness and subordination, as well as other operational concepts in translation studies, inform the reflection on socio-cultural histories in the Americas as it problematizes questions of origin in thinking the center in relation to the periphery, for example, or the South to the North. In the colonial history of the Americas, questions of origin, source and ‘influence’ in translation mirror the struggle to talk about contact without, or beyond, presupposing sources and influences. We face the challenge of talking about cultural difference beyond the model of the peripheral ‘copy’ and the hegemonic ‘source’. In translation as transculturation, the source is surpassed, perpetually reinvented, and ultimately rendered superfluous ‘as source’. Its ghost, or shadow, remains in the relation. In translation, the source can also be surpassed, perpetually reinvented, and ultimately rendered superfluous *as source*. In a historicized, problematized conception of communication, we must place voices and texts and their modes of circulation in their particular sites of enunciation. Thus, here lies one of the fundamental connections between the translational and the transcultural: a questioning of essentializing notions of originality and unity to legitimate the product and the subject of translation.

As stated previously, transculturation is processual and presupposes relation. Translation is an event and a process in a space that is often non articulable.

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of these are the contributions made to translation theory from post-structuralist perspectives and from cultural studies—theorists who have worked in this vein are Lawrence Venuti, Rosemary Arrojo, Douglas Robinson, Else Vieira, Daniel Simeoni, and others whose work shows a concern in offering historiographic perspectives to translation.

Transculturation names that space and displaces the binaries so prevalent in traditional translation theory, which leads to a questioning of romanticized and essentialist definitions of ‘equivalence’ and ‘faithfulness’. It also contests the dogma of ‘untranslatability’ without effacing the asymmetry and the violence in the translation event. The notion of translation is thus fully (re)articulated in “transculturation.” Untranslatability is not a problem anymore, given that the reproduction of a *copy* is always possible. The real challenge—for the transculturating move—is to keep the distance necessary “in order *not* to collapse into de original” (Pérez Firmat 5)—full meaning is attained from the translational displacement. In this vein the nature of the cultural and aesthetic project—of Cuba, in Pérez Firmat’s case—is “translational” rather than “foundational.” The literary vernacular is attained by “recasting, refashioning, adapting” exogenous models in order to respond to the tension “between the New World and the old *words*” and transculturation allows for the necessary “translational displacements that generate vernacular culture.” As Mignolo points out, ‘transculturation’ foregrounds the ‘inequality’ of languages, it refers to the ‘social life of things’ as they are foreplanted though converging histories. Of particular interest for translation is this “convergence of histories” to address the historical and political specificities of Latin America and their linguistic/textual dimension.

Moreover, as it is processual, transculturation denotes the passage itself—the ongoing translational situation rather than a fixed end product. It is consistent with a definition of translation as a dynamic space that both engenders and encapsulates the new. Translation is the enactment of contact and of difference in language, and the site and the performance of tension between structural forces in the transcultural event. The new product that emerges is also conditioned by the power relations and by the historically, ideologically-bound agents of translation. Cultural products exist in relation to dominant forms of culture. Nevertheless, the product of culture that emerges is always changed, always in the process of formation. Given these reasons, the enriched image of the contact that emerges from thinking translation as transculturation, the possibility to ground the poetic and creative in its historicity addressing the inescapable tension and inequality, and the fact that its conceptual root also bears the traces of the concept’s locus of enunciation, transculturation should figure as part of the landscape of Latin Americanist translation engagements.

Translation is invested mediation. Historically, it has been the instrument of colonization and oppression. It is a practice of power, conflict, and consent. It should be part of our understanding of the material and symbolic realities of language contact in the Americas, with their fluid and complex geographies and temporalities and their utopian and dystopian landscapes. Rather than a neutral, transparent, or ‘pacific space’, translation may very well be Santiago’s ‘volcanic soil’ in the context of Pratt’s ‘contact zone.’ Her articulation of transculturation as a fact of the contact zone echoes contemporary translation theories that take up questions of translation alongside contemporary issues of migration and international conflict, such as Emily Apter’s notion of the “translation zone”—a “linguistic hot spot” on which a “subset of politics at large, with particular agendas and strategic interests” is superimposed (2006, 130). According to Apter, the translation zone refers to the demarcation of a community of speakers around an “ideal threshold of communication” as well as, in the case of war, for example, “a translation no-fly zone, an area of border trouble where linguistic separatism is

enforced but where the lines dividing discrete languages are muddy and disputatious” (2006 130). Translation is a social engagement that takes place in these contact, translation zones. There is a stance taken, an ideological position. Translation can be violent, parodic appropriation or, as Ortiz proposes, a multidirectional process allowing for circular cross-fertilization. The translator’s position is crucial in this context, for translators are not innocent agents. As Else Vieira points out,

Translating Western literature in Brazil or in the whole of Latin America is not, cannot be innocent. Each act of translation carries the original across; each act of translation carries Western civilization across – hence the double implication of translating Western literature: translation rewrites the original but also rewrites history; translation represents the original but also re-presents history. (1998; 175)

Vieira also makes a parallel between translated texts and colonized cultures. She says that given that they are “both marginal spaces and, conventionally, considered derivative, tend to be evaluated by what they fail to be in relation to the originating text or culture rather than by what they are”(1998; 175). Thus, the notion of transculturation also helps articulate this complex in-between space of translation and of translators in the Americas, while offering a discourse generated both outside and in relation to Western paradigms.

Translation permeates the relationships between communities throughout the Americas. A transcultural historiography of the Americas would address questions of language and translation specifically in relation to the rich and plurivocal continuum of the production of meanings and cultures throughout the hemisphere. Transculturation also addresses the specificity of the post-colonial and neocolonial experience in the South of the hemisphere—a specificity that would add texture and detail to post-colonial readings of translation in Latin America. In this project there is also a call for a theory of the *translator*, as part of the fertile “circuit” of communication, of the “circulations of meaning, insight and value” (Pratt 2006, 328). To the extent that the subjectivities and rationalities of translators inscribe texts, translation is ethnography, autobiography, performance, commentary, testimonio. The conceptual relationship between translational phenomena and transcultural phenomena expands the image of the translator—both in the North and in the South—to foreground the translator’s social and political dimension and her/his relationship with the vernacular. This is particularly true to think the Latin American translator, as ‘transculturation’ has been an operational notion discussed in Latin American criticism and applied to Latin American works and authors (e.g., Ángel Rama’s work on Arguedas).

Transculturation also foregrounds language as a key question to face our historical past and understand our historical present. Where and how are the lines of difference drawn, when do we begin and when do we cease to ‘translate’ the other, and how is translatability the possibility of unity in difference. This opens up the question of translatability and representation in the Americas: of the Caribbean, of Brazil, of indigenous languages—from Inuktitut to Guarani—and their relationship with the colonial languages, of the knowledges attached to minoritized languages, and so on. It addresses the experience of bodies in relation of historical and cultural tension, of inequality and dominance—as is the case in readings of ‘transculturation’, such as those by Ortiz and Rama, revisited by Mignolo, Coronil, and De la Campa, to name a few.

Translation means the production of symbolic value, a productive space that is not to be romanticized as a “bridge between cultures” or as neutral “cultural exchange.” The transcultural encounter can be both examined and problematized in and through translation.

Finally, transculturation presents a view of translation that speaks to community self-determination. As practice and knowledge, translation will inevitably participate either in reproducing the colonial structure or in contesting it; it may, therefore, produce and reinvent signifying practices and discourses that do not conform with Eurocentric forms of global consciousness. Translators, like other cultural agents, can perform the role of what Pratt calls “transculturators,” rather than being subject to mirroring colonial meaning-making (Pratt 136).

Mignolo suggests one path for decolonial translation theories:

The theories of translation/transculturation that we foresee are coming from a critical reflection on the colonial difference and seeking to overcome the national-language ideological framework in which translation was conceived, practiced, and theorized in the modern/colonial world. Modern concepts and theories of translation assumed the unity and purity of language and linked it to national culture and national literature [...] This was one possible scenario. The other was the anthropological translation of non-Western languages and cultures to the main languages of scholarship that were, at the same time, hegemonic imperial and national languages. The future of theories and practices of translation, we surmise, will come from the perspective of coloniality and the colonial difference (Mignolo 279).

Thus, we can foresee a transcultural translation studies that would result from a *creolization* of discourses and paradigms, incorporating local, vernacular voices to current scholarly practice beyond Western theorizations, with larger texture and specificity than the “West” and the “rest”—a homogenized whole where all experiences are added up into one and the same discursive space. Translation as “*trasculturación*” would signal a particular specificity to Latin American translation theory in the study of Latin American products, which engages cultural history and the resulting social theory of the place, without advocating provincialisms.

As Pérez Firmat points out, transculturation for Ortiz also had a political dimension, one which can be identified as a praxis of agency, of action, and of resistance. There is also a performative exercise to be undertaken on the basis of the exploration: creating meaning with a vernacular *voz* in the sense of Ortiz. Transculturation, for Ortiz, was a textual as well as a disciplinary practice—a way of ‘doing’ anthropology. We could create meaning and writing in translation studies with a vernacular *voz*.

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