

Institution: Queen's University Belfast		
Unit of Assessment: 26		
Title of case study: Re-thinking Theatre through Translation		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2011-2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): David Johnston	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of Translation	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2000 - date
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? Y		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>This case study embodies how translation research may inform and enrich performance practice. Johnston's research has promoted new ways of thinking about theatre among theatre practitioners by introducing them to the processes and products of translation. Through multiple workshops, he has enabled actors, directors and drama students to reflect more deeply on the possibilities of interpretation and representation. His sustained work with the Royal Shakespeare Company has facilitated the translation of Shakespeare into Chinese and of Chinese classics into English. Several of his own translations of Spanish theatre have been produced 30 times during this period in the UK, North America and Europe.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>From exegesis to hermeneutics, the interpretation of social and cultural phenomena has been the definitive act of humanistic scholarship. At the heart of such activities is an awareness of the complexities of representation - textual, visual, scientific and ideological. Johnston's work places the act of translation as the conduit between interpretation and representation (3).</p> <p>He argues that translation exposes the instability of meaning in text and identity; no other mode encapsulates so completely the co-habitation of sameness and difference within practices and identities. Translation destabilises correctness of interpretation, rightness of assumption, and self-containment of being. It prompts – or may prompt– its recipients to look at things differently. In this way, translation, as a cultural practice, inserts itself into one of the most powerful tendencies of modern thought: the questioning of implicit trust in representation (1).</p> <p>One of the key ways in which Johnston has explored the instabilities of acts of representation is through his analysis of the 'performability' of dramatic works. His earlier work established the basis of this question, challenging the then common perception that performability was solely a matter of concern for the director. From 2011 onwards, this principle develops into a philosophy of translation in which he argues that translations should not only work on stage, but also offer audiences a new perspective on their own contingent assumptions and practices (7). Echoing Field Day, Johnston discusses translation as a way of imagining alternatives, repudiating the commercial tendency in English-speaking theatre to erode cultural and linguistic differences in the name of accommodating the translated text into a domesticated perspective (1,4,6,7).</p> <p>From this, Johnston's research explores the translated text not as second-order writing set against the original, but as the embodiment of translational processes arising from the new meanings that the original text accrues as it journeys through time and space (2,5,7). In this way, his work explores the quality of the original text's translatability as a form of complementarity with the affordances of the new context (4,5,6,7). The translation contributes to this context by instantiating its interests, asserting its values, and enriching through its forms. But it is also recognisable as a version of itself (5,6,7). Johnston's concept of translation extends in this way Benjamin's description of translation as operating through 'continua of transformation' (2,3,5,6).</p>		

The work presented here is the practical dimension of this project. Johnston's work with theatre practitioners illustrates how interpretation and representation are central not only to theatre making but also to the understanding of translational processes. In that way, theatre translation is the most appropriate and direct mode for investigating the potential of translation as a writing practice that condones contestedness, enriches our sense of the unseen complexities of any act of representation, and promotes an everyday cosmopolitanism (1,2,3).

3. References to the research

1. Johnston, David, 'Metaphor and Metonymy: The Translator-Practitioner's Visibility', in Baines, Marinetti and Perteghella (eds.) *Staging and Performing Translation: Text and Theatre Practice* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2011). ISBN: 978-0-230-29460-8.
2. Johnston, David, 'Eking Out Performance with the Mind', in Mujica (ed.) *Shakespeare and the Comedia. Festschrift for Susan Fischer* (Lewiston: Bucknell University Press, 2012). ISBN: 978-1-61148-517-2.
3. Johnston, David, 'Professing Translation: the acts-in-between', *Target*, Vol. 25, 2013. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1075/target.25.3.04joh>
4. Johnston, David, 'Sister Act: Reflection and Refraction in the English Translations of *La dama boba*' in Johnston and Thacker (eds.) *Bulletin of the Comediantes*, Vol. 67, 2014. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/boc.2015.0005>
5. Johnston, David, 'Translating the Past: The Moral Universe of Calderón's *Painter of Dishonour*', in Blumczynski and Gillespie (eds.) *Translating Values Evaluative Concepts in Translation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). ISBN: 978-1-137-54971-6.
6. Johnston, David, 'Travelling Through the Senses: Translating the Erotic', *Palimpsestes*, Vol. 29, 2016. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/palimpsestes.2283>
7. Johnston, David, 'Narratives of Translation in Performance: Collaborative Acts', in Cole and Brodie (eds.) *Staging and Adapting Translation* (London: Routledge, 2017). ISBN: 9781138218871.

4. Details of the impact

Johnston's research has achieved impact in the creative industries mainly in the UK, US, Spain and China. He has applied his research into translation, and particularly his insights into the effects of time and space, to theatre practice in his work with actors and directors, at both professional and trainee levels, helping them to transport scripts from different times and places into live performance in a contemporary space. There have been 30 productions of his own translations of Spanish theatre in the UK, North America and Europe during this census period.

Impact on Practitioners

Since 2015, Johnston has been advising the RSC on its Folio Project which aims to produceactable versions of Shakespeare's plays for Chinese audiences. Through this scheme, he has trained writers and translators to identify dramatic actions within texts and to write performable translations. He delivered a two-day workshop in Shanghai in 2016, attended by 30 Chinese writers, and this led to a follow-up workshop at the Wuzhen Theatre Festival in 2017 (1). In response to the Shanghai workshop, a Beijing-based translator observed that Johnston's innovative approach urged participants to 'see themselves as writers who open up conversations across languages, cultures, and time/space' and 'see what Shakespeare's language does, and not [just] what it means' (2).

As part of the same project, Johnston led an RSC workshop in Stratford (Translating the Chinese Classics) in 2018 (3) attended by ten British and Chinese practitioners. An RSC survey of participants shows significant impact, with 7 of the 8 respondents commenting on how their practice had changed as a result of the workshop. For example, one participant stated, "It gives me new ideas and awareness in approaching the source text, especially on the musicality of the words and how to find ways to present that in a new language" (3).

As a result of leading these workshops, Johnston was invited to discuss his work at the Cheltenham Literary Festival 2018 in an event co-sponsored by the RSC and the AHRC (4). The workshops have supported and informed 7 commissions for the Chinese Classics Translations Project, 36 translations of the Folio, and collaborations between the RSC and London theatres, including the Lyceum and Unicorn (5). An RSC dramaturg notes that the workshops contributed to the '*decolonisation of the UK canon of theatre*' and enabled performable translations of Shakespeare in China (5). One playwright of Chinese heritage observed that her participation enabled her to '*feel acknowledged, accepted, and perhaps, even belonging, alongside writers and words which you have grown up revering*' (cited in 5).

Johnston has also worked widely with theatre trainees, leading multiple workshops at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts (LAMDA), the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama (RWCMD), and Edge Hill University. These annual sessions were conducted using Johnston's own translations, seven of which received public performances. Johnston has been central to the LAMDA workshops for MA students: the course director attests that '*translation across centuries, languages and cultures became a central point of departure for all their work*' thanks to Johnston's influence (6). His *State of Madness* workshops inspired the 2015 cohort to create their own company in New York, the Ducdame Ensemble, focussing on works in translation (6). One LAMDA workshop resulted in the performance of *A State of Madness* in 2019 which played to 750 people over 7 nights generating a box office of GBP5,000 (7). The impact on the participating students was significant. One was struck by the role of the translator as '*creative mediator*' between the source text and the actor, while another observed: '*I felt like a more active agent in the creative, living process of translation and, in a way, actually nearer to the source text through David's contemporary approach*' (7).

In 2017, 30 students at the RWCMD chose Johnston's *The Agony and the Style* (Lope de Vega's rarely performed *Las bizarrías de Belisa*) for their final-year showcase, directed by an RSC director. The play ran for 10 nights in the Richard Burton Theatre (8a). The director describes the production as an '*emotional fist-fight*' in which he was greatly helped by knowledge of contemporary performance conditions as revealed through Johnston's practitioner-oriented *Translating Theatre of the Spanish Golden Age* (8b).

In 2016, Edge Hill began collaborating with Johnston using his translations. The course leader produced Lorca's *Blood Wedding* with her second-year Drama students and, in 2017, undertook a more ambitious collaboration exploring the work of Valle-Inclán, with productions of *Bohemian Lights* and *Ballad of Wolves*. Johnston provided dramaturgical support and rehearsal feedback. As the director notes, this '*excursion into radical approaches to important Spanish modernism would not have been possible without [Johnston]*' (8c).

Johnston has also worked with students and practitioners in Europe and India, for example at Assam University (as a Global Initiative of Academic Networks scholar) in 2017 (9a), and in Paris (Sorbonne Nouvelle) in 2018. As a result of the latter, Johnston was subsequently interviewed for the magazine *Coup de Théâtre* (9b).

Productions and Audiences

A total of 30 productions of plays translated by Johnston, including by Lope de Vega, Mayorga, and Valle-Inclán, were staged by professional and amateur companies at venues in the US, Canada, UK, Ireland, Spain, and Greece during the census period (13). This programme enabled Spanish playwrights to reach international audiences that would not otherwise have been possible and contributed to a greater diversification of the English canon. The pandemic has prevented the collection of final audience figures, but we estimate, based on the break-even figures, that these theatre productions have been seen by at least 22,500 people (13). The follow-on productions are indicators in themselves of the success of earlier stagings.

The quality and impact of the translations are indicated in many reviews, including in *The Guardian*, *Time Out*, *Financial Times* and *Washington Post*. A *Time Out* reviewer describes Johnston's *Lady of Little Sense* as '*feisty, bringing great word play, a touch of the modern and language oddities (flibbertigibbet, for instance) to 400-year-old characters*' (10a); the *FT* describes it as an '*exuberant comedy, and David Johnston's translation catches its energy*' (10b); *The Guardian*'s Michael Billington praises Johnston's '*sprightly translation*', quoting his vivid description of the intellectually-challenged *Finea* as '*thick as potato mash*' (10c).

The ability of Johnston's translations to engage audiences across cultural barriers is noted. One reviewer describes *Hamlyn* as a '*gripping production that, like a good television police drama, draws the audience in*' (10d). Another describes the '*mesmerising qualities that will leave audiences utterly captivated*' (10e). Gala Theatre's production of *Cabaret Barrocco*, described in a review in the *Washington Post* as '*familiar and evergreen*' with a '*timeless, accessible quality*' (10f), embodies Johnston's approach to accessibility. Presented in Spanish with Johnston's surtitles in English, Roger Catlin acknowledges the connectivity achieved by the translation when he writes in *MD Theatre Guide*, '*there hardly seems any language barrier at all*' (10g).

Johnston's translation of Mayorga's *El chico de la última fila* was first broadcast by BBC Radio 3 on 22nd March 2014, starring Neil Pearson, and it subsequently received a BBC Audio Drama Award for best use of sound (11a). One reviewer declared it '*one of my favourite radio dramas that I've listened to this year so far*' (11b).

Johnston's importance as an interlocutor for Spanish playwrights is best summed up by an internationally-acclaimed Spanish playwright who describes Johnston as '*an essential companion on my path in the theatre*' and his first critic who '*never stops making suggestions that almost always end up becoming decisive*' (12). In this way, Johnston is not only introducing Spanish theatre to English-speaking audiences but is also an important intermediary, intimately involved in the development of the art itself.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. a) Shakespeare Folio Project: <https://www.rsc.org.uk/about-us/our-work-in-china/shakespeare-folio-translation-project>, b) Workshop: <https://www.rsc.org.uk/news/translating-shakespeare-into-chinese> (corroborates Johnston's involvement).
2. Han Zhao, 'Notes from the Royal Shakespeare Company's Translation Workshop' (published in Chinese).
3. a) Translating the Chinese Classics (<https://www.rsc.org.uk/about-us/our-work-in-china/chinese-classics-translation-project>); b) Chinese Classics Translation Workshop Feedback (survey conducted by RSC, June 2018).
4. Cheltenham Festival, Translating Shakespeare In China. Screenshot details.
5. Associate Dramaturg, RSC, and Leader of the RSC Chinese Classics Project, Testimonial, including testimonials from two other participants.
6. Course Leader, LAMDA, Testimonial.
7. Audience figures LAMDA (including Impact assessment from participants).
8. a) *The Agony and The Style*, Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama, screenshot of online event information; b) RSC Director, Testimonial; c) Edge Hill Senior Lecturer and Director, Testimonial.
9. Gian Workshop, Assam University, India (programme); Interview in *Coup de Théâtre* (No 33, 2019) <http://radac.fr/index.php/en/journal/#toggle-id-2>.
10. Reviews: a) *Time Out*, 15 Mar 2014, *Financial Times*, 2 Feb 2014, *Guardian*, 15 Oct 2013; b) *Everything Theatre*, 28 Apr 2014, *Younger Theatre*, 28 Apr 2014; c) *Washington Post*, 18 Sept 2013, *Maryland Theater Guide*, 15 Sept 2013. Collated document available.
11. BBC Radio 3, Drama on 3, 22 Mar 2015 (listing); award at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/TVJPhZL3PWrlLcV6PT4Dg/bbc-audio->

[drama-awards-2015-winners](#); reviewed in Oughttobeclowns, 5 April 2014:
<https://oughttobeclowns.com/>.

12. Playwright, Testimonial, dated 19th January 2021: 'Siendo uno de los primeros lectores de mis obras, es también su primer crítico, y nunca deja de hacerme sugerencias que casi siempre acaban convirtiéndose en decisivas... David Johnston es, en fin, un compañero esencial en mi camino en el teatro'.
13. Audience numbers have been estimated by multiplying number of productions x auditorium capacity (details provided by contract) x 0.7 box (70% capacity is a standard breakeven calculation, and all productions at least broke-even). Productions are listed below.

Author	Title of Translation	Publication	Productions since 2013
Lope de Vega	<i>The Dog in the Manger</i>	2004	Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival (New York) 2014 • Pitt Stages (University of Pittsburgh) 2015 • We Happy Few Theatre Company (Washington) 2017 • University of Southern Indiana (Evansville) 2018
Mayorga	<i>Way to Heaven</i>	2006	Belfry Theatre (WorldPlay: rehearsed reading Victoria, British Columbia) 2014 • Rough Magic (Project Arts, Dublin) 2014 • Athens Epidaurus Festival (Greece) 2019 • Bas Bleu Theatre Company (Fort Collins, Colorado) 2020-postponed
Mayorga	<i>Nocturnal</i>	2009	LaMicro Theater (New York) 2014 • Little Theatre (Bournemouth) 2018 • Patio Playhouse (San Diego) 2019
Lope	<i>A Lady of Little Sense</i>	2013	Theatre Royal, Bath, 2013 • Arcola Theatre (London) 2014; • Belgrade Theatre (Coventry) 2014; • Janus Theatre Company (The Minack) 2015
Various	<i>Cabaret Barroco</i>	-	Gala Theatre Company (Washington DC) 2013
Cervantes	<i>Don Quixote</i>	-	Oval House, London, 2014
Mayorga	<i>Hamlyn</i>	2010	Crescent Arts Centre, Belfast 2013 • The Space, London, 2014 • Fells Point Theatre (Baltimore) 2015
Mayorga	<i>The Boy at the Back</i>	-	BBC Radio 3, 2014, 2015 • Frida Kahlo Theater (Los Angeles) 2016
Lorca	<i>Blood Wedding</i>	1991 revised 2008	Edgehill University, 2015 • Burdall's Yard (Bath) 2015; • Havant and South Downs College (Havant) 2019
Lope	<i>Madness in Valencia</i>	1995 revised 2001	RWCMD (Cardiff) 2015 • Institut des Arts (Sitges, Spain), 2017
Lope	<i>The Agony and the Style</i>	-	RWCMD (Cardiff) 2017
Mayorga	<i>Darwin's Tortoise</i>	-	Cervantes Theatre (London) 2017
Valle	<i>Bohemian Lights</i>	-	Edgehill University, 2017
Valle	<i>Ballad of Wolves</i>	-	Edgehill University, 2017
Lope	<i>A State of Madness</i>	-	LAMDA, 2017 • Ducdame (New York) postponed