

32nd International Conference of the Spanish Association of Applied Linguistics (AESLA):
Language Industries and Social Change

Poems from the Inner Life: how to translate spirit voices

Manuel Barea Muñoz^a, Miguel Cisneros Perales^{a*}

^aUniversidad Pablo de Olavide, Ctra. de Utrera, Km. 1, Sevilla 41013, Spain

Abstract

Lizzie Doten, a famous 19th century American poet, was best known for being a medium through whom the spirits of popular poets such as Edgar A. Poe could still transmit their verses even dead by using her as a channel. The characteristics of the trances in which she would recite a poem supposedly under the influence of a spirit were mostly oral and improvised. Lizzie Doten wrote two books: *Poems from the Inner Life* (1863) and *Poems of Progress* (1871). They are both a compilation of poems created by spirits through her. In this paper we will focus on the former, for it is the best example of Doten's work where we can find those types of poems. It is also a challenging text to translate, for what we must take into account some of the main items that appear in Doten's poetry: intertextuality, the mediumship process, rhythms, and metrics.

© 2015 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Peer-review under responsibility of Universidad Pablo de Olavide.

Keywords: Lizzie Doten; Robert Burns; Shakespeare; Edgar Allan Poe; translation; Spiritualism; intertextuality.

1. State of the art

References on Lizzie Doten and Spiritualism are treated from diverse points of view: comparative literature (Fritz, 2013; Rudy, 2009), history of religions (McDannell, 2001) or feminism and genre studies (Braude, 2001), just to name a few. There are also some authors who have written about Lizzie Doten since they were studying the influences of Shakespeare, Poe or Burns (Richards, 2004). Nevertheless, the main work on Doten's life is Bednarowski's dissertation, written in 1969.

On the other hand, there are no specific references on translation of spiritualist literature, but we can take advantage of what has been said in general Translation Studies. Furthermore, we think that this kind of literature is interesting for a translation analysis because it encounters many problems, such as the double voice of a text (in this

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +34 666 88 74 10

E-mail address: miguelcisper@gmail.com

case triple: author–medium–translator), metrics, rhythm, realia, or intertextuality, discussed by the most recent translation theories: Cultural Studies or the Manipulation School.

2. Introduction

We often find authors in the history of literature who have been deliberately displaced or forgotten by the public over the course of the years. And we use the word ‘find’ here because we, as translators, consider that a vital part of our work is to resurrect certain authors who would otherwise remain completely unknown for almost everyone in our days. Thus, the main objective of this paper will be not only to analyse the translational aspects related to a certain work whose peculiarities make it highly complex and fascinating, but also to bring back to life an authoress who is nowadays unknown but who was, a hundred years back in the eastern coast of the United States, one of the most famous and influential mediums of her time: Lizzie Doten.

Leaving aside the general aspects of the translation of poetry (EN>ES), topic which has been covered by many Spanish theorists (Hurtado, 2004 and Torre, 1994 and 2000, for example), in this paper we would classify the main characteristics of Doten’s poetry, namely those that suppose a challenge from a Translation Studies’ point of view.

Lizzie Doten (1829-1913?, Plymouth, Massachusetts) was known for being a medium through whom the spirits of diverse poets wrote their verses from the great beyond, spirits like those of William Shakespeare, Robert Burns, or Edgar Allan Poe, as well as many other unknown spirits. The most interesting feature of those episodes in which she allegedly contacted those spirits is that the result was, most of the time, an oral speech that Doten would improvise in front of an audience. These performances were, apparently, unexpected (Martin, 2009, p. 257).

Despite of those poems being made to be declaimed, this type of improvised spiritual poetry would be successfully edited and printed. Her most famous works were *Poems from the Inner Life* (1863) and *Poems of Progress* (1871). We will focus on *Poems of the Inner Life* as it is in its second part where we find the poems in which the authoress does recognize a direct spiritual influence (that of Shakespeare, Burns and Poe), poems which are actually the most unusual and challenging pieces for us, as translators, to work with.

Thus, in order to not just translate those poems, but also to read and understand them, it is necessary to define the context of these pieces of work—that is to say, the situation in which an interaction was supposedly established between the spirit and Doten in order to create poetry. The context used to be very specific: the trance would arise during or after one of the series of conferences that Doten used to give to an audience, which tended to be speeches of a religious character (Braude, 2001, p. 89).

In addition to this, in order to better translate her poems, we would have to ask ourselves who we are actually translating from: the living authoress/channel that is Lizzie Doten or the spiritual author/influence who possessed her in order to ultimately create those poems? According to Doten herself, the poem was the result of a shared effort, thus it would likely be of a shared responsibility, and then, authorship (Doten, xi). She was convinced that she was not just a mere channel to another author’s spiritual voice, but that she added her personal touch to the final outcome. As matter of fact, Doten claimed that those spirits chose her because of her poetic skills, but we will go beyond and state that she had an excellent ability to mimic the technique and personal style of every single poet she theoretically was ‘influenced’ by. As some authors have said, this capacity for copycatting was a way of proving that those ‘visits’ were actually occurring (Richards, 2004, pp. 121-122).

Sontag states that «The modern style of interpretation excavates, and as it excavates, destroys; it digs ‘behind’ the text, to find a subtext which is a true one» (1996, p. 6). In the texts we are analyzing the translator should work without prejudice, without questioning or interpreting the truth of Lizzie Doten powers. Even more: in case of doubt, the translator of Doten’s poetry should use all the possible tools in the translation to make possible to the reader’s eyes that what Doten said was true.

Anyway, whatever the truth might be, she finally left her medium career claiming that she was no longer able to clearly differentiate those messages created by her and those that came from the spiritual presences. This double voice, which was something confusing even for Doten in her last days, is an almost unique characteristic and a joyful challenge for a translator, taking into account that he or she would not only be translating a poem by Shakespeare or Poe, but also a poem by Doten. She was not just a channel: she filtered those poems from that ‘inner life’ according to her own ability, to her literary and writing skills and style, just like a translator does.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1111575>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1111575>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)