Re_Translating as Activist Practice

Queering the German Translation of *Stone Butch Blues*

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> When *Stone Butch Blues* was published, I thought I would keep cartons of copies in my closet to give out to people who were ready to read it. But this book, like the movements for social change it was inextricably connected with, exploded the closet door off its hinges. (Feinberg 2014: 336)[1]

Introduction

Gender-inclusive language has found its way into official German language use. More and more institutional organisations and companies are actively contributing to a change in language by departing from the grammatically generic masculinum towards more inclusive options. Furthermore, gender in language opens up a bigger debate about how gender roles and norms dominate our reality. In the German speaking context, the so called *Genderdebatte* – the socio-political discourse about gendered language – concerning the generic masculinum, gender-neutral spellings, and inclusive language at large, has therefore gained and continues to gain attention, implementation, and controversy (Söder 2024). Also, among literary translators, different practices around inclusive language-use continue to be a controversial subject. On a grammatical level, however, it is rather simple: English has no grammatical marker for gender, it is a challenge to translate it into German, which heavily relies on grammatical gender. My translation practice acknowledges that shift and turn in language use, especially in literary texts, is not just a question

1 Author afterword of the 10th Anniversary Edition, 2003.

for queer and trans issues and subjectivities. It is a question that re_surfaces during the practice of translation with a new awareness and sense for binary grammatical language structures. It is not just a question concerning the change of parameters for literary texts on trans and gender non-conforming characters, but it concerns every act of writing.

I specifically seek to demonstrate how re_translation figures as activist practice, especially in the tradition of feminist, queer and trans translation theory, with its consciousness for power structures repeated in and through language. How do those inclusive developments figure in literary texts? Not only the translator's active contribution, but also publishers' policies, public discourse, and market economy play a part in how works of fiction can and will be translated. I want to demonstrate my argument by re_translating passages from Leslie Feinberg's 1993 debut novel *Stone Butch Blues*. Leslie Feinberg, an activist, communist, butch, lesbian, Jewish trans person and an active advocate of the trans liberation movement hirself, wrote an explicitly political novel on the life and coming of age as well as coming-out of a trans masculine, lesbian butch protagonist. The existing 1996 German translation by Claudia Brusdeylins, published with Krug & Schadenberg, has softened the edges of the novel significantly, not only because of the different approaches to gender-inclusive language then and now. My practice of re_translation will remain in dialogue with the existing translation, to be able to reflect on the choices made and re_translate them with my knowledge of gender-inclusive language and trans identities.

I will present my own translated version of crucial text passages, presenting queer and trans subjectivities with an extended understanding of gender-inclusive or gender-neutral language use. I will focus on the analysis and comparison of the structure of grammatical gender of the source language (SL) and target language (TL) and how it can compromise the enunciation of trans subjectivities. What can the existing German translation of *Stone Butch Blues* teach us about the inherent structural differences of English and German and how can we work with and against them as translators? I will argue that re_translating as an activist practice can give us the tools to make use of the structural differences of English and German to make queer and trans experiences and subjectivities more visible and intelligible in translation.

In Germany, one of the first publications on feminist linguistics and a call for change, first and foremost to abolish the generic masculinum, was an essay collection by linguist Luise F. Pusch ([1984] 2023). Her account of the history of the *Genderdebatte* maps out the progression and different groups involved in the fight for visibility and inclusion. Beginning with a feminist call for visibility in language practice of the feminine grammatical form in the 1970s, through a number of versions that have been tested out, including the *Partizip*-forms *Studierende* (students, gender-neutral) or *Geflüchtete* (refugees, gender-neutral) instead of the masculine forms *Studenten* and *Flüchtlinge* (students/refugees, masculine grammatical gender), to the

invention of the *BinnenI* (a capitalised letter to signal the gendered dimension of the word), Pusch arrives at mentioning the queer and trans community in the 1990s who are described as the pioneers for including or coming up with the asterisk or *Gendersternchen* (*). What had, up until then, among feminist linguists been a question of including women and the feminine grammatical form, became a question of including different genders and trans people, intersex people and/or non-binary and agender people.

The linguistic changes we see today continue to lead to controversial discussions in both public and private spheres. They are rooted in activist history and in theoretical and academic contributions that are often overlooked, devalued and pushed to the margins of society. As language continues to change and develop, it's newer iterations are not only taken up by feminist media professionals and publishers. Instead, it has become normalised to the extent that its novelty and controversy fade into the background, and gender-inclusive language has reached mainstream media and even conservative politicians.

In what follows, I will give an outline of the theory that inspired me and that I have worked with on interventionist feminist translation practices. I will connect and further this approach with queer and LGBT approaches to translation theory, and discuss the impossibility of translating queer texts within a heteronormative matrix and "queer implicature" as used by David Gramling (2018). Before I present a number of examples of my own re_translation and translation analyses of *Stone Butch Blues*, I contextualise Feinberg's work as distinctly activist. I will then compare the first and last edition of the original novel and briefly comment on (sub)culturally specific identity-markers in the existing German translation.

Theories of Gender in/and Translation

For literary texts dealing with trans characters who identify with non-binary genders and who are lacking the appropriate language to describe themselves, grammatical gender is very significant. This means, apart from the fact that some languages rely on grammatical gender to transport meaning (i.e. is the speaker of a certain gender), others are almost or completely free of it on a grammatical level. If we are faced with a language pair in translation like English to German, where grammatical gender needs to be added in translation, it opens up the question of how far the translation can, and should, depart from the SL when considering and adapting to this difficulty. When can this alteration of an implied gender by binary categories be considered a "linguistic intervention" (Godayol 2018: 470), as feminist translation theory would call it? Every act of translation carries an act of decision making, especially when SL and TL differ linguistically and in respect to their grammatical gen-

der categories and implementations, decisions can dictate gender expression and impact how a narrative can be perceived.

Linguistic intervention as a translator's activist practice is only one element of the historical intersection of gender and translation studies. In her essay "Gender and Translation", Godayol (2013) traces that intersection from the 1980s until the early 2010s. Godayol is concerned with the role of women in translation studies as well as the socio-cultural and metaphorical meaning of women in translation. On the whole, her approach is very much woman-centred, and the essay represents a historical revision of women as translators and their social positionality. Crucial for this topic is her research on translation practices between a gendered translator and respective author. Godayol largely equates women with gender by referring to the Canadian Feminist School, but also remarks on how "there are other ideological groups who claim feminine subjectivity and, in whose translations the indelible mark of sexual difference appears in a variety of ways" (2013: 175). It is important to mention that gender can also be read as sexual difference in general here, which allows for identities/groups and sexualities beyond a binary and/or heteronormative system to also be recognised as active participants in translation theory. Godayol goes on to say:

> It is not a question of judging the value systems of this movement, but of questioning them to discover how the consumption and reproduction of texts are related to other practices of social and cultural power, and also in order to remind ourselves that any subject belongs to a system that is behind his/her subjectivity for writing, translating or theorizing on translation. (ibid.)

This statement acknowledges that there can be different intersections and structures of oppression. While the text retraces mainly the 'woman-translator' and how she has theoretically, metaphorically, and practically found her place in translation studies and translation as a practice, it has to be stressed that there are other subjectivities and groups who write from a feminist standpoint without necessarily identifying as women.

Godayol identifies numerous paratextual tools a translator has to call attention to in order to transform the text through translation. For example, among these tools are notes, prologues, introductions, or interviews. Her paper "Feminist Translation" (2018) offers more insight concerning the actual practices of feminist translators. Godayol references a group of Canadian feminist translators in the 1980s whom she locates as the founders of feminist translation practice and who applied feminist interventionist strategies for translation. The most interesting practice to this thesis is 'supplementing' which "does not only refer to compensating the differences between languages but also to a voluntary action of textual manipulation by the translators, who use tactics such as desexualising and feminising to demonstrate their politi-

cal intervention in the text" (Godayol 2018: 470). While 'desexualising' refers to the practice of neutralising masculine gendered forms, 'feminising' intends to leave out or considerably change explicitly sexist terms or metaphors. These strategies do not include a proper desexualising in terms of trying to appeal to gender neutrality on a grammatical level. Circumventing the generic masculinum in English as well as German has its tradition and place within the feminist movement and continues to be a political debate and place of struggle. For the means of translating the queer trans novel *Stone Butch Blues*, however, it will not suffice, and other solutions have to be found to do justice to the source text in translation.

Godayol also stresses that there is a considerable gap between theory and practice in feminist translation. The discourse around the intersection of gender and translation theory is growing, as shown by the increasing number of publications and academic discussions. At the same time, she mentions the difficulties of being able to implement theory practically. This is mostly due to the lack of collaboration with publishers and the "commercial and economic imperatives" (ibid.: 476) that hinder translators from publishing or gaining funding for feminist interventionist translation projects. David Gramling's paper "Queer/LGBT Approaches" (2018) reflects this dilemma of mainstream commercial imperatives of cultural commodities. Gramling starts off his paper with a metaphorical approach as to why queer people tend to be translators by the nature of their deviation from the heteronormative matrix, and almost professes translation as an ontological condition of queerness: "Indeed, we cannot quite consider LGBT approaches to translation as such without first reckoning with the simple fact that translating is always also a form of enunciation – a *social* way of figuring, conveying and communicating meaning" (Gramling 2018: 496).

By taking a closer look at the German translation of *Stone Butch Blues,* it comes to show that the translation has a number of shortcomings with regards to subculturally specific terms or identity markers. The same shortcomings can be observed on a structural level, concerning grammatical gender, which of course is intrinsically connected to the themes of the novel. Gramling argues that:

> It is tempting to hypothesise generally, […] that original compositions tend to be a great deal queerer than their translations. […] Sometimes the issue is not an individual translator's misrecognition alone, but rather the structural aspects of a lexicon that does not accommodate translation of queer content as reliably as it does in heteronormative figuration. (ibid.: 496–497)

Only having a heteronormative lexicon to work with certainly poses a great challenge to name or enunciate subcultural identities or phenomena from within queer contexts. What my analysis seeks to examine more closely is the grammatical structure and how the very structure of the language itself can forbid or make nearly impos-

sible the enunciation of a queer – and in this case trans – experience as the source language asks or allows the text to. Obviously, English has its restrictions to express gender beyond the binary, too, on which Leslie Feinberg has commented and written as well. Gramling addresses the predicament of simply not having the words to express one's identity at all and how this has usually led to the usage of translated loanwords. The genealogy of the word *Homosexualität* (homosexuality), and how it has travelled between language systems, is just one example for this phenomenon:

> The clinical, Latinate, and rather un-Germanic word *Homosexualität*, […] makes its way […] to the Jewish-American Rita [Mae Weems] in the midst of the [HIV/AIDS] pandemic around here 100 years later, who uses it in the same way Kértbeny had: to fashion through translated meaning a useable mnemonic device of identification in a social order structurally opposed to their existence. Many early gay-rights organisations likewise took up such translated loanwords as their identificatory symbols and rallying cries. (ibid.: 498)

A number of examples can be given in the case of the German translation of *Stone Butch Blues* concerning this idea of the heteronormative lexicon. 'Butch', as the title already reveals, has not been translated throughout the entire novel and, as I would argue, has by way of this translation found its way into German language use. But other specifically queer identity markers, like 'drag queen', were almost exclusively translated with *Transvestit* or *Tunte*. The self-descriptive identity marker 'he-she' which the protagonist uses frequently throughout the entire novel, has been almost exclusively translated with *KV*, a German acronym which stands for *Kesser Vater*[2].

To come back to the difference in grammar categories, it could be argued that the demands of gender-inclusive language and the political struggle and victories of the so-called *Genderdebatte* in Germany are very recent phenomena which could not yet play into the decisions of the translator and editor(s). After all, the German translation of *Stone Butch Blues* lies almost thirty years back. It was published by Krug & Schadenberg who mainly publish lesbian-centred fiction. While translator and editors alike must have had a certain level of sensitivity concerning lesbian subcultural codes and contexts, problems arising in connection with trans issues and identity have fallen short in the translation. Other more obvious problems of culturally spe-

2 A compound of the dated adjective *kess*, meaning 'perky, bold, cheeky', and *Vater* (father). During my research at the Spinnboden Lesbenarchiv & Bibliothek, a queer-feminist lesbian archive in Berlin, I found out that the acronym *KV* was a common denominator for lesbian butch-identities and that it had been used to translate the then in German uncommon term 'butch'. It was commonly used in the German speaking lesbian community from around 1970 to 1990, until it was replaced by the English 'butch'.

cific terms and identity markers, all pertaining to LGBTQIA subculture, must have kept translator and editors alike uncomfortable with certain choices.

Gramling goes on to explain the nature of queer implicature in literary texts. Translating queer implicature, by queering the German translation of *Stone Butch Blues*, is problematic because of the structural grammatical difference at hand. "We translators have before us the choice whether to consider, or not to consider, the intra- and extratextual circumstances of attenuation, censorship, and social consequences that has always attended any such queer utterances" (Gramling 2018: 500). The translator of *Stone Butch Blues* might have fully ignored and at the same time justified the effacement of trans characters in the novel by way of arguing that, concerning the self-referential female pronouns used in the source text, the protagonist's 'biological' gender can safely be assumed female. Since the German language does not allow for gender-neutral forms or declension of nouns, gendering the protagonist as cis-female could appear as the simplest solution. However, a closer reading of the novel asks for a much more nuanced approach. Gramling points out how "[q]ueer translation must thus be in the business of painstakingly translating implicature, rudimentariness, inchoateness, aborted attempts at articulation, and discursive fragmentation to a degree that is often utterly foreign to other spheres of translation" (ibid.). My analysis will show how minor changes can do considerable justice to the narrative of a trans and gender non-conforming protagonist.

Gramling is also careful to mention that sometimes 'queering' a translation goes too far in respect to adhering to identity politics of the moment instead of leaving room for literary discontinuities. Gramling points not only to the already mentioned problem of linguistic gender differences but also, as already mentioned by Godayol, the very practical and material implications of "editorial policies that explicitly or implicitly regulate gender as binary" (ibid.: 501). He goes on to speak to the tendency to market a literary text with respect to a narrative of queer agency, which can help book promotion. Gramling also points to examples which must lead the translator to fully take into consideration, if available, the author's intention or decisions to use certain terms or represent themselves in a certain fashion, in order to not abuse the translation as a project that "skew[s] queer subjects towards certain visions of empowerment, solidarity or rights-based discourse that, however credible in their own right and context, are far afield from the design and intention of the author composing the original" (ibid.: 502).

Before taking Leslie Feinberg as an example of an author who has given ample subtext for a translator to make informed decisions, Gramling's observations on how "trans subjectivity tends to become a discursive occasion not only for the definition of the human, but also for the definition of translation" (ibid.), need to be mentioned. He takes the example of the word *androginos*, which is a Greek loanword in the example of an Aramaic and Hebrew translation. It shows how one word in translation, which explicitly describes a third gender, can be an example of the inevitability of

having to make use of circumlocutions, compounds, or periphrasis. It reminds us how "transgendered subjects have always tended to frustrate that principle of efficiency and decisiveness" (ibid.: 501) of the translation process. For *Stone Butch Blues*, the translated text needs to break with the level of binary grammatical gender and its textual efficiency that normative translation practice usually demands. Despite the challenges concerning the grammatical discrepancy between English and German that surface during translation, efficient, yet not as normative solutions like degendering, or flagging, as I will point out in my analyses, exist to fall back on. Re_translating as activist practice also means to resist normative linguistic categories.

The dedication with which *Stone Butch Blues* has been edited and reclaimed over the years will further show the inherently activist character of Feinberg's creative work. I will take into consideration some of hir non-fiction texts and commentary on the collective struggle to formulate a queered language, as well as display how *Stone Butch Blues* has been subject to two major editing processes.

A Text in Re_Vision

The 20th Anniversary Author Edition of *Stone Butch Blues*, released online in 2014, is not only the second revised version of the novel, which was first published in 1993, it is also a collection of subtexts (i.e. collected prefaces of the different editions and translated editions, afterwords, dedications, and statements on translation- and copyrights). I have access to both the first Firebrand Books 1993 edition of the novel and the 2014 anniversary edition. The main difference I can make out concerns the revision of a racist slur. The final edition has changed one occasion of the N-word to Black (Feinberg 1993: 21; Feinberg 2014: 17). Interestingly, throughout the remaining text of the 1993 edition the spelling of Black, when referring to a person, is already capitalised. The issue of saying Black instead of antiquated slurs is also addressed between Jess and Ed, when they talk about going to a Black bar (Feinberg 2014: 55). In chapter 15, a quote by W.E.B du Bois is abbreviated, to not repeat a variation of the N-word there as well. The translation of course still contains those words, since the 1993 edition, which served as the source text, also does. Apart from those two instances in which the translation uses the N-Word, it translates it with *schwarz* (black) and fails to capitalise *Schwarz* when it is mentioned mostly during dialogue, as the 1993 edition does. Anti-racist language has not been the focus of my analyses, it functions however as an example to place this novel in an activist framework of language use. The novel's language is very accessible to a large audience, but also manages to carry a consciousness and a clear intention to respect and incorporate political struggles and the fight for recognition carried about in and through language use. To capitalise Black, respectively *Schwarz*, is a product of Black and PoC activists and community organisations, to highlight the social construct of racial

identities and attributions. Capitalising those adjectives when referring to a person signals to the reader that the text shows solidarity with and aligns itself with those political struggles (Eggers 2009: 13).

In addition, the anniversary edition, on which Feinberg worked up to the time of hir death in November 2014, is dedicated to CeCe McDonald, a young Black trans woman, "organizer and activist sent to prison for defending herself against a white neo-Nazi attacker" (Pratt 2014). In comparison, the 1993 edition's only subtext is a text of acknowledgments at the beginning of the novel, dedicated to Feinberg's friends, test readers and co-organisers. It also commemorates the death of a now famous trans woman who took part in the Stonewall Riots in 1969:

> In loving memory to you Marsha "Pay It No Mind" Johnson – found floating in the Hudson River on July 4, 1992 – and the other Stonewall combatants who gave birth to the modern lesbian and gay movement, and to the many other transgendered human beings whose lives ended in violence. (Feinberg 1993: iii)

Comparing these acknowledgements shows Feinberg's ongoing involvement with the trans community. It shows hir commitment and solidarity and is part of the novel's text as much as the narrative. The life story of protagonist Jess Goldberg is embedded in the social struggles and commemorations of violence and discrimination that trans people have endured and continue to endure.

Re_Translating an Activist Author

One of Feinberg's first publications, a pamphlet called *Transgender Liberation*, discusses the struggle of choosing words and how this connects to political struggle and community building:

> In recent years, a community has begun to emerge that is sometimes referred to as the gender or transgender community. Within our community is a diverse group of people who define ourselves in many different ways. Transgendered people are demanding the right to choose our own self-definitions. The language used in this pamphlet may quickly become outdated as the gender community coalesces and organizes – a wonderful problem. […] We are trying to find words, however inadequate, that can connect us, that can capture what is similar about the oppression we endure. We have also given careful thought to our use of pronouns, striving for both clarity and sensitivity in a language that only allows for two sexes. (Feinberg 1992: 6)

What Feinberg rightly points out here is the ever-present development of marginalised groups of people to find a common language whilst coming from diverse places. This

can also be observed now within mainstream society concerning the *Genderdebatte* and new ways of speaking, writing, and talking from within the community about the community. It remains difficult to find a common language from within the queer community, and this language-in-the-making is simultaneously put to the test by mainstream society. Alternative language does not originate from a fixed place or identity, but is a struggle, a process of becoming literate in describing who we are. To defend ourselves against linguistic practices that have made us invisible, or only describe us in dissidence and deviation from norms, demands a practice of re_translation. Apart from the grammatical structure, which is at the surface of language but also underlying all our preconceived ideas, grammatical systems and hierarchies are subject to change, too.

In the non-fiction essay collection *Transgender Warriors* (1996) Feinberg traces the existence and history of trans and genderqueer people throughout history and different cultures. Feinberg has identified as butch, lesbian, as a communist, and member of the Workers World Party. On pronoun use Feinberg writes in the preface to *Transgender Warriors*:

> There are no pronouns in the English language as complex as I am, and I do not want to simplify myself in order to neatly fit one or the other. […] Living struggles accelerate changes in language. […] There were no words that we'd go out of our way to use that made us feel good about ourselves. […] I learned that language can't be ordered individually, as if from a Sears catalogue. It is forged collectively, in the fiery heat of struggle. (Feinberg 1996: ix)

This statement is testament to the political place of struggle that language represents for hir. It sets the tone for Feinberg's opinion and general stance on how language needs to change and be fought for. Gramling (2018) has commented on the different motivations to translate queer texts and possibly instrumentalise their work to further a certain agenda or follow a market trend. This statement and Feinberg's work as an active campaigner, author, and leader of the trans liberation movement proves that a re_translation aligns with Feinberg's calling to forge the language that we need and use collectively.

A Comment on Identity Markers

The only identity marker that finds space to be commented on in depth here is 'he-she'. The existing translation has chosen two options to translate this identity marker in the novel: *KV* and *Mannsweib*. My first idea to write this paper grew with my quest to find out what the German acronym *KV* stands for. The word keeps surfacing throughout the entire translation, just as 'he-she' does in the original. While

from my reading experience, I could vaguely tell that *KV* had to stand for an identity concept, I was still puzzled for the most part, unsure what it was supposed to mean. All traces seemed only to return to the German translation of *Stone Butch Blues*. When I finally looked into the source text, I was baffled with the choices the translator had made. This little compound 'he-she', at the same time a slur, identity marker, and self-definition, as innocent-looking, literal, and easy to understand, yet without an equivalent in the German speaking context was exclusively translated with *KV*, which stands for *Kesser Vater*, a term that originated in the 1920s and 1930s. The term *Mannsweib* comes to mind, however, it usually functions as a slur or insult, being a compound of the word 'man' and an outdated and/or derogatory term for 'woman' or 'wife'. I have chosen this term in my translation on a few occasions. However, 'he-she' within the novel, is a fully formed and actualized self-denominator for Jess to describe her identity. In fact, Jess comments on her usage of the term in the last chapter of the novel, holding a speech at a LGBT manifestation in New York City about her lifelong struggle to find and accept herself and assert her identity:

> I looked at the hundreds of faces staring at me. "I'm a butch, a he-she. I don't know if the people who hate our guts call us that anymore. But that single epithet shaped my teenage years." Everyone got very quiet as I spoke, and I knew they were listening; I knew they had heard me. (Feinberg 2014: 324)

I wanted to find out why the translator decided to translate 'he-she' with *KV* twenty-nine years ago. But a lack of resources meant I had to stop after many unanswered e-mails. At this point, I assume that this term is not only hardly known to a contemporary audience, but also obscures a simple concept (male and female pronouns in a compound) beyond recognition. I have chosen to translate 'he-she' with *Mannsweib*, whenever it is used as a slur and on one occasion I translate it with *Weder*noch* 'neither…nor' (Queer Lexikon 2023), which is a lesser known term from within the German trans community, which describes more or less the same thing, yet it is intelligible even for a reader unfamiliar with non-binary gender identity. On one occasion, I have translated it with *Butch*, for lack of a better solution. In this process, I realised that it takes tact and genealogical knowledge of certain words and their community internal usage. What remains, however, just with the problems arising on the grammatical level, is the realisation that choices in this context are never fully fixed. It is an imprint of what the current language use allows me to express and what I, as a translator, can find out about trans and non-binary identities.

Analysis

For the scope of this article, I will discuss how I handled the translation of 'butch' in two sections of chapter thirteen as well as showcase two passages from chapter nineteen. Chapter nineteen marks a turning point on the narrative level, exploring Jess' decision-making-process for her social and medical transition. One significant challenge were the pitfalls of translating gender on a grammatical level, from English to German, but also in respect to how it connects to the content level of a gender-queer trans protagonist. Since I advocate for gender-inclusive language use and avoiding, for example, the generic masculinum as well as gendering nouns and adjectives in German whenever possible, any passage would have served for demonstration. However, choosing passages that directly negotiate the protagonist's struggle connected to being trans, highlights the restrictions of language to express and negotiate gender-queer and trans identities.

Chapter nineteen demarcates the moment Jess decides to stop taking hormones. The excerpt shows her inner conflict, and the changes in her life after stopping hormone treatment, building up to the point where she decides to leave Buffalo and move to New York, which introduces the last part of the novel. I will not only present my own re_translation but also, in order to demonstrate my decision-making-process, compare some of my highlighted passages with the existing German translation. I want to largely operate in two categories of interventionist practices, as mentioned above by Godayol, both are a form of supplementing which refers to voluntary actions of manipulating the text. 'Desexualising' refers to the practice of neutralising masculine gender forms, which means to circumvent and re_translate for example a gendered noun and add or change word categories and sentence structure to appeal to a level of gender neutrality. The second category under which I want to group a number of decisions in the re_translating process is 'flagging', which also refers to a desexualising practice, but is made visible with the gender asterisk or the feminine. On a few occasions, I have used the feminine whenever the German translation has used the generic masculinum. Pertaining to all instances in which a bystander not further described, for example a customer/passenger/pedestrian/villager, is part of the scene, I have chosen to alternate between using the feminine and the asterisk. This way, the reading flow is occasionally mildly disrupted to question the reader's gender assumptions.

The term 'butch' is an integral part of the novel. It has even found its way into Duden,[3] albeit still being a work in progress. As is also discussed in the novel; some of the first in-group conflicts of the women's liberation movement were the misgivings many feminist university groups held against the gender presentation of queer

3 Duden (n.d.): "(bei Homosexuellen) ausgeprägt männlich (im Aussehen usw.)" – (for homosexuals) distinctly male (in appearance etc.).

and lesbian working-class people, who had an interest and a stake in being part of the movement. Theresa tells Jess about how the women on campus were angry at butches for presenting masculine, but they are also offended by the femmes, who are too feminine. This conflict stands for a supposed emancipation from oppressive heteronormative gender roles. It fails to acknowledge that the division into masculine and feminine in a lesbian relationship is far from a mere copy or imitation of heterosexual relationships:

> Female masculinity within queer sexual discourse allows for the disruption of even flows between gender and anatomy, sexuality and identity, sexual practice and performativity. It reveals a variety of queer genders, such as stone butchness, that challenge once and for all the stability and accuracy of binary sex-gender systems. (Halberstam 1998: 139)

The existing translation of *Stone Butch Blues* has exclusively used the feminine for 'butch'. This is one aspect which I have changed on every occasion. There are butches who identify as women and would not reject the feminine, however, as Halberstam has argued, 'butch' breaks and recreates negotiations of gender and sexuality in such a way that I want to try and gender the term as inclusively as possible. In some cases, this was easy to maintain by merely omitting the articles, especially when scenes were set in plural. However, on other occasions, by doing away with an article, which automatically genders the word, the substantive grammatically turns into an adjective. I have left 'Butch' capitalised nevertheless, since it does not disrupt the reading flow and still contains the same meaning and message. In the following excerpt, this was an easy task, since nothing seems to go missing by cutting the article.

> "You once told me about a factory you worked where the guys didn't want the butches to come to the union meetings?" I nodded. "Yeah, so?" She smiled. "You told me Grant said to hell with the union. But you knew the union was a good thing. You said what was wrong was keeping out the butches. You tried to organize to get the butches into the union, remember?" (Feinberg 2014: 145)
> "Weißt du noch, die Fabrik, in der du mal gearbeitet hast, wo die Typen nicht wollten, dass Butches an den Gewerkschaftstreffen teilnehmen?" Ich nickte. "Und?" Sie lächelte. "Du hast erzählt, Grant hätte gesagt, scheiß auf die Gewerkschaft. Aber du wusstest doch, dass die Gewerkschaft etwas Gutes war. Du hast gesagt, was nicht damit gestimmt hat, war die Tatsache, dass sie Butches nicht reinlassen, weißt du noch?" (my translation)

Later in chapter thirteen, I have also left out the indefinite article *eine*, which commonly always adds a gendered dimension to the noun, by which *Butch* at first hand reads as an adjective: "Und was passiert dann? Dauert es nur kurz an? Also, was ich

damit meine, kannst du später wieder Butch sein, wenn es wieder sicher ist, sich zu zeigen?" (my translation)

The following passage from chapter nineteen deals with a very clear example of the challenges that surfaces during an activist re_translating process. It was certainly one of the passages that stood out to me when I first read the German translation back-to-back with the original. During my own translation process, at first I was inclined to repeat what had disrupted my own reading. I then discovered that German in this case held an unexpected gender-inclusive alternative. In this scene, Jess talks about herself retrospectively as a child. The source text also genders the child with the pronoun 'she', however, since *das Kind* (the child) has the grammatical neuter gender indicators, I decided to conform to that in my translation. The existing German translation has translated 'child' with *das Mädchen* (the girl), which coincidentally also has neuter gender, yet the translator chose to not only translate 'child' to *Mädchen* but also to keep the feminine. As a reaction to the existing translation, I decided to translate 'child' with *Kind*, which seemed a lot more fitting to my reading and translation process. Jess explains what it feels like to be caught between genders and not having the right words or community to explain and describe herself. To make use of or exploit the possibility of implementing the neuter gender of *das Kind* revealed itself as the least invasive intervention to re_translating not only more gender-inclusively, but also to remain in dialogue with both the source text and the existing translation:

> I stared far back into my past and remembered the child who couldn't be catalogued by Sears. I saw her standing in front of her own mirror, in her father's suit, asking me if I was the person she would grow up to become. Yes, I answered her. And I thought how brave she was to have begun this journey, to have withstood the towering judgments. (Feinberg 2014: 240)
>
> Ich blickte weit in meine Vergangenheit zurück und dachte an das Mädchen, die sich im Versandhauskatalog nicht wiederfand. Ich sah sie vor dem Spiegel stehen, im Anzug ihres Vaters, und mich fragen, ob sie wie ich sein würde, wenn sie erwachsen war. Ja, antwortete ich ihr. Und ich dachte, wie mutig sie war, sich auf diese Reise begeben und all den vernichtenden Urteilen widerstanden zu haben. (Feinberg 1998: 338)
>
> Ich blickte weit in meine Vergangenheit zurück und dachte an das Kind, das sich im Versandhauskatalog nicht wiederfand. Ich sah, wie es vorm Spiegel stand, im Anzug seines Vaters, und mich fragte, ob ich die Person war, zu der es eines Tages werden würde. Ja, antwortete ich. Und ich dachte mir, wie mutig es war, sich auf diese Reise zu begeben, sich gegen die vernichtenden Vorurteile zu stellen. (my translation)

The next scene from chapter nineteen shows Jess reflecting on how taking hormones has shaped her life. Jess explicitly evaluates her life as a trans person and what this

has meant for her. At this point in her life, she is male passing and is content with her outward appearance. Yet, the feminine gender indicators in the German translation of the words 'stranger' and 'expert' signify that the speaker very much identifies as woman in this monologue. For this reason, I have chosen to take away the gendered dimension from all nouns used in this passage in order to make gender-inclusive choices:

> I didn't regret the decision to take hormones. I wouldn't have survived much longer without passing. And the surgery was a gift to myself, a coming home to my body. But I wanted more than to just barely exist, a stranger always trying not to get involved. I wanted to find out who I was, to define myself. Whoever I was, I wanted to deal with it, I wanted to live it again. I wanted to be able to explain my life, how the world looked from behind my eyes. […] I wished there was someone, somewhere I could ask: What should I do? But no such person existed in my world. I was the only expert on living my own life, the only person I could turn to for answers. (Feinberg 2014: 243–244)
>
> Ich habe die Entscheidung, Hormone zu nehmen, nicht bereut. Ohne sie, ohne als Mann durchzugehen, hätte ich nicht viel länger überleben können. Und die Operation war ein Geschenk für mich, eine Heimkehr in meinen Körper. Aber ich wollte mehr, als bloß existieren, wollte mehr, als eine Fremde sein, die es ständig vermeidet, sich auf etwas einzulassen. Ich wollte herausfinden, wer ich war, mich definieren. Wer ich auch war, ich wollte mich damit auseinandersetzen, ich wollte es wieder leben. Ich wollte imstande sein, mein Leben zu begreifen, mir die Welt aus meiner Sicht zu erklären. […] Ich wünschte, es gäbe einen Menschen, den ich hätte fragen können: Was soll ich tun? Aber in meiner Welt gab es niemand. Ich war die einzige Expertin für mein Leben, die einzige, an die ich mich mit meinen Fragen wenden konnte. (Feinberg 1998: 342–343)
>
> Ich hatte die Entscheidung, Hormone zu nehmen, nicht bereut. Ohne Passing hätte ich nicht länger überlebt. Und die Operation war ein Geschenk an mich, eine Heimkehr in meinen Körper. Aber ich wollte mehr als gerade so zu existieren, als eine fremde Person, die stets versuchte, sich nirgends dazwischenzustellen. Ich wollte herausfinden, wer ich eigentlich war, um mich selbst definieren zu können. Wer ich auch war, ich wollte mich damit auseinandersetzen und ich wollte leben. Ich allein wollte bestimmen, wie ich die Welt sah. […] Ich wünschte, dass es irgendwo eine Person gäbe, die ich fragen konnte: Was soll ich jetzt machen? Aber so einen Menschen gab es in meinem Leben nicht. Ich war die einzige Person, die wirklich wusste, wie ich mein Leben zu leben hatte, ich allein kannte die Antworten auf meine Fragen. (my translation)

I wanted to set all three versions next to each other to demonstrate the effect of using gender-neutral language in this passage. The first change concerning the words 'a stranger', which the existing translation translated with *eine Fremde*, holds numerous possible alternatives, for example, the change of word class to an adjective: *mir*

selber fremd sein. An easier alternative is the addition of the non-descript and gender-neutral, yet grammatically feminine auxiliary noun *Person*, as it already is a frequently used alternative to avoid ascribing grammatical gender or calling people man or woman.

The second passage I want to discuss found a larger step away from the original text, in order to circumvent resorting to using the masculine form. I opted for finding a circumlocution equivalent to 'being an expert to' and in this way avoiding having to include a noun which again would need to be gendered. For "I was the only expert on living my own life, the only person I could turn to" (Feinberg 2014: 244), possible solutions could be: *Ich allein wusste, wie ich mein Leben zu führen hatte*, or: *Nur ich konnte wissen, wie ich mein Leben zu führen hatte, [denn] ich war die einzige Person, an die ich mich mit meinen Fragen wenden konnte*. The second part of the sentence, as already demonstrated, finds a fairly easy solution by inserting the auxiliary noun *Person* again. Similar examples can be found throughout the entire novel, yet this passage stresses, by the nature of what is being discussed, how the choices made for grammatical gender function as a gender assigning moment to a character who questions their gender. This passage is very similar to others in the novel, in which gendered language can be re_translated to gender-inclusive language.

Conclusion

By emphasising how Leslie Feinberg's politics, life work, and accomplishments are deeply rooted in an activist community, my choices to re_translate parts of hir novel *Stone Butch Blues* with a language practice rooted in the German queer-feminist movement became transparent. By claiming re_translation as an activist practice, the product of our work can be a part of forging the language that we use and want to see in the world, and re_claiming it to make it encompass and represent trans, queer, and gender-free or non-conforming subjectivities. I have pointed out how the language we aim to speak today is part of a legacy of activists and campaigners, linguists, academics, authors, and translators, trying to change how identities beyond a binary gender system and ideas of gender in general can be perceived and conceptualised through language.

My comments on theory demonstrated the integral position of interventionist feminist language practice as part of translation theory and practice. By taking Godayol up on her remark on identities other than women, making use of said interventionist translation practices, I was able to open that tradition and to connect it to queer and LGBT approaches. Through Gramling's remarks I was able to connect and point to salient parts of my own approach and statement that re_translating as an activist practice can give us the tools to make use of the structural differences of English and German to make queer and trans experiences and subjectivities more

visible and intelligible in translation. The nature of not being inscribed into a heteronormative matrix, and what challenges that poses for the lexical level, but also the knowledge and ability to read into queer implicature have greatly informed my approach. Despite the lexical level not being the focus of my article, I have briefly addressed and mapped out what some of the translation challenges and shortcomings are. By comparing the first and last revised edition of the source text, I have demonstrated its inherently activist quality, which had the aim of changing vocabulary in order to appeal to an anti-racist language use.

The analyses of my experience with re_translating passages from *Stone Butch Blues* made my choices to appeal to gender-neutral or -free options in connection to my reading of the novel apparent. As expected, by, on the one hand, trusting my queer reading to appeal to the visibility of the character's gender identities by changing grammatical choices, and, on the other hand, being in dialogue with the existing translation, I was able to adapt and change the target text accordingly. Through my comparison, many translation choices became part of a toolbox, to also change or adapt future translation processes accordingly. Every act of interpreting a text creates a different approach of how to translate or re_translate it. Every translation is an imprint of the historically embedded language use, which is even more important when the translator is conscious of the political act of translation and the agency they have by translating literature. Of course, the current practice is an imprint of what authors want to see in their works, or at times, what the publisher's style sheet demands. Overall, we see a shift in language use. How that will translate to translated literary works is a question of time and of how we can shift our perspective on for whom we are writing and about whom we are translating.

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