

LIVING-IN-BETWEEN- LANGUAGES@ BORDERLANDS.GLOBAL

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ABSTRACT

The voices of the “literary periphery” escape the suppression of invisibility by translating themselves into more “universal languages.” The literary system acting as one of the repositories of cultural memory is in this way forced to reshape, conform or reinvent itself into new literary expressions.

I will study the Basque case as it has been placed at the peripheries of Spanish cultural life but in the last decades jumped into the international literary system by translating what had only belonged to the intimate Basque collectivity. Is this exposure an attempt to validate themselves after decades of linguistic isolation? How do political views interact with this linguistic phenomenon? What is the relation between the national identity and the expression of such in a translated format? Does the “I” that writes represent the Basque author or a mirrored image of him or her? How do we cross linguistic barriers without losing identities? This is not a new scenario in the global literary system but we are finding new ways to overcome it. This literary projection of the Basque culture is supported by other cultural initiatives that accompany the literary event. Although the linguistic isolation was partly due to the linguistic challenges of the Basque language itself, it is interesting to see how the Spanish and the global literary community receives these new translations that are contextualized in a political and militant decision not to pursue global recognition through violent venues.

Keywords: bilingualism, borderlands, Basque, glocal, linguistic minority

INTRODUCTION

Postcolonial theories have proposed concepts such as centre and periphery, borderlands, national cultures, or national language. Nowadays, globalization has taken over the stage and the linguistic maps were reconfigured again. Minority languages found a new stage to compete for global attention, thus liberating them from the peripheral linguistic ghettos within a national linguistic and cultural dominance. This is the case of the Basque language and literature that is taking the global stage with the aid of bridge languages that do not convey the traditional and historical painful stigma that centuries of linguistic dominance imposed on them. The Basque population has used Spanish and sometimes French as a second language to communicate within the Basque community and with outside communities. This imposed bilingualism created for the Basques a schizophrenic expression. In this article, I will analyse how some communications or dialogues conducted in the mother tongue contrast with the majority that use a m(other) tongue. There has always been the need to translate it because someone in the audience does not speak Basque or because the source of information or story originated in a second language. This use of constant translation creates the illusion of invisibility, which is contrary to the process of identity formation. The need for translation is not only oral but also in written form.

TRANSLATION PROCESSES AT THE BASQUE "BORDERLAND" LEADING TO THE CONCEPTION OF A TRANSNATIONAL SPACE

In the translation process there is an interlocutor that is an active participant in the communicational transaction retaining some of the presence of the speaker. Lawrence Venuti expressed it this way, "A translated text [...] is judged acceptable by most publishers, reviewers, and reader when it reads fluently, when the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer's personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text-the disap-

pearance, in other words, that the translation is not in fact a translation, but the “original” (Lawrence 1995, 1).

Translation has been the main tool in the linguistic transactions between the Basques and the rest of the world given the difficulties inherent in the language and, to some extent, the geographical isolation on the linguistic map. The linguistic borderland between the mother tongue and the “other foreign tongue” has always constituted a challenge for the Basques and Spanish alike. With the recognition of the Basque language as one of the national languages we could be led to believe that an inclusion and recognition took place. This was not the case; the linguistic borderline continues to divide two peoples and two languages that compete for attention. The Basque people had to face their own challenges that change from one linguistic community to another. Joseph explains the Case of Scotland indicating that “In the case of Scotland, where two separate national languages emerged (Gaelic and Scots, of Celtic and Germanic provenance respectively), their coexistence has not favoured the development of linguistic nationalism, but has impeded it, as partisans of the two languages have focused much of their energies on combating the rival claims of the other, rather than the hegemony of English” (Joseph 2004, 94).

In our transnational world as two individuals come close and desire communication it is inevitable that the speaker of the minority language will yield to the use of a “more universal” language. A national competition is not present but the authoritarian rule of one over the other is still in place. The borderland space is the new territory where languages meet and the communication event could be peaceful or violent given a very delicate balance in the contexts and the circumstances of the borderland. Each individual living in the borderlands is very aware of the risks of living in between languages. Languages are still the arms of the political powers.

In the case of the Basque country the concept of a subordinate culture was not modified with the political decision to recognize the language as one of the national languages, as the main publishing houses were mainly concerned with publications in Spanish given the restrictive audience of the Basque language. “A fluent translation would thus give the impression that the reader is given direct access to the original work, and therefore the impression that nothing is missed, (or gained), by reading the translation. The implications of the ideal of invisibility for the understanding of cultural otherness in a multilingual world divided by power relations are obvious: dominant majority languages are conspicuously present and proficiency in them is often regarded as an emblem of cosmopolitanism – they are

highly visible and recognizable –, while minority languages fade into the background (or, for some, the backlands) and “attachment” to them may even be seen as an obstacle to universal communication” (Olaziregi 2009, 214).

The use of translation while living in between languages offers a double value; on the one hand, two parties can communicate while before it was impossible. On the other hand, the speaker is impregnated by certain invisibility as he is trying to put forth a thought that needs to be modified and shaped so that the listener can not only understand but also accept the message shared. The cultural and social life at this translational borderland unavoidably follows the pendulum between being explained or even modified, or misunderstood.

The Basque Country as a geographical borderland of the Spanish political map constituted itself as an ironic “self-linguistic borderland” of the Basque language. The Basque country itself was “the borderland” where a cultural and linguistic identity was trying to emerge. At the same time the Basque people were translating the process through the filter of other languages and settings such as the literary setting. The political misconceptions and stereotypes permeated many of the images conveyed but a connection was established between the Basque voice and the global scene.

THE BASQUE CASE

The presence of terrorist activities imprinted a violent connotation on the cultural pains that this people were trying to sort out. The Basque language was the contested space where the culture could flourish and establish itself as a mark of identity.

The Basque people followed the change from nationalistic assertions to a global world scenario, which operates in a transnational framework, deciding to open up to the world using English and French as bridge languages in order to manifest their identity and their voice. Similarly, to the Basque-Spanish relationship, the Basque-English and the Basque-French relationships constituted unique constructions of an identity that is, by nature, dual at least. The idea of in-between testifies to this linguistic borderland that needs constantly to be redefined and to be explained. Mari Jose Olaziregi affirms that “One could say that practically all the current 800,000 Basque-speakers or *euskaldunak* who live on both sides of the Pyrenees in Spain and France are bilingual. And that this bilingualism is formed in conjunction with such widely spoken languages

as Spanish and such prestigious languages in literary circles as French; languages that, in turn, have been displaced by the enormously central and legitimizing place that English occupies in the current global framework" (Olaziregi 2009, 19–20).

Following the political fight for the construction and the representation of a unique identity of a people, the literary production in the Basque country in the Basque language worked hard to authenticate a voice of their own. As the dialogues were established with the outside world, which did not have access to the Basque language, a translation was the only road to connect linguistically the "other" with the "m(other)" tongue. The linguistically contested space of the Basque borderland had to open up to a linguistic transaction that taxed the minority language by forcing a translated voice to convey the "words of the land".

Pascale Casanova commented about this phenomenon, "[...] in a market where intellectual and publishing logic have grown apart, it is clear from the outset that an author who already writes in a "universal" language can avoid having to be validated by translation when competing for a place in the world rankings" (Casanova 2004).

As we start to understand the intricate space of linguistic borderlands, especially of languages of minorities, we discover that in each attempt to reach out to the "other" there is a need to die, at least partially, to have the right to be simply understood. The transaction of reaching out is a fragile exchange where the violence of misunderstandings lurks at every corner of the road. Nonetheless, the alternative of isolation is impossible to consider in our transnational world. As much as we distrust translations, there is a generous act of an honest "self" that risks, once again, to be heard that matches the generous act of the "other" that is interested and fascinated by the speaker. When these poles of attraction are based on honesty and authenticity then we can dream of a valid exchange, nonetheless, this dialogue can also be perverted by the lack of sincerity and the desire to take advantage over the other.

THE "BORDERLAND" ACCESSES THE TRANSNATIONAL LINGUISTIC SPACE HOSTING THE BASQUE LANGUAGE

Borderlands have the potential to create spaces of danger, of transition, of exchanges that are charged with real and imaginary dangers as well as promises of connection. The positive aspect of

this scenario is that the more frequently we cross into different borderlands, even while staying in the same neighborhood, the more familiar we become with the position and posture of being the "other". There is a great potential for distrust as well as for compassion. The linguistic borderland is no different from any geographical borderland. Somehow, these speakers have been forced to leave the comfort of their mother tongue to venture to the linguistic space of the "other."

In our globalized world, within our transnational migration of peoples, the identification of a m(other) tongue is becoming rarer. There is a group of people that travel and live in between languages trying not to lose themselves in the myriad linguistic transactions. Each communication conveys not only the real, but also the imaginary community of the speaker. In this way, the understanding of "the outsider" of the community is influenced by the real as well as by the imaginary universes. More knowledge of the other is not the key to bridging these linguistic borderlands, as it is not in the intellect where rejection and violence towards the other occurs. Multiculturalism, as a philosophy of life, did not open the doors of borderland spaces. It all rests in a much deeper cause, the willingness to accept the other even when it is not easy or fair. Inclusion will become a reality when the fact of being human will be the connecting factor, then languages will be able to act as bridges. Until this happens, we can all engage in the fantasy of open borderlands where languages can be used as connecting lines.

By recognizing the configurations of linguistic maps we can project towards a "transnational linguistic borderland" that is closer than we expect. These borderlands are not only associated with nations, but they are a part of the geography of families and other close relationships. "Although rhetorically effective in arguing for a central dialect as the basis of the national language, the strategy of marginalising the periphery is quite the opposite of what political nation-building entails. The Spanish (or Italian, or whatever) people is a construct based upon political boundaries, which are arbitrary in the sense that they are historically contingent, having lain elsewhere at other times. The political-cultural goal becomes that of fixing the boundaries to prevent them moving again (unless it is to expand). To do this, it is necessary to convince those living on the frontiers of the nation, near the borders, that they are one people with those in the centre, and not one with their neighbours just across the border. It is necessary as well to persuade those in the centre of the same thing, if they are to be motivated to pay for war to keep the nation's boundaries intact" (Joseph 2004, 105).

In the nation forming stages political powers and linguistic choices and dominances went hand in hand. As we open the national borders to a transnational world where borderlands are not so strictly defined and observed, the linguistic imposition becomes more flexible, more adaptable to these new spaces that are created in the borderlands. That is why it does not surprise us anymore to find people living between languages as, for many, geographical borders become a reference more than a restriction. Each day there are more and more ways to cross national borders without physically crossing them. Social media, journalistic reports, literature and arts in general have been the engines that created these borderland spaces that are transnational in essence. The dilemma of the choice of language occurred again. The selection of a language is unavoidable but it is still not clear what will be the parameters of the choice, the contexts of those exchanges, the ethics of the communications in the transnational borderlands as loyalties are not defined; it is my opinion that a stronger sense of being human and sharing in that commonality is the essence. We can create a new vision of interrelations when ethical principles of respect for all peoples giving value to each individual as such will replace the selfish nationalistic parameters.

Although this is still an ideal, I believe that the conditions are given, since we already have the linguistic spaces to practice old ethics in a new environment. Linguistic choices are bound to be respected since they touch the essence of each individual. We cannot avoid translating, but practicing it within an ethical environment loses the dark side while allowing for new settings to express each person's voice in freedom and respect.

LINGUISTIC IDENTITIES, TRANSLATION, AND BILINGUALISM AT THE BORDERLANDS

The process of shaping identities takes time as it is developed slowly in time starting with the evolution of the expression of a culture until it is concluded in the formation of a culture. In this way, language is simultaneously a by-product of culture as well as an essential component of it. The acquisition of a linguistic identity is a gradual process that starts when we are unable to communicate until we feel comfortable using a certain learned code of communication within a certain community.

Repetition and memory are the foundations where the linguistic “home” of an individual is constructed. The process of repetition is broken, as more and more translations are needed for each exchange of words. Constant translation creates insecurity and undermines the formation of a robust identity. “[...] any body of people considering themselves a ‘nation’ claimed the right to self-determination [...] In consequence of this multiplication of potential ‘unhistorical’ nations, ethnicity and language became the central, increasingly the decisive or even the only criterion of potential nationhood” (Hobsbawm 1991, 102).

Hobsbawm, in this citation confirms the fact that borderlands need to be kept only temporarily as they do not constitute the fertile land necessary to grow roots of identity.

As populations are closer and closer, the tension of the need of translation is more frequent. The concept of an “organic language” is very attractive, as we need to know how to cultivate it without the intrusion of foreign elements. Language and nature are close to the human experience, the “humus” of our origin. They both partake in the “individual universe” where identities are formed and constructed.

An individual needs to spend a long time in contact with the “mother tongue” in order to layer his experience into many layers of culture, history, tradition, innovation, camaraderie, fellowship, etc. Translation not only interrupts this process but also makes it even more difficult as in a split second the individual is expected to go through all the layers, analyze and interpret the outlook of the whole, which took considerable time to be elaborated. The process of translation brings the individual outside this natural process demanding that the individual shows the same kind of deep knowledge (which is the product of time spent in contact with the language) in the bridge language. Bilingualism is a valid attempt to bring both languages to the same level, although allegiance to one more than the other is a frequent result of it. Biculturalism is a bit deeper than bilingualism as it requires many more layers of instruction and cultural references. I would not place bilingualism and biculturalism in the linguistic borderland of each culture. I think that both concepts, fully developed and sufficiently exercised, indicate a familiarity and flexibility of the individual to go from one “motherland” to another “motherland.”

Unfortunately, there is a modern trend to identify bilingualism and biculturalism while it is in a premature stage thus allowing for a borderland space in each one of them. True bilingualism and biculturalism

turalism do not include borderlands, as it is a natural process of passage between the two cultures and the two languages. In Joa Maragall's words, "Philology is this loving relationship with the word, or more exactly, with meaning captured *in status nascens*, in the very moment when sound breathes a "soul" into things." [...] "Every region of the planet and every language evokes and shapes a universal truth that can only be accessed by participating ontologically-lovingly, -in the immediate surroundings. Because every land endows the most substantial words, of its people with subtle meaning that cannot be explained by any dictionary or taught by any grammar book" (Maragall 1912, 10–11).

CONCLUSION

In a fast-paced world, we have demonized the natural gradual process of shaping the identity of each individual, as the self needs to get the nutrients out of "the ground" that the person inhabits. As in psychology, the fact of having multiple personalities is considered a disorder in linguistic terms; it could be a talent. There is a fine line between a "disorder" and a "talent." The "talent" works for the individual, it is an asset while the "disorder" is uncontrollable and does not define the healthy individual but the "disorder." Living between languages calls for a new global linguistic adventure. It constitutes a new opportunity to communicate respecting the "other tongue" as much as our "mother tongue." The borderlands territory is here and it needs new rules and new ways of conducting "business" in this new land. As we have witnessed the failure of past authoritarian and repressive measures, we can choose again new ways to communicate. It is not a futuristic choice, but it is imposed on us as new media is, continuously, coming into existence, as distances are shortened, as "the other" is closer than ever and communication is unavoidable when living in such close proximity.

The case of the Basque country, a linguistic "minority" in Spain, is an example of the many linguistic groups that are finding, for the first time, a platform to stand side by side with other more "universal languages" in order to be heard and to express themselves in their own words even if they are translated. Living in between languages is one of the many new scenarios that the twenty-first century is bringing to our shore.

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