*JALDA'*s **Interview with Professor Luise von Flotow**

Interview by Dr. Reza Yalsharzeh

Luise von Flotow

Luise von Flotow is a Professor of Translation Studies at the School of Translation and Interpretation, University of Ottawa, Canada. She got her BA in German and French from the University of London (1974) and her MA in French from the University of Windsor (1985) and her Ph.D. in French from the University of Michigan (1991). Professor von Flotow was the director of the School of Translation and Interpretation at the University of Ottawa in 2006-2016. Her areas of academic interest include political and ideological influences on translation, specifically translation and gender; audiovisual translation, dubbing and subtitling, and literary translation as public diplomacy. Besides numerous journal articles, professor von Flotow has published the following books: *Translation and Gender: Translation in the Era of Feminism (1997), The Politics of Translation in the Middle Ages and the Renais*sance (2001), *Translating Women* (2011). She has also co-edited with professor Farzaneh Farahzad *Translating Women: Different Voices and New Horizons*. Dr. Reza Yalsharzeh, assistant professor of Translation Studies at Azarbaijan Shahid Madani University and a former student of professor von Flotow has arranged this interview with her.

RY: ---- Thank you dear doctor for accepting *JALDA'*s invitation to have this internet-based interview with us.

LvF: ---- It′s my pleasure.

RY: ---- **In your idea, what is a successful program in translation studies at both undergraduate and graduate levels? Do you recommend the division of Ph.D. programs into separate branches like audio-visual translation studies, humanities-based translation studies, and interpreting studies, with each university focusing only on one of these areas?**

LvF: ---- I can describe such a program based on my own experience as a teacher of undergraduate translation students, graduate translation studies students, and as an observer of other institutions, in Europe and most recently in Sri Lanka.

In my experience, an undergraduate program is most successful when it is designed to train translators who work between an A-language (their mother tongue) and a B and/or C language (the languages from which they translate into their mother

tongue.) After a 3-4 year undergraduate program that focuses on language skills: writing properly in the A-language and properly understanding and interpreting the B and C-languages; on technical skills of computer-aided translation, information mining and database work;and that incorporates supervised internships or periods of co-op learning on the job, students can generally go to work as translators.

The "translation studies" aspect of this training – i.e. theoretical or historical understanding of translation – can be acquired in one or two specialized courses or incorporated in the more pragmatic courses. Often, undergraduate students do not have the background knowledge to undertake in-depth 'translation studies" where cultural, political, and systemic questions come into play in the study and analysis of translation.After a praxis-based and well-planned undergraduate program in *translation*, however, students can begin work as translators.

A successful program in *translation studies* is almost by definition a graduate program: it requires students to have considerable world knowledge, discernment, analytical skills, and the courage to see and discuss the manipulations that often accompany translations. At this level, MA and Ph.D. programs are useful, though MA programs would do well to also include pragmatic translation training (including the skilled use of translation technologies.) This is because an MA in Translation Studies might otherwise end up being considered too theoretical and graduates not possessing the skills they need to do the work of translation.

A Ph.D. program, on the other hand, must assume that students are proficient in several languages and their cultures/histories. Further, given the broad range of translation studies, it is wise to allow students to specialize early – for instance, in fields such as audio-visual translation, or legal translation, or humanities-based translation (literature, essays, history of translation), interpreting studies, or technical aspects of translation. Several overview courses taught early in a Ph.D. program can lay out the general background of translation studies theories and the various approaches to the study of translation that have developed in the last 30 years, but specialization is essential for the student's thesis project and dissertation. Just as in other broad disciplines, it is wise to understand the broad lines of force and history but soon narrow the focus to a specific research question.

RY: ----University–business cooperation is one of the topics that is widely discussed in Iran these days. In your idea, how can this relationship be realized in the field of translation?

LvF: ----Given the fact that international communications of all sorts require linguists, translators, and communication experts, it is not difficult to see how the study of translation and training of translators can be incorporated with business/commercial/government interests and activities. Translation students in

supervised internships can work for international initiatives, being useful and learning at the same time: they can work in business and government, in NGOs, and other associations. However, they can also work internally, translating between the various different languages that exist in any one country: in Iran, this might involve translating between Farsi and Bakhtiari or Turkish. In many multilingual countries, translation serves to supply government information to all the minority speakers, thus incorporating them in the society-at-large and helping serve their interests – by making information available and, at the same time, respecting and reinforcing their language.

RY: ----Finding a proper method to teach practical translation at university classes especially at the undergraduate levels becomes a challenging job for instructors at times. Which method do you deem appropriate for translation teachers to adopt in practical translation classes such as literary translation?

LvF: ----Pedagogical methods applied in pragmatic translation classrooms differ according to every teacher, I think. Some teachers try to simplify matters by insisting on hard and fast rules which the students must learn and adapt to. I suspect that this can be counter-productive, hampering students′ creativity, flexibility, and agility and reducing language to some pre-determined standard. In my experience, students benefit most directly by regular practice and feedback from the teacher, plus the option to correct and re-submit revisions of their work. In class, this involves identifying topics that are of interest and finding texts that address and work with those topics, and then assigning translations to be done regularly, corrected immediately, and revised within a week. Students learn through revision, through work on their texts, NOT through lectures about language. Further, since students need to learn to explain and justify their work – as they will encounter clients who know (or think they know) the other language and for whom they will have to explain their choices – it is good practice for students to footnote their translation decisions, and explain why they chose one option over another.

RY: ----What kind of examination does justice to the assessment of the students′ translation ability? Does it suffice to give them a piece of text to translate as their final examination?

LvF: ----Assessing a student′s translation ability is not a simple matter, but the only practical way of doing so is assigning and evaluating a translation they have produced. If students have worked on certain topics over the course of a semester, it is fair to assign a final text that remains within that range of topics so that they don′t struggle with terminology and can focus on style and writing excellence. If they have been trained to explain their translation choices and justify them, it makes

sense to also require such explanations in the final assignment. For a final ″commented translation″ project of a thousand or more words, it makes sense to also grade them on the way the work is presented: font, margins, footnoting, writing style in the commentary section, bibliography, and technical references. This prepares them for work with clients, who can be very demanding.

RY: ----As a scholar in the field of translation studies, how do you see the position of translated Persian literature in the western literary polysystem? What position does Persian literature in general or translated Persian literature in particular occupy in the western literary polysystem from your perspective?

LvF: ----I have to admit that this is not one of my research topics, and that I am not aware of many contemporary Persian authors whose work might be available in English or German or French. I am aware of translations of the Sufi poet and mystic known as Rumi and have acted as an examiner for a Ph.D. thesis on the French and English translations of his writings. I am also aware of the Persian origins of the *Thousand and One Nights* and know of their translation /adaptation history. Regarding more contemporary work, I know of ShidaBazyar′s, *Nachtsistesleise in Teheran* [The nights are quiet in Tehran], and MarjanSatrapi′s graphic novel and animation *Persepolis.*

RY: ---- The last question is about your field of expertise, feminism in translation studies. In your idea, how can gender awareness in translation affect the democratization of society as a whole?

LvF: ---- Feminism in translation studies: gender differences and expectations as well as stereotypes are set through and in language. They are enforced or acted upon in other ways as well, but language is a crucial factor in establishing ″gender.″ Gender-awareness in language – i.e. the understanding of the role that language plays in defining what gender means in a culture and in laying down rules about gendered behavior – can be taught and learnt. Students of translation, like any students of language, literature, law, history, political science, education, and so on can be sensitized to this phenomenon and made aware of how language can define and enforce certain rules about gender. Late 20th century feminist work certainly focused on these questions, and first and foremost, studied how conventional language, held in place by educational institutions, publishing houses, dictionaries and grammar books, and the entire cultural history of western Anglo-America and Europe systematically debased and defiled women. Since the early 2000s, similar critical work about gender-in-language has concentrated on gender beyond the conventional/traditional woman/man binary.

The pedagogical work being done in this area sensitizes the general public (and, of course, students) to how language can be and is used to establish and enforce specific gender rules. Further, such work shows how traditional institutionally-approved language-use has historically placed the human male in top position (usually demanding that he fulfill or at least pretend to fulfill the requirements of heterosexuality). This has occurred to the detriment of all women and those men who refuse to be or cannot be heterosexuals, and led to virulently un-democratic systems, where over half of the population of a given society is deemed and treated as second-class citizens, and labeled as such through the very language they use.

Teaching gender-awareness in translation classes and drawing attention to these important questions of language goes a long way to helping democratize society: when demeaning or insulting language used for women, or for other "minorities" in society is pointed out and criticized and finally rejected and cancelled, this leads to a fairer and more just situation where every human being counts, regardless of gender.

RY: ---- Thank you for your time.

LvF: ---- You′re welcome.