

From Threshold to Threshold: Translation as a Liminal Activity

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Abstract

This essay focuses on the spatiotemporal notion of liminality and the way it can be mapped onto translation processes and the role of the translator. The concept of liminality can be traced back to Arnold van Gennep's (1960) rites of passage and their re-elaboration by Victor Turner (1967 and 1974). It has recently been theorized within the social sciences as a central concept that allows a redefinition of the relationship of structure and agency (Thomassen 2014; Szakolczai 2015). In postcolonial studies (Bhabha 2006) and translation studies, it has been frequently used as a synonym of the notions of in-betweenness and third space (Aammari 2017; Bery 2007; Inghilleri 2017; Johnston 2007). However, despite some common traits, liminality offers a more comprehensive and dynamic approach. The notion of liminality is, furthermore, connected to the spatial metaphors of the door (Simmel 1957), the threshold, the arcade (Benjamin 2002 and 2004) and the gate (Tawada 2003; Sakai 2011), which do not conceive of languages as isolated self-contained units but focus on a possible opening between systems whose character is otherwise left unspecified.

Keywords

threshold, gate, liminality, in-betweenness, third space