

TRANSLATION AS A DIALOGUE BETWEEN CULTURES: THE JESUIT EXPERIENCE

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Language manifests itself in a specific historical context. The word, which emerges from such a historical specificity, gains clusters of meanings having connotative values. In any society word is not just a lexical entity. It is essentially a cultural memory, in which the entire society participates. The society remembers and recapitulates this experience, when this word is put into a context. The translator has to recreate this participatory experience of the source language culture by recontextualising it in the target language culture, so that the target language reader can participate in an alien cultural experience, so to say.

In my paper I am going to look at about the process of translation as a process of acculturation and the process of accommodation that was followed by the Jesuits. Whether it was Latin America or India, the Jesuits used translation to achieve catechism. The translations by Jesuits contain a large amount of acculturation, a readiness to mix Catholic and native Indian terms, in order to achieve the catechism of the Indians, their acculturation into Catholicism. We see this readiness to mix Christian Catholic terms and concepts from the spiritual world of the Indians as having much in common with the dynamic equivalence found in the work of Eugene Nida.

To make a foreign work of literature acceptable to the receiving culture, translators will often «adapt» it to the poetics of that receiv-

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ing culture. The strategy of the first Franciscans who settled with the Aztecs in the early 16th century, trying to convince them of the superiority of the Christian God and therefore the need for them to convert to Catholicism, was that of using the thinking system of the natives and operating in the logic of the «Other» in order to convert them as a natural consequence of their own way of thinking. This move was apparently successful in the early days of Mexico. In the beginning, the missionaries made several million baptisms among the natives. But the Franciscans were aware of the fact that they had to go beyond baptism and promote a deeper cultural change. In order to do so, they adopted the Indian way of life and rapidly learnt the mechanisms of the Aztec culture. They learnt some of the Aztec language, Náhuatl and other minor native languages so that they could translate the Catholic texts.

A distinct quality of the Jesuits was adaptation or accommodation. The theory of accommodation is concerned with motivations underlying and consequences arising from ways in which we adapt our language and communication patterns toward others. Since accommodation theory's emergence in the early 1970s, it has attracted empirical attention across many disciplines and has been elaborated and expanded many times. In *Contexts of Accommodation*, accommodation theory is presented as a basis for sociolinguistic explanation. Accommodative processes can, for example, facilitate or impede language learners' proficiency in a second language as well as immigrants' acceptance into certain host communities

Accommodation is the term normally used to refer to the means we take to adjust our way of interacting with people of different cultures in order to facilitate communication. An individual is said to accommodate if s/he meets her/his interlocutors on their cultural grounds by such means as adopting their phonological system, using their habitual turn-taking procedures and observing their genre constructions. This paper extends the term «accommodation», usually applied to oral interaction, to embrace the kind of translation that Peter Newmark calls «communicative», in which linguistic forms, discourse conventions and even genre traits are adapted to the cultural expectations of the target readership.

Effective accommodation is not mere mimicry of one's interlocutors but rather identification with their way of «seeing and saying things». This wider perspective derives in turn from a new view of

natural human languages, seen primarily as «volitional matrices» and only secondarily as «semiotic systems». It is because language is primarily a volitional state (a «*will to mean*») that adopting an interlocutor's expressive traits in a way that produces *entente* requires, first of all, identifying with (interjecting) the existential values that inform their cultural meaning.

THE USE OF LOCAL LANGUAGES HELPED TURN CATHOLICISM INTO A NATIVE RELIGION, I.E., TO BRING EUROPE INTO THE AMERICAS

José de Anchieta was a Canarian Jesuit missionary to Brazil in the second half of the XVI century. A highly influential figure in Brazil's history, Anchieta was one of the founders of São Paulo, in 1554, and Rio de Janeiro, in 1565. He was a writer and poet, and is considered the first Brazilian writer. Anchieta was also involved in the catechesis and conversion to the Catholic faith of the Indian population; his efforts together with another Jesuit missionary, Manuel da Nóbrega, were crucial to the establishment of stable colonial settlements in the new country.

Jesuits like Anchieta aimed at cultural convergence or acculturation, joining Catholicism to elements of the Indian cultures, translation and equivalence. As an example, I quote John Milton of the Universidad de Sao Paulo, who has done extensive work on the Tupi language, that «the Jesuits used the fact that the Guaraní mythology predisposed their people to accept the idea of a single God and the existence of a heavenly world. In addition, the Christian ritual, with its pomp and music, attracted the natives and resulted in a smoother conversion»¹. Tupi was the main language spoken in Brazil in the 16th century due to the fact that it was used by the Jesuits and the colonial administration. Eduardo Navarro in his book, *The Translations of the First Texts to Tupi, the Classical Indian Language in Brazil*, mentions the fact that «knowledge of Tupi was very widespread in Brazil during the 17th and 18th century and although pupils at the Jesuit schools were taught to read and write Portuguese and Latin, the medium of instruction was Tupi. Jesuit missionaries were obliged to learn Tupi. The Jesuits used Tupi in order to get closer to the Indians. As it was spoken in the catechism and by the backwoodsmen, it was an instrument of the spiritual and territorial con-

¹ Milton, 2007, p. 1399.

quests of our history, and knowledge of Tupi, however superficial it may have been, has been part of our national culture»².

According to Maria Antonia Grandville (*The Catechisms of Father Anchieta*), the role of the catholic priest was redefined by the Indians: they did not see him as someone in the service of god but as someone who had an important position according to the tribal status. In the catechism, the Jesuit priests substituted the shaman and were the new doctors and of course, they also acted as medical doctors in curing the Indians with medicines brought from Europe. The priest had the strength to demand, to talk and to make decisions with the authorities on behalf of the community since he was considered the bearer of messianic hope, promising a better, safer land³.

Thus one can see that Anchieta had a ready audience and shaped his catechetical work to fit certain Indian beliefs, allowing a level of acculturation, mixing Jesuit Catholicism with Indian beliefs. The Jesuits were always prudent and anxious to maintain the trust of the Indians and were quite tolerant of this hybrid culture. In his attempts to spread the Catholic message and thus encourage the acculturation of the Indians, Anchieta created a new theatre which was neither totally Indian nor shaped by the rigid foreign standards.

Francis Xavier came to India in 1542. He reached Goa and started working in the Royal Hospital of the Holy Spirit. After working in Goa for five months, he sailed for Manappad in the territory of the Paravas, also known as the Fishery Coast along with three seminaries. By the time Xavier met the Paravas they had already adopted Christianity. However he had to instruct them as there were no priests to guide them. From Manappad he went to Tuticorin. Here Xavier faced a problem as the native language was Tamil. To overcome this, he searched for those who were conversant with Portuguese and Tamil and they translated the basic prayers into Tamil. It was after a great toil for many days that Xavier learnt them by heart and taught them to the people. It was sometime later, that St. Francis Xavier instituted the office of catechist on the fisheries coast.

In a letter he wrote to the Society at Rome, on his approbation and confirmation he gave an account of his method of preaching to

² Navarro, 2001, p. 52.

³ Grandville, 1997.

Paravas. He said, «We could not understand one another, as I spoke Castilian and they Malabar; so I picked out the most intelligent and well-read of them, and then sought out with the greatest diligence men who knew both languages. We held meetings for several days and by our joint efforts and with infinite difficulty we translated the Catechism into the Malabar tongue. This I learnt by heart, and then I began to go through all the villages on the coast, calling around me by the sound of the bell as many as I could, children and men. I assembled them twice a day and taught them the Christian doctrine: thus in the space of a month, the children had it well by heart. And all the time I kept telling them to go on teaching in their turn whatever they had learnt to their parents, family and neighbours.

Every Sunday I collected them all, men and women, boys and girls, in the church. They came with great readiness and with a great desire for instruction. Then in the hearing of all, I began by calling on the name of the most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and the Holy Ghost, and I recited aloud the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary and the Creed in the language of the country: they all followed me in the same words, and delighted in it wonderfully. I take care to make them repeat the Creed oftener than the other prayers; and I tell them that those who believe all that is contained therein are called Christians»⁴.

St. Ignatius of Loyola was the founder of the Jesuit order. He was keen on proper selection of members for the foreign missions. The member was bound to the Society and had to learn the classical and the Biblical languages and also the Chaldean, Arabic and the Indian languages. He was aware that normal Jesuit training would not suffice for those who were to work in other countries. Hence in the Jesuit constitution he emphasised the knowledge of the local language. Consequently, the Jesuits not only studied the local language, they also produced literature in those languages. Xavier has been credited with the introduction of the Christina greeting in Tamil Sarvevaranukku- stotiram meaning praise to God. Xavier also preferred the use of the local language to make the teaching effective.

Roberto de Nobili was an Italian Jesuit missionary to Southern India. He used a novel method of adaptation (accommodation) to preach Christianity, adopting many local customs of India which

⁴ Coleridge, 2004, pp. 151-152.

were, in his view, not contrary to Christianity. Born in Montepulciano, Tuscany Roberto de Nobili came to Goa in 1605. After a short stay in Cochin, he took residence in Madurai. He soon called himself a «teacher of wisdom» and began to dress like a *Sannyasi*. He took advantage of his noble parentage to approach high caste people and was willing to engage in dialogue with Hindu scholars on the truths of Christianity.

De Nobili studied Sanskrit and Tamil literature and gained mastery in those ancient languages. As he expounded the Christian doctrine in Tamil he coined several words to communicate the message to his Tamil audience. He used the word «*kovil*» for a place of worship, «*arul*» and «*prasadam*» for grace, «*guru*» for priest or teacher, «*Vedam*» for the Bible, «*poosai*» for Mass, etc. As S. J. Hambye mentions in *History of Christianity in India* he adopted certain rites which were very similar to the local practises⁵. His successors continued to follow them and most of these practises were accepted in the Mysore and Carnatic missions. These rites were The sacred thread blessed by the priest along with a cross; marks with sandal paste on the forehead, the bust and upper arms, and later on also with ashes, all blessed by the priest; baths as symbol of inner purification; tuft of hair for men; the use of thali for married women; omitting the use of saliva during baptism.

When we speak of «a culture» or «the receiving culture», we would do well to remember that cultures are not monolithic entities, but that there is always a tension inside a culture between different groups, or individuals, who want to influence the evolution of that culture in the way they think best. Translations have been made with the intention of influencing the development of a culture.

Two decades ago, translation in history was merely considered a metaphor for new strategies of intellectual history, but today it is an object of epistemological analysis. Today, the understanding of translation is guided by linguistics and literary theory. Translation is no longer a simple transfer of words or texts from one language to another like maybe in a dictionary, but has become a translanguag act of transcoding cultural material and a complex act of communication.

A lot of work on translation in history in the past few years has come about because of interest in the effects of European colonial-

⁵ Hambye, 1997, p. 212.

ism. With the expansion of mercantilism in the sixteenth century, Western Europe initiated contact with a host of peoples around the globe. Their long term associations made it necessary to have a mediating language and one of the consequences was the formal study of languages and processes of translation. A large part of the work on translation as a historical process in the past decade has been accomplished within Asian Studies. The experience that China and Japan present has given rise to interest shown in the problems of translation. They present a stark contrast to the other regions of the world in the sense that they were never formally colonized. But they were alert to the need to learn about the west in order to avoid the fate of those who had failed to retain their autonomy from the west. China and Japan were centralized states with long literary, educational and historical traditions and their first contact with the west being in the shape of interaction with Jesuit Missionaries hoping to persuade them of the truth of Christianity, they immediately engaged the problem of mediating language differences through translation procedures. But at the same time Asian Studies has also studied the examples of people without strong centralised states, who were colonized by European powers, in particular those of the Indian subcontinent, with their multiple literary traditions.

The encounter with an alien culture would in the first instance amount to a confrontation of two heterogeneous sensibilities which are conditioned by their intrinsic value systems of their respective cultures. It is the translator who has to obliterate these demarcations of alienness through his intercultural mediation and convey the sense of alterity of the SL culture to the recipients of the TL culture. Cultural content is not entirely identifiable and is intricately woven into the texture of the language. The translator has to transmit this special tone/ texture or cultural quality of the text into his own language. At times he may have to change the text in order to convey the cultural manner. Translators must therefore be alive to two cultures.

Translation has to do with authority and legitimacy and, ultimately, with power, which is precisely why it has been and continues to be the subject of so many acrimonious debates. Translation is not just a window opened on another world, or some such pious platitude. Rather, translation is a channel opened, often not without a certain reluctance, through which foreign influences can penetrate the native culture, challenge it, and even contribute to subverting it.

«When you offer a translation to a nation», says Victor Hugo, «that nation will almost always look on the translation as an act of violence against itself»⁶.

Classically, translation has been theorised either negatively, in terms of appropriation, or, positively, in terms of the introduction of foreign values. To characterise these movements, expressions such as *source* language, text, and culture, and *target* language, text, and culture, have been used. This choice of terminology is revealing, suggesting, in an essentialist and homogenizing way, the existence of two linguistic, textual, and cultural territories, one of which is clearly in a position of superiority, even if it is generous, tolerant, and well-meaning. Between the two, translation would serve as a medium of unilateral or bilateral communication or exchange. In fact, however, translation serves to denounce all ideological pretensions of this type regarding the foundations and limits of languages, texts and cultures. The sub-*versive* function of translation destabilises notions of appropriation, or of internal or external cultural values. It undoes the borders designating works as foreign; it puts into question the notion of the original, through which anteriority is easily transformed into authority.

Traditional theories understand translation as a relationship of the same to the other. To translate is to convert difference into similarity, to make the author write as if s/he had written directly in the target language. But alterity is never simply unidirectional. The other does not refer back to the same, or to the other of the same—which is simply an extension or projection of the same—but to a radically different other, a constantly changing discourse and Translation historicity. Translation is what can bring about the multiplication of texts, since it is multiplicity, without placing limits on the activity of translation, on languages or on epochs. A translation is a text, and, as such, it is meaningful as a vector and an index of historicity, where the original and its translation meet and interweave, a text that Walter Benjamin says is «ignited by the eternal continuing life of the work and the endless revival of languages». These texts and their translations offer us a glimpse into the past and help us to understand it.

⁶ Lefevere, 1992, p. 114.

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