

An introduction to Cultural Transduction

Introducción a la transducción cultural

Introdução à transdução cultural

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A few years back, while we were studying a variety of cases where media products had been changed or altered to suit specific markets, we discovered that there was a great amount of literature on the topic. The various authors we encountered talked about many different aspects of the process and provided a vocabulary that was developed to answer the particular concerns they had found when addressing their specific subject. However, as we pierced through pages of books and articles, we discovered that many of the terms were different, but the general meanings they were giving them were similar. Moreover, many of the terms and concepts proposed by the various authors seemed complementary and, in our eyes, the articulation of said concepts, bringing them together, provided a more nuanced and comprehensive picture of the subject. That is how we decided to create a general framework that could encompass all of the terminology and theoretical perspectives that had been developed, in order to provide a common ground for analysis of the processes of modification of cultural products as they crossed borders and markets.

Our point of departure had been the flow and contraflow of cultural products (Thussu, 2007), which had been developed following a critique of the single-flow of television products (Tunstall, 1977) levied by Straubhaar (1991) and Sinclair (1996). These critiques looked at the production and distribution of television programs in Latin America and presented a more complex landscape of the exchange of audiovisual products in terms of an asymmetrical interdependence and the establishment of geo-linguistic regions.

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We continued our exploration through the developments in the world format trade (Moran, 2009), and how it served to expose interesting mechanics dealing with the transformation of television products that went beyond a mere economic flooding by the larger markets. The new multidirectional flow of audiovisual products provides evidence of a far richer network of exchanges than originally discussed in academia.

We started our analysis from the perspective of television products and their production and distribution systems. In the beginning, concepts and perspectives derived from political economy (see Straubhaar, 1991; Thussu, 2007), cultural studies (see Iwabuchi, 2002; Olson, 1999; Singhal & Udornpim, 1997; Wang & Yeh, 2005) and media economics (see Albarran, 2010; Rohn, 2011; Sánchez-Tabernero, 2006) allowed for a good point of departure. But after a while it became evident that we had overlooked other disciplines and perspectives that had also shed light on how creative production had been transformed or modified crossing cultural or temporal barriers. Adaptation and translation studies had both already addressed similar issues, yet we had not delved deeply enough to include them in our original proposal.

Thus, bringing together the various perspectives that we had managed to draw from television studies, we came up with the first draft of the cultural transduction framework (see Uribe-Jongbloed & Espinosa-Medina, 2014). We decided to use the term *transduction*, taking it from the biological and engineering sciences, in an attempt to avoid already loaded terms such as *translation*, *adaptation* or *localization*, since we found them to be ambiguous, at best, and quite problematic, at worst. Transduction in biology refers to the transfer of genetic material from one cell to another, usually through a viral agent, and in engineering it is associated with the transformation of one type of energy into another one. Both refer to keeping a certain essence (be it genetic material or stored energy), but changing the vessel to the appropriate host or environment. The analogy seems to be clear, then. We were looking at the ways in which certain cultural products, particularly television programs in our case, had been modified or altered to become available, appealing or relevant in other cultural contexts. It was

not a new concern, but our approach to organize it under specific categories seemed worth the effort.

At the same time as we continued our own research and presented it internationally, we became aware of a growing series of studies concerned with the modification of specific products, particularly, the localization of global game shows, such as *Big Brother* (Chalaby, 2011), scripted shows like *The Office* (Breedon & De Bruin, 2010), and analyses of the various versions of the Colombian mega-hit *Yo soy Betty, la fea*, which has received considerable international attention (see Adriaens & Biltreyst, 2011; Fung & Zhang, 2011; McCabe & Akass, 2013; Mikos & Perrotta, 2012, just to name a few). Related to the processes of cultural localization found in those texts was the process of trading the products and rights (Chalaby, 2015), the specific international fairs where those products are exchanged (see Bielby & Harrington, 2008; Havens, 2006) and the role of business people in those venues (Kuipers, 2012). These cases have provided valuable input in the development of the cultural transduction framework. They led us to define the four major topics or tenets of the framework: markets, product, people, and place.

Once we had constructed the framework, we began applying it to a variety of cases, ranging from TV shows in Colombia before the advent of the global format trade (Espinosa-Medina & Uribe-Jongbloed, 2016), to new developments in the videogame industry and the creation of transmedia products (Espinosa-Medina & Uribe-Jongbloed, 2017; Uribe-Jongbloed, Espinosa-Medina, & Biddle, 2016). In the process of moving from television shows to videogames, we discovered the need to thread other disciplinary grounds, including adaptation and translation studies. It certainly helped us identify the limits and potential of our framework and highlighted the need to include a more open dialogue with other perspectives that would put the framework to the test.

With those ideas in mind, we organized a conference, the first Cultural Transduction Conference, held in May 2016, at Universidad del Norte, in Barranquilla, where we invited academics and practitioners alike to discuss

the framework and to provide other perspectives that could criticize and enrich our theoretical construct.

The papers in this issue were selected from the presentations held on that event, and exemplify the dialogue with semiotics (see Elleström), adaptation (see Cattrysse), translation (see Conway), art criticism (see Walker) and more general media and video game studies (see Beattie; Brassard; Donoso Munita; Scholz y Stein). The places where these perspectives come together are evident, and they complement and strengthen the framework, providing new categories or clarifying elements within them. As you read through the articles, you will notice that the cultural transduction framework proves to be a useful tool in bringing together different debates concerning the exchange of cultural products. The papers also highlight the current limitations of the construct, which we are more than happy to address in further work. Particularly, the debate regarding the process tenet, presented here by Scholz & Stein, would clearly enrich the framework. This international discussion shows the importance of collaborative work and the need to continue the dialogue through academic spaces such as this journal.

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