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Sahagún's Sixteenth-Century Translation Techniques

Victoria Ríos Castaño

Abstract

This article continues to defend the belief that Fray Bernardino de Sahagún acted as the principal translator of the Nahuatl text of *Historia universal de las cosas de Nueva España* (ca. 1577) into Spanish. Initially, Sahagún envisaged the Spanish translation as part of an encyclopaedic-lexicographical work for preachers and confessors, but he eventually completed the translation, as it appears in the surviving manuscript, the *Florentine Codex*, as a palatable account of the Nahua world for Spanish officials. The second section of this article focuses on the most salient translation techniques of some Nahua culture-specific items into Spanish, as found in the Spanish column of the *Florentine Codex*. From a contemporary viewpoint, these techniques can be grouped as conservation strategies, in the form of intratextual gloss and transcription of Nahuatl words, and as substitution strategies, through naturalization, deletion, and autonomous creation.[1]

Keywords: Evangelization, *Florentine Codex*, Nahua world, Sahagún, translation techniques

Sahagún's Sixteenth-Century Translation Techniques

Victoria Ríos Castaño

During his sixty years of missionary life in Central Mexico, Fray Bernardino de Sahagún embarked on the composition of a number of Nahuatl-source language works that were intended to serve him and his brethren in their attempts to bring the Christian faith to the Nahuas. Of all these works, the twelve-book encyclopaedia on the Nahua world *Historia universal de las cosas de Nueva España* (ca. 1577), hereafter referred to as *Historia universal*, has assured Sahagún international recognition.[2] The surviving manuscript, the *Florentine Codex*, is a two-column page parallel text in Nahuatl and Spanish, decorated with lavish illustrations. For the writing of the Nahuatl source-text, a group of 'colegiales', Nahua assistants who had been educated by the Franciscans at the Imperial College of Santa Cruz in Santiago of Tlatelolco, compiled information delivered by Nahua high-born elders, compared collected material and wrote the final text—activities that were carried out under Sahagún's supervision.[3] As for the translation into Spanish, Sahagún has been traditionally credited with the task, which he performed assisted by the group of 'colegiales' to whom he dictated the translation. In two recent articles, however, this attribution of authorship has been reconsidered. By way of analysing some passages in Book XII of *Historia universal*, on the conquest, Kevin Terraciano presumes that 'Sahagún translated or participated in the translation of the Nahuatl into Spanish', and that '[s]omeone, perhaps Sahagún himself, seems to have softened the tenor of the Nahuatl text in the Spanish translation'.[4] Adopting a riskier assumption, Mariana C. Zinni leaves unexplored the claim that Sahagún's assistants translated all the books, simply stating that 'estos estudiantes […] tradujeron al español [la sección náhuatl del texto] (mientras fray Bernardino revisaba la misma)'.[5]

Without denying that the 'colegiales' played a vital role throughout the composition of the *Florentine Codex*, and aided Sahagún during the translation process of the twelve books by clarifying the subtleties of the Nahuatl text which, as a non-native speaker, escaped him, this article reasserts Sahagún's role as the principal translator of the Nahuatl text into Spanish. It also seeks to contribute to Sahaguntine studies by moving away from the topics of the latest collections of studies on *Historia universal*—concerning the assistants, the history of the *Florentine Codex* and earlier drafts, and its pictures and colours—, offering instead a brief textual analysis of its Spanish version.[6] Thus, this essay examines the most salient strategies that only Sahagún, as a native speaker of Spanish and at times in possession of specific cultural knowledge, drew on in the translation of Nahua culture-specific items.[7] So far, several studies have identified some of his translation strategies—such as deletion, comparison, and addition by description and insertion of Nahuatl loan words—in Books I, on gods; II, on ceremonies; and XI, on the natural world.[8] Yet, these studies have neither distinguished the two different Spanish target audiences to whom Sahagún tailored his translation—friars and officials working for the Council of the Indies—nor explored how his translation decisions varied according to them. In this respect, the following pages will concentrate on the manner in which Sahagún interpreted some Nahua buildings, professions, domestic utensils, food, fauna, entertainment, traditions, and beliefs by bearing in mind his potential readers.

The composition of *Historia universal* and the translation of the Nahuatl text into Spanish

In 1558, Fray Francisco de Toral, the highest Prelate of the Franciscan Order in New Spain, commissioned Sahagún to create several works that contributed to the evangelization of the Nahuas. One of the works Sahagún wished to produce was an encyclopaedic reference work that would encapsulate the texts he had consulted in the library of the Friary of San Francisco in Salamanca, where he took his vows in the 1520s, and those he continued to consult in the library of the Friary and College of Tlatelolco, where he was to reside many years of his life in

New Spain.[9] Tlatelolco, like any other Franciscan centre of studies, stored a large number of religious works, such as collections of sermons, treatises of vices and virtues, confession manuals, and breviaries, together with encyclopaedic works like Pliny's book on animals and Olaus Magnus's *Description of the Northern Peoples* (1555).[10] These works, however, comprised information on European and Christian cultures, either in Latin or Spanish, and Sahagún was confident that, for the effective dissemination of God's word and the extirpation of 'idolatry', friars needed texts in their indigenous neophytes' language and data on their traditions and beliefs.

To this end and behaving as a cultural translator, Sahagún relocated his translation unit—what he had decided to record on the world of the Nahuas—into a harmonious categorization of knowledge that mirrored classical and medieval hierarchically-ordered encyclopaedias, the result being *Historia universal*. For the macro-level classification of material, one of his textual archetypes was the Franciscan Bartholomaeus Anglicus's *De proprietatibus rerum* (ca. 1240-1260), extensively drawn on by the Franciscans in their composition of sermons.[11] At a micro-level, whether for the organization of a book, or a section within a book, Sahagún imitated the structure of Christian auxiliary works such as breviaries; collections of sermons, proverbs, and metaphors; treatises of vices and virtues; and confession manuals. The influence of these texts is perceived, respectively, in Book II, where the description of Nahua ceremonies is flanked by the Julian and the Nahua calendars for ease of identification of 'idolatrous' rites; Book VI, which gathers a number of Nahua speeches, sayings, riddles, and metaphors; and Book X, in which the categorization of family members and professions abides by a virtuous versus sinful Christian dichotomy.[12]

The translation for which Sahagún is known, and on which this article centres, is that of the Nahuatl text into Spanish, which occupies the left-hand column of the *Florentine Codex*. As mentioned earlier, Sahagún composed it with the assistance of a group of 'colegiales' who,

as native speakers trained in grammar and rhetoric, clarified linguistic issues related to lexis and grammar within the Nahuatl source-text.[13] The earliest samples of the translation, initially conceived for a target audience of sixteenth-century friars, are found in the 'Memoriales con escolios', preliminary drafts that were written in Tlatelolco sometime between 1561 and 1565, and which reflect Sahagún's original plan for the composition of *Historia universal*: a three-column page work that contained the Nahuatl source-text in the centre of the page, the *scholia* or lexicographical notes deriving from the Nahuatl text in the right-hand column, and the translation into Spanish on the left.[14] Preachers who sought evocative similes and *exempla* in order to attract their congregation, and confessors who required particular information on 'sinful' conduct and beliefs for the interrogation of their Nahua penitents, would find words, expressions, and grammar structures contextualized in the Nahuatl text, which was at the same time explained in the column with lexicographical notes and translated into Spanish.

This format and its contents are Sahagún's response to the impossibility of producing a 'Calepin' of the Nahuatl language—a monolingual dictionary similar to the exhaustive Latin *Cornucopiae* (1502) by the Italian humanist Ambrosio Calepino—because, as Sahagún laments in his second prologue to *Historia universal*, he lacked the Nahua written sources or *auctoritates* that could give credit to the meaning and use of words in the Nahuatl language, as had happened for Latin.[15] Nevertheless, Sahagún strove to supply material for a future 'Nahuatl Calepin' in which entries would comprise definition, etymology, synonyms, collocations, grammar information, and examples of use, all of which could be extracted from the three columns he envisaged.

The Nahuatl text of the central column, labelled by Sahagún as a bank of texts with linguistic authority or a 'red barredera para sacar a luz todos los vocablos desta lengua con sus propias y methaphoricas significaçiones', was completed in around 1569.[16] During this time, the religious authorities' approach towards the study of indigenous beliefs and practices had

radically changed, and any representation of the indigenous peoples' ancient culture was perceived as counterproductive, a remnant of the 'idolatry' that put at risk the firm footing of the Christian message in the New World. As a result, Sahagún lost his order's support for the completion of his intended three-column page layout and his manuscripts were confiscated and scattered throughout the Franciscan province of Central Mexico. As for the explanatory notes and the translation, it is possible that Sahagún and his assistants continued to write them up to 1570. In fact, around this year, in order to circumvent the decisions taken by his order and secure financial support, Sahagún sent to Pope Pius V a 'Breve compendio de los ritos idolátricos que los indios de esta Nueva España usaban en tiempo de su infidelidad', which contains a translation of Book I, on gods, and twenty chapters of Book II, on ceremonies.[17]

In 1575, nonetheless, Sahagún saw his project resumed with official funding at the behest of Juan de Ovando, the President of the Council of the Indies, who, together with the cosmographer-chronicler Juan López de Velasco, demanded the dispatch of New World accounts of encyclopaedic nature to Spain.[18] According to Sahagún, this new brief requested that the twelve books 'todos se Romanzasen, y así en Romance, como en lengua mexicana se escribiesen de buena letra'.[19] The surviving manuscript of this commission, the *Florentine Codex*, incorporates in its left-hand column the Spanish translation of the 'Memoriales con escolios' and the continuation of the translation process after Ovando's petition. In other words, the Spanish column of the *Florentine Codex* gathers translations for two different audiences; that of Sahagún's contemporary friars—with the objective of supplying an encyclopaedic and linguistic work, in which the Spanish translation was interwoven with the other two columns—and that of officials of the Council of the Indies—to whom the final translation, produced under time constraints, was intended to please and sound palatable. The following pages will try to showcase some of the translation techniques on which Sahagún relied for the interpretation of Nahua culture-specific items; that is, culturally-laden references that were alien to the receiving

culture of both Spanish friars and officials, and the understanding of which entailed certain degree of manipulation on Sahagún's part. In addition, some examples of the manner in which Sahagún took translation decisions so as to accommodate the Nahuatl text to either friars or officials will be briefly examined.

Translation techniques in the Spanish version of *Historia universal*

In his attempt to make culture-specific items understood in the target culture, Sahagún resorted to the general techniques of conservation—in the form of 'intratextual gloss' or explanation, repetition of ideas, and transcription of Nahua words—and of substitution—in the form of naturalization, deletion, and 'autonomous creation' or insertion of comments.[20] Amongst these techniques, naturalization is a prevalent one throughout the Spanish text but, due to the sheer volume of references, this article will only focus on certain semantic groups, including religion, professions, food, fauna, forms of entertainment, and beliefs. Regarding religion, in Book II the Nahua ceremonies, institutions, buildings, and hierarchical ranks are related to European ones. Thus, in chapter XXV, the *Calmecac*—the pre-Hispanic priests' dwelling where upper-class children received instruction—is translated as *monesterio* [*sic*], which shows that Sahagún struck an immediate association with friaries in which indigenous children were schooled, like that of Tlatelolco.[21] Another prime example appears in chapter XXX, where women performing rituals are said to gather within temples or *teteupan*, understood in Spanish as *sacristías*—the vestry or sacristy in which ornaments and apparel for the religious services are kept.[22] At times, this direct substitution or use of an equivalent intermingles with conservation techniques, as can be seen in chapter IX of the appendix to Book III, on mythology. Sahagún identifies the Nahua religious grades of *tlamacazto*, *tlamacazqui*, *tlenamacac*, and *quequetzalcoah* with Catholic grades and occupations and, avoiding explanatory comments to describe differences in detail, he maintains a foreignizing effect by adding both the title of these grades in Nahuatl and a minimal intratextual gloss: '[E]l primero,

le llamaban *tlamacazto*, es como acólito; el segundo, le llamaban *tlamacazqui*; que es como diácono, el tercero le llaman *tlenamácac*, que es como sacerdote. Destos sacerdotes los mejores elegían por sumos pontífices, que se llamaban *quequetzalcóah*, que quiere decir 'succesores [*sic*] de Quetzalcóatl'.[23] In this passage Sahagún either inserts a comparison with the phrase 'que es como' or translates the meaning of the Nahuatl term into Spanish, as in the case of the *quequetzalcoah*.

This naturalization of professions extends beyond the religious sphere to cover other Spanish-European ones. Chapters VII, VIII, and X of Book X, on Nahua people, list a number of occupations that Sahagún, focusing on the similarities between European and approximate ones in the Nahua culture, translates as 'oficial mecánico', 'platero', 'herrero', 'carpintero', 'cantero', 'pintor', 'albañíl', 'sabios', 'médico', 'sastre', and 'hilador'.[24] Thus, overlooking their distinct background and training, the *ticitl* or Nahua healer is understood as 'médico' on the basis that both apply remedies to cure sickness. In addition, for the translation of Nahua professions that are non-existent in Spain, a new word is coined by analogy with a Spanish term. As an example, the *amantecatl* or feather artist, who arranged and glued feathers in order to create ornaments, attire, and shields, is understood to fulfil an *oficio*, a craftsmanship or a vocational profession. Like the *toltecatl* or craftsman, translated as 'oficial mecánico', the *amantecatl* becomes an 'oficial de plumas', literally a skilled worker of feathers, in that he uses them to fabricate fine products.[25]

Sixteenth-century everyday Spanish life also makes its presence felt throughout the translation thanks to the inclusion of Spanish terms referring to domestic utensils, food, beverages, and manners of entertainment. For example, Sahagún finds inspiration in Spanish kitchen utensils when translating some chapters of Book VIII, on kings and lords, and of Book X. In chapter XXIII of the latter, 'which telleth of the olla makers, the clay workers, and the makers of large baskets [and] of small baskets', the *çoquichiuhqui* or maker of pots of clay is

said to trade 'ollas, tinajas, cántaros y cantarillos, bacines, braseros, candeleros, vasillos bruñidos, y todos los vasos de cualquier manera; cucharas, cazuelas'.[26] It is not known whether the *çoquichiuhqui* indeed sold these utensils, for the Nahuatl version does not furnish such a long inventory of items. Sahagún could have increased the variety of goods in order to make his readers believe that the Nahuas had at their disposal the same type of domestic items as in Spain. Similarly, in chapter XIII of Book VIII, on kings and lords' meals, Sahagún states that the Nahuas possessed 'escudillas', 'salseras', 'cestillos', and 'xícaras'.[27]

Regarding food, the same chapter of Book VIII evokes a suggestive picture of Nahua meals by drawing parallels with Spanish ones. Traditional dishes prepared for the high-born class, such as 'tamales made of maize flowers with ground amaranth seed and cherries […]; tortillas of green maize or of tender maize […], green maize cooked in a pot and dried', turn into 'tortillas', 'panecillos', 'empanadillas', 'cazuelas', and 'potajes'.[28] The 'iztac tlatzincuitl', made of tender maize, is also depicted to be 'como digamos pan de bamba o de la Guillena'.[29] By 'bamba bread', Sahagún is referring to very white and delicate bread rolls that continue to be popular in Spanish cuisine, and by 'bread from Guillena' to the cereal fields of this town close to Seville. Further examples of how he is thinking of Spanish equivalents for Nahua food and beverages appear in Books I and II, on gods and ceremonies. Thus, he explains that in the celebration held in honour of the god-goddess of art and dances, *Macuilxochitl*, the Nahuas drank a type of Spanish cold soup or 'mazamorra, que se llama tlacuilolatulli'.[30] Another type of Nahua concoction was '[u]na manera de brebaxe que ellos llaman chienpinolli […], mezclando agua y harina de chían en una canoa'.[31] Firstly, Sahagún mentions a general concept for sixteenth-century Spaniards; 'brebaxe' or concoction, so that his readers have a picture in mind of what he is alluding to and, secondly, he points at the difference by adding the Nahuatl word and an explanation of how it was prepared.

As previously mentioned, the inclusion of an intratextual gloss, beginning with 'una manera de', 'como', and 'digamos' in order to set comparisons for a Spanish audience, is a widely-spread technique when translating Nahua culture-specific items. To serve as another example, in chapter XXIV of Book II Sahagún portrays ritual dances during the debt-paying celebrations of the Nahuas' fifth month and festival, *Toxcatl*, by stressing connections between the Nahuas and the Castilian dances with which he was familiar. He writes that:

> Toda la gente del palacio y la gente de guerra, viejos y mozos, danzaban en otras partes del patio, trabados de las manos y culebreando, a manera de las danzas que los populares hombres y mujeres hacen en Castilla la Vieja. [...] [L]as doncellas, afeitadas y emplumadas de pluma colorada todos los brazos y todas las piernas, […] llevaban en la cabeza puestos unos capillejos compuestos en lugar de flores con maíz tostado […] [,] estos capillejos eran a la manera que los capillejos que usan las mozas en Campos, por mayo.[32]

Interestingly, in spite of the inclusion of Nahua specific items, such as the covering of the human body with decorative feathers and the use of hair bands made of toasted corn, Sahagún expresses more interest in noting similarities. He adapts the original to a great extent with the objective of enabling his target audience to imagine a Spanish scenario in which people danced in and out of a Castilian palace, like the commoners did in his home province of 'Castilla la Vieja', and resumes this association to the extent of writing that Nahua women's hair adornments resembled those which maidens wore during spring celebrations in Campos, the region of his hometown, Sahagún. Further examples of his comparison between Nahua and Spanish forms of entertainment are found in Book VIII, on kings and lords. He equates the *teponaztli*, a lateral drum played when the lords danced, to an 'atambor […] alto […] de la

manera de los de España en la cubertura [*sic*]', and interprets one of the rulers' games, the *patolli*, 'como el juego del castro o alcherque, o casi como el juego de los dados'; that is to say, as European table games with a lined chart, through which small stones are moved.[33]

This comparison technique is frequently repeated in Book XI, concerning native fauna, flora, and mineralogy.[34] To name a few, animals that are considered to bear a resemblance with those in Spain are the *coyametl*, portrayed as 'come como puerco de castilla'; the *tolcomoctli* as 'del tamaño como un capón de Castilla'; the *zuli* or *zulli* as 'codornices [...]. Son tan grandes como las de Castilla'; and the *acoatl* as 'culebras del agua [...] como las de Castilla'.[35] To be noted is that the allusion to a Spanish equivalent often results in the deletion of data. Illustrative of this are the vivid and rich Nahuatl descriptions regarding feather colour, habitat, and nests of the *atzitzicujlotl* (northern phalarope) and the *acujcujalotl* (cliff swallow). In the original text, aimed at providing 'una red barredera' of Nahuatl terminology, the characterization of the former consists of a long list of adjectives and reformulations: 'round-backed. The bill is long and pointed, needle-like pointed, very pointed, black. The legs are long, very long, stilt-like, like stilts, broom-like, slender. Its dwelling place is [the province of] Anahuac. It is white-breasted. The large northern phalarope is heavily fleshed, fat, greasy. It is greasy; it makes itself greasy; it is fat'.[36] In the translation, nevertheless, the portrayal of both birds ends up reduced to '[hay] aviones en esta tierra, como los de Castilla. Y crían como los de Castilla, en sus casitas de tierra. Hay también golondrinas como las de Castilla. Crían y cantan y vuelan como las de Castilla'.[37] The repetition of 'como los de Castilla' emphasizes once again the desire to identify both birds with swifts and swallows so as to cater for a Spanish target audience who would make the connection immediately. As in the examples presented above, differences are ignored; thus, the Nahuatl source-text mentions that the *atzitzicujlotl* gets greasy and fat, a feature that applies to neither swifts nor swallows.

This deletion of information might respond to time constraints during the completion of the work, which also helps to justify the poor stylistics of the paragraph. Another possibility rests upon the fact that Sahagún wanted to save Spanish officials from the reading of monotonous and irrelevant material. While the Nahuatl text was meant to provide friars with 'una red barredera' of certified and contextualized vocabulary for a future 'Nahuatl Calepin'—and its entire translation into Spanish would have assisted them in the learning of specific terms and grammar structures—, this objective had changed by the time Sahagún was requested to finish the translation. Bearing only in mind a target reader of Spanish officials, interested in the Nahuas' way of life and their natural world, Sahagún's new brief transforms the translation of a wide range of vocabulary and phrases into a pointless exercise, and, given the pressure under which the *Florentine Codex* was being produced after 1575, into a waste of time and energy.[38]

Many remarkable instances of this deletion technique result from these two translation purposes, as showcased in chapter X of Book XI, on fine stones. Echoing the lexicographical column of the 'Memoriales con escolios', the text of the Nahuatl column of the *Florentine Codex* resembles a monolingual dictionary, comprising an entry with its equivalent in Spanish, a definition, and a list of collocations. Thus, the entry for *temetztlalli*, 'plomo molido', follows as: 'this is the earth from which the gold, or the lead, or the tin comes. It is green, like flint, like limestone […]. I excavate temetztlalli. I gather temetztlalli. I pulverize temetztlalli. I heat temetztlalli'.[39] In the Spanish version, the collocations—only needed to use the Nahuatl language with propriety—are omitted, and the definition of the Nahuatl term is expanded so that the Spanish reader learns that *temetztlalli* means not only 'la escoria que sale de los metales cuando se pulen o se labran' but also 'la vena o piedra de donde se sacan estos metales'.[40]

Despite Sahagún's avoidance of redundant and linguistically purpose-driven material, the Spanish column of the first chapters of Book X of the *Florentine Codex*, on family members

according to their 'virtuous' or 'sinful' behaviour, contains the translation of some passages of the 'Memoriales con escolios', consisting of long lists of adjectives and phrases. Sahagún cannot resist explaining to his new audience of Spanish officials that those chapters had been previously intended to imitate a treatise of vices and virtues; a useful text in Nahuatl and Spanish for friars on the lookout for reproachable and laudable material to be inserted in their sermons.[41] This is not the first time that Sahagún addresses his Spanish audience and recalls the original linguistic purpose of his former project. Throughout the Spanish translation of the twelve books, he is keen to highlight that a wealth of vocabulary within the Nahuatl text has been left behind. For example, in chapter IV of Book XI, on water animals, instead of translating the description of a water lizard called *citlalaxolotl* entirely, the Spanish version reads: 'Hay en esta relación muy buenos vocablos, y muchos. Hay unos lagartillos del agua. No son buenos de comer, y son pintados con unas estrellicas, y tienen la barriga verde, pintada de blanco. Estos se crían también en los lugares húmedos. Pienso es vaqueruela de Castilla'.[42] Noticeably, one of Sahagún's assistants appears to reproduce Sahagún's think-aloud interpretation. First, Sahagún lets his readers know that the Nahuatl source-text abounds in details; second, he offers a general description and comments that the *citlalaxolotl* is inedible— an item of information that does not exist in the Nahuatl text—, and finally he tries to ascertain to which type of water lizard the *citlalaxolotl* is similar in Spain.

Deletion happens not only when Sahagún deems the translation of a given passage irrelevant. With his new audience in mind, he considers that some culture-specific items sound ethically unacceptable or imply an effort of cultural comprehension. One of many examples is present in chapter XI of Book X, on 'vicious and perverse' people, such as murderers, traitors and buffoons. Sahagún does not come up with a suitable interpretation for the 'temacpalitoti macpalitoti' or 'dancer with a dead woman's forearm'. The Nahuatl version explains that this man was a thief: '[He is] advised, a guardian [of secret rituals]; a master of the spoken word,

of song. [He is] one who robs by casting a spell, who puts people to sleep; [he is] a thief. He dances with a dead woman's forearm; he robs by casting a spell, causing people to faint, to swoon'.[43] In his translation, Sahagún refrains from rendering the name 'dancer with a dead woman's forearm' literally and from explaining its origin—whether it was a fixed phrase with a literal or a figurative meaning. What is more, he does not list this figure's properties and summarizes the unlawful activities in which he was involved by relating that 'el ladrón que encantaba para hurtar sabía muy bien los encantamientos con los cuales hacía amortecer o desmayar a los de [la] casa donde él entraba, y así amortecidos hurtaba cuanto hallaba en casa'.[44] Probably adhering to his decision to eliminate linguistic and unpleasant information, in this case translating 'temacpalitoti macpalitoti' along the lines of 'ladrón que baila con el antebrazo de una mujer muerta', Sahagún shifts the focus of the passage upon the man's ability to cast spells whilst stealing, an aspect that the Spanish readers would grasp unproblematically, and which would provoke neither disgust nor astonishment. Besides, the Spanish translation reads with more fluency—moving coherently from the idea that this thief knew powerful spells to the fact that he deployed them in order to break into houses—, and adds a new item of information, stressing that this thief stole 'everything he found'.

Known as autonomous creation, the free translation strategy manifested above—by which the translator inserts information that is inexistent in the source text in order to make a notion understood and establish links with cultural beliefs of the target culture—is pervasive throughout the Spanish text. Illustrative of this is Sahagún's treatment of Nahua religious practices. In the Nahuatl source-text, Sahagún is driven by a linguistic purpose that prevents him from intervening with long and explicit Christian biased comments, and his attacks on Nahua religion are therefore limited to the appearance of key words like *Diablo* and *demonio* when characterizing gods and ceremonies. Contrarily, in his translation he seizes the opportunity to incorporate a scathing disapproval of, for example, Nahua sacrificial rituals.

Instances abound in Book II, such as in chapter XXIV, which depicts the Nahuas' scarring of their skin as self-mortification of the flesh. Having maintained the description of the original, which tells how 'the offering priests cut the skin on people; […] they cut the skin of their stomachs, on their breasts, and on both sides of each of their upper arms and on their forearms', in his translation Sahagún also introduces a paragraph in which he presupposes the origin of the rite: 'Estas señales parece que eran como hierro del Demonio, con que herraba a sus ovejas, y los que ahora todavía hacen estas señales no carecen de mácula de idolatría si después del baptismo la recibieron'.[45] Apart from holding the Devil accountable for this ritual, the final sentence reveals the manner in which Sahagún must have warned against this particular practice when addressing the Nahuas about the sins that, he believed, the Devil continued to force them to commit. Another condemnation of 'evil practices', as if he were admonishing or thinking of delivering a sermon, appears in chapter XX of the same book. Following the description of the Nahuas' sacrifices of children to the god of the rain, *Tlaloc*, he incorporates this new paragraph:

> [N]o creo que hay [*sic*] corazón tan duro que oyendo una crueldad tan inhumana, y más que bestial y endiablada como la que arriba queda puesta, no se enternezca y mueva a lágrimas y horror y espanto [...]. La culpa desta tan cruel ceguedad que en estos desdichados niños se esecutaba [*sic*] no se debe tanto imputar a la crueldad de los padres, los cuales derramando muchas lágrimas y con gran dolor de sus corazones la exercitaban, cuanto al cruelísimo odio de nuestro antiquísimo enemigo Satanás, el cual con malignísima astucia los persuadió a tan infernal hazaña. ¡Oh, señor Dios, haced justicia deste cruel enemigo, que tanto mal nos hace y nos desea hacer! ¡Quitadle, señor, todo el poder de empecer![46]

When translating the Nahuatl text and reflecting on what he was expressing in Spanish, Sahagún possibly felt inclined to deprecate the sacrifices as horrendous and bloody rituals instigated by the Devil, a belief that seems to be clearly suited to both his target audience of friars and officials. Perhaps in an attempt to appease the detractors of his work—those who thought that, rather than contributing to its obliteration, the study of indigenous beliefs and practices perpetuated 'idolatry'—Sahagún judged it necessary to clarify that although he had compiled this data on cruel Nahua ceremonies, he obviously abhorred them as diabolical. In addition, the final exclamations in which, reminiscent of a sermon, he called for God's direct intervention to strip Satan of his power and open the Nahuas' eyes, Sahagún is blaming the Devil. He presents the Nahuas as suffering parents, supressed by the tyranny of the Devil, and concludes that Christianity is the key to their salvation. Echoing debates on the intellectual capacities of the indigenous peoples, and whether they were able to truly embrace Christianity, in this passage Sahagún defends the Nahuas as human beings to feel sorry for, victims to be rescued by the Christian God rather than cruel and barbarian executors.[47]

That Sahagún took for granted the existence of a satanic stranglehold upon the Nahuas is similarly reflected in his translation of the text on the 'tlapouhqui tonalpouhqui', soothsayers or prophets who claimed to predict the future. The original depicts this figure as 'a deceiver, a mocker, a false speaker, a hypocrite—a diabolical, a scandalous speaker. He disturbs, confounds, beguiles, deceives others'.[48] The Spanish version dwells on the satanic motive, adding this extra passage: '[El] astrolo judiciario o nigromántico [...] tiene pacto con el Demonio [,] se transfigura en diversos animales, y por odio desea muerte a los otros, usando hechicerías y muchos maleficios'.[49] This image of the sorcerers' deceiving nature, their transfiguration into animals, and their powerful spells echo European superstitions and beliefs that were widely circulated in demonology manuals, like the Dominican inquisitors Henry Kramer and Jacob Sprenger's *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486). This work was a textual model for

the *Tratado de las supersticiones y hechicerías* (1529) of the Franciscan Fray Martín de Castañega, a treatise that was in turn adapted into Nahuatl by one of Sahagún's contemporary brethren, Fray Andrés de Olmos, as *Tratado de hechicerías y sortilegios* (1553). Thus, in chapter VII 'Cómo en diversas figuras pueden andar y parecer los ministros del demonio', Castañega and Olmos declare that the Devil, or those of whom he took possession, had the capacity of adopting zoomorphic forms.[50]

Another example of the manner in which the Devil was believed to bestow his power upon human beings occurs in chapter XIV of Book X. In the Nahuatl text, the female *ticitl*, esteemed in one paragraph as a virtuous woman, versed in the correct application of herbs, roots and stones to cure illness, is depicted in the subsequent paragraph as dangerous and unprofessional, in that she 'makes one drink potions, kills people with medications, causes them to worsen, endangers them, increases sickness, makes them sick, kills them'.[51] Once again, Sahagún translates this passage by striking an association with the Devil: 'La que es mala médica usa de la hechicería supersticiosa en su oficio, y tiene pacto con el Demonio, e sabe dar bebedizos con que mata a los hombres'.[52] As observed in the case of the 'tlapouhqui tonalpouhqui', when establishing a comparison between witches and female Nahua curers who hold tacit pacts with Satan, Sahagún is recalling the ingrained sixteenth-century European belief in witchcraft that was found not only in demonology manuals like Castañega and Olmos's but also in doctrinal works and publications of anthropological interest, like Magnus's *Description of the Northern Peoples*, available to Sahagún in the library of Tlatelolco.

The previous example leads the reader to wonder in which cases and to which type of autonomous creation Sahagún resorted when translating the Nahuatl text for his audience of either friars or officials. The translation that he completed after his 1575 commission, including data on professions, food, fauna, entertainment, and beliefs with which this article has briefly dealt, was intended to be mostly read by officials. As this article has tried to prove, in those

passages the Nahuas, like the Spaniards, occupy the same professions, cook similar dishes, enjoy analogous games and dances, and cannot escape from falling into Satan's deceitful trap. Sahagún irons out differences and coalesces concepts and traditions, perhaps entertaining the idea that, when the reading of his translation echoed the contemporary debates on the capacities of the indigenous peoples, the officials would not doubt that the Nahuas were equals, in his own words: 'procedientes, del tronco de Adam, como nosotros'.[53] On some occasions, as this article has also sought to demonstrate, Sahagún draws a clear line between his two potential target readers. It is for the friars that he had adopted and translated into Spanish the dual 'virtuous' versus 'sinful' pattern of description of Nahua family members and professions—as mentioned above, he pursued the creation of a treatise of vices and virtues in Nahuatl and Spanish. It is for the Spanish officials that he deletes linguistic information and avoids the problems of interpreting complicated or dissimilar culture-specific concepts, indulging instead in a blatant manipulation of the source text.

Perhaps one of the main underlying distinctions between the translation resulting from the first brief—the three-column page for friars—and the second brief—the two-column page for Spanish officials—rests on Sahagún's commitment to translate the Nahuatl source-text more or less faithfully. In other words, the Spanish translation within the left-hand column of the 'Memoriales con escolios', interwoven more intrinsically with the other two columns—the Nahuatl text and the lexicographical explanations—, probably follows the original more adequately than the Spanish translation that was produced from 1575 onwards. Supporting this argument, however, requires a thorough comparison of the translations written for the first time to be incorporated in the *Florentine Codex* and those completed before this manuscript—including not only the Spanish text of the 'Memoriales con escolios' but also the 'Breve compendio de los ritos idolátricos' sent to Pope Pius V and another manuscript known as the 'Memoriales en español', finished around 1569. A thorough analysis of these texts would also

help to determine to what extent Sahagún's assistants contributed to the Spanish translation. While as Nahuatl native speakers they must be credited with the finer points of the linguistic explanations of the 'Memoriales con escolios' column and, thereby, with a certain co-authorship of the related Spanish translation, their contribution to the Spanish text of the *Florentine Codex* that was not copied from the surviving 'Memoriales con escolios' can only be presumed. In any case, Sahagún's powerful imprint is pervasive throughout the Spanish version. It is only him who could have come up with comparisons such as 'bread of Guillena' and 'dances from Campos', and inserted an adamant condemnation of the Devil's sacrifices as if delivering a sermon. The claim with which this article began, that his Nahua assistants authored or co-authored the Spanish translation of the *Florentine Codex*, would demand a rigorous examination of their contribution to the lexicographical notes and the Spanish translation of the 'Memoriales con escolios', and to other texts of *Historia universal*. Scholars could attempt to discover, for instance, passages with awkward stylistic constructions written by a non-native sixteenth-century speaker of Spanish and passages with a clear shift of voice, that is to say, excerpts containing, rather than Sahagún's domestication stance, which permeates throughout the Spanish text, a more indigenous and 'foreignizing' orientation.[54]

Notes

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[1] The author would like to thank two blind reviewers for their invaluable comments and suggestions.

[2] For a study of Sahagún's life and works, see Jesús Bustamante García, *La obra etnográfica y lingüística de fray Bernardino de Sahagún*, Madrid, Universidad Complutense, 1989; and *Fray Bernardino de Sahagún: una revisión crítica de los manuscritos y de su proceso de composición*, México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1990; and Miguel León-Portilla, *Bernardino de Sahagún: pionero de la antropología*, México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1999.

[3] Sahagún acknowledges the involvement of at least seven assistants, whom he names in his second prologue to *Historia universal*. For further information on their works and social status during the colonial period, see José María Kobayashi, *La educación como conquista: empresa franciscana en México*, México, El Colegio de México, 1974, pp. 357-87; and Louise M. Burkhart 'Nahua scholars', in Burkhart (ed. and trans.), *Holy Wednesday: A Nahua Drama from Early Colonial Mexico*, Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996, pp. 65-73.

[4] Kevin Terraciano, 'Three Texts in One: Book XII of the *Florentine Codex*', *Ethnohistory*, 57:1, 2010, pp. 51-72, pp. 51, 62.

[5] Mariana C. Zinni, 'Umbrales hermenéuticos: los "prólogos" y "advertencias" de fray Bernardino de Sahagún', *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl*, 43, 2012, pp. 161-83, p. 163.

[6] See the editions of Gerhard Wolf and Joseph Connors (with Louis A. Waldman), *Colors Between Two Worlds: The Florentine Codex of Bernardino de Sahagún*, Milan, Villa I Tatti, Harvard University Press, 2012, and of María del Carmen Hidalgo Brinquis and Rebeca Benito Lope, *Los manuscritos de la Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España de Bernardino de Sahagún: El Códice matritense de la Real Academia de la Historia*, Madrid, Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2013.

[7] Culture-specific items are defined as those 'whose function and connotations in a source text involve a translation problem in their transference to a target text, whenever this problem is a product of the nonexistence of the referred item or of its different intertextual status in the cultural system of the readers of the target text'. Javier Franco Aixelá, 'Culture-specific Items in Translation', in Román Álvarez Rodríguez and María Carmen África Vidal Claramonte (eds), *Translation, Power, Subversion*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters, 1996, pp. 52-78, p. 58.

[8] The list of studies includes, in chronological order, those of Arthur J. O. Anderson, 'Sahagún's Sources for Book II', *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl*, 15, 1982, pp. 73-88; Pilar Máynez, 'La fauna mexica en la obra de Bernardino de Sahagún', *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl*, 21, 1991, pp. 145-61; Marie Sautron, 'Un ejemplo de comparación entre el texto castellano de la *Historia general* y el texto náhuatl del *Códice florentino* de fray Bernardino de Sahagún: la avifauna', in Jesús Paniagua Pérez and María Isabel Viforcos Marinas (eds), *Fray Bernardino de Sahagún y su tiempo*, León, Lancia, 2000, pp. 631-47; Ilaria Palmeri Capesciotti, 'La fauna del libro XI del *Códice florentino* de fray Bernardino de Sahagún: dos sistemas taxonómicos frente a frente', *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl*, 32, 2001, pp. 189-221; Pilar Máynez, 'El texto

castellano del *Códice florentino*: traducción, paráfrasis o interpolación', *Caravelle* (*Hommage à Georges Baudot*), 76-77, 2001, pp. 197-204; and Victoria Ríos Castaño, 'Domesticating the Nahuas: Sahagún's Cultural Translation of Nahua Gods and Ceremonies in Book I of *Historia universal de las cosas de Nueva España*', *Romance Studies*, 27, 2009, pp. 211-22. Klaus Zimmermann has also provided a general introduction to sixteenth-century translation in colonial Mexico, concentrating on translation techniques in Sahagún's *Colloquios y doctrina christiana*, see 'Traducción, préstamos y teoría del lenguaje: la práctica transcultural de los lingüistas misioneros en el México del siglo XVI', in Otto Zwartjes and Cristina Altman (eds), *Missionary Linguistics II/Lingüística misionera II: Orthography and Phonology*, Amsterdam; Philadelphia, Benjamins, 2005, pp. 155-82.

[9] Amongst others, Bustamante García, *La obra etnográfica y lingüística* and *Una revisión crítica,* and León-Portilla, *Bernardino de Sahagún*, have reported on his stays at Tlatelolco and studied the different production stages of Sahagún's works.

[10] For a reconstructed catalogue of the library, see Michael Mathes, *Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco: la primera biblioteca académica de las Américas*, México, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1982.

[11] See Donald Robertson, 'The Sixteenth-Century Mexican Encyclopedia of Fray Bernardino de Sahagún', *Cahiers d'histoire mondiale*, 9, 1966, pp. 617-27, p. 623; and Bert Roest, *A History of Franciscan Education (c. 1210-1517)*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 2000, pp. 286-89.

[12] For further reference on the influence of European encyclopaedias and religious books on Sahagún's work, see chapter III of Ríos Castaño, *Translation as Conquest: Sahagún and Universal History of the Things of New Spain*, Madrid-Frankfurt, Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2014.

[13] Sahagún accounts for their indispensable assistance in the second prologue and in the Spanish text of Book X of *Historia universal*; see Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History*

of the Things of New Spain, Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble (eds and trans), Santa Fe and Salt Lake City, School of American Research and University of Utah, 1950-1982, Prologues, pp. 55, 83. For further reference on their involvement in the writing of *Historia universal*, see James Lockhart, 'Introduction', in *We People Here: Nahuatl Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico*, Oregon, Wipf and Stock, 2004, (1st ed. 1993), pp. 1-46.

[14] The surviving drafts were eventually transferred to Book VII, on natural philosophy, and Book X, on Nahua people, of *Historia universal*. The Mexican historian Francisco del Paso y Troncoso edited a photographic reproduction of the 'Memoriales con escolios'; see Sahagún, *Historia de las cosas de Nueva España*, VI-VII, Madrid, Hauser y Menet, 1905-1906. Some folios of the manuscript are available online thanks to the Biblioteca Digital Mexicana.

[15] For the relevant passage, see Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Prologues, p. 50.

[16] Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Prologues, p. 47.

[17] See Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, I, pp. 55-56. For an edition of this brief compendium, in which Sahagún informs the Pope of his work, see Livario Oliger, *Breve compendio de los ritos idolátricos que los indios de esta Nueva España usaban en tiempo de su infidelidad*, *Antonianum*, 17, 1942, pp. 133-74.

[18] See Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Prologues, p. 56, Bustamante García, *La obra etnográfica y lingüística*, pp. 478-80, and Barbara E. Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain: Indigenous Cartography and the Maps of the Relaciones Geográficas*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996, pp. 16-17. Bustamante García argues that behind Ovando's petition was Philip II's chief physician Francisco Hernández; see *Una revisión crítica*, p. 361.

[19] Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Prologues, p. 47.

[20] Franco Aixelá suggests these translation techniques for an examination of culture-specific items; see 'Culture-specifics Items in Translation', pp. 55-56, 61-64.

[21] Sahagún, *Historia general*, II, p. 151. This article quotes hereafter the English translation of

the Nahuatl text written by Anderson and Dibble, see Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, and the Spanish text edited by Josefina García Quintana and Alfredo López Austin, *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, referred to hereafter as *Historia general*, Madrid, Alianza, 1988. As for the source text in the Nahuatl language, it can be consulted in Anderson and Dibble's parallel text edition of the *Florentine Codex*.

[22] Sahagún, *Historia general*, II, p. 167.

[23] Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, III, p. 68, Sahagún, *Historia general*, III, p. 229.

[24] Sahagún, *Historia general*, X, pp. 595-602.

[25] Sahagún, *Historia general*, X, p. 595.

[26] Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, X, p. 82, Sahagún, *Historia general*, X, p. 619.

[27] Sahagún, *Historia general*, VIII, pp. 516-17.

[28] Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, VIII, p. 38, Sahagún, *Historia general*, VIII, pp. 512-13.

[29] Sahagún, *Historia general*, VIII, p. 513.

[30] Sahagún, *Historia general*, I, p. 50.

[31] Sahagún, *Historia general*, II, p. 134. To be noted are the words *chían*, an indigenous seed, and *canoa*, in the context a kind of container, which might reflect that the two terms had made their way into the Spanish language that was spoken in New Spain. For a thorough study of indigenous terminology in Sahagún's translation, see Teresa Bastardín Candón, *Vitalidad de los términos indígenas en la Historia de las cosas de Nueva España de fray Bernardino de Sahagún*, Cádiz, Universidad de Cádiz, Servicio de Publicaciones, 2005 (http://minerva.uca.es/publicaciones/asp/docs/tesis/bastardin.pdf).

[32] Sahagún, *Historia general*, II, p. 121.

[33] Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, VIII, p. 28, Sahagún, *Historia general*, VIII, pp. 507-09. The definitions are Sebastián de Covarrubias's in his *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española* (1611), Felipe C.R. Maldonado (ed.), Madrid, Castalia, 1994, pp. 78, 284.

[34] For a specific study on the translation into Spanish of the fauna of Book XI, see Sautron, 'Un ejemplo de comparación'.

[35] Sahagún, *Historia general*, XI, pp. 684-722.

[36] Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, XI, p. 28.

[37] Sahagún, *Historia general*, XI, pp. 696-97.

[38] Bustamante García, *Una revisión crítica*, p. 360, and Miguel Figueroa Saavedra hold the same view; see his article 'Sustantivos mútilos y su traducción en el *Códice Florentino*', *Revista Española de Antropología Americana*, 30, 2000, pp. 191-220, p. 197. In the same vein, Sahagún determined that the translation of some passages of Books IX, X, and XI—copious in Nahuatl terminology—was unnecessary. In Book X, he left several paragraphs untranslated, using the available space of the Spanish column to highlight the importance of the College of Tlatelolco and to extol his 'colegiales'. Similarly, in Book XI he introduced a digression on the role of the Catholic Church.

[39] Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, XI, p. 237.

[40] Sahagún, *Historia general*, XI, p. 796. One might wonder whether the second definition that is added to the Spanish text was suggested by one of Sahagún's assistants whilst he was dictating his translation.

[41] The relevant quote reads: 'No se debe ofender el lector prudente en que se ponen solamente vocablos y no sentencias en lo arriba puesto, y en otras partes adelante, porque principalmente se pretende en este tratado aplicar el lenguaje castellano al lenguaje indígena para que se sepan hablar los vocablos propios desta materia, de *viciis et virtutibus*', Sahagún, *Historia general*, X, p. 585.

[42] Sahagún, *Historia general*, XI, p. 722. Further examples of this kind of deletion appear in Book IX, on merchants and craftsmen. Sahagún omitted information from chapters XVI on goldsmiths, XVII on jewellers, and XX and XXI on feather-workers because, as he states at

the beginning of chapter XVII: 'como es cosa muy usada y siempre se usa en los pueblos principales desta Nueva España, quien quisiere entender los vocablos y esta manera de hablar podralo tomar de los mesmos oficiales', Sahagún, *Historia general*, IX, p. 579.

[43] Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, X, p. 39.

[44] Sahagún, *Historia general*, X, p. 600.

[45] Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, II, pp. 76-77, Sahagún, *Historia general*, II, p. 122.

[46] Sahagún, *Historia general*, II, pp. 106-107.

[47] On the debates about the indigenous 'barbarity', subject to improvement by contact with Christians who were, by the custom of the time, 'más humanos', meaning more civilized, see Rolena Adorno, *The Polemics of Possession in Spanish American Narrative*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2007, pp. 82-83, 115-16.

[48] Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, X, p. 31.

[49] Sahagún, *Historia general*, X, p. 598.

[50] For a comparison of this passage in the source and target texts, see Fray Martín de Castañega, *Tratado de las supersticiones y hechizerias*, Fabián Alejandro Campagne (ed.), Buenos Aires, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1997, p. 76, and Fray Andrés de Olmos, *Tratado de hechicerías y sortilegios*, Georges Baudot (ed. and trans.), México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1990, pp. 58-59.

[51] Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, X, p. 53.

[52] Sahagún, *Historia general*, X, p. 606.

[53] Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Prologues, p. 49.

[54] James Lockhart examines this indigenous contribution during the writing process of Book XII of the *Florentine Codex* in his introduction to *We People Here*. Likewise, new studies could consider looking into the translation strategies that the Nahua assistants could have learnt at the College of Tlatelolco and whilst working on Sahagún's project, and which they might have

applied to the creation of plays in the Nahuatl language. For a study of some of these texts, see Burkhart's *Holy Wednesday*, 1996, and the four volumes of the series on Nahuatl theatre edited and translated by Burkhart and Barry R. Sell.