

## *Some Remarks on Translating “Gender Trouble” and on Polish Foreign to Poles*

### *Kilka uwag dotyczących „problematyki płci” w tłumaczeniu oraz o języku polskim obcym dla Polaków*

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feminism, gender, translation strategies

#### **Słowa kluczowe**

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#### **Abstract**

The aim of the paper is to pose questions concerning the current perspectives of a gender focused approach within Translation Studies, as well as to examine its potential to influence every day translation practices. From the academic perspective, the cultural turn in Translation Studies resulting from interest in post-structural and deconstructivist philosophy and, more generally, from the new politics of identity, may be seen as something which can be taken for granted. Nevertheless, I will argue that in a country like Poland, where the absence of critical theorizations of identity was for quite some time intentional absence, the gap thus created is clearly discernible in both translators' approaches and in the reception of translated texts. This gap, which has never been fully made up for, is also reflected in the absence of linguistic customs which are adequate to address various materializations of gender. In the light of the rise of new gender politics (to use Judith Butler's term) and well beyond the end of the era of feminism (to allude to the phraseology of Luise von Flotow), gender and translation related issues seem to be a timely matter to consider; particularly in the Polish context. Within the educational institutions whose teaching and research are

strongly based on the assumptions and values of universal humanism as well as in the institutions of public life cultural differentiation, including that of gender, is of marginal interest. I will attempt to show how the lack of certain gender-related linguistic customs of translators and the lack of gender-related academic research and teaching are interrelated, and result in translations in which significant aspects of the translated texts are obfuscated or eliminated. It can be argued that Polish political changes of 1989 in fact have positioned gender-sensitive discourses as marginal, rebellious, and subversive to the publicly legitimate order of things.

### **Abstrakt**

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest postawienie pytań dotyczących badań translacyjnych koncentrujących się na problematyce gender, a także zbadanie ich wpływu na codzienne praktyki tłumaczeniowe. Z perspektywy naukowej, kulturowy przełom w obrębie studiów translatorskich wynikający z zainteresowania filozofią post-strukturalną i dekonstruktywizmem, a bardziej ogólnie z nową polityką tożsamości, można uznać za coś co wydaje się być oczywiste. Poniższy artykuł dowodzi, że w kraju takim jak Polska, gdzie nieobecność krytycznej teorii tożsamości była przez pewien czas zamierzona, powstała w oczywisty sposób dostrzegalna luka zarówno w podejściu tłumaczy, jak i w przyjmowaniu przetłumaczonych tekstów. Ta luka, która nawet do tej pory nie została w pełni zlikwidowana, znajduje również swoje odzwierciedlenie w braku językowych zwyczajów tak potrzebnych do wyrażenia różnych sposobów materializacji płci.

W świetle nowych polityk płciowych (wykorzystując termin Judith Butler) i po zakończeniu epoki feminizmu (nawiązując do frazeologii Luise von Flotow) kwestie związane z płcią i tłumaczeniem wydają się być sprawą jak najbardziej godną rozważenia, szczególnie w polskim kontekście. Zwłaszcza jeśli weźmiemy pod uwagę, że w instytucjach oświatowych, których nauczanie i badania są silnie oparte na założeniach i wartościach uniwersalnego humanizmu oraz w instytucjach życia publicznego, zróżnicowanie kulturowe, w tym kwestia płci, ma marginalne znaczenie. Artykuł pokazuje jak brak pewnych nawyków językowych oraz badań i nauczania akademickiego związanych z płcią są ze sobą powiązane i skutkują takimi tłumaczeniami tekstów, gdzie znaczące elementy są pomijane lub zniekształcone. Z pewnością można dowodzić, że polskie zmiany polityczne z 1989 r. Rzeczywiście ustaliły dyskursy wrażliwe na płć jako marginalne, zbuntowane i wywrotowe wobec publicznie uzasadnionych porządków rzeczy.

### Some Remarks on Translating *Gender Trouble* and on Polish Foreign to Poles

The, generally, phenomenological bias of a philological approach to languages and their uses in Poland seems to be motivated by some peculiar love for what there is behind the word rather than for what the word says, or at least seems to be saying. This bias is only a locally practical concretization of what Derrida labeled as “metaphysics of presence”, yet in the Polish context its persistence is certainly a sign of strong immunity to change attitudes to reading and writing, and, more generally, to representation. Such an immune attitude implicitly embraces the idea of an unspoiled authenticity of meaning and its pre-linguistic origin as a governing principle of various interpretive practices in various fields of philological concern. This seems to be most evident in the case of “translatology” (*przekładoznawstwo*), where the distinction, or division into original and derivative texts is, by necessity, most explicit. The resistance to accept intertextuality as an inevitable effect of any kind of writing, and of translation in particular, is obscured by the seeming obviousness of the extratextual residence of meanings and senses which dwell in the fairly immaterial spheres of intentionality or other more or less noumenal “locations”.

According to Lawrence Venuti, such an extratextual approach to meaning

carries two disadvantageous implications for the translator. On the one hand, translation is defined as a second-order representation: only the foreign text can be original, an authentic copy, true to the author’s personality or intention, whereas the translation is derivative, fake, potentially a false copy. (Venuti 2004: 6-7)

The marginalization of translation into a secondary role of repetitive rendition is related to the idea of a masterly objective semantic existence, where mastery over the original text is ascribed to the Author, to whom the translator must be in some way obedient, while disobedience is frequently read as unfaithfulness or betrayal of sorts. This marital metaphor, very often used with reference to translations of particular texts, willy-nilly genders translation rendering the masculine act of Writing as superior to the feminine translational scribbling. This non-serious activity, at least according to some theories of translation, is also bound to be unfaithful, a betrayal of sorts in which the “husbands” fall prey to both ethical and aesthetical infidelity. The history of such metaphorisation of translation is quite long and the career of the term “Les belles infidels,” as Sherry Simon points out,

is another case in point. Introduced by the French rhetorician Ménage (1613–1692), the adage declares that, like women, translations must be either beautiful or faithful. Its success is due in some measure to the way it positions fidelity as the opposite of beauty, ethics as the opposite of elegance, the drudgery of moral obligation as incompatible with stylistic (or marital) felicity. (Simon: 10).

This old prejudice seems to be still lurking in thinking about translation, with accents being put on the predominance of one (ethics) over the other (aesthetics), depending on the genre or the cultural significance of translated texts. Still, the reproductive aspect of translation, its association with “women’s work” along with the epistemological desire to “maintain control of the reproduction of texts” is strongly present in contemporary culture, and, as Luise von Flotow notices, constitutes a mixture of protection with the “need to retain the ownership of offspring (texts)” (Flotow: 80–81). If we add the equally well rooted bias as regards women authors and authorship, a text written by a woman and one translated by a woman may well be read as a marriage of hell with hell, especially when the text undermines not only the possibility of masculine domination, but also the strength of masculinity itself.

A telling example of immunity to thinking in terms of difference paired with hostility to the proponents of such a thinking can be exemplified with the treatment of two women’s text (an original whose author is a woman and its translation by a woman) by a philosopher representing, and as we shall see also defending, a highly traditional approach to both philosophy and the world. The texts in question are Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990) and its translation into Polish by Karolina Krasuska (2008). The latter book, and in fact both, are criticized by a “professional” Polish philosopher, Marek Rosiak, in his text published by the Polish Internet Journal *Lectiones & Acroases Philosophicae*, devoted to thematic studies of key concepts in philosophy and history of philosophy. The title of Rosiak’s review of the translation is simultaneously a declaration of its authors critical position: “Gender in the Eyes of a (Phal)logocentricist” (“Gender w oczach (fal)logocentryka”, 2014).

Needless to say, from the space whose center is admittedly the phallus everything else is either marginal or nothing. If this “else” in any way questions the centrality of that position, it is treated as an usurpation, as an attempt at taking over the central position, because this central position, perhaps only in the eyes of the phallus, is for some reason imagined as crucial, important and significant. What the title in fact implicitly announces is the strength of a single, objective position in which the question of gendering should not appear at all, as it would also question the alleged neutrality of that position. The bracketed “(Phal)” is thus but a prefix which only signals

the masculinity of the otherwise neuter “logocentricist”. This vindication of patriarchy seems to be, however unconscious, naturalization, or making obvious, of the dominant as neutral, the mechanism which Pierre Bourdieu saw as the sexualization of world-view:

The particular strength of the masculine sociodicy comes from the fact that it combines and condenses two operations: it legitimates a relationship of domination by embedding it in a biological nature that is itself a naturalized social construction. (Bourdieu 2001: 23)

Needless to say that from the neuter-phallic position, one which does not perceive itself as in any way gendered, anything that does not claim hardness and stability of the norm will be treated as vague, suspicious, strange, alien and, in fact, dangerous to objective truths and values of the logocentric tradition. The “(Phal)” in the title is thus a mark of redundancy which proves that phallogocentrism (without brackets) is an invention of a nonexistent entity or category whose task is, or seems to be, at least subversive.

Rosiak’s text begins with very brief biographical information about Judith Butler who is introduced as an “American lesbian of Jewish origin.” In the footnote to this presentation Rosiak tells the reader that this information is quite significant in the light of Butler’s project of tracking the genealogy of dominant discourse. This tracking, according to Rosiak, is itself a revolutionary project of becoming dominant, and what he promises to do in his text is to do the same, that is to say to track a desire to dominate in Butler’s tracking of domination. What reverberates in this seemingly innocent introductory presentation of Butler as American, lesbian and Jewish is, of course, the old, worn out and highly banal fear of Jewish conspiracy that becomes even more dangerous when married with feminism, lesbianism and perhaps also with Americanism whose obsession with democracy threatens Rosiak’s order of the universe. Though he does not openly declare it in the discussed paper, apart from being a philosopher faithful to the true philosophical tradition, he is also a strong supporter of monarchy, active on the website of the Organization of Polish Monarchists (Organizacja Monarchistów Polskich) that opposes the “sick reality of totalitarian democracy ... and the poverty of egalitarianism”.<sup>1</sup> This thin allusion both to Proudhon and Karl Marx seems to be a key to Rosiak’s criticism of *Gender Trouble* and its translation, which both, as we shall see, are simultaneously anarchist and revolutionary if only through their implicit suggestion of the possibility of the erected being re-

<sup>1</sup> „Jesteśmy stowarzyszeniem Polaków, których sprzeciw budzi chora rzeczywistość totalitarnej demokracji. Zwalczamy wszelkie odmiany socjalizmu, przeciwstawiamy się szarości i nędzy egalitaryzmu.” this should be translated into English (<http://www.legitymizm.org/organizacja>)

placed by something elected, a suggestion that smacks of the abolition of the Monarch whose phallogocentric position, as Norman O. Brown rightly noticed (after Ernst Kantorowicz) is underlined by the symbolic dimension of the head in the crown being “penis in the vagina” (O. Brown: 135). Adding, just after the information about the authors, that gender is also a project supported by some circles plotting a moral upheaval in the world and propagated in Poland by the publisher of Lenin, Žižek and Badiou (“Krytyka Polityczna”), the philosopher clearly envisions the catastrophic dimension of the enterprise that smacks of the approach of a new-communist revolution and which, as is well known, breaks phalluses and takes over crowns.

Rosiak’s criticism of Butler posits her as a pseudo-scholar unfaithful to the philosophical tradition of philosophy which she treats as perfumes (*pachnidło*), freely choosing scents depending on the occasion instead of being faithful the philosophical search for the first principles (Rosiak 2014a: 12). This search is, according to Rosiak, the instituting principle of philosophy itself, and the most fundamental of those principles is substance, the problem already solved by Aristotle whose proposal in this respect “seems to remain for ages the most satisfactory answer to the problem” (Rosiak 2014b: 3). Then why still search, and for what? Yet Rosiak’s Butler ignores Aristotle’s solutions along with all the first principles and substances by way of ignoring ontology of which she is simultaneously ignorant. Moreover, she dares to claim that reality can be made up of words and discourses without reaching to the actual explanation of the problem of the ontology of reality offered, among others, by phenomenology, and by Marek Rosiak himself, one of whose numerous publications he modestly, in the footnote, refers the reader to (Rosiak 2014a: 14). Everything has already been said, and had Butler read Rosiak, she surely would have remained faithful to the ontological root of all being. Instead of hastily producing “dummies of foundations” (“atrapy”, p. 18), she would have returned to the true pillars of knowledge which, or who, like Plato, Aristotle and Rosiak would be able to unquestionably prove, as Rosiak does in one of his writings, that a broken rod is a broken rod, though it isn’t: “A rod bent too much can break into two. In such a case we do not say that a change of substance has happened – we rather claim that that substance in question has been destroyed” (Rosiak 2014b: 8). What “we” can say to this is that bending rods too much is really dangerous and that it is really necessary to think about who and why may break them. For why is it so that rods are bent too much if the potentiality of such bending is not an immanent feature of a “basic individual” (Rosiak 2014b: 6)? The latter phrase, otherwise most frequently used as a modifier of individual human rights, is another central, or centric, character that speaks through and reveals itself in various insubstantial forms in Rosiak’s rhetorical potency.

The presentation of Butler, her book, and her ideas is, generally, a lengthy repetition of phrases like “thoughtlessly” (“bez namysłu”, p. 12), “fatal ignorance” (“wobec fatalnej ignorancji Butler”, p. 14), “talking balderdash” (“głoszenie banialuk”, p. 15), etc. From this presentation, Rosiak moves on to a critique of the translation of the book reading it, again, through biographical information about the author, though this time the author is the translator. Positing himself as a sedentarily domestic philosopher, Rosiak draws the image of Karolina Krasuska as a scholar whose partly foreign education in Germany and in America raised her to a prestigious position in Poland, whereas this scholarly prestige should predispose her to be a reliable transmitter of the “progressive ideas of the famous author” (Butler) to some “less emancipated” Polish readers (“mniej wyemancypowanym rodakom”) like Rosiak himself (Rosiak 2014a: 2). In other words, the translation should be a clear and transparent exposition of ideas to readers to whom those ideas are not familiar. This demand also implies at least a trace of hospitality on the part of the readers for whom the language communicating those new ideas may seem alien and foreign, even if the language is labeled as their own, as Polish, for example, whose name indicates some possibility of sharing senses within a certain community. In the case of translation from other languages, at least a trace of openness to strangeness and difference should accompany the acts of reading because otherwise the reading, when demanding only a repetition of the same familiarity of the world, closes the domestic sphere of culture and, in fact, simultaneously guards it against intruders. Yet hospitality to any strangeness and newness seems to be alien to Rosiak. In his review, he clearly assumes a position of a disappointed normalizer who is not only unable to go beyond the stiff rigidity of what he already knows, but also to accept this strangeness as something worth inquiring otherwise than ascribing it to the spheres of nonexistence.

From such a position, which is clearly visible in Rosiak’s text, the translator of alien ideas is an ally of the aliens, of the foreign which is by all means unwelcome not only because of its foreignness, but also because it, here by definition, wants to take over the home and domesticate itself within its space thus beginning its occupation as an enemy. The translator of a strange text (like Krasuska) is in fact a traitor who acts exactly as the fifth column, as an enemy within, who has been trained abroad, in American academic circles whose Lenins, like Butler, plot to take over Rosiak’s power of saying the truth of all the “basic individuals” whom we all are. In the home of the phallus, which position the title of Rosiak’s text clearly defines, only those who admire it are welcome, those who cherish its mastery of “unifying experience” rather than the possibility of diversifying and problematizing this unity.

Rosiak's critical review of the translation of Butler's book begins with the already mentioned motif of betrayal on the part of the translator. The reader, writes Rosiak, "candidly expects that the translation will faithfully reflect the progressive ideas of the famous author so as to enable some less emancipated kinsmen to make an acquaintance with them" (Rosiak 2014a: 2). It turns out, however, that the English and the Polish titles of Butler's book are not the same ("*Uwikłani w płęć* to nie to samo, co *Gender Trouble*"), not to mention the subtitle which, in translation, means something quite opposite (Rosiak 2014a: 2). Apart from claiming, this time, that Butler's text does have some sense or meaning, the text of the review also reflects an important and frequent tendency of the Polish academic discourse which may be described, to some extent after Rosiak, as a *candid expectation of the same* which is dictated by the search of pre-existent meanings behind language rather than within it. This tendency is generally noticeable not only in such a discipline as philosophy, but also in what is traditionally called "philology", the love of the word that treats words almost exclusively as steppingstones to meanings. The tendency, interestingly, has been for a long time the foundation of Polish "translatology" ("przekładoznawstwo") which still avoids the theoretical and practical issues raised by contemporary Translation Studies, and to which Judith Butler is much closer than Roman Ingarden. The candid expectation of the same, of an ideal repetition and of the possibility of repetition of substantially unchanging categories and identities is an expectation lying dormant within numerous other scholarly disciplines and approaches. Academic discourse, some of whose properties Rosiak's text in fact caricaturizes, is still quite hermetically closed to importations from other cultures, and especially to critical theories generated in the wake of poststructuralism, one of them being of course gender studies. Such theories are frequently treated as fashionable products of Parisian philosophers from whom nothing can be really learnt, and like "the little Frenchman Battaile" ("Francuzik Bataille"), whom Rosiak calls up with that name in a lecture (Rosiak 2015), are jugglers of ideas rather than serious thinkers.

Butler's *Gender Trouble* was discussed in some academic localities in Poland long before it was translated into Polish, but the publication of its translation eighteen years after the original is quite telling. Karolina Krasuska's translation, like any translation of any text, diverges from the original, and the expectation, however candid, of "the same" is as absurd as the expectation of the same from a translation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Rosiak condemns the translation not really for some errors or misreading, but basically for the fact that, like "genderism" itself, it dares to exist. Rosiak's review constructs Butler and her translator as semi-academics who break and dismantle the unity and immanence of both subjects and objects. Rosiak refers to what



gets demolished with a hardly translatable phrase “immanente uposażenie podmiotu” (Rosiak 2914a: 14), something that perhaps can be phrased as an “immanent equipage of the subject”, though also as the subject’s “immanent salary,” an idea in itself worth considering at the time of the alleged crisis of capitalism. What is at stake is of course unity and oneness, the existence of undiversified spheres that guarantee easy and unproblematic categorizations and make the subject to shuffling and reshuffling within equally unified theoretical models and paradigms.

It is exactly such delusions of unity and their projections that constitute part and parcel of Butler’s project, and it is first of all that project which, in the eyes of Rosiak, betrays the philosophical tradition which it simultaneously ignores. Butler does not say the obvious, she does not say what should be said, and neither she nor her ideas can be approached as worth inquiring. Butler mixes otherwise substantially separate categories and in this way brings in a troublesome disorientation within the seemingly ordered order of things.

Translation is never the same as the original, whereas Rosiak seems to be demanding absolute sameness, perhaps in order to make sure that the philosophical systems he seems to know exist in themselves, without the intervention of language and translation. In the case of Aristotle, to take an example closer to Rosiak’s search for principle, the English word substance is usually regarded as the proper translation of the Greek *ousia*, and yet the derivation of this word from the verb *to be* invites plausible translations of *ousia* as “real being”, or even as “reality”, both possibilities allowing for at least two different readings of this absolutely singular and basic category (Cf. Dancy: 338).

Rosiak’s trouble with Butler and Krasuska consists exactly in the potentiality of there not being any already mentioned “basic individuals” alongside any basic men or women. “Basic individuals” are an abstraction, an abstract projection to whose power of making up a reality Rosiak is absolutely blind. I have no space here, or pleasure, to go into his critical divagations in detail as most of them reflect his deafness to the language of difference and a willing suspension of vision whose task is to violently suppress difference, to throw it out from the home of philosophy as idiocy. Only an idiot does not see that we are, first of all and principally, basic individuals and not complex human beings entangled in genderly-sexualized lives in which certainty is, as it were, rare. This violent suppression is achieved not only by the violence of language which Derrida tried to make somehow visible, but also by the violence of abstractions of the type of basic individuals whose principality constitutes the regulative power of the seemingly unquestionable order and stability of the world. Thus the phrase, in Polish, “abstrakcje [...] używają przemocy wobec ciała” sounds funny to Rosiak’s ears, and it is in fact only

“some ladies” (“pewne panie”, Rosiak 2014a: 7), in this case the woman translator, who violate the abstraction of grammar (by the way, I do not see what rules of Polish grammar are violated here). The sentence in which the quoted phrase appears, and in which Butler evokes Monique Wittig, reads:

The power Wittig accords to this “system” of language is enormous. Concepts, categories, and abstractions, she argues, can effect a physical and material violence against the bodies they claim to organize and interpret: “There is nothing abstract about the power that sciences and theories have to act materially and actually upon our bodies and minds, even if the discourse that produces it is abstract. (Butler: 148)

For Rosiak this English sentence, for some reason, sounds “idiotically” (“nie mniej idiotycznie”, 7), though the explanation of what violence is and how it works along with its comparison to an attempt at reverting the current of the river provided there is, so to speak, daftish. Abstractions, like phallus or the equivalent basic individuals, do not effect any violence and are only innocently guarding the logical order of the world against some ladies who, rather than kissing the exemplary rod, prefer to excessively bend it. The suspicion of there being any violence in abstractions is a blasphemy and a threat, and the project of an alternative thinking about the gendering of people smacks of disintegration not only of “some social groups but, of whole societies” (Rosiak 2014a: 21). Needless to say, there must be someone standing behind the project, a devil or a Lenin who make use of women like Butler as “useful idiots” (21) in the hellish plan of castrating the world. The Polish of the translated book, along with the book itself, should thus remain foreign to Poles; it should be avoided and exiled. The book, in effect, should be put away on the shelf with “prohibits” so that society is healthy and wise with the absolutely self-confident wisdom of the phallic logic. Where there is no violence, any action against it is pure idiocy, a construction of a phantasmatic violence to no end. Butler, gender and Lenin produce this fictitious image in order to establish their own power and system to violate what Gonzalo, in *The Tempest* (II.i. 169), called the innocent people.

Interestingly, the argument employed in a document titled “Reasons why the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence should not be ratified” published by the Institute for the Culture of Law *Ordo Iuris* (cf. “Dlaczego nie należy ratyfikować Konwencji RE”) is exactly that of a plot against the good state with its good traditional and proper division of men’s and women’s roles in it.<sup>2</sup> These

<sup>2</sup> E.g.: „Przepisy Konwencji otwierają furtkę do rozmywania naturalnej tożsamości rodziny jako związku kobiety i mężczyzny oraz praw rodziców do wychowania swoich dzieci zgodnie z własnymi przekonaniami (Konwencja nakłada m.in. obowiązek

roles are treated by the “feminist ideology” as stereotypes rather than natural functions of basic individuals. These natural functions, however abstract, are in themselves innocently neutral and based on the principle of “equal but different”, while the convention against violence silently and cunningly introduces the possibility of there in reality being the Orwellian equal and more equal ones, thus rendering the system, however abstract as oppressive. Though the stereotype of women being, in various aspects, inferior to men is an element strongly present in numerous social and political practices, the convention, in the hands of the authors of the text in question, attacks the traditional model of the Polish family in which, of course, violence is either nonexistent or caused by other reasons than the treatment of women as inferior. In order to better convince the reader that violence against women is a necessary evil which the convention will not manage to eradicate anyway, and in order to save the division of roles as natural and substantial, the authors of the text simply omit the phrase referring to the idea of inferiority, whilst leaving the other stereotypes intact. This is, of course, a kind of Polish which is not alien to Poles, some of whom may now traditionally beat their traditional wives without seeing them as inferior.

Though Marek Rosiak did not beat Judith Butler or any other of the ladies he mentions in his paper, the misogyny of his text shows that violence against women, however abstract, lurks in the philosophical edifice in which he dwells, even if those women (like Judith Butler, and perhaps also like Julia Kristeva and many other women philosophers) “strictly speaking ... cannot be said to exist” (Kristeva in the epigraph to *Gender Trouble*).

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