RuPaul's Drag Race en français:
The Influences of Modern LGBTQ Media Translation on Queer Identity and Visibility

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ABSTRACT

RuPaul's Drag Race en francais:

The Influences of Modern LGBTQ Media Translation on Queer Identity and Visibility

Michael Fusco

Since the recent advent of over-the-top media services, such as Netflix and other internet-based streaming platforms, the very way in which media content is consumed and broadcasted has changed drastically. This thesis investigates the specific ways in which modern LGBTQ media translation influences queer identity. Its framework is based on the idea that language plays an important role in the construction of identity. It relies on the concepts of power (Michel Foucault), performance (Judith Butler), agency (Luise von Flotow) and community (Keith Harvey). Through a comparative English-to-French translation case study of seasons eight and nine of the series *RuPaul's Drag Race,* I present eight trends in translation that influence queer identity: the conceptualization of drag; the employment of English lexicon; the transposition of grammatical gender markers; the diminishment of queer source material through mistranslation and omission; the enrichment of queer source material; the alteration of register; the treatment of transgender lexicon; and the transformation of reclaimed vocabulary. I argue that, for gender and sexual minority groups, these translation trends have real and important influences on the evolution of queer identity and the visibility of various LGBTQ communities.

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I would like to first and foremost acknowledge the fierce, strong drag queens throughout history who have rioted against discrimination and who continue to fight for equality, acceptance and social justice around the world. Without these queens, I would not be able to share my true, authentic voice with the world to the same extent as I am able to do so today.

I would also like to thank my wonderful supervisor, Pier-Pascale Boulanger, for supporting me and always pushing me to follow my passions and interests. The guidance and enthusiasm she showed working with the subject *RuPaul's Drag Race* truly inspired me to complete my research in the hopes of encouraging future generations of LGBTQ translation scholars around the world.

Finally, I would like to thank my mother, Maryann, who raised me to become the sensitive, loving and fearless individual I am today. The values, kindness and strength she has instilled in me have allowed me to time and time again fight for justice and equality in the face of discrimination and hatred. Without her love, I would be lost.

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Introduction

"We're all born naked and the rest is drag."
Born Naked, RuPaul Charles

With a focus on LGBTQ[1] media content, this thesis investigates the modern influences of translation on the evolution of queer[2] identity and visibility. Taking as a case study the popular twenty-first century American competitive reality series, *RuPaul's Drag Race* and its translation in several francophone regions of the world, I set out to specifically answer the following two questions: in what exact ways does the translation of LGBTQ media influence the evolution of queer identity, and how will modern media translation trends continue to influence the visibility of LGBTQ communities in years to come?

To answer these questions, I utilize an identity-driven theoretical framework based on research published in the fields of feminist, queer and Translation Studies. I focus on the notion of performance as it relates to the identity of members of LGBTQ communities and is compatible with the idea that translation is a site of activism. I apply this framework to an in-depth case study of English to French translation samples taken from conversations exchanged between drag queen competitors appearing on the series *RuPaul's Drag Race*, as it is available for viewing on Netflix in both Canada and France. Existing research combined with my own comparative study provide concrete examples of the influences of media translation on queerness as a performative identity construct. My thesis aims to highlight the importance of translation practices and the ways in which they influence the visibility of LGBTQ communities.

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[1] The term LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer) is used throughout this thesis to refer inclusively to all gender and sexual minority identities, with full recognition and esteem for the existence of other terms and identities such as LGBTQ+ and LGBTQIA+ (A: asexual, I: intersex).

[2] Queer is a reclaimed umbrella term used by gender and sexual minority communities and individuals who do not identify as heterosexual and/or cisgender (i.e., in alignment with the gender assigned at birth) (Geneq 2010).

Today, the world consumes televised media content quite differently than it did just ten years ago. With the growing popularity of Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+ and other over-the-top (OTT)[3] subscription-based media streaming service providers, the very way in which televised video content is created, translated and circulated has changed dramatically when compared to traditional cable TV providers of the past. These OTT subscription-based services allow for, amongst other things, wider diffusion of media content than traditional television networks in addition to the unprecedented availability for around-the-clock consumption (i.e., binge viewing). With on-demand streaming access, OTT streaming is able to provide uninterrupted access to digital media content, and has replaced traditional cable TV network provider services completely for many viewers.

Given the popularity of OTT media content, more and more smart or web-connected televisions are being added to households around the world. The demand for OTT media content is only expected to grow in future years, as the digital media market research company eMarketer reports: "In 2018 […] 181.5 million people in the US will use connected TVs at least once per month—a number that amounts to just over 55% of the general population. By 2021, the ranks of connected TV users will swell to 194.4 million, or nearly 58% of the population." (Verna, 2017) In addition to the popularity of smart televisions, the increasing usage of mobile devices for media access has also drastically changed how, where and when media content can be consumed. The rise of responsive design, i.e., the design and formatting of internet content for media devices, has allowed for OTT media content to transition seamlessly from the medium to the small screen. In fact, between 2017 and 2022, the mobile internet usage worldwide is expected to increase sevenfold: "According to April 2019 data, the global mobile population

[3] Over-the-top media refers to media content that is accessible directly via the internet, bypassing traditional cable distribution channels.

amounted to 4 billion unique users. As of February 2019, mobile devices accounted for 48 percent of web page views worldwide." (Clement 2019) With around half of all internet activity occurring on mobile devices, mobile-based OTT content is able to follow us just about anywhere and everywhere we go. It is this evolution and circulation of new media technologies, combined with the ongoing shift in media ownership towards OTT providers, that has dramatically influenced the popular landscape of media production and consumption. And for LGBTQ communities around the world, I argue that the nonstop and mobile access to localized queer media content has influenced the trajectory of queer identity. Widely available LGBTQ media content has increased the visibility and helped the representation of LGBTQ identity to the world at large.

But it is not only the landscape of popular media diffusion that has changed since the era of traditional network stations; so too has the way in which media content is translated for foreign audiences. Before the creation of OTT media service providers, it was most often the television networks and media content producers themselves who commissioned and produced translations and localizations. An example of this can be seen in the well-studied case of the Anglo-American cartoon series *The Simpsons* and its commissioned adaption by media company FOX into French for both France (led by Juliette Vigouroux and Alain, (Simpsonspark)) and Quebec (led by Johanne Léveillé and Réal Picard (Mouyal)). This dual-type localization strategy of providing two regional adaptations of a series into the same foreign language, while generally rare for American television series, seems to be more common practice in translations made by and for traditional television networks rather than localization made by OTT streaming services. Netflix's French translation of *RuPaul's Drag Race,* by contrast, is produced with an "international" Franco-European market in mind; no other region-specific localization (i.e.,

Quebec French version) is currently available for the series in French. Dual localization is but one example of how translation strategies differ between national television networks and international OTT media service providers, as the ownership of the translation services has shifted hands from networks to OTT media providers.

Indeed, OTT service providers are today translating not only their own media content, but also the media content of traditional network providers and other media companies, much like large agencies. Key differences exist in terms of who is doing the translations, how they are being performed and what influences they have on their intended audiences. This shift in translation realities for media content in the era of OTT production, specifically when looking at LGBTQ media content, has an influence on the visibility and evolution of queer identity not only in the United States, but abroad as well.

Overall, the growing popularity of OTT-distributed media content such as LGBTQ content, paired with technological advances in media consumption, means that translations by OTT companies will only continue to become more influential and widespread in the future. And while increasing numbers of academic works published in the field of Translation Studies have begun to tackle the link between translation and queer identity, such as *Translating Women: From Recent Histories and Re-Translations to 'Queering' Translation, and Metamorphosis* (2012) by Luise von Flotow*, Gay Community, Gay Identity and the Translated Text* (2000) by Keith Harvey and *La manipulation et la censure du discours queer dans la traduction française de deux séries télévisées : Les enjeux de la reception* (2014) by Karim Chagnon, very few are focused on media content specifically, and even fewer touch upon twenty-first century OTT trends and how they affect the translation and circulation of LGBTQ media content.

As the academic field of Translation Studies is beginning to pay more attention to media translation and LGBTQ communities, this thesis is written to contribute to this growing scholarship and is broken up into three supporting chapters, which are briefly presented below.

Overview of Chapter One: Why Choose *RuPaul's Drag Race*?

I first define the scope of my research, centering around what exactly constitutes LGBTQ media content, while also providing the specific details and parameters of my comparative translation case study of *RuPaul's Drag Race*.

Second, the relevance and importance of my research into the influences of LGBTQ media translation on queer identity and visibility are brought into question. The need for increased research and the marginalized status of LGBTQ communities are taken into consideration, in addition to the real-world influences that LGBTQ media can have on society.

The continued rise in visibility of drag as an international queer art and entertainment product has brought enormous attention to LGBTQ communities in recent years, with public events such as drag story time and drag brunches bringing queer culture further into the public eye. As this thesis revolves around the series *RuPaul's Drag Race* and its translation, specific attention is given to the evolution and visibility of drag as a queer art form, focusing notably on the relationship between queer identity and the increased production of drag-based reality competition series, including *RuPaul's Drag Race*, *RuPaul's Drag Race UK, Canada's Drag Race, Dragula*, and *Drag Race Thailand* to name a few. An investigation into the popularity and reception of televised drag media helps to support my claim that popular LGBTQ based media content, and its translation, is able to greatly influence the identity and visibility of LGBTQ communities both inside and outside of the United States.

Overview of Chapter Two: Literature Review

In the third chapter of my thesis, I review key academic and philosophical writings, with specific mention given to the concept of identity and performance as noted in both Michel Foucault's *Histoire de la sexualité : La volonté de savoir,* originally published in 1976, and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,* originally published in 1990. The review of this literature provides the theoretical framework needed to posit that language and identity are intertwined through the key concept of performance, which underpins my investigation of the translation of *RuPaul's Drag Race.* It also allows me to contend that translation, as a sociolinguistic activity, can shape queer identity and contribute to LGBTQ communities.

Besides Foucault and Butler, I look at several works published in the field of Translation Studies that focus on activism and LGBTQ communities, including *Translating Women: From Recent Histories and Re-Translations to 'Queering' Translation, and Metamorphosis* (2012) by Luise von Flotow*, Gay Community, Gay Identity and the Translated Text* (2000) by Keith Harvey and *La manipulation et la censure du discours queer dans la traduction française de deux séries télévisées : Les enjeux de la reception* (2014) by Karim Chagnon. Here concepts such as enrichment, diminishment, censorship, intentionality and agency are discussed as factors that influence LGBTQ translation and queer identity. The review of these works published mainly in the fields of feminist, queer and Translation Studies allows for a better understanding of what exactly queer identity is, how it can be influenced and specifically how translation is able to perform and shape the future of queer identity and LGBTQ visibility.

Overview of Chapter Three: Case Study

In Chapter Four, I compare specific English to French translation samples taken primarily from seasons eight and nine of the series *RuPaul's Drag Race* found on Netflix, taking a look at both textual based translations (i.e., the works of the subtitler) and audio based translations (in the case of *RuPaul's Drag Race,* I looked at the works of the voiceover[4] translator). This comparative analysis provides key and concrete examples of the influences that media translation has on the evolution of queer identity, through the identification of specific translation trends.

I follow my comparative investigation of *RuPaul's Drag Race* with a more in-depth analysis of the translation trends and their meaning for the future of LGBTQ identity and visibility on a global scale. I review big-picture translation trends, for instance the co-existence or blending of feminine and masculine topic markers, as well as more specific topics, such as the use of anglicisms. Other trends including vocabulary choice, queer lexicon, LGBTQ cultural/historical adaptations, and the juxtaposition of English gender- and sexuality-based discourse are examined at length in order to support my claim LGBTQ media translation influences queer identity. Overall, I identify eight specific translation trends or practices used in the series' translation that can be seen as having an influence on queer identity and the visibility of LGBTQ communities.

In addition to trends in the commercially available translation, I examine francophone reception of the series' translation, which is evidenced by the existence of fan-based translations of the series. Insight into the reception of the series' translation by francophone audiences helps to contextualize the current influence of LGBTQ media translation. It also provides a glimpse into the potential of LGBTQ media translation and the growing visibility of LGBTQ

[4] A voiceover is a technique in audiovisual translation where the original source and the translated tracks of dialogue are presented simultaneously to the target viewer, with the volume of the former lowered, though still audible, to avoid confusion (Baños 2018, 4).

communities. Examining reception allows me to better contextualize the influence of Netflix's translation and to understand exactly why fan-based translations continue to be produced despite the existence of Netflix's "official" translation of the series. The ways in which fan-based translations are created and shared, compared to those of OTT providers, confirm the activism of a community through translation intent on influencing the evolution of LGBTQ discourse in francophone regions of the world.

Finally, I conclude my thesis by touching upon my core arguments in support of thoughtful, intentional translation practices as they relate to the construction of LGBTQ discourse and the power of translation in shaping queer identity. This thesis ends with a hopeful look towards the future for the increased production, translation, circulation and academic study of LGBTQ media content and its influence on the world. It is thus in part through LGBTQ media content, and its translation, that queer communities all over the world are able to continue developing a shared and unified sense of identity in the face of growing adversity and challenge.

Chapter One: Why Choose *RuPaul's Drag Race*?

1.1 Scope

As a cultural product, the show *RuPaul's Drag Race* is a valuable object of inquiry not only because it intersects linguistic and identity dynamics, but also because it is readily available in translated form on the internet. For the purposes of my research, LGBTQ media is defined as media content, including television shows, podcasts, news broadcasts, movies and other forms of mass communication, created notably, yet not exclusively, by and for the sexual and gender minority groups that make up various LGBTQ communities. I focus on the televised LGBTQ series *RuPaul's Drag Race* to advance a list of eight specific translation trends that influence queer identity and LGBTQ visibility. I have inferred these from my comparative English to French translation case study of *RuPaul's Drag Race,* and I provide evidence of them by showing samples taken from the series' subtitler and voiceover translator, as available for streaming in both Canada and France on the popular OTT streaming service Netflix.

Upon personal review of the platform, I observed that Netflix offers a variety of translation options for viewing the series in languages other than English[5], and each curated translation list is dependent on the country in which the content is being viewed, as can be seen in the following two tables (Murray 2009; Netflix 2020):

Table 1. Netlix France Offerings of *RuPaul's Drag Race*

Season(s)	Audio voiceover languages	Language subtitles
One, two, three, four, five	English	French, Arabic, German and European Spanish, English
Six	English, French	French, Arabic, German

[5] Of interest, *RuPaul's Drag Race* is not currently (at the time of writing) available for streaming on Netflix in the United States, although seasons 1 to 11 are available in Canada and France.

		and European Spanish, English
Seven	English, French, German	French, Arabic, German and European Spanish, English
Eight, nine, ten	English, French, German, European Spanish, Brazilian Portuguese	French, Arabic, German and European Spanish, English
Eleven	English	French, Portuguese, Arabic, European Spanish, English

Table 2: Netflix Canada Offerings of *RuPaul's Drag Race*

Season(s)	**Audio voiceover languages**	**Language subtitles**
One, two, three, four, five	English	French, Italian, Spanish, German, English
Six	English, French	French, Italian, Spanish, German, English
Seven	English, French, German	French, Italian, Spanish, German, English
Eight, nine, ten	English, French, German, Spanish, Italian	French, Italian, Spanish, German, English
Eleven	English	English, German, Dutch

I have chosen to examine samples taken primarily from seasons eight and nine of *RuPaul's Drag Race* as these two seasons mark the change of hands between the network providers in the United States: seasons one through eight were broadcasted by LOGOtv and season nine (and all subsequent seasons to date) have been broadcasted by VH1[6]. This aspect allowed me to see whether further differences in translation could be noted between network ownership.

[6] Both LOGOtv and VH1 are owned by multinational media conglomerate ViacomCBS Inc.

Given the recent increased francophone access to the series[7], *RuPaul's Drag Race* enables me to critically highlight the important and ever-changing role of media translation in shaping the contemporary evolution of LGBTQ discourse outside of the English-speaking world. Specific elements related to the performative role of language and media on gender identity and sexuality were analyzed alongside key translation trends inferred from the show, including the transposition of grammatical gender markers, frequent use of anglicisms, and transformation of English-based LGBTQ slang.

1.2 Relevance

Why is it important to study the translation of LGBTQ media content and its influence on queer identity and visibility? My work was undertaken in response to the frequent call for more research to be carried out regarding LGBTQ issues and translation, as expressed in various publications written by authors in the fields of translation and Queer Studies, including Karim Chagnon (2014), Keith Harvey (2000) and Luise von Flotow (2012). The status of LGBTQ communities as historically marginalized minority groups has led to a lack of public attention and objective academic research. While things have begun to change for LGBTQ communities in many parts of the world regarding acceptance and visibility, it is still the case that increased research into the influences of translation on LGBTQ communities is needed to better understand how translation practices can be used to help and not harm disenfranchised minority communities.

Much of the research on LGBTQ translation focuses on literature, legal publications, and clinical research; however, with the increasing rate of media consumption, the importance of

[7] The series became available in French in both France and Canada on November 31st, 2017 (Martin 2017; Caron 2017).

understanding the influences of media translation on LGBTQ communities is higher now than it arguably has ever been in the past.

Today, audiences are able to watch foreign media series in their native language with the push of a button, and this globalization has important yet understudied influences on various international audiences and communities. Interlingual media access allows for queer experiences to be broadcasted into homes across the planet, not specific to a singular country or region. The increase of LGBTQ media (or even media content that highlights LGBTQ characters and actors) has many important consequences on the ways in which queerness is perceived. These consequences can be understood best in terms of increased visibility of LGBTQ issues, greater tolerance and acceptance of queer identity and LGBTQ communities as a whole. The diffusion of LGBTQ media around the world contributes crucially to softening the hatred and xenophobia shown towards queer individuals through exposure and empathy.

The positive influence of the increased availability and consumption of LGBTQ media can be seen in the following quote taken from *The Engaged Sociologist,* in which the influence of LGBTQ media exposure on an American demographic is discussed:

> Shows such as *Modern Family*, *Glee*, *Teen Wolf*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *How To Get Away With Murder*, *Six Feet Under*, *The Fosters*, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, *Will and Grace*, and many others have brought gay people into the living rooms of millions of Americans and helped change many people's attitudes about gay men, women, and youth. (White and White 2019, 109)

If the representation of LGBTQ communities reaches millions of American viewers via national media outlets, the international circulation of LGBTQ series via international OTT platforms and multilingual adaptions thus provides more opportunity for increased LGBTQ

visibility. It is fair to assume that LGBTQ media content is a force that can be seen as influencing the popular discourse surrounding queer identity and has real world consequences on how LGBTQ individuals are viewed and treated in many parts of the world.

For many non-native English speakers, Netflix and other large OTT streaming services provide oftentimes the only access, or rather more simplified and greater access, to LGBTQ media content. The library of queer documentaries, movies and television series is constantly growing on many Netflix accounts around the world, and the instant access provided by OTT companies allows for greater consumption of LGBTQ content by individuals who may or may not identify as being LGBTQ themselves. This increase and broadening of access to LGBTQ media content via translation and diffusion gives OTT media providers great power in influencing queer identity, above all in regions where little access to LGBTQ media exists outside of the platform. A study into the realities of LGBTQ media translation inherently deals with a study into the growing availability of LGBTQ media. Hence, the importance of this research can also be understood in tracing the commercial diffusion and translation of LGBTQ media content in regions around the globe.

Finally, I find it important to study the diffusion of LGBTQ media content in relation to queer identity and visibility due to the real-world influences of LGBTQ discourse I have observed in social, commercial and political environments. A clear example of this can be seen in the quotation of *RuPaul's Drag Race* in the Canadian Parliament, when Michelle Rempel, Conservative Member for Calgary Nose Hill, while debating Bill C-66, stated the following: "I am not sure anyone has ever done this in the House [of Commons] before, I am going to quote RuPaul: 'If you can't love yourself, how in the hell you gonna love somebody else?'" (Rempell 2017)

Rempel's 2017 statement came in defense of The Expungement of Historically Unjust Convictions Act, which was eventually enacted on June 21st, 2018, serving to help erase past criminal offence regarding gay sex acts. As her words show, popular LGBTQ media reaches far beyond the television screen and can influence the discourse of politicians from a range of political ideologies.

In sum, the need for increased LGBTQ media translation research, the marginalized status of LGBTQ communities, the growing importance of media in daily life, and the visibility accorded through research and the real world implications of media are all strong indicators as to the importance and relevance of studies dedicated to LGBTQ media, translation and queer identity and visibility.

1.3 Overview of *RuPaul's Drag Race*

With scope and relevance now explained, I would like to better examine the series of focus for this thesis, *RuPaul's Drag Race*, as well as its history and connection to queer identity and LGBTQ communities. Since its debut in 2009, the award-winning American televised reality-competition series *RuPaul's Drag Race* has achieved widespread popularity in the United States as well as abroad, making it today one of the world's most-watched LGBTQ series of all time (Cooper 2017; Andreeva 2017). Currently in production, the show and its twelve seasons of drag queen competitors have quickly become influential components of contemporary LGBTQ culture, influencing not only the international visibility of drag as a queer art, but also the way in which gender identity and sexual orientation are conceptualized, discussed and performed around the world. While the show's popularity has given rise to multiple translations and even country-specific localizations (Blake 2015), most of the world's francophone communities could, until

very recently, only access the series commercially in English, if at all; however, on November 31st, 2017 the American entertainment giant Netflix added several seasons of the show to its catalogs in France and Canada, with the option to watch episodes in several different languages, including French (Martin 2017; Caron 2017).

With more than 156 total episodes (TV Guide 2019) between *RuPaul's Drag Race* and its multiple spin-off series (*RuPaul's Drag Race: All Stars*, *RuPaul's Drag U* and *RuPaul's Celebrity Drag Race,* etc.), the show has strengthened the visibility and importance of drag as an established and popular queer art. The series increased its reach with its notable move in March 2017 from the American LGBTQ broadcasting channel LOGOtv to the more mainstream entertainment channel VH1, a channel which in 2018 was viewed by an average of 640,000 people in the United States alone (Watson 2020).

Beyond the sheer number of viewers and its growing fanbase, the series has produced a large market for drag entertainment offscreen, inducing various official events, drag shows, conventions, music and merchandise opportunities. Common viewings of the series in gay bars, cafés and clubs, often accompanied by a drag queen host, provide community connection for many LGBTQ fans of the series and helps to promote LGBTQ businesses and artists alike. The renowned show is often seen as emblematic of LGBTQ culture and community, a message that the New York-based airline company JetBlue promoted by painting RuPaul's famous quote "Shantay you stay" with a twist, "Shantay Blue Stay," on the fuselage of some its planes, amongst other activities during the LGBTQ pride month of June 2019 (JetBlue 2019)[8].

Onscreen, the series has been cited as an important component of modern LGBTQ culture, with the online media review website Thrillist referring to *RuPaul's Drag Race* as "the

[8] The airline company promoted its plane with a video titled "JetBlue and *RuPaul's Drag Race* bring it to the runway" featuring two famous drag queens: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QM_7CWbpOk0.

closest gay culture gets to a sports league" (Moylan, 2017). While the statement is mostly meant to be taken with humor, it does point out the general cult following and enthusiasm the series has generated amongst LGBTQ viewers (and even non-LGBTQ viewers alike).

The series' popularity today can be seen outside of LGBTQ communities, with fanbases ranging in terms of sexual and gender identity, from queer to straight and everywhere in between. As Thomas Ling writes in his RadioTimes article *Are straight people 'stealing' RuPaul's Drag Race?,* "Although Drag Race began as an underground show on a niche US LGBTQ channel, a mass non-queer audience now tunes in every week. Drag Race has become mainstream" (Ling 2019). And while arguments can be made for and against the appropriation of queer culture stimulating the series' growth in popularity, the importance of the series as a visible cultural phenomenon should not be overlooked when considering its reach.

The series is generally well received by critics online; in 2019, *RuPaul's Drag Race* was listed 93rd on *The Guardian*'s list of the 100 best TV shows of the 21st century (Abbott et al., 2019). The series itself also often gives back financially to LGBTQ causes, including donations to numerous human rights organizations and LGBTQ-specific charities around the world (Caulfield 2016; Allen 2014).

The host of the series, RuPaul Charles, has won numerous awards and recognitions, including the 1990 GLAAD[9] Vito Russo Award for making a significant difference in promoting equality for LGBTQ communities, as well as his consecutive 2016, 2017, 218 and 2019 Emmy awards for Outstanding Host for a Reality or Reality-Competition Program, in addition to his 2017 MTV Movie + TV award for best host (IMDb). Also acclaimed is the show itself, having received, among other recognitions, the 2010 GLADD Media award for Outstanding Reality

[9] GLADD (formerly the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) is an American non-governmental media monitoring organization.

Program and the 2017 MTV Movie + TV award for Best Reality Competition (IMDb), a primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Reality-Competition Program in 2018 and 2019, and the Outstanding Reality Program award at the 21st GLAAD Media Awards (GLADD 2011, Chuba and Allison 2019).

Outside of the United States, popular *RuPaul's Drag Race* events attest to the growing international following of the series, including long running international tours such as *Werq the World*, which currently boasts fifteen planned or completed legs in more than twenty-seven countries as of May 2017 (Montero, 2020). The series has also influenced the creation of international localizations, including *Drag Race Thailand, Drag Race UK, Canada's Drag Race* as well as other drag reality television shows such as *The Boulet Brothers' Dragula*.

While the sheer exposure to LGBTQ content that *RuPaul's Drag Race* has promoted around the world can be seen as impressive and powerful, it is not the case that the series and host have only received praise for their influence on advancing a queer/drag narrative. Both RuPaul Charles and the series' online fanbase presence have been criticized by LGBTQ activists, journalists and other fans alike for the racist portrayal and bias of drag shown on the main stage, in addition to transphobic attitudes towards non-cisgender male drag performers and even questionable environmental practices (Menchavez et al. 2020). Many have written on the less than positive side of the series, including Philip Henry in their 2018 article *RuPaul Needs to Take Responsibility for the Racism on Drag Race,* where the series' racial bias is discussed in reference to series eight contestant, The Vixen, who walked out of the series during the filming of a reunion episode, after discussions of the shows relationship with race ultimately led to argument. Henry writes:

> But she [The Vixen] brought up something that's long plagued *Drag Race*: the racism prevalent amongst the show's fans, and how race affects everything from the way

> queens are portrayed in each episode's final cut to who gets the most love from the fandom. As Season 8 winner Bob The Drag Queen pointed out in a recent viral tweet, many of the show's most popular queens are white and thin, which sparked its own melee of debate and discussion. (Henry 2018)

The series is often described by members of LGBTQ communities as portraying a specific version of drag to the mass public, while also holding a monopoly on drag entertainment through mass production and influential marketing campaigns. While the series is able to accomplish much for its LGBTQ fanbase, it is not the case the series is without its moral shortcomings. Moreover, scholars have argued that liberation through narcissism, such as it is featured in *RuPaul's Drag U,* "rearticulates classic tropes of patriarchal domination" (LeMaster 2015, 167), and that the competitive aspect of *RuPaul's Drag Race* "demands identifying institutional structures that constrain performativity" inherent to drag (Brennan 2017, 29).

As it is part of mainstream media, the series cannot be simply judged in terms of positive and negative influences; it must also be viewed as an institutionalized capitalist product with a centralized goal: the generation of revenue. This makes for a more nuanced perspective. Indeed, the series does provide excellent exposure of LGBTQ culture and drag to mainstream audiences; however, it also places queer identity and drag in a metaphorical box in order to ensure current and future ratings and profits. Nonetheless, this profitable enterprise has generated a sustainable production of LGBTQ content as well as multilingual translation around the world.

Overall, the series serves as an important cultural phenomenon that greatly influences the evolution and visibility of queer identity. While it is important to note that the series has been criticized for valuing production over racial and transgender equality, its influence on LGBTQ and mainstream culture cannot be ignored. The series continues to produce season after season of popularly consumed media content.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

After consideration of the series and its general importance in terms of LGBTQ visibility and queer identity, I would now like to turn to the review of the literature relating to the topics of identity and translation.

The academicization of queerness has given rise to new platforms and audiences for the writings of authors on the subjects of queer identity, translation and the many ways in which these two topics intersect. Eminent works focusing on human sexuality and queer identity, including Michel Foucault's *L'Histoire de la sexualité* and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble,* help to provide important insight into the historical discourse surrounding sexuality, identity and gender expression in much of the Western world. They also offer a critical look at the relationship between queer identity and institutional power as it relates to the modern era. In this chapter, I focus on both of these works, in addition to those by authors in the field of Translation Studies centering around gender and sexual identity. My goal is to provide concrete evidence for the ways in which queer identity is able to be influenced and performed by institutional forces, including media production and translation.

2.1 Michel Foucault

To begin this review, I would like to investigate Foucault's tracing of the emergence of homosexuality in the nineteenth century as a distinct identity category*:*

> The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. […] We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized. […] Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior

> androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite has been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. (Foucault 1978, 43)

Here, Foucault ties the public identity-emergence of homosexuality closely to the medical, clinical and social separation of homosexuality from taboo and perverse concepts such as sodomy[10]. While homosexual acts and experiences, including acts of sodomy, have been recorded long before the nineteenth century (Greenberg 1997), Foucault argues that it is with the emergence of public legitimization at the hands of crystalized social structures, such as modern medicine and psychology, that homosexuality as an identity category was brought forth into the public consciousness and, in a sense, born.

Sexual identity in the nineteenth century began to see the institutionally guided shift away from act-based definition towards more human-based definition systems, with the inclusion of topics such as the character and soul of a person into the overarching narrative at the time. As sexuality became more likened to something of a personality trait, something personal and intrinsic rather than a defined set of acts carried out by individuals, the emergence of sexual identity came forward to the public consciousness in a different way than before.

In his work, Foucault describes several sexually based identity categories that emerged in the nineteenth century with the assistance of the increased clinicalization surrounding human sexuality. As other notions entered the popular vocabulary of the time, such as zoophiles, auto-monosexualists, mixoscophiles, gynecomasts and presbyophiles, etc. (Foucault 1978, 43), the very definition of sexuality itself began to change, and with this change came the emergence of diverse sexual identity categories.

[10] Sodomy used in this thesis refers to all sexual acts not performed with the goal of human procreation in mind. While sodomy today commonly designates anal intercourse, its larger historical and religious contexts also keenly influenced the development of sexual identity in much of the West (Foucault 1978, 37).

This emergence and clinical recording of sexual diversity in humans, which challenges the very existence of heteronormativity[11] at the time, were ultimately made possible through the influence of powerful institutions from the medical, psychological and clinically academic fields. These institutions, while often fraught with a dark history of LGBTQ mistreatment and discrimination, have indeed helped to steer the trajectory and advance the narrative of sexual identity for more than a hundred years.

Since the nineteenth century, several prominent institutions in the fields of psychology and medicine have publicly begun to formally depathologize queerness, homosexuality and transgenderism, classifying them openly as acceptable forms of identity, without the need for clinical intervention. The ever-changing face of institutions, and the power they exercise on queer identity are very much taken into consideration when speaking about the identity of sexual minority identity, such as homosexuality. The depathologization of queerness via medical institutions has ultimately had tremendous influences on the trajectory of queer identity, allowing LGBTQ communities to take control of their health and mental wellbeing like never before.

Brief examples of this ongoing depathologization can be seen in the American Psychiatric Association (APA)'s 1973 removal of homosexuality as a diagnosis from the *DSM-III* (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, version three) (Dresher 2015, 525). Before this, homosexuality was classified as a "sociopathic personality disturbance" in the 1952 version of the *DSM-I* and as a "sexual deviation" in the 1968 version of the *DSM-II* (Dresher 2015, 525). Furthermore, it is not until 2018 that the World Health Organization (WHO) depathologized

[11] Heteronormativity describes the belief system in which heterosexuality, relying greatly on the assumed existence of a gender binary, is and should be the normal or default sexual orientation of human beings.

"gender identity disorder"[12] to "gender incongruence" (my emphasis), which it defines as the "marked and persistent incongruence between a person's experienced gender and assigned sex" in its *International Classification of Diseases*, 11th edition (WHO, 2018). Overall, these clinical definitions provide for increased protection and security for the minority communities they target; however, they also highlight the hold these institutions continue to have on the way in which sexual and gender-based identity is conceptualized and discussed by the many.

Foucault focus on the emergence of homosexuality and various other sexual identity categories in the nineteenth century, fueled in part by the influence of popular medical institutions[13] at the time, helps to demonstrate the importance of social structures and institutions in the development of identity, specifically sexual identity. While there are numerous factors that must be accounted for when quantifying the origins of institutional power, Foucault's identifies of two specific mechanisms that allow institutions the ability to use power to influence sexuality: discourse and biopower.

The ways in which discourse is able to be used to control queer identity can be seen in the use of medical language to identify and define gender and sexuality. Via the creation and maintenance of a linguistically realized discourse, clinical institutions are able to have a lasting influence on the lives of LGBTQ individuals. The increased popularity of sexuality-based clinicalization in the nineteenth century meant that the language used in medical journals helped to form the concept of what homosexuality is, and isn't, and what it means to identify as homosexual, medically speaking at the time that is. The influence of clinical discourse does not

[12] In the World Health Organization's *International Classification of Diseases* (ICD) manual, 10th edition, the first "disorder" on the list is transsexualism, defined as follows: "A desire to live and be accepted as a member of the opposite sex, usually accompanied by a sense of discomfort with, or inappropriateness of, one's anatomic sex, and a wish to have surgery and hormonal treatment to make one's body as congruent as possible with one's preferred sex." (WHO, 2019).

[13] Foucault and other authors, such as Butler, use the term *institution* in different ways, referencing physical and symbolic entities. For the purposes of this thesis, I focus more so on the symbolic entity that is referred to by the term.

solely exist in a vacuum and readily permeates public opinion, policy and speech. The use of clinical terminology pushed, and today arguably still pushes, queer identity into the role of being a medical subject, a phenomenon that scholars investigated when AIDS afflicted gay communities (e.g., Altman 1986). Combined with other institutional powers, the language used to study and talk about queer identity has allowed for an evolution of public discourse on the topic human sexuality and more precisely, queer identity.

While the existence of prolonged institutional control on the narrative surrounding queer identity is clear, it is important to further contextualize exactly how these institutions, as social structures, are able to influence sexual identity in the first place. For Foucault, it is necessary to think of institutions as devices of power (Foucault 1978, 106-107).

A central topic of Foucault's theories on human sexuality is that sex is the production of multifaceted power relationships. By extension, he postulates that sexuality can be understood in terms of sex, thus also in terms of power relationships, which Foucault argues are the crystallization of social, political and, importantly, economic institutions. He explains two power mechanisms: the "deployment of alliance" (Foucault 1978, 106), which refers to systems of rules such as kinship, marriage and familial possessions to tie sexuality and family to the circulation of wealth and reproduction; the "deployment of sexuality" (Foucault 1978, 106), which ties sexuality to the economy. Foucault defines the latter as follows:

> it is concerned with the sensations of the body, the quality of pleasure, and the nature of impressions, however tenuous or imperceptible these may be [...], and it is linked to the economy through numerous and subtle relays, the main one of which, however, is the body–the body that produces and consumes. (1978, 106)

In line with the deployment of sexuality, biopower is key to understand the importance of the human body in Foucault's theories surrounding sexual identity. Foucault delves further into

the developed connection between capitalism, sexuality and bodies, stating that it is not one specific social institution that is responsible for controlling sexual identity and associated bodies, but a set of diverse institutional forces. Moreover, if human bodies are the very objects that institutional power is enforced upon, as Foucault argues, it is the efforts exerted by human bodies that allow for institutional power to be maintained. The inclusion of bodies as part of the power mechanism allows Foucault to argue that power is not simply a repressive force:

> This biopower was without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism; the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production. (Foucault 1978, 140)

Biopower is exerted whenever we discipline our bodies to meet criteria that promote a positive outcome. For example, going for runs to stay fit, because a fit body may be more appealing and is scientifically proven to be more productive, is a form of biopower. The notion of bodies as machines that participate willingly in capitalist production is useful to think critically about the object of my investigation, *RuPaul's Drag Race.* Competing in a reality show and subjecting one's body to the standards of a jury in order to produce marketable content is a form of institutional power. However, it is difficult to say to what extent these norms actually regulate queer identity.

As regards othering of sexual bodies falling outside heteronormative norms and the violent history of queer identity continuing to this day can thus be partially explained in terms of biopower. With Foucault, human sexual identity can be said to be controlled to meet the needs of societal function and production. While discourse and biopower are two forces that construct and regulate identity, it is important to note that queer identity was also not created or maintained in a vacuum. As the term biopower is also related to *biohistory* and *biopolitics*, I feel it necessary to connect these terms to their influence on sexual and queer identity. As Foucault explains, "[i]f

one can apply the term biohistory to the pressures through which the movements of life and the processes of history interfere with one another, one would have to speak of biopower to designate what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculation and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life." (1978, 143) For many LGBTQ communities, the intersection of life and history have been at times quite turbulent, and historical scars can be seen both metaphorically and physically on the bodies of queer individuals. The historical narrative surrounding LGBTQ communities, as told by human beings and have been influenced by religious, governmental and scientific institutions.

And as for biopolitics, the same principles can be applied. The political subjugation of queerness, and the fight for civil rights, visibility and protection for LGBTQ communities have also greatly influenced queer identity. The political history and evolution of LGBTQ communities around the world is thus crucial when discussing queer identity.

In terms of sexual identity and the discourse surrounding it, institutional power remains significant today, and not only in clinical and medical settings. I believe that many of Foucault's theories on sexuality and power and sexual identity can be applied to both queer identity and media translation.

Overall, Foucault's theories on human sexual and institutional power serve as the basis I use in this paper to define queer identity and to contextualize the forces that are able to create, maintain and guide it. Is media an institution? With great certainty, I answer that, yes, media today constitutes a powerful and influential institutional force. The function of media being largely based on informing and entertaining the public grants it enormous power to influence a variety of social, political and economic spheres. Today, politicians inform the world of important decisions via Twitter, and online news media as well as television shows continue to

inform and educate the public on social issues, including those related to LGBTQ communities. Art Silverblatt, in their article *Media as a Social Institution* further supports the designation of media as an institution stating that "[… they] have emerged as a social institution, assuming many of the functions formerly served by traditional social institutions such as the church, school, government, and family." (2004, 35)

Since the time of Foucault's writing of *L'Histoire de la sexualité,* many critiques and reviews of his work have been published by academic scholars, notably in the field of feminist philosophy. An understanding of popular feminist reviews of Foucault's theories will help to further contextualize his work in terms of gender and queer identity. As such, the next section is dedicated to queer feminist author Judith Butler and her critiques of Foucault, in addition to her own theories as they surround performance and queer identity.

2.2 Judith Butler

Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, published originally by Routledge in 1990 and as a Classic Edition in 2006, serves as a foundational text of queer theory and provides important insight that will help to further contextualize Foucault's theories on sexuality and identity with regard to LGBTQ communities. Butler's performative notions of gender and sex are greatly influenced by French poststructuralist writings, including those of Foucault, and strongly rooted in the academic realms of gender studies and modern feminist theory. They provide excellent critiques of previous works and theories in regards to questions of identity, gender and sexuality. I have chosen to take an in-depth look at three specific concepts mentioned in *Gender Trouble*, namely compulsory heterosexuality, discourse internalization and performativity/performance, to better examine not only queer identity itself,

but also the factors that influence its journey in the modern world. This review of Butler's popular work is done with the goal of demonstrating how such factors are able to shape queer identity and ultimately, the lives of those who make up LGBTQ communities.

Throughout *Gender Trouble,* Butler contrasts her own theories on gender and sexual identity against Foucault's, in addition to those posed by feminist authors such as Monique Wittig, to present a more holistic study into queer identity and the very things that are able to influence it. Much like Foucault, Butler ties the key historical emergence of sexual identity discourse to the nineteenth century, with a large emphasis on both gender and sex, to taboo and heteronormativity, as she writes the following: "We have already considered the incest taboo and the prior taboo against homosexuality as generative moments of gender identity, the prohibitions that produce identity along the culturally intelligible grids of an idealized and compulsory heterosexuality." (Butler 2006, 184). The term *compulsory heterosexuality*, which she references throughout her work*,* was initially popularized in Adrienne Rich's 1980 essay *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* and refers to the systematic assumption, expectation and enforcement of heterosexuality by a society that is, at its core, patriarchal.

Extremely important in understanding queer identity, compulsory heterosexuality can also be thought of as the structuring of society by and for a heterosexual population; and in this sense, it is linked quite closely to biopower. Butler asks herself how the binary identity concepts "men" and "women" are constructed to fit "a heterosexual matrix for conceptualizing gender and desire," which she considers to be a "configuration of power" (Butler 2006, xxx). As Butler points out, compulsory heterosexuality is idealized and conceptual; it is an intangible social construction used to maintain and control the discourse surrounding human sexuality and gender identity. Butler proposes that it constitutes an institution in and of itself, along with

phallogocentrism (Butler 2006, xxxi). This designation of compulsory heterosexuality as an institution allows Butler to expand on the clinical, medical and judicial viewpoints provided by Foucault and other poststructuralist authors, while also advancing a similar connection between institutions, power and queer identity.

For Butler, Foucault's writings capture the essence of sexual and gender identity as socially based constructions, imposed via a series of cultural prohibitions and enforced by institutional power. Under the framework of compulsory heterosexuality, Butler advances the notion that the socially created prohibitions originally designed to regulate human sexual activity have helped, in part, to create the very identities they wished to exterminate. This is to say that compulsory heterosexuality at its core has played an important, yet often turbulent, role in the creation and maintenance of queer identity as a social construct. Ultimately, in referencing compulsory heterosexuality when speaking about sexual identity, Butler advances, much in the same vein as Foucault, the power and influence of social structures and institutions and how they can be used to create and maintain sexual identity.

While Butler agrees with Foucault, to an extent, on the historical emergence of sexual identity and the intrinsic power of institutions, she disagrees with Foucault's notion of identity, as she remarks in the following terms: "Foucault understands his own project to be an inquiry into how the category of 'sex' and sexual difference are constructed within discourse as necessary features of bodily identity." (Butler 2006, 130) According to Butler, Foucault's instance on describing sexuality and gender identity in terms of sex, a composite of power relationships and influence, is often too closely tied to the physical body in a very removed and clinical sense (i.e., the medical examination and definition of the body).

It is this clinical connection between human sexuality, gender identity and the human body, or "necessary features of bodily identity," (Butler 2006, 130) that is rejected by Butler in *Gender Trouble.* She takes it upon herself to investigate the ways in which the human body orders the discussion of gender and sexual identity by asking the following two questions:

> Is 'the body' or 'the sexed body' the firm foundation on which gender and systems of compulsory sexuality operate? Or is 'the body' itself shaped by political forces with strategic interests in keeping that body bounded and constituted by the markers of sex? (Butler 2006, 175)

For Butler, the answer leans more towards the latter; the body is not the basis of sex, gender, and sexuality as they represent identity constructions. Instead, the body can be viewed more simply as a canvas upon which these constructions are painted or performed. And for queer bodies, it is not the bodies or their actions themselves which render their identity as queer, but rather it is the title of queerness itself that is placed upon these bodies through societal and institutional power.

Beyond this, Butler finds that the stabilization of identity, or the coherence of the subject, is dictated by external discourse that human beings internalize and not by an interior essence of the body that reveals itself to the world. She asks not how, but *why* identity is understood as interiority in the first place: "From what strategic position in public discourse and for what reasons has the trope of interiority and the disjunctive binary of inner/outer taken hold? […] How does a body figure on its surface the very invisibility of its hidden depth?" (Butler 2006, 183)

Butler does not contend that the concepts of inner and outer, in reference to identity and discourse, are natural ones, but rather they are also socially constructed and sustained by the use of a trope, a metaphor used by someone or something for the achievement of an ultimate goal. But let us step away from Butler's own discussion of discourse for a minute in order to ponder

the forces that uphold heteronormative hegemonic power through compulsory heterosexuality and the trope of identity as an internal essence naturally expressed onto bodies. We could easily propose political and economic forces; it is easier to govern predictable bodies that execute a number of tasks, namely reproduction to populate the workforce and pay taxes.

While political and economic factors are considered by Butler, she also highlights the importance of language in shaping identity that best describes the connection between identity and why it is often thought to be internalized through discourse. For feminist theorist Monique Wittig, whose work Butler examines, language holds power over identity: "[l]anguage has a dual possibility: it can be used to assert a true and inclusive universality of persons, or it can institute a hierarchy in which only some persons are eligible to speak and others, by virtue of their exclusion from the universal point of view, cannot 'speak' without simultaneously deauthorizing that speech." (Butler 2006, 164). The duality of language, to both unify and divide people and identity categories, helps to better underline the role of language in use, or discourse, for the creation and maintenance of identity. Butler's discussion is important because it allows me to argue that language in use, and by extension language in translation, are both key influential factors that carry with them the power to greatly influence queer identity and LGBTQ communities. As Butler expands on the concept of language and its limits, she writes "for this 'I' that you read is in part a consequence of the grammar that governs the ability of persons in language. I am not outside the language that structures me, but neither am I determined by the language that makes this 'I' possible." (Butler 2006, xxxvi). Here the interaction between autonomy, language and institutional power comes into play when discussing identity. While Butler does remind us of the limits of language, she goes on to express that it is also a tool that is used by subjects, bodies and mouths to perform and create social reality (Butler 2006, 156). In fact, Butler points out the

creative power of language: “The terms *queens*, *butches*, *femmes*, *girls*, even the parodic reappropriation of *dyke*, *queer*, and *fag* redeploy and destabilize the categories of sex and the originally derogatory categories for homosexual identity. […p]arodic categories serve the purposes of denaturalizing sex itself.” (Butler 2006, 168).

In addition to compulsory heterosexuality and discourse internalization, Butler also advances the key notions of performance and performativity, stating that identity is not an intrinsic factor that determines a set of secondary actions for an individual (i.e., language, speech, gestures etc.), but instead it is these secondary actions that influence, or perform identity itself onto the human body. In other words, it can be said that identity categories, such as gender identity or sexual identity, are performative insofar as they are played out, as Butler puts it:

> If gender attributes, however, are not expressive but performative, then these attributes effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal. The distinction between expression and performativeness is crucial […] That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender’s performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality (Butler 2006, 192-193)

Shifting away from the notion of true or genuine identity, she argues here that identity is performative. Actions, speech and gestures and the societal perception and attribution of these determine one’s identity, importantly combined with the aforementioned power exerted by institutions. But what exactly defines performance? A performance of identity can take many forms and is best defined by Butler as a theatrical act involving both an actor and an audience. Butler also offers a linguistic explanation of performance, in that the languages used to talk about identity itself is a performance of said identity (2006, xxvii).

In further connecting the notion of performance to queer identity, Butler makes specific mention in *Gender Trouble* to the queer art of drag when she writes that “the performance of

drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed. But we are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity and gender performance." (Butler 2006, 187) Here drag is seen as the literal and physical performance of gender, helping also to demonstrate other performative gendered actions such as speech, demeanor and appearance. The conceptualization of drag is most often associated with gay men dressing up as or impersonating women and the female form. However, for Butler drag is not simply the parody of one's own gender identity, as she dismisses altogether the notion of one's original or 'true' gender (i.e., the identity of the drag performer out of drag); instead, drag is for Butler a strong parody of the entire notion of original gender itself: "Indeed, the parody [of gender] is *of* the very notion of an original." (Butler 2006, 188) Drag, in being a physical and staged performance of gender, helps to reveal the absence of an intrinsic and original gender while at the same time highlights the performative nature of gender identity itself.

Even further, Butler describes drag as an act of performance that stands in defiance of compulsory heterosexuality: "As much as drag creates a unified picture of 'woman' (what its critics often oppose), it also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence." (Butler 2006, 187) Drag acts as a magnifying glass that amplifies the set of acts governed by heteronormativity; it turns the gendered binary on its head. Compulsory heterosexuality as an institution is able to exist via performance, among other factors; however, it is also through the performance of drag that compulsory heterosexuality can be, at least in part, destabilized and subverted.

In general, I would like to extend upon Butler's theories to postulate that the autonomy of queer bodies over their own identity, while absolutely important to recognize, cannot be something that is viewed as fully removed from surrounding institutional power. External factors, but most notably discourse, lead human beings to internalize identity constructions, including gender and sexual identity. Furthermore, I also wish to illustrate, in a more concrete manner, the difference between performativity and performance as defined by Butler, using an example that I have come up with: this being a female-identifying individual wearing a dress. The dress is a way for the individual to perform gender and femininity using fashion; however, it is not the case that this individual's female gender identity is what causes the dress wearing. A non-female identifying person has the ability to wear a dress just the same, but female gender identity in this case is performative because it is constructed by the performance of dress wearing. Society attributes femininity to dress wearing, and the act of wearing a dress creates the perceived image of female identity in many parts of the world.

2.3 Translation Scholars

Thus far, Foucault and Butler's theories on identity, sexuality, gender, compulsory heterosexuality, internalization and performance have been examined at length to form a critical view of what identity is and how it can be constructed and influenced. But where exactly does translation fall into this?

To consolidate the link between language, translation and identity, specifically queer identity, I take a look at various writings published by scholars in the field of Translation Studies, namely Luise von Flotow, Keith Harvey and Karim Chagnon. I aim to demonstrate the

influence that translation as a human activity can have on queer identity and the visibility of LGBTQ communities through precise and concrete examples.

2.3.1 Luise von Flotow

To start, Luise von Flotow's *Translating Women: From Recent Histories and Re-Translations to 'Queering' Translation and Metamorphosis* (2012) helps to elaborate upon Butler's determinist stance regarding language and gender identity, in which identity is in part determined or created via external factors including language. Flotow's aim throughout *Translating Women* is to highlight the power of translated language on the socially based constructions of gender and sexuality, while providing a critical link between translation, performativity and queer identity. In her reading of Butler, von Flotow clearly foregrounds the translator's agency:

> Contrary to Butler's pessimistic assessments of discourse as a restricted performative cage, but *with* her socio-activist motivations in mind, translation studies scholars, who choose to view translation as a deliberate and intentional act carried out between discourses, may well find aspects of performance theory useful. Translations allow various performances of a text; they foment differences in these performances — from one language to many others but also from one language to many versions of another […] (Flotow 2012, 134).

Von Flotow's argument that translators have the power to create meaning through language underpins this thesis' position that media translation has the potential to influence queer content and identity. Von Flotow expands upon the concept of agency by also examining the supporting actors that partake in the translation process when she writes that "never is a translation the responsibility of only the translator; it is a collaboration" (Flotow 2012, 129). Here, several players including publishers, copyrighters and proofreaders are mentioned; just like

the translators themselves, they have the power to use language in subversive ways that influence identity. It is not just one person who is able to influence queer identity as a social construction.

To reinforce the agency of translation teams, von Flotow underlines the importance of translation on the discourse surrounding feminist identity and philosophy, stating that "the past forty years of the women's movement, feminist politics, and feminist scholarship have been strongly affected by translation: not only in English-speaking countries but all over the world." (Flotow 2012, 128) For specific and categorical examples of the influence translation is able to wield on gender identity, von Flotow lists the following four (2012, 128): 1) the "massive cross-fertilization and exchange of ideas"; 2) the increased re-interpretation and re-evaluation of existing influential Western texts; 3) the exponential continuation of translation activities, as translated feminist writings often lead to an increased interest thus increased translations of feminist writings; and 4) the fact that translation is often considered as a feminine activity in and of itself, above all in terms of feminist text, where translations are often carried out by women.

These four specific examples of how translation has served a feminist, gender-based agenda can also be applied to the construction of queer identity, as von Flotow herself recognizes the connection between feminist politics and queer identity, writing that "queer theory in the humanities derives from feminisms" (Flotow 2012, 131). Here the common link between feminist movements and queer identity, in re-defining the definitions of gendered experience, is asserted by von Flotow, as it is also expressed in her other works such as *Gender in Audiovisual Translation Studies* (written with Daniel Josephy-Hernández in 2018) . Just like translated feminist texts, the translation of queer text can follow the same four directions that von Flotow advances: the exchange of ideas, re-interpretation, exponential activity and in-group translation (i.e., the translation of queer material by queer translators).

However, von Flotow goes further than simply defining exactly how translation can influence identity. She cites three specific works of translation and the documented influence they have had on the world in terms of identity. These translations are of the 1971 health manual *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, the 1895 version of *The Women's Bible* and Simone de Beauvoir's 1949 *Le Deuxième Sexe*.

Our Bodies, Ourselves, an important piece of non-fiction, has been translated into thirty languages around the world since its publication and researchers, including Kathleen Davis in her 2007 *The Making of* Our Bodies Ourselves*: How Feminism Travels Across Borders*, have pointed out several ways in which translation strategies were actively and intentionally used to further bolster the book's influence around the world. Of these multiple strategies, Davis mentions: 1) different localization strategies for European markets, including the choice of alternative book covers; 2) further strategies for non-European markets, including Japan and Egypt, as well as the skirting of state censors via translation choices which take into account cultural and political realities and limits at the time; 3) strong sentiments of women's health activism via translation choices and 4) a focus on women's experience via translation to provide resourceful feminist critiques of gendered science and medicine (Davis, 2017).

As for *The Woman's Bible*, a re-translation of the Bible, von Flotow points out that the translators and editors chose inclusive language that represents women: "Suddenly, it was possible to read the Hebrew Elohim as being both feminine and masculine, and translate it as 'God the Mother and Father'." (Flotow 2012,130) This English re-translation of the Bible with a feminist and gender inclusive lens was able to re-introduce pieces of knowledge which had been wiped out through millennia of patriarchal translation strategies. More than this, *The Woman's Bible* gave start to the French re-version, *La Bible 2001,* in the process of which it was

discovered that virginity as a religious virtue was fabricated during translation, as von Flotow explains:

> In the ancient Greek texts of the New Testament there is no mention of the term virgin for the mother of Jesus. […] For hundreds of years, however, this pseudo-condition of "virginity" existed and was constantly asserted to terrorize real women and demean and soil their human sexuality. (2012, 130)

Here, the power of the translator to re-read the past and re-write another version of a very old narrative appears very clearly, in addition to the influences of such revision.

Finally, von Flotow touches upon the influences of the English translation of Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe,* published by Knopf, New York in 1953 as *The Second Sex*. This translation led to criticism received from anglophone feminist groups due to several factors (including a 15% reduction of the original work via translation, in addition to general mistranslations and misunderstandings of the source French text, above all in involving philosophical concepts) and can be considered as a having influenced the book's re-translation in 2009 by two translators, Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. As von Flotow points out, the original translation was intentionally "dumbed-down" (her words) for the mainstream American public by Knopf. As this work is viewed as a fundamental text for feminist movements, its watered down translation and then re-translation each have important, yet different, influences on feminist discourse and the concept of gender as it is known and understood around the world, even outside academic and feminist circles.

Besides providing concrete examples of translated and re-translated works and their influence on identity around the world, von Flotow also acknowledges the notion of *transformance* with "the experimental work of several well-known feminist, gender-interested scholars and translators, Susan Knutson, Barbara Godard, Kathy Mezei and others […] who first

presented translation as “transformance” (translation + performance), especially in the case where various translators work with, understand and perform the same text differently.” (Flotow 2012, 134). When viewing translation as von Flotow describes, as a performance of a source text, it is the agency and intentionality of the translation team that is crucial with regard to creating a different influence on the world, one that may differ from the performance offered by the source or translated material to begin with.

And while so far von Flotow has defined the ways in which translation can influence identity, and has provided specific translation-based examples of this influence throughout history, she herself contends that queer re-translation acts have not yet caught up to their feminist sisters (Flotow 2012,123). Von Flotow calls for the increased queer (re-)translation of material and is hopeful that such a movement in translation is not only possible, but on its way to fruition, fueled by the increased movement towards queer visibility and civil rights in many parts of the world. Ultimately, von Flotow’s work helps to demonstrate how agency and intentionality can empower translation as a performative act.

2.3.2 Keith Harvey

Queer activist and former translation scholar Keith Harvey, who like von Flotow has written on the topic of queer identity and translation, also highlights the importance of and hope for increased cooperative efforts between queer and Translation Studies in his essay “Gay Community, Gay Identity and the Translated Text” (Harvey 2000, 137). Harvey supports the notion that queer theory and translation theory can benefit and support each other in their respective philosophical endeavors. I use the theories contained in Harvey’s work to investigate the notion of community as it relates to identity, and to further exemplify how the translation of

queer material influences not only queer identity, but the visibility of LGBTQ communities as well.

In his essay, Harvey expands upon the general investigation into identity by linking it to the similar, yet distinct notion of community:

> The terms 'identity' and 'community' are not by chance twin sites of contention and description for gay people, including activists and researchers in contemporary lesbian and gay studies. Rather, they are terms which can best be understood in relation to each other. (Harvey 2000, 139)

While identity has been discussed at length so far in this thesis, Harvey's definition of community allows for the connection to be made between translation and the consequences it can have on the lives of queer individuals and communities around the world.

Leaning greatly on the ideas expressed in Carol Warren's 1974 *Identity and Community in the Gay World,* Harvey identifies a dual nature of community as it relates to identity. Firstly, community denotes a geographical and/or temporal or virtual space, in which interactions and relationships are able to proliferate. Secondly, the notion of community employs the conceptualization of an idealized space, which implies that community can also exist outside of a definite physical (or virtual) location. As such, community can be thought of as both a physical and idealized concept for LGBTQ individuals, whose experience and sense of queerness and belonging can be shared, even in the face of oppression, seclusion and aggression. Simply put, *identity* asks the question "who am I?", whereas *community* asks, "where do I belong?"

As for queer identity, Harvey echoes Butler's notion of a performative conception of identity, which "allows — through the central reinforcing mechanism of repetition — for the subversion and multiplication of its own effects of identity" (Harvey 2000, 143). However, Harvey's essay discusses the over-academicization of queer identity and the risks of it hindering the needed attention on the lives of individuals that make up LGBTQ communities. Harvey

himself provides accounts from queer individuals in his essay, such as film theorist Andy Medhurst, to expand upon the disconnect between academically philosophized identity and the real-world implications of what it means to exist as queer in the world. To illustrate his point, Harvey quotes Medhurst's autobiography (1991, 208):

> I have read my Foucault, I am aware of the conceptual shortcomings of a timeless, essentialist homosexual identity, I might even want to take the step of putting quotations [sic] marks around the word 'gay' — but the man who queerbashed me some years ago did not put quotation marks around his fists. (in Harvey 2000, 144).

Here the direct implications of violence and the constant threat and experience of violent acts against LGBTQ communities provide their own influences on queer identity. This reality adds layers to what it means to identify as queer in today's world.

To further link the concepts of identity and community to the "real world," and to provide links between the academic and non-academic conceptualization of identity, Harvey provides evidence and accounts of British gay men, who link their own queer identity and community to the historical hardships faced in the pursuit of acceptance and visibility. He writes: "It would appear that many non-academic gay men in Britain today concur with Medhurst, considering the label 'gay' — both as it relates to 'identity' and 'community' — as an important, valid and workable outcome of years of struggle for visibility and equality." (Harvey 200,144) Here Harvey also touches upon the power that language has in identifying and maintaining a singular identity/community narrative, in which the word gay grants some in LGBTQ communities the power to self-identify with a history of struggle and a bright future of activism.

For Harvey, ideas can only live through people: "'Identity/community' are real and valid as concepts as long as those that choose to work and think with them project them as such." (Harvey 2000, 144) As regards translators, "those that choose to work and think with them"

(2000, 144) can greatly influence the creation of queer cultural content, such as literature and media products.

However, in his essay the exact distinguishing factors that allow identity and community to co-exist individually are often difficult to grasp, for instance when Harvey writes "'I am gay' as a statement of identity means, quite literally, 'I belong to the gay community'." (Harvey 2000, 146) While I personally do feel that this statement can serve as an over-generalization on Harvey's part, as I can conceptualize an individual whose gay identity does not inherently make them a part of an LGBTQ community, I do concede that, for the most part, Harvey's statement rings true and helps to highlight the close interrelation between identity and community.

Using Harvey's and Warren's definition of community as both a physical and a conceptual reality, I would like to claim that community, much like language, serves as a performative act in which identity is both represented and maintained. This is to say that the role of community is to help re-enforce identity and influence the future trajectory of identity. Queer spaces, such as gay bars and cafés, and even queer literature (which is to say literature with a queer subject matter, written often for and by a queer population), represent some of the physical ways in which queerness as an identity concept is performed by LGBTQ communities. Harvey himself expresses that "'[g]ay writing' is, perhaps above all else, a literary genre that explores the parameters of gay experience in order to validate an identity position and create an interactional space for the formulation and reception of gay voices." (Harvey 2000, 146) The very principles that apply to queer literature as a vehicle of performance also apply to LGBTQ media content.

While Harvey argues that translation can influence queer identity and LGBTQ communities, I would like to focus on two specific examples of translation cited in his "Gay

Community, Gay Identity and the Translated Text" to further highlight this influence. The first translation case that Harvey investigates in his essay is of Juan Goytisolo's autobiographical memoir *En los Reinos de Taifa* (1986), written originally in Spanish and translated into English as *Realms of Strife* by Peter Bush in 1990. As Harvey shows in Bush's English translation, the use of third person pronouns (they, them, themselves) provide a level of distance between the author, who is gay himself, and *homosexuals* as a conceptual identity category described in the text. This pronoun distancing effect is notably less present in the Spanish source text, as Harvey explains:

> The target text clause 'they [homosexuals] take on an extra layer of exaggerated virility' *contains* a pronoun that is absent from the source text ('asumen al contrario un suplemento de virilidad exacerbada', p. 298) […T]he target text underlines the presence of the dichotomy by the proliferation of a distinct class of lexical item. (2000, 152)

And as the grammatical inflection of the Spanish verb *asumen* allows for understanding of the third person plural in the source sentence, the added distance through the use of the English personal pronoun *they* creates a unique dichotomy of me/them. This "me/them" dichotomy thus causes the translation to carry with it a distinct influence on the conceptualization of queer identity for English readers, as Harvey argues: "In other words, the surface of the passage demonstrates a particularly high density of pronominal forms that accentuates the 'me-them' dichotomy for the target text reader." (Harvey 2000, 152)

While specific grammatical realities across languages can be shown to enrich a translation's influence on notions of identity and community, vocabulary as well as socio-linguistic specificities can also come into play. The second translation example that I would like to highlight in Harvey's investigation involves sections from the English-language play *Angels in America, A Gay Fantasia on National Themes; Part One: Millennium Approaches* (1992)

written by Tony Kushner and translated into French by Gérard Wacjmann and Jacqueline Lichtenstein in 1994.

The play, which Harvey describes as centering around "a group of *gay* men at a crucial time in American *gay* politics and cultural advance" (2000, 154), constitutes an important piece of queer theater and is marked heavily by gay cultural reference, vocabulary and camp[14] style. The French translation of such gay references, while quite successful in the eyes of Harvey, does create a different surface passage than the English source. Each passage, between the source and target material, carries with it a unique influence on the reader by virtue of vocabulary choices owed.

To illustrate this, I am including a specific English to French translation example taken from the play, as cited in Harvey's work; it involves a conversation between two homosexual characters Belize and Louis.

> **BELIZE**: [...] Look at that heavy sky out there...
> **LOUIS**: Purple.
> **BELIZE**: *Purple*? Boy, what kind of homosexual are you, anyway? That's not purple, Mary, that colour up there is (*Very grand*.) *mauve*.
> (Tony Kushner 1992, p.76)

Here, the two words, *mauve* and *Mary* provide key indicators of homosexual sub-text, allowing the English-speaking reader to connect to the underlying queer themes of the text through specific vocabulary use. With the use of the word *mauve*, Belize's witty self-parody of both men as gay hinges on the audience's knowledge of a specific stereotype relating to gay men and interior design, in which the delicate understanding between subtle color shades is a telltale sign of homosexuality. In addition to knowing that mauve signifies homosexuality due to this

[14] Camp refers to a specific aesthetic style, sensibility, social practice and function in which things are viewed as appealing due of their bad taste and ironic value. Similar to, yet distinct from kitsch, camp often refers to exaggerated, effeminate and theatrical behavior. Camp style is commonplace in many LGBTQ cultural products and communities.

stereotype, Belize's employment of the word *Mary* as a vocative nickname in reference to Louis re-enforces the implication of his homosexual identity due to the popular use of the term by American gay men. To call someone *Mary* signifying homosexual can be seen throughout English queer productions in literature and media, and is frequently used in the television series *RuPaul's Drag Race* as well. It is not the case that *Mary* is a randomly chosen female name here, but a specific vocabulary choice used by the author to imply the notion of both men's homosexual identity to the reader.

Besides the two subtle homosexual sub-text references, Belize asks the direct question "Boy what kind of homosexual are you, anyway?", which presupposes both Louis's gay identity and membership to an LGBTQ community, while also humorously validating this identity and membership. The combination of these three gay text markers are quite important for signaling the queer identity of the two interlocutors. The reading thus allows for a general understanding of the deeper sub-textual reading of homosexuality, without it needing to be fully explicit.

The French translation of this passage is as follows:

> **BELIZE**: [...] Regarde comme le ciel est lourd là-haut…
> **LOUIS**: Pourpre.
> **BELIZE**: *Pourpre*? Mais, enfin, quel genre d'homosexuel es-tu? Ça ce n'est pas pourpre, Josiane, cette couleur là-haut (*Très grandiose)* c'est du *mauve*.
> (Tony Kushner (1992), translated by Gérard Wacjmann with the collaboration of Jacqueline Lichtenstein (1994, p. 65)

In general, I agree with Harvey that this translation of the English source is quite successful in retaining both the explicit and sub-textual homosexual themes for the reader, as much as can be done in the textual situation. However, the French vocabulary choices paired with subtle socio-cultural differences between the United States and France, above all in terms of the countries' respective LGBTQ communities, allows the French reading to have a subtly

different influence on the reader and includes a diminished queer reading due to both vocabulary restraints and the above-mentioned cultural differences.

The translation of the vocative identifier *Mary* as *Josiane* in French allows the solicitation of a humorous and positive reaction, as Josiane invokes an imagery of an older woman. Much like the English *Mary,* it is not a surname chosen at random; however, although it contributes to the inversion of gender, it does not invoke the same homosexual sub-context as its English partner, and, in this sense, the homosexual reading of the French text is diminished. Perhaps the word *ma tante* would have been more efficient as a reclaimed word referencing homosexuality (*tante* being historically derogatory) that also refers to a person from another generation who is old fashioned.

In sum, the aspects that I retain the most from Harvey's work are the notion of community and the acuity of his investigation into both the Spanish to English and English to French translations. The examples that I chose to relate serve to demonstrate the power that translation has in influencing queer identity via both grammatical and vocabulary enrichment and diminishment, and its ability to create a sense of community.

2.3.3 Karim Chagnon

To contrast the enriching and diminishing influences that translation can have on queer identity, as identified by Harvey, and to further contextualize the influence of LGBTQ media translation specifically, I have chosen to investigate the concepts advanced in Karim Chagnon 2014 Master's thesis *La manipulation et la censure du discours queer dans la traduction française de deux séries télévisées : Les enjeux de la réception.* As mentioned in the title of this work, Chagnon focuses on the powerful notion of censorship as it relates to queer discourse and

identity via the translation of LGBTQ content. An understanding of the translation censorship factors presented by Chagnon, combined with the other previously mentioned translation influences on identity as advanced by von Flotow and Harvey, allow for a more rounded examination of how exactly media translation is able to influence queer identity and the visibility of LGBTQ communities. Investigation into these factors also provides me with increased support when reviewing the translation examples taken from *RuPaul's Drag Race* as a case study in the next chapter of my thesis.

Chagnon seeks to answer the following question: "la traduction vers le français des séries télévisées transforme-t-elle le discours social porté par les identités queers?" (Chagnon 2014, 2) Throughout the work, the answer that Chagnon provides to this question is an overwhelming affirmation. Queer identity, and the discourse surrounding it, is influenced by the English to French translation of televised media series. A large factor that determines this transformation lies within the censorship of queer culture and identity at the hands of translation.

To support this claim, Chagnon offers an overview of the English to French translations of two popular and well known English language queer television series, *Queer as Folk* and *The L Word,* and highlights the systematic way in which queer identity elements are often removed, changed and censored via translation of the series, creating an altogether different influence on queer identity and the discourse surrounding it in French when compared to English. Chagnon provides a list of five general trends observed: "1) L'évacuation d'un lexique spécifique et des mots de réappropriation; 2) L'évitement et la censure de la sexualité; 3) La caricature vocale; 4) Le relèvement du registre de langue; and 5) L'imposition du mode binaire féminin/masculin." (Chagnon 2014, 79) The omission of references to queer identity and censorship of sexuality as

well as the overall increase of language register serve as points of departure in my analysis of the translation of *RuPaul's Drag Race*.

First, and very much in line with the vocabulary examples provided by Harvey, Chagnon points out that the queer English lexicon used in televised series, including reclaimed words frequently used by members of LGBTQ communities (including the word *queer* itself), is often dropped or used without regards to socio-cultural context and equivalence when being translated into French. Aside from the differences and limitations of French queer vocabulary, such as a queer English term possibly having no direct equivalent in French, Chagnon points to queer English reclaimed words such as *queer* and *fairy* having a history of past derogatory use. These words play an important role, as we have seen with Butler that parodic reappropriation of traditionally derogatory words serves to "redeploy and destabilize the categories of sex" (Butler 2006, 168). However, they are often translated into French by the use of words in which little to no reclamation has taken place; this results in an added sense of vulgarity, hostility and deprecation that is not present in the English source. A clear example of this trend is given in Chagnon's thesis, where the gay male character Brian in *Queer as Folk* uses the word *queers* to refer to homosexual men. The example, and its French translation is as follows:

Table 3: Chagnon Translation Example #1

Brian: Do you think they have any **queers** in Portland? (*QAF* 1:05)	Vous croyez qu'il y a des **pédales** à Portland?

(Chagnon 2014, 60)

Here, the reclaimed word *queers,* used quite neutrally in the English source, is sharply contrasted by the French word *pédales,* the etymology of which is *pederast* whereby homosexuality became synonymous with historical acts of pedophilia. The word choice may have been determined by the translator's decision to create an alliteration or by differences

between linguistic realities in Quebec and France; however, in both regions the word lacks the reclaimed ownership and usage inherent to the word *queer* in English and thus is closer to the derogatory word *faggot.* This mistranslation vastly changes the character's intention, which was to refer to his community in a neutral manner. The lack of corresponding and reclaimed queer lexicon between English and French is the result of a different socio-cultural evolution and history in the United States, France and Quebec. As Chagnon points out, the use of a Franco-French-centric lexicon may constitute one of the reasons why the French translation of *Queer as Folk* was not diffused in Quebec.

Further to this point, queer-specific lexicon, even when not reclaimed, is often omitted from French translations and replaced with non-LGBTQ vocabulary. This can be seen in the following example, spoken by the gay male character Emmett in *Queer as Folk*:

Table 4. Chagnon Translation Example #2

Now, for my final segment, I'm going to show you how a little **fairy dust** can transform even the most hopeless of heteros. (*QAF* 5:03)	Pour ma 2e et dernière intervention, je vais vous montrer **comment transformer en quelque chose de présentable** le plus désespérant et déprimant des hétéros.

(Chagnon 2014, 73)

The use of the term *fairy dust* provides clear reference to LGBTQ culture and queer identity, stemming from the word *fairy* as it is used to denote male homosexuality. However, in the French version, the noun phrase *fairy dust* is removed altogether, and with it the general queer undertones of the utterance are slightly lost to the ears of a French-speaking audience.

The reasons for the exclusion of queer lexicon and reclaimed vocabulary may stem from the fact that translating queer lexicon is difficult, especially when there is no direct French equivalent due to historic and socio-cultural difference. Consequently, avoiding queer lexicon altogether may be easier for the translator. This strategy of valuing simplicity has a strong

influence on the way in which queer identity is performed in the target version. These excerpts are perfect counterexamples of translation agency and intentionality.

Chagnon also identifies the avoidance and censorship of sexuality as a translation strategy. Often, the sexual undertones of jokes told in English LGBTQ series are removed, as in the following example cited from Chagnon's thesis, in which the gay male character Ben gives a toast to his friend and fellow gay male character, Brian:

Table 5. Chagnon Translation Example #3

Ben: In his younger days, Brian dreamed of being a lawyer. He said: "I **want to get innocent men off**. I'll go to any length to **get to the bottom of this**."	Dans ses jeunes années, Brian rêvait d'être un brillant avocat. Il disait : « Je veux **défendre tous les garçons innocents** de cette planète. Eh bien, tout le monde sait qu'il est allé au bout de ses rêves et qu'il a **joint l'utile à l'agréable**.

(Chagnon 2014, 69)

Here, *getting men off* (with one semantic meaning of "to cause orgasm") and the term bottom[15] are sexual references that pepper the speech with queer innuendos and add humor. In the French version, these innuendos are either completely omitted, or expressed in a much less subversive manner. Of interest here is also the translation of *men* as *garçons* in French, highlighting the underlying themes of pederasty found within the French translation, which notably are absent in the English source. The removal and censorship of overt sexuality and sexual undertones strip away much of the queer sub-textual content tied to the lives and speech of LGBTQ characters in the series.

Lastly, the general register of language used in the written script often differs between source and target versions of LGBTQ series. As Chagnon points out, the register is often and

[15] In LGBTQ terms, above all in gay male culture, the term bottom usually denotes the partner in a sexual act who receives the penetration or sexual act itself. Top generally refers to the partner performing the penetration or sexual act. In contrast, someone who is versatile engages in either or both roles.

notably raised in the French translation. An example of this is in one of the sentences spoken by the lesbian character Lisa in the series *The L Word:*

Table 6. Chagnon Translation Example #4

The four "F's": She finds them, feels them, fucks them, and forgets them. (*TLW* 1:03)	Les quatre « F » : les flirts, les filles, les foufounes et la fuite.

(Chagnon 2014, 69)

The vulgar register of the English, with the employment of the word *fuck*, is here tamed in the French translation. This raise in register is a direct translation choice and can again be tied to the perception of audience reception. Chagnon provides a possible alternative translation of this example, which keeps the general English register upon translation: "Les quatre 'C': la conquête, les caresses, le cul et la cassure" (Chagnon 2014, 69). This alternative version demonstrates the possibility of similar register employment in the target language through the active choice by translators and media producers to be bold.

In general, I would like contextualize the link between censorship and translation by providing support for the fact that translators, television networks and OTT providers do not set out to create a target version of a series that is as close as possible to the original, but rather one that is close to their imagined audience. This goal directly influences translation strategies. What television network and OTT providers judge as an effective translation is one that will garner the most visibility and capitalist return of the series in question via advertisement revenue and ratings. In this sense, it is fair to argue that both translators and network producers aim for a translation that will speak to the Franco-French audience, which is bigger than the Quebec-French one, even if this means the omission or altering of queer lexicon. However, while fair to argue in terms of numbers, the influence of capitalist translation strategies has important

implications for the reception of the series by LGBTQ audiences (France based or not).

2.4 Conclusion

From defining the origins of academic study of queer identity with Foucault and Butler, to expanding on how identity is constructed and how translation plays a role in the performance and influence of queer identity, I have established the framework within which I will analyze the French translation of *RuPaul's Drag Race* in the next chapter. This case study will lead me to cite further examples of enrichment, diminishment, performance, intentionality/agency and censorship through translation. It will also allow me to exemplify how international and queer-conscious translation strategies can be carried out if translation is to play an important and positive role in the development of queer identity amongst communities around the world.

Chapter Three: Case Study

I would now like to provide specific translation examples taken from the series *RuPaul's Drag Race* in order to craft a response to the central question underpinning my thesis, namely: in what ways has LGBTQ media translation influenced queer identity and how will modern media translation continue to influence the visibility of LGBTQ communities in the years to come? To answer this question, I first advance the following eight specific translation trends or practices observed in the English to French translation *RuPaul's Drag Race*.

For the methodology I used to organize these eight specific translation trends, I began by first watching episodes of the series in English and French (both subtitles and voiceover) and recorded specific translation instances as they appeared to reference queer identity. At first, the translation examples I recorded were slightly subjective: if a translation example seemed interesting or particularly relevant to the notion of queer identity, I recorded it to build up a corpus of examples. After several episodes of recording examples, I began to notice the emergence of several groups of related translation trends. While I ended up recording many translation examples that did not make into this thesis, I was able to take my corpus and organize examples into eight specific categories based largely on my own observations in addition to the previous research and works from translation scholars and authors previously discussed in this thesis (such as Foucault, Butler, von Flotow, Harvey and Chagnon). After much review and grouping, I ended up arriving at the following eight LGBTQ media translation trends as they influence queer identity: 1) the conceptualization of drag; 2) the employment of English lexicon; 3) the transposition of grammatical gender markers; 4) the diminishment of queer source material through mistranslation and omission; 5) the enrichment of queer source material; 6) the alteration of register; 7) the treatment of transgender lexicon, and finally 8) the transformation of

reclaimed vocabulary.

Several of these translation observations have previously been identified or touched upon by the various authors and translation scholars mentioned in this thesis, including notably ones mentioned by Chagnon, von Flotow and Harvey. Further research taken from the field of Audiovisual Translation Studies, including works by Daniel Josephy-Hernández, Jan Pedersen and Anne-Lise Feral help to contextualize my findings specifically in terms of audiovisual translation.

In their essay titled *Gender in Audiovisual Translation Studies,* authors Luise von Flotow and Daniel Josephy-Hernández summarize the general observed approaches taken in regard to the study of gender[16] and audiovisual translation. To start, both authors identity three main approaches to how questions of gender in audiovisual translation are studied, these being: 1) review of feminist materials in Anglo-American to Romance language audiovisual translations; 2) comparison of subtitled and dubbed[17] versions of Anglo-American source texts, and 3) review of gay and queer source text materials and their treatment in translation (von Flotow and Josephy-Hernández 2018, 300).

While I have pulled a bit from each of these three approaches, I have focused my research primarily on the second and third categories specifically, with an investigation of s queer Anglo-American text and its audiovisual translations (including a comparison of subtitles and voiceovers). Specific to dubbing, von Flotow and Josephy-Hernández mention Anne-Lise Feral's comparative study of English to French translations of the American series *Sex and the City* in her 2011 *Gender in audiovisual translation: Naturalizing feminine voices in the French Sex and the City,* to conclude that distributors of translated media content often make

[16] In their essay, Josephy-Hernández and von Flotow use the term gender to refer to both biological sexual differences and sexual orientation, highlighting the link between gender and sexuality (von Flotow 2018, 298)

assumptions as to the intended audience's beliefs and values when it comes to gender; these assumptions can create differences between subtitled and dubbed versions of a translated audiovisual products (Feral 2011, 392). More than this, Feral's research highlights the influence of these assumptions on the outcome of various that the based on the intended audience.

As for the third approach to audiovisual translation studies, centering on the linguistic representation of gender and sexual orientation, authors Lewis (2010) and Ranzato (2012) are mentioned regarding their speculation on the possibility that translators of audiovisual content may not recognize specific queer references or moments of sexual ambiguity during translation; thus, the censorship caused by a lack of queer recognition during production may be unintentional. This point is import when considering the translators employed by Netflix for the series *RuPaul's Drag Race,* not all translation choices are informed and fully intentional.

To conclude the methodological contextualization of my research in terms of Audiovisual Translation Studies, I would like to mention Josephy-Herández and von Flotow's own statement about audiovisual translation not existing in a vacuum, and being able to be influenced by factors such as: 1) the attitudes of translators in assumed roles as moral gate-keepers; 2) the translators experiences and exposure to 'gender' as a construction, and 3) the agendas of specific broadcasting networks. These influences are found to be pertinent to the examples that I review from the series *RuPaul's Drag Race*.

3.1 General Observations

Before diving into the case study of the eight trends and the translation examples that support their identification, I would first like to touch briefly on general observations I have gathered from watching and reading the series in both English to French. For the purposes of this thesis, I compared the original English audio of the series to both the works of the French

voiceover translator and French subtitler as available on Netflix. As mentioned previously, I focused mainly on seasons eight and nine of the series, as both are offered in voiceover/subtitled format in Canada and France and both seasons provide excellent translation examples. The offerings in terms of voiceovers and subtitles offered in French are limited, as only one version is available regardless of the series being accessed in Canada or in France. No Quebec French localization is offered by Netflix for the series.

Overall, I think that the translations offered by Netflix are successful in rendering the series accessible to a French-speaking population and I would like to applaud the efforts of the translators, vocal actors and production teams who made the translations possible. However, I do find that the translation of the series often strips vital queer content, jokes and vocabulary from the series. As I will touch on later, the translation efforts, while successful to an extent, could stand to be improved upon through thoughtful and inventive translation choices made to better benefit francophone LGBTQ communities in terms of visibility and identity.

As for the general translation style observed as being used by the French voiceover translator, it is of note that Netflix offers a documentary style voiceover for several seasons of the series, yet not all of them, where the original English audio is heard in addition to an overlay of spoken French. Different from dubbing, a voiceover describes a specific kind of audio-visual translation technique, as explained by Rocío Baños and Jorge Diaz-Cintas in their 2018 "Language and Translation in Film: Dubbing and Subtitling" (leaning on Franco et al. "Voice-over Translation: An Overview," 2010) as:

> Unlike dubbing, in voiceover there is no replacement of audio tracks, but an overlapping: the original and the translated tracks of dialogue are presented simultaneously to the target viewer, with the volume of the former lowered, though still audible, to avoid confusion. In this AVT [audiovisual translation] mode, which is often associated with non-fictional programmes such as documentaries but also used to translate fictional material in certain East European countries, the translated dialogue track usually starts

> and finishes a few seconds after and before the original dialogue (Franco et al. 2010: 43). (Baños 2018, 4)

This documentary style voiceover contrasts with a pure dubbing technique, in which the English audio would be completely removed and replaced with French voicing. The use of a documentary style voiceover allows the translated series to exude a unique "reality tv show" feel and allows for the source English tone and vocabulary to bleed through at times. As I will discuss in the section dedicated to the use of English lexicon, the inclusion of the source English audio has the effect of further tying the queer subject matter to the English language.

In terms of voices used, generally what is considered as a male French voice is used by the voiceover production team to portray the cisgender male English judges and guest stars on the series; additionally, a perceived male voice is used by the voiceover team to portray the English-speaking drag queen contestants, even for drag queens who identify as transwomen or genderqueer. In contrast, a generally perceived French female voice is used by the voiceover team to portray cisgender female judges and guest stars (most notably for the voice of recurring judge Michelle Visage). The over exaggerated and campy vocal effects used in the source English audio, notably by drag queen contestants and RuPaul, are often flattened or diminished by the voiceover translator. However, as both the English and French can be heard simultaneously, some of the English camp effect is maintained at times.

Another important observed fact about the show's translation lies in the speech of drag queen competitors, both directed at themselves and other drag contestants, and how this speech is translated using feminine grammatical markers in French. Therefore, it is often the case that perceived French male voices are heard using grammatically feminine markers. This creates a very interesting dynamic to the show and adds to the general sense of gender bending in the

series, however in a way that is quite different and unique when compared to the original English audio.

Both the works produced by the subtitler and the voiceover translator are remarkably Franco-French. A Eurocentric international accent is used by the voiceover actors, and Franco-French linguistic markings, such as the use of verlan (ex: *meuf* for *femme*) and other French slang terms, pepper both the works of the voiceover translator and subtitler.

It seems to be the case that subtitler and voiceover translator worked separately on the production of the translations. The voiceover translator did not not appear to use the subtitler's work as a starting point for production and vice versa. As for the French voiceover and subtitles themselves, a few marked trends appear systematically, and varying strategies are used by the subtitler and voiceover translator, respectively. For example, the voiceover translator made the decision to use far more English words, such as *bitch* and *queen,* whereas the subtitler often translated these terms into their French approximations (such as *pétasse/salope* and *reine*). One final particularity of the French subtitler's efforts is the noted choice to translate all song lyrics, even when no current French localization of said lyrics exist in French. This includes all songs to which the drag queen contestants lip sync during each episode's elimination round.

The fact that the subtitler's and voiceover translator's efforts do not match up very closely means that individuals and communities without the ability to access both translations, such as francophone deaf communities, are only able to watch the show using one of the translations provided by Netflix. And while it can be argued that most fans would elect to watch the series using either the voice-over or the subtitle offering, restriction of access to both offerings means only the influence of the subtitles or voice-over is able to be experienced. As

these translations vary greatly, so too does the way in which they perform the notion of queer identity.

As a final observation, I did not find much difference in translation practices and trends between seasons eight and nine of the series. While the network ownership of the series changed between these two seasons, it appears that the same translation methodologies were used by Netflix's production team.

3.2 Translation Trends and Practices

I now turn to the eight translation trends and practices identified in Netflix's translation of *RuPaul's Drag Race* as they influence queer identity.

3.2.1 Conceptualization of Drag

The translation of the English word *drag*, used as a noun, adjective and verb in the series, is itself handled quite interestingly and differently by both the French subtitler and voiceover translator. The history behind the English term *drag* denoting a gendered performance art is often cited as emerging in late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, arising from the act of long skirts and dresses quite literally dragging on a stage floor when entertainers performed (Henley 2012). Today however, the term drag has taken on important cultural significance for LGBTQ communities around the world, and refers to more than just cisgender men using clothing and makeup to impersonate the female gender and form; drag culture carries with it a rich history of performance art and has, with the aid of LGBTQ media, begun to spill over into modern day popular culture. Even removed from LGBTQ culture, drag serves as an important factor shaping gendered realities in many parts of the world.

The importance of the term *drag* to LGBTQ communities and to queer identity itself means that the way in which the term is translated also carries importance for the conceptualization of drag in other languages and cultures. As for the French translation of *RuPaul's Drag Race*, I have found that *drag* is most commonly, yet oddly, translated by the French voiceover translator as the nominalized *drag-queen* (feminine), however, sometimes the noun *drag* is used by itself in the voiceover as both a masculine and feminine noun (see *RuPaul's Drag Race* translation examples thirty-four (Table 40) and thirty-seven (Table 43)). The inconsistency as to the grammatical gender of the word *drag* in French translations of the series is quite telling of the status drag has as a gender-bending discursive practice.

As for the subtitler, there is an apparent preference to translate the verb form of drag as (se) *travestir* and the noun form as *le transformisme*. While I personally perceive a marked falling out of fashion of these terms with younger francophone queer communities today, *se travestir* brings to mind the equally antiquated English word *transvestite*; both terms carry with them the notion of wearing the clothing of the opposite gender; however, neither of them fully capture the complex cultural significance that lies within the culture of drag itself.

Furthermore, the word *transformisme* to render the term *drag* is inadequate because its scientific meaning relates to the biological transmutation of a species. This exemplifies how the use of scientific vocabulary clinicalizes the words used to describe queer culture and identity. In terms of popularity within French-speaking LGBTQ communities, the word is still in use although it seems antiquated. As a rough approximation, a Google search of *cabaret transformiste* returned 120,000 results in comparison to 216,000 for the word *cabaret drag*. The word *transformisme* may be more popular in France, and it was the preferred terminology by

Agence France-Press in a news release upon the passing away of Michou, the famous Parisian drag club owner in January 2020.

Finally, at times both the French subtitler and voiceover translator omit the English word *drag* altogether during translation. To better demonstrate and contextualize the various translation solutions of this term as used in *RuPaul's Drag Race*, the following examples are given:

Table 7. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #1

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 10	RuPaul: You know like I always say, a family that **drags** together, slays together.
French subtitles	Comme j'ai toujours dit, la famille qui **se travestit** ensemble, assure ensemble.
French voiceover	Comme je le dis toujours, les familles qui **font du drag** ensemble, déchirent ensemble.

Table 8. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #2

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 1	Kim Chi: I guess I'm worried about my mom finding out that I'm a **drag queen**.
French subtitles	Je crains que ma mère découvre que **je me travestis**.
French voiceover	Je crois que j'ai un peu peur que ma mère découvre que **je suis drag-queen.**

Here the subtitler employed the verb *se travestir* as a solution to both the English verb *to drag* and the noun *drag queen,* whereas the French voiceover translator used the loan word *drag* in the noun constructions *faire du drag* (n.m) and *être drag-queen* (n.f.).

Table 9. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #3

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 4	Derrick Barry: I want to be a pop star of **drag**.
French subtitles	Je veux être une pop star du **transformisme.**
French voiceover	Je veux devenir une **reine** de la pop.

In this above example, *drag* is also omitted in the French. We can see that *transformisme* was deemed adequate by the subtitler. However, the voiceover translator here provided a clear mistranslation.

Table 10. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #4

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 1	Bob the Drag Queen: And how long have you been **doing drag**?
French subtitles	Et **tu te travestis** depuis quand?
French voiceover	Et **tu es drag-queen** depuis quand?

Table 11. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #5

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 9	Ross Mathews (complimenting Bob the Drag Queen's runway outfit): But I think this is a really good place for **your drag**.
French subtitles	Mais je crois que c'est un bon look pour **ta drag-queen.**
French voiceover	Mais je pense que c'est très bien sur toi.

Table 12. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #6

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 1	RuPaul: **Drag** is not a contact sport.
French subtitles	**Le transformisme**, ce n'est pas un sport de contact.
French voiceover	**Drag-queen** n'est pas un sport de contact.

Of note in the *RuPaul's Drag Race* translation examples four (Table 10), five (Table 11) and six (Table 12) is the fact that *drag* is translated as the nominalized *drag-queen* by the voiceover translator. This slightly awkward translation into French, in my opinion, has the effect of excluding drag kings (perceived cisgender women dressing as male personas) from the conversation, as in English drag can refer to more than just drag queen entertainers. This nominalization of *drag* as *drag-queen* can be seen as having for a consequence the further advancement of the narrative that drag is representative of only cisgender male performers impersonating femininity via costume and makeup.

From my North American point of view, I would suggest that the most adequate translation of *drag*, used as a noun, verb or adjective in English, would be *drag* in French (for, example in the sentence: Comme je le dis toujours, les familles qui **font du drag** ensemble, déchirent ensemble). It should be noted, however that the use of the verb *draguer* in Quebec has for the meaning: to pick or seduce someone; as such use of *draguer* in French to denote the act of drag may cause confusion in some French speaking areas. In my personal experience, queer

French speakers in drag bars in both Quebec and France refer to drag in French using the English loan word *drag.* However, this translation solution carries with it the consequences of furthering the use of English lexicon when speaking about queer culture and identity in French. However, one could also argue that the translator's choice to employ the antiquated words *travesti* and *se travestir* or the biology-rooted word *transformisme* does not help to empower the way LGBTQ communities, through drag as a queer art, are construed for a French-speaking population.

I posit that these translation solutions alienate queer French-speaking fans of the show since they do not render the drag culture in a way that matches with current speech realities or opinions.

3.2.2 Employment of the English Lexicon

As stated above, a striking aspect of the French voiceover translator's work on the series *RuPaul's Drag Race* involves the frequent use of English lexicon during translation. While English terms are also used by the subtitler at times, hearing English terms in French (such as is the case for the voiceover) frequently creates a very unique effect on the performance of queer identity in French and furthers the notion of linkage between queer identity and the English language. English lexicon permeates the French translation of *RuPaul's Drag Race*; there are notable words that are often systematically left untranslated, including *bitch*, *queen*, *sister* and *gay pride*. Furthermore, English is often used in the French translation of invented words pertaining to drag, as can be seen in the following example:

Table 13. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #7

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 1	RuPaul: Con**drag**ulations. You are the winner of this week's challenge.
French subtitles	Féli**drag**ations. Tu es la gagnante du défi de cette semaine.
French voiceover	Féli**queen**ations.

Here I consider the rendering of this difficult play on words to be quite successful and amusing in French and find it quite interesting that the subtitler and voiceover translator arrived at two completely different, yet successful solutions. This example does, however, highlight the use of English lexicon in the translation of a queer neologism.

As for English loan words used by the French voiceover translator, the following examples illustrate the most frequent ones:

Table 14. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #8

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 4	Nasha Lopez: Cynthia just got eliminated. My continental Puerto Rican **sister's** gone. I'm really sad.
French subtitles	Cynthia vient d'être éliminée. Ma **sœur** portoricaine du continent n'est plus là. Je suis super triste.
French voiceover	Cynthia vient de se faire éliminer. Ma **sister** portoricaine n'est plus avec nous. Je suis super triste.

Table 15. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #9

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 1	Acid Betty (referring to herself): The main point of Acid Betty is that she's a **bitch**. That's it.
French subtitles	Le point important d'Acid Betty, c'est que c'est une **salope**. C'est tout.
French voiceover	Le point fort de Betty c'est que c'est une **bitch**, tout simplement.

Table 16. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #10

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 9	RuPaul: This week we challenged our top four **queens** to star in the official music video of my song, "The Realness."
French subtitles	Cette semaine, le défi de nos quatre **reines** était de jouer dans le clip officiel de ma chanson « The Realness ».
French voiceover	Cette semaine, on a demandé à nos 4 meilleures **queens** de participer au clip officiel de ma chanson « The Realness ».

As the *RuPaul's Drag Race* translation examples eight (Table 14), nine (Table 15) and ten (Table 16) show, several English terms are kept untranslated by the French voiceover translator, yet translated, or approximated in the case of *salope,* by the subtitler. These English terms identify the queer relationships or queer self-identification between drag queen contestants through sisterhood, rivalry and pageant.

The notion that French queer discourse in the series relies on English lexicon can also be seen in references to queer cultural events, such as gay pride, as shown in the following example:

Table 17. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #11

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 1	Bob the Drag Queen: I started drag on Gay Pride.
French subtitles	J'ai commencé à me travestir pour **la Gay Pride**
French voiceover	Oui, j'ai commencé pour une **Gay Pride**.

It is of note that the English term *pride* is also frequently translated into French as *fierté*, however only at the hands of the subtitler. Historically in francophone regions of the world, the event Gay Pride celebrating the New York Stonewall Inn riots of June 1969 may have been first introduced using its English name, but tendency is given to creating a French language equivalent for the event's appellation in many regions of the world. In Paris, the city's pride event used to be called Gay Pride but is now denoted officially by the organizers today as *la Marche des fiertés lesbiennes, gaies, bi, trans et intersexes*, or simply *la Marche des fiertés* (Pride.fr 2019). In Montreal, the event is commonly referred to as *Fierté Montréal*, or simply *Fierté* (Fierté Montreal 2020). Not only does the use of the English term *Gay Pride* in French tie queer identity and pride to the English language, but it also appears to be out of line with popular queer lexicon in French, denoting the event in French more commonly as *Fierté.*

While the French voiceover translator of the series tends to favor the use of English loan words, there are indeed instances in which the subtitler chose to employ English terms, while the voiceover translator rendered them in French. This can be seen in the following example:

Table 18. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #12

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 1	RuPaul: This is not **RuPaul's Best Friends Race**.
French subtitles	Mais ici, ce n'est pas **RuPaul's Best Friends Race**.
French voiceover	Vous n'êtes pas ici pour participer à la **course de la meilleure amie de RuPaul.**

In this instance "RuPaul's Best Friends Race" is a quote from a previous season that was popularized to indicate the overall competitive nature of the series. This example is interesting because the subtitler used a strategy referred to by Jan Pedersen in his 2007 "How is Culture Rendered in Subtitles?" as *retention*, i.e., the choice of employing the untranslated English term (Pedersen 2007). This is contrasted by the voiceover translator's decision to employ the strategy of paraphrasing (Pedersen 2007). What is interesting here is that the tendency that has emerged thus far is the opposite: the subtitler tends to paraphrase while the voiceover translator tends to use a retention-based strategy.

The effect of sprinkling in English lexicon items, above all ones related to queer culture and diction, is not unique to the translation of *RuPaul's Drag Race*. Often in French, queer speech becomes a mix of both French and English terms, and the construction of queer identity mediated by televised cultural products alludes to the American academic origins of queer identity (Chagnon 2014, 1). However, the extent to which the English lexicon is used in French translations of LGBTQ media content varies between regions. A clear example of this can be found in the way in which the queer sexual dichotomy top/bottom is spoken about in the French language. In Quebec, I notice that the English terms top and bottom are more so used, however in France the terms *passif* and *actif* are often used (although *top* and *bottom* are also used and understood in France).[18] Here the linguistic reality of employing the English terms *top/bottom*, or the French language based terms *passif/actif*, has a strong influence on queer identity and how sexual identity and the discourse around it can be influenced by language and translation.

[18] Here, it is of note that the act of bottoming, i.e., receiving anal penetration during sexual acts, does not inherently imply passivity as it is often indicated in France via the use of the term *passif*. This non-passivity can be seen through the existence of the term *power bottom* in English, which implies a strong lack of passivity altogether.

The terms used in the translation of *RuPaul's Drag Race* also influences the popular speech of LGBTQ communities around the world due to the show's global popularity. This influence is argued in the article *How "RuPaul's Drag Race" Changed the Way We Speak,* written by Carolina Are for *Quartz*:

> Drag Race is influencing the way we speak and the content we create, to the extent that it is now becoming the subject of academic papers and studies. And the success of the show demonstrates that today's viewers do not just want to sit and watch. They want to evaluate, critique, and engage in their own content creation based on the show that creates its own new, newsworthy subcultures and then bleeds on into the mainstream. (Are, 2019)

The use of English in the French translation of *RuPaul's Drag Race*, combined with the sound of the English original audio of the show itself in the voiceover, help to influence the way in which francophone queer lingo is conveyed to French-speaking queer communities. Here the prominence of English helps to shape and form francophone queer identity, and the choice to translate English lexicon items, or not, greatly influences the future direction of linguistic queer identity and how it is performed by various communities in many parts of the globe.

3.2.3 Transposition of Grammatical Gender Markers

In contrast to the use of English in the series, a very unique aspect of the show's translation into French is the transposition of binary grammatical gender onto the spoken words and conversations of drag queens. As Chagnon noted in a discussion of this topic, the use of grammatical gender in French greatly influences the performance of the French version of series in a way that is quite different from the English source. Feminine grammatical markers do not only influence the queer identity of the drag queen contestants, but other identity categories as well, such religious identity. This cross-identity influence can be seen in the following example when the time has come to eliminate one contestant:

Table 19. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #13

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 4	Acid Betty: I'm **Jewish** but I'm praying to all of the gods, so thank you. RuPaul: *Mishpocha*, you may join the other girls.
French subtitles	Acid Betty: **Je suis juive**, mais je prie tous les dieux, alors merci. RuPaul: *Mishpocha*, tu peux rejoindre les autres.
French voiceover	Acid Betty: **Je suis juive** mais je prie tous les dieux merci. RuPaul: Tu peux rejoindre les autres filles.

The English utterance, *I'm Jewish*, carries with it no marking of gender in English; however, the French translation *Je suis juive* implies that Acid Betty identifies as a Jewish woman. The gendered structure of the French language forces the translator to choose how the contestant will perform their identity. Here, both the subtitler and the voiceover translator agree on the feminization of the contestant. Of note, it is common that the French subtitler and voiceover translator of the series refer to the drag queen contestants in the present tense using female grammatical markings, both in and out of drag. This is often the case in the English source audio as well. This feminine self-identification can be seen in the following examples:

Table 20. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #14

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 9	Naomi Smalls: Yes, **we're all friends** but unfortunately **someone** has to go home.
French subtitles	Oui, **on est amies**, mais malheureusement, **quelqu'un** doit partir.
French voiceover	**On est toutes amies** mais **l'une de nous** va devoir rentrer chez **elle**.

Table 21. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #15

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 1	Kim Chi: My name is Kim Chi and **I came** here to destroy **everyone**, with my makeup. **I'm known** for crazy over-the-top, pure anime fantasy.
French subtitles	Je m'appelle Kim Chi et **je suis venue** anéantir **tout le monde** avec mon maquillage. **Je suis connue** pour mes styles anime déjantés et extravagantes.

French voiceover	Je m'appelle Kim chi et **je suis venue**[19] ici pour **toutes** les détruire avec mon maquillage. **Je suis connue**[20] pour mon style dingue, complètement excentrique de dessin-anime fantastique.

As seen in these above two example, gender markings in French are used to enforce the feminine self-identification of drag queen contestants even when such gendered enforcement is absent from the English source audio. This French language feminization via translation adds greatly to the performance of gender, sexuality and queer identity in French, and the absence of these grammatical markings in English means that, to an extent, the French and English versions of the series do not perform queer identity in the same way.

What is also quite interesting here is the fact that, when drag queen contestants are referring to themselves in the past and their experiences growing up as children, the decision was made by the Netflix's translation team to switch to masculine gender markings in French, as illustrated by the following examples:

Table 22. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #16

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 1	Kim Chi: I guess I'm worried about my mom finding out that I did drag because **growing up**, I always felt like I could never be a model child that all Asian mothers want.
French subtitles	Je crains que ma mère découvre que je me travestis parce que quand **j'étais petit**, je pensais que je pourrais jamais être l'enfant modèle que toutes les mères asiatiques voulaient.
French voiceover	Je crois que j'ai un peu peur que ma mère découvre que je suis drag-queen**. En grandissant** j'ai eu le sentiment que je ne serais jamais l'enfant modèle que toutes les mères asiatiques veulent.

Table 23. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #17

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 9	Bob the Drag Queen: I have not always been this confident. **I was like a little chunky kid. I was really effeminate.** Really dark skin and kids can be mean to you.

[19] As both the masculine and feminine form of this verb particle are pronounced the same in French, I am making the assumption that *je suis venue* is spelt here in the voiceover using the feminine form, based off of the context of the utterance in addition to the way in which the feminine form was used by the subtitler.

[20] As for the above example, the assumption has been made on my end to render the feminine form of this verb particle based on context.

French subtitles	J'ai pas toujours eu confiance en moi. **Petit, j'étais grassouillet. J'étais très efféminé,** la peau très noire. Les enfants peuvent être cruels.
French voiceover	Quand **j'étais petit, j'étais un peu gros. J'étais très efféminé.** j'avais la peau foncée. Les enfants peuvent être vraiment durs entre eux**.**

Beyond further asserting the present female identity conveyed by the French translation of drag queen speech, the juxtaposition of masculine markers when referring to the past creates a gender divide that is completely absent in the source English audio. In using a strategic and temporal male/female grammatical dichotomy in terms of the self-identification discourse of several drag-queen contestants, the French translation further implies the lack of a cisgender identification continuum, which is not present in the English version of the series. To maintain the continuum as in the English source, the subtitler could have crafted a version that eludes the gendered nature of French, much like how *en grandissant* was used by the voiceover translator in the *RuPaul's Drag Race* translation example 17 (Table 23). To provide alternative solutions for this translation, the subtitler could have written: "J'ai pas toujours eu confiance en moi. Jeune, je faisais genre de l'embonpoint et j'avais une allure très efféminée, la peau très noire. Les enfants peuvent être cruels." However, this version of the subtitle contains six more words and may have been deemed too long. The negotiation of grammatical gender across languages shows how important the role of the translator is in promoting queer identity.

3.2.4 Diminishment of Queer Source Material

One further way in which the translation of *RuPaul's Drag Race* influences queer identity and the discourse surrounding is through the diminishment of queer subject matter through the mistranslation or omission of important LGBTQ references and slang. In addition to

this, the unsuccessful translation of camp style jokes, a key component of queer identity, also has an influence on how queerness is performed in the French translation of the series.

Throughout the series, several queer cultural references are omitted during translation, as can be seen in the following example:

Table 24. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #18

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 9	Jayson Whitmore: Paris is Burning!
French subtitles	Paris est en feu.
French voiceover	Allumez le feu!

Here, guest judge and choreographer Jason Whitmore exclaims *Paris is burning!*, to express approval for a drag performance. He is referring to the title of an influential 1990 American queer documentary, directed by Jennie Livingston. The documentary provides investigation into what is often called the "Golden age" of New York City drag balls[21]. Leading up to the late 1980s, ball culture, often cited as the origin of and precursor to modern-day drag culture, was an important part of underground queer society and LGBTQ communities. Balls and drag events performed largely by minority queer individuals, including performers from African-American and Latino transgender communities, have had a lasting influence on the way in which drag is performed and understood today. Whitmore's reference to the documentary is completely lost in the translation provided by the French voiceover translator, and so too is the important historical reference to queer culture as it is portrayed in the English series. Although ball culture did not exist in French-speaking regions of the world to the extent as it did in the United States, several queer rights group existed and could have been referenced, such as the Gazolines,

[21] Ball culture, house-ballroom community and drag ball culture, among other terms describe a youthful African-American and Latin American underground LGBTQ subculture, originating in New York City, in which people "walk" or compete for trophies, prizes, and glory at events known as balls. Ball performances often combine fashion shows, dance and lip sync performances.

flamboyant activists and working-class men who belonged to the Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire (Bréville 2011).

In addition to this omission, other drag specific terms are also commonly "lost in translation" as I will demonstrate with examples such as tucking. It is important to note that much of the drag-based vocabulary and slang used today can be seen as drawing origins to 1980s ball culture, greatly influenced by black transwomen as pointed out in the article titled "Do Not Erase Black Femmes In Your History of Gay Slang" written by Mikelle Street (Street 2018). The following three examples demonstrate how queer drag vocabulary is diminished and omitted in the series' translation:

Table 25. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #19

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 10	Nancy Grace: **No tea, no shade**, but unleash the lawyers. We got a case here.
French subtitles	**Pas de reproche**, mais préviens tes avocats. On a un dossier solide.
French voiceover	**C'est n'est pas le moment de prendre le thé tranquillement,** mets tes avocats sur le coup. On a un dossier solide.

The popular English phrase *no tea, no shade*, originally *all T, no shade* (meaning: all truth, no shade) refers to the act of telling a strict truth without the intention of disrespect, with the term shade drawing its slang origins from the 1920s, where it was used as a verb meaning *to defeat* (Barrett 2016). The French equivalent is *dire à quelqu'un ses quatre vérités.* It can be used to mean "I mean no disrespect, but I want to tell you that…". The use of *shade* and *T/tea* became popularized as part of ball culture during the 1980s and the term *shade* itself is defined by trans drag performer Dorian Corey in *Paris is Burning* as follows: *"*Shade is, I don't tell you you're ugly, but I don't have to tell you, because you know you're ugly. And that's shade." (Livingston, 1990)

In the above translation example, the subtitler kept the meaning of the expression *no tea no shade*; however, the queer lexical and historical significance is lost. As for the voiceover translator's example, the meaning of the phrase is diminished because the use of the word *thé* relates to the wrong cultural reference. One could see this as a missed opportunity on the part of the translators to coin the word *vérithé* and contribute to the creation of a French queer slang, however this play on words would have not be audible in the voiceover. The translation could have been as follows: "*Laisse faire les quatre vérithés*. Envoie tes avocats. On a un dossier solide." However, neither translation solution allows the sentence to perform queer discourse to the same extent as the English source utterance is able to. In this sense, the queer identity found within the source is diminished in the French translation.

Another instance of the diminishment of a queer term popularized by ball culture involves the translation of the word *trade*. *Trade,* like *butch,* refers to an outwardly perceived masculinity. Whereas *butch* is often applied to lesbians, *trade* is often applied to masculine presenting (queer) men. In *RuPaul's Drag Race*, the translation of *trade* often is problematic, as can be seen in the following example:

Table 26. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #20

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 9	Bob the Drag Queen: Chi Chi is doing great. **I'm like, "fuck you, you fucking fit trade prison bitch."**
French subtitles	Chi Chi se débrouille très bien. **Franchement: "Va te faire foutre, sale garce en forme."**
French voiceover	Chi Chi s'en sort très bien**. J'étais genre sale gars arrête de me voler la vedette.**

While the overall vulgarity and register of the English sentence differs greatly between the English audio and French voiceover, the translation of *fit trade prison bitch* into French as *sale garce en forme* and *sale gars* demonstrates the further trend of queer lexicon erasure during translation, most likely due to lack of cultural knowledge.

Finally, there are several instances of drag-specific vocabulary being omitted in the series' translation into French. One of the most striking is the removal of references to *tucking*, which refers to the concealment of the penis and testicles during drag so as to hide a visible crotch bulge during performances. Used by drag queens to further the illusion of femininity, tucking is frequently referenced in the show and is an important part of drag culture. Beyond *tucking*, the act of *untucking,* or removing male genitals from their hiding spot, is also frequently mentioned in the series. The following exemplifies the general omission of this term:

Table 27. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #21

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 3	RuPaul: While you go **untuck** backstage, the judges and I will deliberate.
French subtitles	Pendant que vous vous **détendez** en coulisses, nous allons délibérer.
French voiceover	Vous pouvez **rejoindre** les coulisses. Les juges et moi allons délibérer.

RuPaul uses the term *untuck* here figuratively and for humorous effect. The drag queens actually untuck and de-drag after RuPaul and the judges deliver their final judgment and after a queen is eliminated. Here, RuPaul is letting the queens know they can hang out backstage before the final judgement of the episode is given. In the above translation example, the meaning behind *untuck* is maintained in French, however the cultural drag significance and humor behind the term is not. One solution coud have been to use the Québécois expression: "Pendant que vous lâcher votre fou en coulisses, nous allons délibérer." The expression *lâcher son fou* means to be able to move about freely at last and have fun; it would have recreated the play on words by referring to the genitals as the "fou" (literally, the crazy), a word with close ties to homosexuality and drag. It is of note that each episode of *RuPaul's Drag Race* has a 'behind the scenes' version, called *Untucked*, which allows fans to see drag queen contestants interacting backstage after the judge's critiques yet before the final judgment and elimination. The systematic omission

of such an important term for drag culture carries with it a lack of creativity and a sense of cultural erasure at the hands of translation.

Beyond omitted terms, it is often the case that queer lexicon is mistranslated. The reasons may be linked to a lack of queer cultural knowledge or a lack of poetic license on the part of translators. One instance of queer lexicon being mistranslated can be seen in the following example:

Table 28. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #22

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 1	Bob The Drag Queen: (talking about Chi Chi out of drag): Look at **this butch bitch**
French subtitles	Regarde-moi **ce gars costaud**.
French voiceover	Regardez **cette petite coquine**.

In the above example, the use of *gars costaud* by the subtitler helps to convey the masculine image of Chi Chi that Bob is expressing in the English statement; however, it does not contain the female and queer implication of *butch* that is expressed in the original utterance. The gendered implication contained in the word *butch* is thus lost here, in addition to the register implied by the use of the term *bitch.* As for the voiceover translator's solution, *petite coquine* does not maintain the semantic meaning behind Bob's words in English. Bob in English is making a statement about how different and masculine Chi Chi looks out of drag, but the use of feminine *coquine* (closer to the English term *naughty* or *cheeky*), in addition to the feminine grammatical markers, goes against the original meaning of Bob's utterance. The voiceover translator thus provides a translation solution with the unrelated meaning of *look at this little vixen*. Interestingly enough, both *boutch(e)* and *bitch* are in the *Antidote* dictionary and the *Dictionnaire collaborative du français parlé* (the equivalent of the *Urban Dictonary*), and the translator could have easily come up with "Regardez-moi cette boutche bitch." It should be mentioned that this solution only "works" for a Quebec French speaking audience. Ultimately, I

view the work of the French voiceover translator here as introducing a mistranslation or misrepresentation of the source queer content.

Finally, besides the diminishment of queer cultural references and lexicon, the French translation of *RuPaul's Drag Race* often fails to render the meaning and humor behind the frequent prevalent, campy jokes told by the drag queen competitors. The following two translation examples demonstrate the common instances in which a joke, sexual in nature, is not successfully rendered in the target French version of the series, greatly removing most of the humor from the interaction.

Table 29. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #23

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 4	RuPaul: Bob, How's your head? Bob the Drag Queen: No complaints.
French subtitles	RuPaul: Bob, comment va ta tête? Bob the Drag Queen: Je me plains pas.
French voiceover	RuPaul: Bob, comment va ta tête? Bob the Drag Queen: Je me plains pas.

The question "How's your head" in English plays upon the double meaning of the word *head*, both referring to the human cranium and also implying reference to oral sex. As such the question can also be read as asking "How are your oral sex skills?" Here Bob's response also contains a double signification, which can be taken as meaning they do not have any complaints of head pains (such as a headache) or that they have not received any complaints about their oral sex abilities from partners. Such double entendres abound in the series and are in fact constitutive of the subversive power of drag. Translating jokes is never easy, but necessary in the performance of queer discourse.

Another failed joke translation can be seen as follows:

Table 30. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #24

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 5	Naomi Smalls: How big is your **clock**? RuPaul: Because **drag queens love a big clock**.
French subtitles	Naomi Smalls: Quelle est la taille de votre **horloge**? RuPaul: Parce que **les drag-queens aiment toujours être à temps**, hein?
French voiceover	Naomi Smalls: Quelle est la taille de votre **montre**? RuPaul: Parce que **les drag-queens aiment les énormes montres,** c'est bien ça?

Here the joke made by RuPaul relies on the phonologic proximity of the English words *clock* and *cock* (in reference to male genitalia). This play on words requires a translation solution based on sound similarities rather than a simple semantic equivalence. The homophonic word *montre* used as noun and as a verb could have been led to the following: "Aimez-vous **les grosses montres**? Parce que les drag-queens **préfèrent qu'on leur en montre une grosse**, non?" The removal of the campy, sexual nature of the above two jokes weakens the finesse with which queer discourse plays on two levels identity. Drag queens are known for their witty, campy, and often sexual remarks, and the cumulative erasure or downplaying of such queer cultural aspects in translation greatly influences how queer identity is performed in the French version of the series.

However, there are examples of the sexual nature of jokes being maintained via translation; but it often involves the removal of visual context clues. This can be seen in the following example:

Table 31. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #25

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 1	Robbie Turner (holding a beaver toy): Speaking of, here's a **beaver.** Chi Chi DeVayne: I don't eat **beaver.** Robbie Turner: Oh, too real?
French subtitles	Robbie Turner: En parlant de ça, voilà un **minou.** Chi Chi DeVayne: Je mange pas de **minou.**

	Robbie Turner: Oh, trop bizarre?
French voiceover	Robbie Turner: Alors regarde, j'ai une chatte pour toi Chi Chi DeVayne: je mange pas de **chatte.** Robbie Turner: Trop réel?

Here, Robby Turner is holding a beaver stuffed animal prompting Chi Chi to remark that they do not eat beaver. This plays on Chi Chi's assumed gay identity and the use of the English word *beaver* to signify female genitalia. The use of *minou* and *chatte* in the French translations of this interaction keep the significance of female genitalia, however at the expense of rendering the beaver stuffed animal context inapplicable. While the textual component of the joke functions in French, it serves ultimately to confuse the audience due to the removal of the key visual context which prompts the joke.

Overall, the general diminishment of queer cultural references and lexicon via omission and mistranslation, combined with the unsuccessful translation of camp style jokes, has great implications for the performance of queer identity in the French version of the series; however, there are some occurrences of enrichment, as is demonstrated in the next section.

3.2.5 Enrichment

While English queer lexicon can often be diminished or misrepresented during translation, there are instances in which translation adds to the queer source content. It is important to note that this strategy is also often referred to as compensation in the world of audiovisual translation, as noted by Maria Teresa Musacchio in *Approaching Audiovisual Translation: Issues and Trends in Subtitling the TED Talks* (Musacchio 2018/2019, 57). This enrichment is demonstrated in the following subtitled example:

Table 32. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #26

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 1	RuPaul: Hey **kitty girl**!
French subtitles	Salut, **ma minette**!
French voiceover	Bonjour **mon chaton**!

The reason the translation of *kitty girl* is enhanced when translated as *ma minette* lies in the connection with French term *minet,* which besides meaning kitten can also be used to denote the queer meaning behind the English word *twink*[22] in French. The linguistic word play involving the femininized *minette* and the queer French term *minet* allows the translation to make reference to French queer identity in a way that is absent from the English source version of the series. Here the added queer undertone added by the French subtitler allows for the enhancement of queer identity performance through the use of language and wordplay.

Another example of queer source enhancement can be seen in the following excerpt, in which RuPaul calls for members of the *Pit Crew* to appear onstage:

[22] Twink is a queer English term that traditionally denotes a young gay male with attractive and often boy-like qualities.

Table 33. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #27

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 7	RuPaul (calling for members of the Pit Crew to enter the scene): Ladies for a little morale boost, I've invited some company. **Oh Pit Crew**!
French subtitles	Mesdemoiselles, pour vous motiver, j'ai invité de la compagnie. **Voilà l'équipe de ravitaillement** !
French voiceover	Les filles j'ai invité des gens pour vous remonter le moral. **Les Beaux Gosses !**

Often for mini challenges (i.e., challenges performed towards the beginning of episodes, before the main challenge take place), shirtless and physically fit male actors wearing provocative and skimpy underwear, collectively referred to as the Pit Crew (and in early seasons the "the Scruff Pit Crew"), assist drag queen competitors, sometimes serving often props. I consider the translation of *Pit Crew* as *Beaux Gosses* (with the meaning similar to the English word "studs") by the voiceover translator to be an enhancement due to the following reason: while it is true that the automobile drag race reference of pit crew is lost in the voiceover (yet retained by the subtitler with the use of *l'équipe de ravitaillement)* the meaning behind the word *gosses* has different significance in France than it does in Quebec. In France, *gosses* has similar meaning to *kids* in English whereas in Quebec *gosses* is used as a slang term to refer to male genital (specifically testicles), similar to the meaning of the word *balls* in English. Possibly without the knowledge of the translators, the translation of *Pit Crew* as *les Beaux Gosses* introduces a double entendre style joke for a Quebec audience; this added double entendre is why I consider this translation to enhance the source text, as it adds a level of humor that is not present in the English audio. While I argue that the France-based meaning of the words *grosses* and *beaux gosses* is generally understood in Quebec, the use of the term still provides humor.

3.2.6 Alteration of Register

As noted in Karim Chagnon's review of the English to French translations of *The L Word* and *Queer as Folk*, the general register of language used in the French translations of LGBTQ media content, including *RuPaul's Drag Race*, often varies greatly from the source English register. In general, the French voiceover translator and subtitler downplay or remove the general vulgarity, use of expletives and overall camp nature of the source. This creates a French translation with a socially higher register.

As previously mentioned, the sexual undertones found in many of the camp style jokes are important aspects of the series and of drag culture in general. The removal of such undertones and style greatly waters down the performance of queer identity as can be seen in the following translation example:

Table 34. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #28

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 9	Kim Chi: Bob's glamour look is really interesting. His right hand looks like he **fisted** a coal mine and his left hand looks like he **fisted** a gold mine.
French subtitles	Le look glamour de Bob est intéressant. À droite, on dirait qu'il a **fisté** une mine de charbon et à gauche, on dirait qu'il a **fisté** une mine d'or.
French voiceover	Le look glamour de Bob est très intéressant. On dirait qu'il a **mis** la main droite dans une mine de charbon et la main gauche dans une mine d'or.

The removal here of the reference to fisting by the French voiceover translator—a sexual act that is known to have visibility and cultural significance in underground queer culture, especially in the gay male leather subculture—greatly changes the meaning behind of Kim Chi's remark. By replacing the verb *fisted* with *a mis la main*, the French sentence not only omits the vulgar and campy undertones of the sentence, but it also alters the way in which the queer subtext is conveyed.

Beyond this example, two English expletives commonly used throughout the series, namely *fuck* and *bitch*, are often defused during translation, resulting in the series having a higher perceived register, with less vulgarity and crudeness, in French. The following two examples demonstrate the register alternate through the omission of *fuck* via translation:

Table 35. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #29

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 9	RuPaul: You **mother tucking** earned it.
French subtitles	Vous l'avez bien mérité.
French voiceover	Vous avez mérité votre place en faisant tous qu'on attendait de vous.

Table 36. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #30

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 1	Naomi Smalls: I'm **fucking** star struck.
French subtitles	Je suis en admiration.
French voiceover	Je suis complètement éblouie.

In the first example, the play on words with the expression *mother fucking* is completely removed by both the subtitler and voiceover translator. This results in very neutral French sentences, where the meaning of the source English is kept, but the cleverness and subversiveness of the series are lost. If the *RuPaul's Drag Race* translation example number 29 (Table 35) is difficult to render, example 30 (Table 36) is not, and the translator could have readily included an expletive.

Very similar instances of register change via omission or altering of English expletives occur throughout the series when *bitch* is translated, as demonstrated in the following examples:

Table 37. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #31

English original (audio): throughout the series	Naomi Smalls: yes **bitch!**
French subtitles	T'assures!
French voiceover	Pas mal!

Table 38. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #32

English original (audio):	Derrick Barry: It's Derrick, **bitch**.

Season 8, episode 1	
French subtitles	C'est Derrick, **salope.**
French voiceover	C'est Derrick, les **filles.**

Table 39. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #33

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 5	Acid Betty: Because she seems like a major **bitch.**
French subtitles	Parce qu'elle a l'air d'être une grosse **pétasse**.
French voiceover	Parce qu'elle a l'air d'être une sacrée **emmerdeuse**.

Throughout these three examples, *bitch* is either completely omitted, translated as *filles* (*girls*), or translated using the French approximations *pétasse* and *emmerdeuse*. Each of these translation choices alters the register and generated effect of the utterance in French, with example thirty-three (Table 39) keeping closest to the English register. Much like the way in which the translation of *fuck* carries with it key influences on queer identity and its performance in French, so too does the translation of *bitch*.

It should be noted that English expletives like *fuck* and *bitch* do have accepted correspondences as loan words frequently used in Quebec French (see *Le dictionnaire collaboratif du français parlé*). However, as the series has been translated with a European French speaking audience in mind, it should be noted that the use of Quebec specific translations solutions may break the code of coherence as it is known in the field of translation; any translation instance that does not align with the general European/international French translation strategy of the series introduces a lack of general coherence for the viewing audience (AL-Azzawi 2004). Ultimately, as Chagnon points, the alteration of register, involving the removal of vulgarity, camp and sexual undertones is a form of censorship as it pertains to queer identity and the way it is performed via the translation.

3.2.7 Treatment of Transgender Lexicon

Transgender drag contestants are not new to the series *RuPaul's Drag Race*, and, while RuPaul himself has a tumultuous past with the acceptance of trans drag queens on the series (Framake 2018), the fact remains that transgender discourse is commonplace in the series. The translation of trans discourse, as I will show through translation examples, often provides very different results than the initial English.

One of the most striking observations is the use of the adjective *transsexuelle* for the translation of the English adjectives *trans* and *transgender*. The cognate word *transsexual* exists in English and designates a specific gender identity that falls under the larger trans-identity umbrella. For the most part, transgender identity expresses the gender identity of an individual that does not match the sex they were assigned to at birth. In contrast, transsexual identity implies the desire for or application of medical interventions such as hormones and surgeries to transition from the gender assigned at birth (Planned Parenthood).

The difference between transgender, trans and transsexual in English is similar to the difference between the words *transgenre*, *trans* and *transsexuel(le)* in French. As Jacques Lafontaine writes in his article *Transgenre ou transsexuel?:*

> Ces termes (transgenre/transsexuel) ne sont pas synonymes. Une personne transgenre adopte l'apparence et le mode de vie d'une personne d'un sexe différent de celui de sa naissance, mais sans changer de sexe. Une personne transsexuelle a modifié son corps par la prise d'hormones ou à l'aide de la chirurgie. Cette personne est passée d'un sexe à l'autre. Pour éviter de donner de l'information trop intime, et pour éviter toute confusion, l'usage veut maintenant que le simple terme trans soit utilisé : une personne trans. (Lafontaine 2018)

As stated, it is often at the hands of the French voiceover translator of the series that the English terms *trans* and *transgender* are mistranslated as *transsexuel(le)*, and the French terms *transgenre, trans* and *transsexuel* are incorrectly used interchangeably as if they were synonyms.

The following translation example highlights this disconnect between the English use of *trans/transgender* and the French use of *transsexuel(le)* during translation:

Table 40. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #34

English original (audio): Season 9, episode 6	Peppermint: It was actually through my drag that I realized my transness…I am a, **I'm trans, I'm a trans woman**. **There's a lot of people who think that drag queens are not trans and shouldn't be, and there's a lot of trans people who think that drag queens have no place in the trans community**. I wanted to really get to know the girls before I came out to them. I was afraid. It took me a long time to really sort out gender and at a really early age I was able to latch on to drag and that was how I was able to express my femininity, but I kind of evolved to realize that all the drag things that I wanted to do, it always led back to the realization that **I am a trans woman**.
French subtitles	C'est ma drag qui m'a permis de réaliser que je suis…**je suis une femme trans. Beaucoup de gens pensent que les drag-queens ne devraient pas être trans. Et beaucoup de trans pensent que les drag-queens n'ont pas leur place dans la communauté trans**. Je voulais mieux connaître les filles avant de faire mon coming out. J'avais peur. J'ai mis très longtemps à comprendre mon genre. Et très jeune, j'ai pu m'identifier au transformisme, et c'est ainsi que j'exprimais ma féminité. Mais j'ai évolué et compris que toutes les choses drag que je voulais faire m'ont permis de réaliser que **je suis une femme trans.**
French voiceover	C'est en devenant drag-queen que je me suis rendu compte que **j'étais transsexuelle…je le suis**…**je suis trans**, j**e suis une femme transsexuelle**. **Il y a beaucoup de gens qui pensent que les drag-queens ne sont pas des trans et ne devraient pas l'être, et il y a beaucoup de transsexuels qui pensent que les drag-queens n'ont pas leur place dans la communauté trans**. Je voulais vraiment apprendre à connaître les filles avent de faire mon coming out. J'avais peur. Il m'a fallu beaucoup de temps pour comprendre comment je m'identifiais, très jeune j'ai pu me défouler en devenant drag-queen et c'est comme ça que j'ai pu exprimer ma féminité. Mais j'ai fini par me rendre compte que tous les trucs de drag que je voulais faire me ramenaient toujours au fait que **je suis transsexuelle**.

Peppermint does not identify as transsexual in the above English passage; however, this identity is applied several times to Peppermint by the French voiceover translator. The term "transsexual"

has enormous implications for the performance and construction of queer and trans identity. For one, the interchangeability of the terms by the French voiceover translator suggests that being trans is synonymous with a desire to transition, which is simply not the case. Such terminological confusion not only impairs the knowledge of LGBTQ communities that French and English viewers alike acquire with the series, but it can also affect the way they interact with trans individuals.

It appears that for the French subtitler, the terms *trans* and *transgenre* are systematically used, as can be seen in the examples taken from season 5 of the series (this season had no French voiceover offering):

Table 41. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #35

English original (audio): Season 5, episode 2	Monica Beverly Hillz: I'm not just a drag queen, **I'm a transgendered woman.**
French subtitles	Je ne suis pas qu'une drag-queen. **Je suis une femme transgenre.**

To demonstrate the further inconsistency between the translation of trans/transgender via the French voiceover translator's work, I would like to also include the following two translation examples, in which the term transsexuel(le) is not used at all:

Table 42. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #36

English original (audio): Season 9, episode 14	Lavern Cox (to Peppermint): You have been my sister for so many years and that has it made it that much sweeter watching you shine, showing the world that being a proud **transgender women** is not incompatible with being American next drag superstar. You can have them both.
French subtitles	Tu es ma sœur depuis de nombreuse années, ça me rend encore plus heureuse de te voir briller et montrer au monde qu'être une **femme transgenre** fière n'est pas incompatible avec le titre de prochaine drag-queen superstar. Tu peux faire les deux.
French voiceover	Tu es comme ma sœur depuis tellement d'années. Et ça les a rendus tellement plus doux cet regarde briller. Tu as montré au monde qu'être une **femme transgenre** fière n'est absolument pas incompatible avec le fait de devenir la nouvelle super star des drag-queens américaines. Tu peux être les deux.

Table 43. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #37

English original (audio): Season 9, episode 14	RuPaul: Now Peppermint, a lot of people get confused about how can you be **a proud trans woman** and be a drag queen. What do you day to those people? Peppermint: **Trans women** have always contributed to the wonderful artform of drag since the beginning of time. This is not new. And my contribution to drag is as powerful as any gay man.
French subtitles	RuPaul: Peppermint, beaucoup de gens ne comprennent pas comment **une femme trans** peut aussi être drag-queen. Qu'as-tu à leur répondre? Peppermint: **Les femmes trans** ont toujours contribué à l'art du transformisme, depuis la nuit des temps. Ça n'a rien de nouveau et ma contribution est aussi puissante que celle de n'importe quel homme gay.
French voiceover	RuPaul: tu sais Peppermint, beaucoup de personnes sont perturbés que tu sois fière d'être une **femme transgenre** et en même temps une drag-queen, qu'est-ce eut tu leur dis? Peppermint: Les **femmes transgenres** ont toujours beaucoup contribué à cette magnifique forme d'art qui est le drag depuis le début de l'humanité. Ce n'est pas nouveau et ma contribution au monde des drag-queens est aussi forte que pour n'importe quel homme gay.

Of the many ways in which translation choices influence the performance of queer identity, and the discourse surrounding it, it is the mistranslation of trans and transgender into French as transsexuel(le), and the lack of regard for the differences between transgender and transsexuel identities that most disserve the show's French-speaking audience. The instances of mistranslation into French hold grave consequences to how transness is understood and talked about by French-speaking audiences.

3.2.8 Transformation of Reclaimed Vocabulary

Like the treatment of trans lexicon, the very way in which reclaimed queer vocabulary is translated into French, including the term *queer,* matters greatly. While small lexical differences in the translation may not first appear to influence the performance of the text, reclaimed terms do not carry with them the same historical implication in terms of queer identity in English and in French. Take for example the way in which the term *pixie* is translated into French as *fée* in reference to a picture of drag queen Laila McQueen out of drag during their youth:

Table 44. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #38

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 10	RuPaul (talking about photo with Laila McQueen): That **little pixie** to the right of my is Laila McQueen.
French subtitles	Là, à ma droite, c'est Laila McQueen.
French voiceover	Cette **petite fée** à droite est Laila McQueen.

The English terms *pixie* and *fairy* have been used through history to refer to effeminate queer men, as well as to queer women often with short hair. However, each of these words contains a different history in terms of queer reclamation, such as the word *fairy,* which carries a greater queer sub-context in my opinion. Once very pejorative, words such as *fairy* and *pixie* are now used as self-identifiable terms, employed with pride by members of LGBTQ communities. While both words are similar in English and can be considered as reclaimed queer terms, they cannot be interchanged without influencing the way in which they denote queer identity. The word *fée* is described by both the French newspaper *Le Parisien* and French blog *Le calice des fées* as "En français moderne, « fée » possède un genre grammatical féminin qui accentue la caractéristique sexuée féminine." (Le Parisien, Le calice des fées). And while the French word denotes feminine sexuality, it does not contain the same reclamation history as the English word fairy in terms of queer identity. As it stands, *fée* in French has not been reclaimed to the same extent as the words *pixie* or *fairy*, nor it does not have the same significance to francophone

LGBTQ communities in terms of reclamation.

Besides this instance of *fée*, the way in which the word *queer* itself is often translated, erased, or censored to meaning only *gay* and *homosexual* can be seen in the following example:

Table 45. *RuPaul's Drag Race* Translation Example #39

English original (audio): Season 8, episode 1	RuPaul: Sasha this season you helped teach the children about **our rich gay history.** Sasha: Yeah, they say that if you look into a mirror and talk about sad things, I appear behind you to give you **a queer history lesson. Drag queens have always been keepers of our queer history**, we make it, we tell it, we remember it, we misremember it and we love it.
French subtitles	RuPaul: Sasha, cette saison tu as aidé les enfants à apprendre **la riche histoire du mouvement gay.** Sasha: Oui, il paraît que si on regarde dans un miroir et qu'on dit des choses tristes, j'apparais derrière vous pour vous parler de **l'histoire queer**. **Les drag-queens ont toujours été les garantes de l'histoire queer**. On la crée, on la raconte, on s'en souvient plus ou moins bien et on l'adore. Je suis vraiment heureuse d'avoir contribué à perpétuer cette tradition à ma manière.
French voiceover	RuPaul : Sasha, cette saison tu as donné un cours aux enfants sur **la très riche histoire des gays.** Sasha: Oui, il paraît que si tu regardes dans un miroir et que tu parles de choses tristes j'apparaîtrai derrière toi pour te donner **une leçon d'histoire gay. Les drag-queens ont toujours été les gardiennes de l'histoire gay.** C'est nous qui la faisons, qui la racontons, qui en sommes les souvenirs, c'est nous qui faisons des erreurs et qui l'aimons. Alors je suis très heureuse de pouvoir aider à rencontrer cette histoire de ma façon dans l'émission.

Here Sasha does not mean to say that drag queens are keepers of only homosexual history as implied by the French voiceover translator, but also keepers of queer history including bisexual history, trans and gender nonconformity history. By translating the umbrella term *queer* as *gay* in French, the translation erases the non-homosexual identity that Sasha wishes to express in their statement. This elimination of an important LGBTQ reclaimed identity term by the voiceover

translator, much like the mistranslation of the term *queer*, greatly influences the discourse surrounding queer identity.

3.3 Reception and Future

The translation trends and practices identified above, in addition to the academic research and cited translation examples supporting them, help to answer the first part of the question underpinning this thesis, namely "in what ways has LGBTQ media translation influenced queer identity?" Upon investigation of the works previously stated in this thesis, and review of the English to French case study of *RuPaul's Drag Race*, I have identified that the translation of LGBTQ media can influence queer identity by: altering the way in which drag is conceptualized, employing English lexicon systematically as part of the translation strategy, transposing grammatical gender when gender is not present in the source text, diminishing and missing queer cultural references, enriching queer cultural references, altering the general register of language spoken, and finally, overlooking reclaimed words and transgender lexicon.

While these examples of how LGBTQ media can influence queer identity are clear, I have not yet specifically answered the second part of this question, namely "how will media translation continue to influence the visibility of LGBTQ communities in the years to come?"

To provide an answer to this question, I would like to first take a look at the current accessibility of Netflix's French translation of *RuPaul's Drag Race,* in addition to its reception. As stated at the beginning of this thesis, the movement towards over-the-top LGBTQ media diffusion, including the increased localization of queer media content into many popular languages around the world, means that LGBTQ media is and will continue to be created, diffused, translated and consumed in numerous regions around the world. Internationally

accessible services, such as Netflix, continue to allow translated LGBTQ media to be viewed in many different countries.

With the increased accessibility to LGBTQ media, and its translated forms, there is a notable increase in international popularity and consumption. *RuPaul's Drag Race* has seen a boom in terms of international fan following in recent years, and global events, such as the *Werq the World* international tour, demonstrate the desire for and consumption of LGBTQ media around the world, even outside of the series itself. Once more, OTT giants like Netflix are able to bring commercial French translations of LGBTQ series, often for the first time, to francophone communities of the world, thereby greatly expanding societal access to LGBTQ media content in their native tongue. The increased availability of LGBTQ media paired with increased localization thus greatly influences the visibility of LGBTQ communities.

Outside of LGBTQ communities, more and more non-queer viewers are interested in LGBTQ media content as it is gaining popularity in mainstream culture. This growth in popularity reinforces queer discourse and visibility since LGBTQ culture, identity and struggles are broadcasted to attentive audiences around the planet.

The reception of translated queer media content also plays an important role in how successful the translation will be in promoting the visibility of LGBTQ communities, in addition to providing important feedback to translators. As noted on one popular fan page, posted on Facebook:

> la VF [version française] de Netflix est mauvaise dans le sens où l'on perd beaucoup de jeux de mots et de double-sens : des blagues tombent à l'eau et des références parfois importantes sont loupées. Vous profitez de l'émission à 30% car la raison de son succès se trouve dans son écriture et ses références. (RuPaul's Drag Race France 2017).

The above general dissatisfaction with the translation of the series, linked largely to the diminishment of queer jokes, wordplay and cultural references, is not limited to a single fan page. While the series' translation provides French-speaking audiences with a linguistic access to the series, one could argue that this access is limited by the shortcomings of the translation provided by Netflix.

In the same post by *RuPaul's Drag Race France*, references to the existence of non-commercial, fan-based translations of the series is highlighted in response to the reception of existing commercial translations, like the one offered by Netflix. The existence of non-commercial, fan-created subtitles and dubbing offerings, as explained in the post, can be seen as stemming from the desire for French translations of the series that maintain the important queer references, lexicon and jokes of the English series. Josephy-Herández and von Flotow touch upon the existence of fan translations and how they differ from commercial translation products, highlighting that fan-based translations of audiovisual content (i.e., fansubbing and fandubbing) are farther from the influence of institutional power compared to commercially-based product (von Flotow and Josephy-Herández 2018, 305). This, I would like to affirm, helps to set up the notion of 'queer' fansubbing and fandubbing, in which the queer cultural content is prioritized as a key part of the translation strategy.

Various social media groups on websites such as Facebook and Reddit provide queer fan-based translations of the series in an attempt to reconcile the lacking components present in existing commercial translations of the series, and to give non-English-speaking fans of the series a translation product which better communicates the queer culture contained in the original production.

As the general fan reception of Netflix's English to French translation of *RuPaul's Drag*

Race highlights room for improvement (a sentiment which I echo), it should be noted that this less than positive fan response renders the translation as having less influence and relevance on queer identity and LGBTQ visibility.

Given the importance of fan reception on a translation's performance, I would like to bring up again the very important notions of agency and intentionality as they relate to translation. Translators of LGBTQ media, be it through fan-based efforts or commercial undertakings, have the potential to research, test and produce comprehensible, popular and well received translation products that are able to intentionally influence the future of queer identity and LGBTQ visibility. As von Flotow stressed in *Translating Women* (134), it is not simply the translator who alone exercises agency, as this course of action lies within the entire production team. The ability to utilize thoughtful and intentional translation practices, such as the enrichment of queer source matter via translation, I argue will lead to greater LGBTQ visibility. However, thoughtfulness and intentionality are not often core principles that OTT production companies' value most when producing translations. It is unfortunate because powerful translations have the potential to attract even more viewers. For companies like Netflix, I postulate that translations are undertaken with minimum quality control due to budgetary and profit needs. Here, the intersection of fan reception and capitalist gain based on rudimentary cost analyses that consider translation as a burden rather than an investment leads me to stress that thoughtful translation practices would stand to benefit all parties. Not only would a sense of LGBTQ community be reinforced through accurate representation among mainstream audiences, but also companies such as Netflix that publish translation of LGBTQ media content would gain an edge on their numerous competitors.

So how exactly will LGBTQ media translation continue to influence LGBTQ visibility in the future? As many popular LGBTQ series translations showcase the possible censorship or diminishment of queer subject matter, it seems that for now the visibility of LGBTQ communities will continue to advance slowly as it has in the past. LGBTQ audiences have continued to voice their opinions on commercial translation productions, and, as consumer reception exerts its power on commercial production, I am hopeful that popular translations of LGBTQ media content will take into consideration the larger-than-ever community demand for thoughtful and intentional translations. A comparative study of the corpus at hand with the translation of recent seasons of the series would reveal whether translation practices have improved, but that would make for another thesis altogether.

Thus, I am joining in the call for increased research, agency and thoughtfulness when it comes to translation practices and trends underlying the multilingual production of LGBTQ media content. As the world is growing to better understand and celebrate the pride, visibility and identity of LGBTQ communities, I am confident that so too will translation practices grow to better support queer identity and visibility.

Conclusion

Queerness is a complex and performative social identity that is constructed through discourse and is greatly influenced by the creation and translation of popular LGBTQ media content. Through a comparative case study of the French translation of *RuPaul's Drag Race*, I was able to identify eight distinct trends and practices that are used in the translation of LGBTQ media content: 1) the conceptualization of drag; 2) the employment of English lexicon; 3) the transposition of grammatical gender markers; 4) the diminishment of queer source material through mistranslation and omission; 5) the enrichment of queer source material; 6) the alteration of register; 7) the treatment of transgender lexicon, and finally 8) the transformation of reclaimed vocabulary.

I have also noted that translation has a growing influence on the visibility of LGBTQ communities in the world at large. As more people are exposed to LGBTQ media through multilingual translation efforts on the part of OTT companies, more conversations are taking place as well as critical reviews that foreground the ways in which these media translations treat queer subject matter. The fan-based translation of LGBTQ media that has emerged in response to the shortcomings of OTT media translation provides important feedback to production teams tasked with localizing LGBTQ media content. It also stresses the fact that thoughtful and intentional LGBTQ media translation can have a more positive influence on the evolution of queer identity and LGBTQ visibility.

While the research I have done in this thesis continues the conversation between LGBTQ communities and translation scholars, I recognize the general limitations to the scope of my work. First, the decision to limit the research specifically to LGBTQ televised series means that other forms of LGBTQ media (movies, podcasts, etc.) were excluded. I chose to investigate an

LGBTQ televised series due to its popularity and availability in terms of translation; however, the trends that I identified as influencing queer identity and LGBTQ visibility may not apply to other forms of media content. Greater, cross-media investigation is needed to expand upon the study of translating LGBTQ media more widely. Besides the limited scope, I also had difficulty finding scholarship specific to LGBTQ media translation. As echoed by other translation scholars before me, increased research is still needed to fully conceptualize the influence of translation and media on queer identity and visibility. Despite the limitations of this thesis, I deem that the translation practices that I identified as influencing queer identity are clearly exemplified and contribute to future corpus-based research on the notion of a translation team's agency in rendering successful and influential translated LGBTQ media content.

In conclusion, it is my sincere hope that this thesis provides increased evidence of the role that translation plays in the development of queer identity and LGBTQ visibility. I also hope to provide encouragement to future generations of translation scholars to continue the task of studying LGBTQ media and translation. As the hatred towards gender and sexual minority groups in many parts of the world is beginning to soften, it is now arguably more critical than ever for translation practices targeting queer content to be examined and improved for the overall benefit of not only LGBTQ communities, but for society as a whole. Scholars of Translation Studies and translation teams alike have the ability to come together in support of thoughtful, intentional translation practices that can be used to better support marginalized communities around the world.

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