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ON METHOD IN HISPANIC TRANSLATION HISTORY

The accumulation and ordering of facts is a very necessary task; it constitutes the archaeology at the basis of any history. If the facts are wrong, they should be corrected. Yet the task of translation history itself, to trace the trails of relations between cultures, requires more than raw data. Some principles of method, and debate about the same, may be in order.

The following notes run through suggestions for two such principles. They have evolved from a series of case studies, mostly from the Hispanic past (1). As such, they cannot aspire to any universality of thought or application. Field-restricted, they might yet be of interest to those tilling similar soils.

Principle 1: Study translators, then texts

Instinctively, we filólogos reach for a text, to check its language, to compare it with a source or, more profitably, to compare translations with alternative translations. It is a normal thing to do. Yet as soon as we do this normal thing, we find ourselves dealing with an issue of sides: target and source, here and there, home and away, even when one of the sides is only virtual (as might occur when comparing various translations of the one source). Thus are we invited never to question the line separating those two sides, nor the correlated belonging of whatever should be on either side. Over there everything is in English, with English turns of phrase, English mentality, and all the stereotypes one could hope to attach to such things. Over here we find the same but in Spanish. We are invited not to see the amount of Englishness that is in things Spanish, nor viceversa, nor the extent to which our epistemological borders conceal the middle grounds.

The two-sided models flounder rather badly when we enter something like the Hispanic twelfth century (Toledo and all that). There, one side is Arabic and Islamic and respectably other, 'our' side is Latin and Christian and familiar enough, but in the

overlaps we find translating Jews, Mozarabs, the occasional Morisco, not to mention the oral use of Romance, or some kind of Castilian, or Leonese, or Aragonese, or Catalan, or indeed written Hebrew texts. All those languages and modes of thought, including the Islamic, might legitimately claim to be Hispanic, all within the one geopolitical mess. In such cases, the basic binary divisions are of remarkably little help.

A facile way to deal with such problems is to manifest them, to describe the ways all language products, including translations, escape homogeneity and manifest difference. Such might be the application of theory that can only discover itself. A more radical step, however, is to question whether our object of study need be a language product at all. After all, if the here-or-there border is a function of texts as translations, the overcoming of that border might simply involve looking at something else. Translators, the human producers of translations, might also be legitimate objects of knowledge. The history of translators is at least as valid a general organizing principle as have been the various focuses on source-text authors, source texts, or target-vs.-source languages, cultures or nations.

Once one starts to look at translators rather than translations, several realizations are likely to dawn:

First, in the Hispanic field as elsewhere, one soon finds that remarkably little is known about most translators (2). In fact, the few exceptions tend to be translators who found fame wearing a different hat (as authors, political figures, polemicists, whatever). Considerable archival work is often required to piece together the elements of a biography; far more is needed before something like a character can emerge. Yet the searches are mostly possible. What they reveal is not only a hidden labyrinth of textual history, but also, indirectly, a few of the historical reasons for the longstanding suppression of translators as significant cultural figures. For example, here we have a fairly obscure Catalan translator of poetry, responsible for some eight anthologies of translated verse, in Castilian, between 1914 and 1921. His contribution to Spanish literature is quantitatively impressive, yet few literary histories bear mention of Fernando Maristany. Finding out about his life is rather like unearthing a tomb. Why

should this be so? The reasons for his marginal status must include the rupture of the Civil War, and perhaps his cultural position as a Catalan in Spanish letters. Yet this is not to pretend there has been some kind of canonical conspiracy against him because of his status as a translator. Nor, in general, is it useful to set out to right a major wrong in the name of oppressed translators. There may be great human qualities to be revealed through translation history. But in this particular case, no, Maristany, along with many of his ilk, was wilfully marginal, casting himself into a service role, adopting grossly conservative or derivative stances on most issues, and producing some occasionally ghastly verse. Uncovering and admitting such things is part of the fun of the game.

— Even when less than heroic, the translators of the past tend to force recognition of what we might call multidiscursive mediation, perhaps just as fancy name for the fact that translators usually do more than just translate. Maristany, for example, was an editor, publisher and author in his own right as well as a translator (family money saved him from lowly obligations). Many others use translation as one leg of a multifarious career, perhaps in initial attempts to enter the literary world, in the leisurely creativity of retirement, or, particularly in Hispanic history, as a means of survival in years of hardship or exile. The resulting connections and overlaps between the various professions and forms of cultural mediation can be of great methodological use. To appreciate why, consider for a moment the directives of a method that would have us look at translations first and receiving (poly)systems second. Such a method obliges us to move from the several thousand shifts embodied in a translated fragment (wherein many a descriptive scholar already becomes lost) and confront the whole churning dynamic of a culture, supposedly in search of some kind of explanation for the translation. Where should the researcher start? One could only talk about things as vague as canons and genres, since anything more specific must be invisible in the multitude. To get a handle on the systems, at least, it is eminently useful to consider the human mediators, to look at the discourses they brought together, to try to see the way those discourses configured intercultural space, and then to look at the main debates in which those discourses spoke to each other.

If we are in the twelfth century, look at the church and the monastic orders: most of the translators were working for them, arguing quietly about the status of pagan science. In the thirteenth, consider the role of the Jews and Italians under Alfonso X, in the context of implicit debates about the role of service minorities in a fledgling national system. In the fourteenth, look carefully at the mediating positions of Catalan and Aragonese, with underground problematics that have survived through to the autonomías of today. And so on.

— Once we can see translators as mediators on many domains, it becomes quite normal to question their cultural allegiance to any one side. Were the protoscientific translators of the twelfth century entirely on the side of Christian doctrine? One suspects not. Were the Jewish astronomers paid by Alfonso uniquely interested in the well-being of their king? Américo Castro (2) suggested they worked into Castilian so as to undermine the Latin of Christendom. Such hypotheses undoubtedly require numerous secondary considerations. Yet the questions themselves only become possible once we abandon the preconception that mediators work–or should work–for one side only. No, intercultural professions also work for themselves, for their own material well-being, and perhaps even for some ideals that will withstand the decline of national sovereignties.

— Find the translators, see who paid them, see what discourses they borrowed and mixed, what minor elements of power they thus found. Usually, unsurprisingly, we also find considerable mobility. Mediators tend to move, from genre to genre, client to client, sometimes country to country. This mobility no doubt increases with the development of transport systems. Yet it is by no means new. Consider the case of the Englishman Robertus Ketenensis (many other names are possible), mostly responsible for the first Latin version of the Qur'an (c.1143). He did the job 'in the region of the Ebro', but in the pay of the Order of Cluny. So was he an ideological footsoldier of Christendom? Perhaps, since immediately after the translation he was appointed archdeacon at Pamplona, probably as a reward. Yet he could not have stayed there long. Robertus signed a translation in Segovia in 1145 and drew up astronomical tables for London in 1149. Vocational integration into the church

structure was obviously not his personal aim. His mobility reveals his allegiance, to science more than to church or state structures. We can trace the history of such moving feet.

So much for what we might discover by looking at translators rather than at translations. Good scholars will object here that our distinction is naïve, that it suggests the immediate availability of people long dead, that what we are working on is always a series of texts, be they translations or biographical documents. Yes, of course, our historical translators are products of language. Yet there is a difference involved, a very fundamental difference. On the one hand, a certain set of research questions focuses on reconstructing social profiles, financial transactions, dates and movements, the archeological details that might piece together a system rather than just assume it. On the other, we find attempts to privilege translators as a 'voice' within the textual translation (4). Such attempts are interesting reading performances, destined to find results. But the questions they are asking, like the methods they employ, reveal something hidden (translatorial subjectivity is indeed often suppressed) that remains quite obvious in the external existence of historical translators. There seems little reason why translation history should deploy intricate textual criticism when it could attain many of its goals more directly by asking biographical and sociological questions. That is, by seeking its points of departure in translators rather than in translations.

Principle 2: Look for intercultures

We have mentioned 'intercultural space' and 'intercultural professions' without properly explaining what the terms mean. For us, that 'inter-' is not to be confused with things that go from one culture to another ('cross-cultural seems an adequate adjective for that), nor with heterogeneity within a social space ('multicultural' would suffice there). Instead, it implies an overlap or intersection like the following:

Here we see two cultures (there could be more) intersecting each other, where a symbolic translator could placed in the intersection. This is a model (a set of

explanatory hypotheses); it is not a law of translation; it is not a definition of all translators. The model might be useful in that it implicitly challenges axiomatic beliefs in fidelity to the source (as if all translators were mere agents of Culture 1) or loyalty to the target (as if they were all wholly determined by the systems of Culture 2). The model thus questions both fidelity-based evaluations and target-based systemic approaches. It suggests that translators may work in a fairly specific locale, drawing on more than one culture (they have at least lear in something of another language) but wholly determined by none.

In the Hispanic context, such interculturality might most obviously be seen in the position of the translating Jews and Mozarabs from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, alongside the various travelling scholars from many parts of Europe. It might be continued through to the various Protestant and protesting translators forced to leave the Spain of the Counter-Reformation and enter the Spain of European exile. It might also be found the Sephardic and Morisco diasporas, in the tradition of cultural mixes and renegade churchmen in the Americas and Philippines, in the waves of intellectuals expelled as Jesuits, afrancesados, Liberals and Republicans (to name but a few historical causes). Hispanic interculturality has a rich past in medieval mixes, and a tragic modernity on the fringes of a robust monocultural core. The translators tend to be found in those mixes, along those fringes, in those exiles, quite logically because of the interculturality they were born into or had imposed upon them. Translation is one of the services a minority cultural group can render; it is one of the ways an exiled intellectual can earn a living. We should thus not to be shocked to find translators among such groups. But the discovery might not be possible if we start from Toury's model where "translators are members of a target culture, or tentatively assume that role" (5).

So much for the abstract qualities of 'intercultural' and 'interculturality'. When we talk of 'intercultures' we are actually going quite a few steps further. The non-abstractive substantive suggests that the middle space has structures and dynamics that are something like those of cultures themselves. Rather than a convenient and transitory accident of history, this overlap would function as a social space, with its

own membership rites, norms of behaviour, ideologies and ethics. Do we have any real grounds for using such a model?

In the Hispanic field, the notion of an 'interculture' cannot be construed to refer to a particular ethnic group. There is certainly no pueblo or Volk whose members are exclusively translators. There is no question of membership by birthright (although birthright-based mediatory groups can be found in West Africa and the Sparta of Herodotus, at least). Further, there is a marked lack of historical awareness underlying any apparent continuity. The exiled Spanish Protestants translating the Bible in the sixteenth century expressed no particular identification with the position of Hispanic Jewish translators in previous centuries (although they certainly borrowed from Jewish translators of the Bible into Castilian), nor with the position of northern European translators in medieval Hispania (who linked with the cultural networks of the Jews). We might argue that the translators should have thought about such connections. Yet the weight of primary cultural identification, the constructed continuities of nationalist histories, means we cannot really expect such translators to act in term of century-spanning intercultures.

At the same time, significant historical networks are frequently formed between translators in ways that constantly cross cultural borders. We might think of the Jews, Christians and Mozarabs brought together in the translation teams of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, or of the European protestants moving between the centres like Wittenberg, Leuven, and London in the sixteenth century, of the many foreigners brought together in the translation schools and agencies of Spain today. These intercultural groups certainly had a sense of community and common purpose. It would perhaps be counterproductive to expect much more.

Let us then restrict our notion of an interculture on the following fronts:

— Membership is determined according to professional criteria, more than any form of primary belonging (birthright, race, ethnicity, mother tongue). Translators would thus have a sense of community simply because they are translators. That, however, is factitious. We have already allowed that translators usually do more than translate; this multidiscursive status could only contradict any membership exclusive

to translators. We fare rather better when looking for relationships between what we might call mediatory professions, covering all the various forms of text localization. An interculture might thus include diplomats, churchmen, foreign-influenced authors, foreign-language teachers, journalists, negotiators at all levels, and increasingly the marketers, business executives, scientists and academics working in globalizing sectors. In each case, we must be prepared to follow the links that lead to such configurations, even at the risk of producing something more than translation history.

— Viewed as such, intercultures would always need the support of more primary structures of cultural belonging. That is, they would always present themselves as being in some way secondary to the relations upon which they operate. Translators would thus work on or for Culture 1 or Culture 2, and if they should function in the name of either side, it is as agent and not principal. For example, when Alonso de Cartagena debated translation strategies with Leonardo Bruni in the years between 1430 and 1437, he was not so much representing Spain or acting as a Spaniard as he was defending a certain tradition for the translation of Aristotle. The debate was situated in a meta position, second to the more primary division of cultures. Cartagena and Bruni could thus find retain their primary identities while at the same time finding much common ground. Both were concerned with the use of classical texts to better their respective societies (they differed on the means, not the end); both probably had interests in the wool trade that connected Burgos and Florence (6). This professional 'secondness', not to be confused with the Peircean use of the term, makes discursive as well as social sense. Indeed, it would seem highly pertinent to the translation form, which by definition presupposes an initial separation of languages and cultures.

— Because they are professionally based and condemned to secondness, intercultures would seem to be transitory. People with different skills and competencies come together to work on cross-cultural relations in a given sphere of human affairs; they do their work; they translate; then their professional relations loosen as the historical task diminishes. This might account for the lack of historical

awareness; intermediaries have no history as a social group. It might also say why Julio-César Santoyo, in introducing his anthology of Hispanic translation theory, observes that the various fragments "no constituyen una 'tradición', ni dependen genéticamente unos de otros" (7). Traditions in translation theory might be the exception rather than the rule; the fundamental problems are perhaps never resolved, they merely lose importance for a while. They come and go, with the intercultures themselves.

— Deprived of great diachronic wealth, intercultures would appear to wax and wane in accordance with circumstance. For Columbus, translation was a problem solved by taking along a polyglot Jew and, failing that, captured natives. From that humble beginning grew the wide intercultures promoted by church and state in the Americas (Cisneros argued for the development of a native-born control caste), historically mediating until that middle overlap grew so wide as to have become a new culture in itself (virtually everyone learnt Spanish). And more or less parallel to that growth of a culture from an interculture, the mediatory caste working from Latin declined in historical importance and power, becoming a thin intersection surviving as good conscience or taste in our churches and universities today. Intercultures may disappear either by becoming general or by shrinking away. More important, at a point of relative generalization (as in the case of English-Spanish exchanges today) we might expect to find a very wide range of professions interacting in the same intercultural space as translators; translators' clients and readerships would not be in primary cultures but in the extensive and growing intersection; everyone would be a bit of a translator; the quality of everyday translating might be expected to decline. Such hypotheses should not be excluded from translation history.

— Where are the intercultures physically located? The question can be rephrased: Where are the networks between professions most intense? Where do people of different cultural backgrounds come together? The answer, usually, is to be found in cities, particularly big cities, the hubs of cross-cultural communications. Translators consequently tend to be either in cities or in the networks centred on cities. Electronic space might be expected to change such concentrations, yet the age

of globalization has at the same time brought about the world cities specializing in complex communications. Is it productive to ask if translators belong to one culture or another? Was Maristany Spanish or Catalan? Was Cartagena Castilian, Converso or part of the European church? If we think in terms of cities and networks, such questions become rather meaningless. The places of intercultural belonging are not the rural expanses and seas of nation-states.

Envoi

Some ten years ago, at the second Jornadas de Historia de la Traducción in León, I presented a series of complaints about the methods being used in translation history (the paper had the undeserved honour of becoming the first article in the first issue of Livius). Since then, as was to be expected, I have found it rather more difficult to construct histories than to criticize the work of others. Now, in a situation of relatively abundant research activity, there are no real fights to be fought against alternative approaches. It is enough to do what we are happiest with. I want to look at translators, others at translations; I like intercultures, others like target systems. And more: I seek large-scale historical relations, others keep track of names, dates and places; I like to start from the study of debates about translation, others are content to locate translation norms. Each side of these equations can help the other. The sum of all those parts will be translation history, and we should be most grateful to those who carry out the tasks that interest us the least. No matter how benighted or short-sighted I might personally consider the various nationalisms still projected onto translations (since translations separate cultures, they are eminently useful to nationalisms), much can be learnt from the data thus found. And we may yet hope that the intercultural, if uncovered, will eventually convert reseachers to its cause. It is in bemused but still evangelistic spirit (call it middle age) that the above principles are put forward.

Notes

1.Most of the case studies are included or summarized in Anthony Pym, Method in Translation History, Manchester: St Jerome, 1998; and, Negotiating the Frontier. Translators and Intercultures in Hispanic History, Manchester: St Jerome, 2000.

2. Hispanic letters nevertheless probably have a greater tradition in this field than do most cultures. We might trace our projects back to Juan Antonio Pellicer y Saforcada's Ensayo de una bibliotheca de traductores españoles, Madrid: Antonio de Sancha, 1778, and Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo's Biblioteca de traductores españoles, vols. 54-57 of Obras completas. Santander: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1952-53. The series of Jornadas de Historia de la Traducción in León would also seem without parallel in other climes. Hispanic translation history might nevertheless benefit enormously from a project along the lines of the Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation, ed. Peter France, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

3. Américo Castro, España en su historia. Cristianos, moros y judíos, Buenos Aires, 1948, 454-478.

4. See, for example, Theo Hermans, "The Translator's Voice in Translated Narrative", Target 8 (1996), 23-48; and "Some Concluding Comments on the Debates and Responses", Current Issues in Language and Society 5 (1998), 135-142, esp. p. 40.

5. Gideon Toury, Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond, Amsterdam & Philadelphia: Benjamins, 1995, 172.

6. See Nicholas Round, 'Libro Llamado Fedrón'. Plato's 'Phaedo' translated by Pero Díaz de Toledo. London: Tamesis, 1993, 72.

7. Julio-César Santoyo, Teoría y crítica de la traducción: Antología, Bellaterra: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 1987, 19.

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