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Introduction: The politics of translation and the translation of politics

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In their introduction to the much-quoted edited collection *Translation, Power, Subversion*, Álvarez and Vidal (1996, p. 2) posit that translation is one the most representative paradigms of the clash between cultures. In their view, it is important to examine the relationship between the production of "knowledge in a given culture and its transmission, relocation and reinterpretation in the target culture". Álvarez and Vidal underscore the influence of the translator as well as the power relationship that the source and target cultures may have upon the translation practice. Although twenty-five years have passed since the publication of their book, Álvarez and Vidal's work keeps resonating in a world that has become increasingly globalized and where power can be exerted in myriad ways. For Álvarez and Vidal, translation is a political act. And, it may be added, non-translation also is.

The influence of politics on translation practice can be observed in the translation of political texts but, as Gagnon claims (2010, p. 252), also in the use of translation as a political statement. The former can be exemplified by the translation of political speeches, such as that of President Donald Trump's inaugural address (discussed by Caimotto's article in this special issue); the translation of news articles, such as those rendered into English and Portuguese by *El País* or into Spanish and Chinese by *The New York Times*; and the translation of political texts, such as the works of Karl Marx and his followers that were rendered into Chinese at the beginning of twentieth century. As for translation as a political statement, it refers to the underlying policies that lead to those translations. If we peruse the Spanish versions of *The New York Times*, for instance, we realize that the texts are only a small fraction of what is published in the English version. The same applies to the English articles that appeared in *El País*. This is, of course, related to the limited resources apportioned to the translation services of these media, but the very selection of news items to be translated is also a political act. An excellent example to study the way in which ideologies influence translation practices was the simultaneous appointments of Spain's new Prime Minister and *El País's* new editor back in 2018. These events provide us with an excellent example of how translation can be reflective of the ideological affinity between a government and a specific news corporation (for a discussion, see Valdeón, 2020).

Ideological affinity is more obvious under dictatorial regimes. In the entry devoted to 'censorship' of the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, Billiani (2009, p. 28) posits that "censorship operates largely according to a set of specific values or criteria established by a dominant body and exercised", which she identifies with the state or the Church. Billiani's entry underscores the importance of (some) institutions in the manipulation of texts for specific ideological reasons or purposes, and traces back the origin of censorship to the classical period. Emperor Justinian's decree allowing the use of Latin and Greek for the translation of the Bible exemplifies, in her view, the alliance between state and religion in the production of texts in the application of certain conventions to ensure orthodoxy. The study of censorship has indeed produced an important bulk of research focusing on the political regimes of Italy (Billiani, 2007), Spain (McLaughlin & Muñoz Basols, 2016), Portugal (Seruya & Moniz, 2008; Spirk 2014) and, to a lesser extent, the former Communist countries (Baer, 2010; Pokorn, 2012). But, as Kuhiwczak has pointed out with reference to Europe, "censorship and translation have been important at every turning point in European history" (2011, p. 359).

In fact, translation has been a political act no matter what part of the world or what period we turn to. Most of the pre-classical texts that have survived, including Egyptian papyri and the stone tablets found in the Middle East, showed that translation was used for religious and political purposes. The Rosetta Stone, for instance, was a political document in three languages, i.e. Ancient Egyptian, Egyptian demonic script and Ancient Greek, which served to establish the cult of King Ptolomy V, while similar documents have been found in other parts of the Middle East. In China, a country with a long translation tradition that goes back thousands of years, the immense borderlands required the practice of translation for political, military and trade concerns (Hung, 2005, p. 45). Thus, the formal practice of translation (as opposed to the daily oral practice of translation) seems to have appeared as a political and religious weapon that has become stronger in the contemporary world as a result of the increased processes of economic and cultural globalization and as part of the creation of supranational entities such as the European Union. In these contexts, translation becomes crucial to disseminate specific narratives and to achieve a degree of political and social equality and/or uniformity respectively. The former is exemplified by the presence of translation in the multilingual websites of all manner of international corporations (including banks, insurance companies, tourist conglomerates and so on), in the translation of audiovisual products and in the creation of multilingual news outlets. The latter in the institutionalization of the practice of translation in the United Nations, the European Union and similar supranational entities.

The role that translation has played and continues to play in these and other contexts has been widely studied from several theoretical perspectives and in a range of different contexts, including the use of Bourdieu's theories (Inghilleri, 2011; Haddadian-Moghaddam, 2014), image studies (van Doorslaer, Flynn & Leerssen, 2016), and narrative theory (Baker, 2006) amongst others. Scholars have studied the role of interpreters in international politics (Roland, 1999), in colonial and postcolonial settings (Bastin & Iturriza, 2008; Wolf 2015; Kruger, 2012), have explored the interface between translation and globalization (Cronin, 2003), between translation and empire (Lung, 2011), between translation and communication (Davier & Conway, 2019). In these and other settings, the political is present in the translated. Translation as a political act does not only imply the exertion of power, or, conversely, some degree of resistance against it: it is also present in the choices made by scholars

themselves. When researchers select an object for analysis, they are engaged in a political act that does not necessarily contribute to the creation of objective knowledge but can in fact add a layer of sectarianism. Because, as Evan and Fernández (2018, p. 3) point out, translation can serve to include but also to exclude, and not only from a colonial perspective.

In fact, this point is not new. Fawcett and Munday (2009) already questioned the objectivity of translation scholars who aim to provide critical assessment of their predecessors' work in the field. Fawcett and Munday (2009) already questioned the objectivity of translation scholars who aim to provide critical assessment of their predecessors' work in the field, specifically, mentioning André Lefevere and Edwin Gentzler in this context. As regards the former, they pose the following question: "And what can we say about Lefevere's own hidden agenda which decrees that the middle and upper classes are a monolith about whose taste sweeping judgments may be made?" (2009, p. 136). As for the latter, Fawcett & Munday point out that Gentzler's criticism of Eugene Nida is based on the 'non-dit of the Protestant sub-text' in Nida's linguistic approach', but his criticism is "to some extent, criticisms of Nida are themselves ideologically motivated' (2009, p. 139). In fact, they add, while Gentzler is critical of Nida's approach for being "dominant white, heterosexual, male, Western Anglo-American", he does not make a comparable denunciation of Godard's feminist translation, which equally alters the original texts, sometimes beyond recognition. This approach has been justified as an act of resistance (Gagnon, 2010, p. 252), even though the ethical issues involved are often ignored.

Another interesting example of the influence of political agendas on translation and translation studies is the Spanish version of Hugh Thomas's *The Spanish Civil War*. Considered one of the best accounts of this historic and traumatic event, Thomas's work was deemed unacceptable in Franco's Spain. For this reason, the text was translated into Spanish by Éditions Ruedo Ibérico, a publishing house established in France by a number of Spanish exiles. The company was considered a mouthpiece of the enemy by the Franco regime. To be sure, the 1975 terrorist attack on Ruedo Ibérico was claimed to have been incited by the Spanish government (Sanz Gallego, 2016, p. 3). Leaving this controversy aside and going back to Thomas's *The Spanish Civil War*, Sanz Gallego has showed that the translators of the Spanish version made a number of important changes to underscore the atrocities committed by nationalist troops and supporters while toning down those committed by the Republican side, thus appropriating the text for their own purposes (Sanz Gallego, 2016, p. 11).

Manipulation of original texts for political purposes can be so manifestly erroneous that the resulting version breaches ethics in ways that can hardly be justified. For instance, Valdeón (2017) has shown that some academics may not harbour ethical reservations to use translation and concoct non-existent theories to support their own political agendas. Sigal, for instance, used a brief translated extract from Cieza de León's monumental *Crónica del Perú* to posit that "Cieza supported a theory then popular in Europe, what elsewhere I have called (drawing from Rudi Bleys's work) the 'progressive development' of sodomy" (Sigal, 2003, p. 2). In his work, Sigal attributes the translated text to Cieza de León which, he claims, shows that the Spanish chronicler was familiar with such a theory and supported it. However, the translation of Cieza de León's work used by Sigal reproduces in fact the words of Father Domingo de Santo Tomás, whom Cieza de León quoted. Sigal omits references to other passages where the chronicler seemed to be more understanding of indigenous rites,

presumably because the American academic is unaware of them. However, this serves him to link Cieza de León, who had left Spain aged thirteen with no trace of formal education, to the theory of progressive development of sodomy, which Sigal himself fabricated to support his own political agenda (for a discussion see Valdeón, 2017, pp. 232-238).

This takes us back to the words of Álvarez and Vidal, who wrote that "translators are constrained in many ways: by their own ideology; by their feelings of superiority or inferiority towards the language in which they are writing the text being translated (…) by the very language in which the text they are translating are written; by what the dominant institutions and ideology expect of them" (1996, p. 6). But it is not only translators who are responsible for the (mis)representations of the Other and of their texts, for symbolic acts of violence used to impose their own views of the world. Translation scholars, it may be pointed out, are also responsible for the choices they make when they opt to study certain texts. Or when they prefer to avoid documents that may prove them wrong or ignore texts that may provide more nuanced representations of the object studied. Scholars are also responsible for the manipulation of the information available to them in order to produce biased narratives that are passed on as *knowledge* or, even worse, as undeniable facts.

As regards the articles selected for this special issue, they showcase the interest in the interface between translation and politics, although all of them from a very western perspective. In his paper, Fruela Fernández discusses a topic that has produced much research over the past twenty years, that is, translation in and about Francisco Franco's dictatorial regime in Spain. Fernández reconstructs the translation battles between Francoist services and Italian anti-Francoist militants as an epitome of the dialectal struggle that took place in the West during the Cold War and points out that both Communists and anti-Communists were aware of the importance of translation as a political weapon. Fernández's article is an excellent example of research that attempts to provide a more nuanced view of the topic studied.

Two other articles consider translation during the Franco regime. Dasca's article analyses the Catalan and Spanish versions of *Le silence de la mer* by Vercors. Dasca, who starts by underscoring the fact that the translation of foreign texts into Catalan was not allowed between 1939 and 1952, claims that "the reception of the work in Catalonia, which was conditioned by repression of the Franco dictatorship, intensifies the political sense of the original (also present in the previously published Spanish version)". For her part, Pilar Godayol also looks at the Francoist period in Spain, although she turns her attention to the translation of feminist writings, and more precisely Simone de Beauvoir's *Brigitte Bardot and the Lolita Syndrome*. Godayol provides an overview of how censorship impacted the translation of the French writer's works, and focuses on one of de Beauvoir's favourite essays, which was banned at the time and, paradoxically, remains untranslated today even though the regime is long gone, since contemporary waves of feminism do not appear to be interested in classic feminist writings anymore.

Rosario Martín Ruano explores the connection between translation, and political and institutional policies. Drawing on insights from political theory, sociology and translation studies, Martín Ruano analyses the relationship between policies and translation practices, which she illustrates through a range of examples from various settings, including the European Union, the Spanish Government and the Government of Gibraltar. Her discussion leads her to conclude that "institutional translation will always have both the possibility of being and the challenge of becoming more "translational": more culturally-

sensitive, more sensible to specificities, and more attuned and favourable to the dialogical expression of diversity".

In their article, Luc van Doorslaer and Terje Loogus discuss a very interesting example of how translation policies can go from one extreme to the other. Focusing on the Estonian case and, more precisely, on two institutional websites (the President of the Republic and the University of Tartu), van Doorslaer and Loogus show how translation practices tend to produce comprehensive translations of Estonian texts into English, but shorter and fewer versions into Russian, even though decades of Soviet rule have left an important Russian minority in the country. In this context, they claim, Estonian is a small but majority language and "power relationships between languages clearly play a role in determining the flexibility of a translation policy".

Cristina Caimotto's article looks at the role of translation in another institutional context, namely the press. Journalistic translation research has grown significantly over the past two decades, usually in Translation rather than in Journalism Studies. Caimotto analyses the translation of a politically loaded text, i.e. President Trump's inaugural speech, and how it was conveyed by eight Italian newspapers. Building on previous work by Munday (2018) and Caimotto (2019), she shows that the selection of material used in the media conveyed different approximations of the Trump address to their target readership. Thus, while two newspapers opted for a positive representation, the other six were far more critical. This type of analysis, Caimotto claims, "becomes a tool allowing the hegemonic, less visible, discourse in which we are all immersed to come to the surface and reveal its presence".

Finally, Dols and Calafat look at Ngugi's argument that translation can be conceived as the language of Africa, as it goes beyond the boundaries of any national tongue and may thus be a tool of Pan-African integration. This view would align with Balibar's suggestion that translation should also occupy a central position in the construction of any European project, which should not be built on the "bases of identitarian 'national language-culture'". Dols and Calafat also consider Butler's concept of universalism and Santos's use of translation as an alternative to the expansion of a monoculture to support the emancipatory potential of translation.

On the whole, the papers in this special issue revisit known territories but also provide an open window to engage in a more critical manner with some of the déjà-vus of translation studies research that, over the past decades, have simultaneously advanced and compromised the field.

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