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## On Not Taming the Wild Tongue: Challenges and Approaches to Institutional Translation in a University Serving a Historically Minoritized Population

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La politique des microcentres : la traduction dans des contextes « mineurs » comme transfert culturel complexe  
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## Article abstract

A consequence of the development of modern states has been the concept of “minority” as used to refer to subsets of the population that are differentiated from that portion of the population which is seen as the “majority.” These minorities are at times distinguished from each other using terms such as *national minorities* and *immigrant minorities*. Some scholars have challenged the distinctions drawn by these constructs. An example of how such constructs are not always accurate can be found in Texas’ Rio Grande Valley, where ethnic and linguistic, immigrant and national, minority and majority are not always clear cut. “The Valley,” as the region is locally known, has a long history of the numerical majority being in a minoritized position. In this context, a local university administered a “speech test” to Mexican American students who enrolled between the 1950s and the 1970s. The purpose, according to Anzaldúa (1987), was to tame their “wild tongue.” This same university, now transformed, proposes to rehabilitate itself, as it becomes bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate. Accordingly, it now undertakes a systematic effort to bilingualize its operations, starting with the localization into Spanish of its website as conducted by the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley’s Translation and Interpreting Office. A number of terminological strategies and translation challenges stemming from the variegated lectal and diglossic landscapes of the region have arisen, which can be illuminated by the Post-Colonial paradigm found in Translation Studies.

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## **Abstract**

A consequence of the development of modern states has been the concept of “minority” as used to refer to subsets of the population that are differentiated from that portion of the population which is seen as the “majority.” These minorities are at times distinguished from each other using terms such as *national minorities* and *immigrant minorities*. Some scholars have challenged the distinctions drawn by these constructs. An example of how such constructs are not always accurate can be found in Texas’ Rio Grande Valley, where ethnic and linguistic, immigrant and national, minority and majority are not always clear cut. “The Valley,” as the region is locally known, has a long history of the numerical majority being in a minoritized position. In this context, a local university administered a “speech test” to Mexican American students who enrolled between the 1950s and the 1970s. The purpose, according to Anzaldúa (1987), was to tame their “wild tongue.” This same university, now transformed, proposes to rehabilitate itself, as it becomes bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate. Accordingly, it now undertakes a systematic effort to bilingualize its operations, starting with the localization into Spanish of its website as conducted by the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley’s Translation and Interpreting Office. A number of terminological strategies and translation challenges stemming

from the variegated lectal and diglossic landscapes of the region have arisen, which can be illuminated by the Post-Colonial paradigm found in Translation Studies.

**Keywords:** minority, diglossia, translation, university, translation policy

### Résumé

L'une des conséquences du développement de l'État moderne tient au concept de «minorité» tel qu'utilisé en référence à une population différente d'une portion de la population décrite comme la «majorité». Ces minorités sont parfois différenciées les unes des autres par des expressions telles que *peuples autochtones*, *minorités nationales* et *minorités immigrantes*. Certains auteurs ont contesté la nature arbitraire des distinctions établies par ces construits. La Vallée du Rio Grande au Texas – où les minorités et majorités ethniques et linguistiques, immigrantes et nationales, ne sont pas évidentes – présente un exemple montrant que ces construits ne sont pas toujours exacts. La Vallée, comme la région est appelée par ses habitants, possède une longue histoire où la majorité numérique se trouve en position minoritaire. Dans ce contexte, une université locale faisait passer un «test de communication orale» aux étudiants états-uniens de descendance mexicaine qui y étaient inscrits entre les années 1950 et 1970. L'objectif, selon Anzaldúa (1987), consistait à affaiblir leur «accent». Cette même université, maintenant transformée, souhaite se racheter en devenant bilingue, biculturelle et bialphabète. Ainsi, elle entreprend un effort systématique pour rendre bilingues ses opérations, en commençant par la traduction vers l'espagnol de son site Internet, prise en charge par le Bureau de traduction et d'interprétation de la University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. Plusieurs stratégies terminologiques et défis de traduction émanent des paysages lectaux et diglossiques de la région, lesquels sont mis en lumière par le paradigme postcolonial de la traductologie.

**Mots-clés :** minorité, diglossie, traduction, université, politiques de traduction

### Introduction: On the Topic of this Paper

This paper addresses *translation* and *minority*, two oft-contested terms. In Translation Studies, the term *minority* has been articulated by Lawrence Venuti as “a cultural or political position that is subordinate, whether the social context that defines it is local, national or global” (1998, p. 135). In turn, Michael Cronin has reflected on the difficulties of defining *minority*, because it “is the expression of a relation, not of an essence” (1995, p. 86) and, as such, should be defined in a way that is “dynamic rather than static” (*ibid.*). This broad understanding of minority as a relative position is helpful conceptually, and it can readily be applied to literatures, languages, peoples, and so forth. When one considers specific examples, certain cases come to mind: the Welsh are a minority nation in the United Kingdom in their relationship to the

English, and Spanish is a minority language in the United States in its relationship to English. In this paper, the specific case of the Rio Grande Valley, a region in the southernmost tip of Texas, is brought to the forefront as a way to explore the relationship between minoritizing practices and translation.

To do that, this paper will first consider some traditional understandings of minority that scholars have proposed. Then, the paper will explore the concept in the context of the Rio Grande Valley's languages. This will be followed by a historical snapshot of the Rio Grande Valley to illustrate how the majority was effectively minoritized, and how the handling of language was an important part of the power relations included in that process, especially in public education. Finally, the paper will consider how a new, public university in that region is using translation as a way of redress, as an attempt to un-minoritize a population.

### **On the Concept of Minority**

Regarding the concept of minority, groups of individuals who are in a position of minority have been conceptualized in different ways, to a large extent depending on the context in which they are found. Because contexts of minority are so different, finding a consensus over what it means for someone to belong to a minority group has proven to be difficult (Letschert, 2007, pp. 46 et seq.). The position of minority might be understood one way in a European context but quite differently in the United States.

In Europe, the concept of “national minority” is often used to refer to groups of individuals who have resided in some place for a very long time, usually predating the creation of the state they inhabit, and share a common sense of identity that is distinct from that of the majority of individuals in the state. An example of this would be Danish individuals who live in the Northern German state of Schleswig-Holstein. The Danes have lived in the area since the 7<sup>th</sup> century, and even today they self-identify as Danish in some form, for example, when they refer to themselves as Danish South Schleswigians (Klatt, 2012, p. 63). Such groups are often distinguished from immigrant groups, who began arriving to the state at some point after the state's creation. For example, the Turkish would not be considered a national minority in Germany. This distinction between national minority and immigrant group is not always observed (e.g., Government of the Czech Republic, 2017, n.p.), and some scholars have argued

that the distinction between national and immigrant minorities is not necessarily helpful (see e.g., Eide, 2004, p. 379). Others, most notably Roberta Medda-Windischer (2009, p. 62), have proposed that what matters is the position of minority coupled with the explicit or implicit manifestation of a desire to maintain a collective identity that is different in some way from that of the majority.

In the United States, the construct of minority is linked not to the concept of nation but rather to subordination to a dominant group (Schaefer, 2012, p. 5). Specifically, minority groups have been identified by sociologists as those that meet the following criteria: “unequal treatment, distinguishing physical or cultural traits, involuntary membership, awareness of subordination, and ingroup marriage” (*ibid.*, p. 6). This is an expansive definition that can include racial groups, ethnic groups, religious groups, and others (*ibid.*, pp. 7-10). For example, racial groups which are non-Anglo, or “not white,” are often considered to be minorities. This means that a Mexican American in Texas whose family roots date back to the days of the Spanish colony would be considered a minority, and a Mexican-born resident of Texas would also be considered a minority.

It should be stressed at this point that groups in minority positions need not be numerically inferior within a given territory in order to occupy that place of subordination in their specific context. As Jennifer Jackson-Preece keenly points out

what makes minority status politically significant is not size, but belonging: Minorities are those who are denied or prevented from enjoying the full rights of membership within a political community because their religion, race, language, or ethnicity differs from that of the official public identity. (2008, p. 906)

Regardless of their relative size, these groups have an identity that is different somehow than the dominant one and this places them at a disadvantage.

Thus, minority groups can be distinguished in terms of identity from the rest of the population. Oftentimes, one of the traits that signals that distinctiveness is the use of a language other than that adopted, *de facto* or *de jure*, as the state’s official language. The language adopted by the state tends to be the language of those in the majority position (i.e., the position of power), so that speaking a different language, or at least sharing a sense of identity with speakers of that language, can become a marker of minority. Consequently, these

languages are sometimes referred to as *minority languages*. An example of a minority language would be Spanish in the United States. Significantly, minority languages can be spoken by a sizable portion of the population and still have that place of subordination. Spanish is spoken at home by over 38 million people aged five and over in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013, p. 3), but it nonetheless is in a minority position. This can be true even in areas within the country where Spanish speakers outnumber English speakers.

### On Minority and Language in the Rio Grande Valley

Texas' Rio Grande Valley provides a clear example of this. By way of background, The Valley (as the area is known locally) is the southernmost region of Texas. It shares a border with Mexico, and is comprised of four counties: Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy.

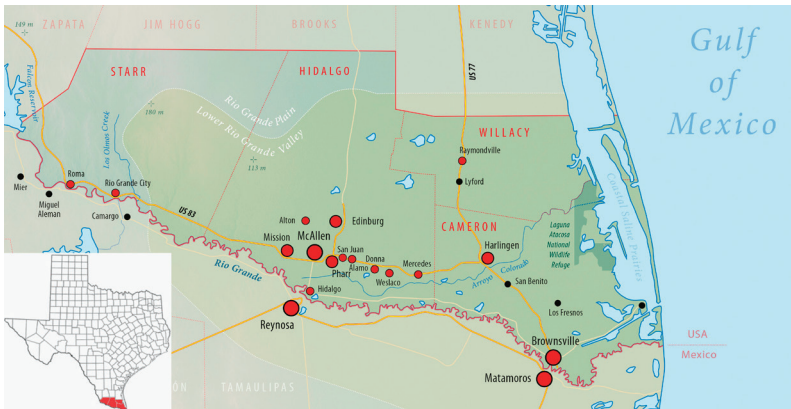


Image 1. Map of The Rio Grande Valley, in South Texas, comprised of the four counties in red. UTRGV campuses are located in Brownsville, Edinburg, Harlingen, McAllen, Rio Grande City and South Padre Island. Source: Wikimedia Commons. Composite from images in the public domain under Creative Commons license.  
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According to data from the American Community Survey,<sup>1</sup> estimates for the 2011–2015 period place the population of the Rio Grande Valley at 1,198,432 inhabitants aged five and over. Of these,

1. The American Community Survey (ACS) is a statistical survey carried out by the U.S. Census Bureau. While the statistics are not infallible (e.g., people are believed to misrepresent the answers to some questions, the answers are self-reported and not verified, etc.), the ACS provides helpful information on language use at home.

222,102 (or 18.5%) are estimated monolingual speakers of English. In turn, 963,802 (or 80.4%) are estimated speakers of Spanish. The Survey does not tell how many of these speakers of Spanish are monolingual, but it does provide a glimpse of how many of them are dominant speakers of Spanish by indicating the number of people who report they “speak English less than very well.” Specifically, 376,710 Spanish speakers (or 31.4% of the total population) do not speak English very well. In essence, the Rio Grande Valley is a region where most people are bilingual, but over 30% percent of the population are Spanish speakers with limited English capacities.

English and Spanish interact in the Rio Grande Valley in complex ways. *Diglossia* is the term that best defines the type of language contact that prevails in the region, with Spanish in general as the language most frequently used in household environments and English as the language of education and official business. An initial observation is that several lectal varieties of English and Spanish co-exist and play different sociolinguistic roles. According to the Texas State Historical Association (Walters, 2010), the two predominant varieties of English in the region are a mix of Southern and upland Southern dialect, and an overlay of Midwestern speech. Strong phonetical and lexical influence from Spanish generates Spanish-Influenced English or Chicano English (*ibid.*). Spanish, in turn, displays an array of dialects in constant interaction, including: 1) “Mexicano” or Spanish in several Northern Mexico varieties (*ibid.*); 2) Heritage Spanish, which can be traced back to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century in the region and has a significant influx from English, purveying nonetheless some conservative phonetic traits from older Spanish (Fernández Moreno, 2008, p. 193); and 3) Spanglish, a complex variety or set of varieties of Spanish with different degrees of hybridity at the lexical and syntactical levels (Lipski, 2007).

These varieties of English and Spanish interact in different ways, which make it difficult to draw clear lines of demarcation between minority and majority. Translanguaging and code-switching are two of the most frequent linguistic phenomena in the region. Their presence stretches from commercial advertising to everyday personal interactions. Translanguaging is defined as “the act performed by bilinguals of accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what are described as autonomous languages, in order to maximize communicative potential” (García, 2009, p. 140). Code-switching, perhaps a more traditional term for the same phenomenon, refers



to a process where words from a different language are inserted in sentences due to the speaker's different levels of competence in either language, cognitive access speed to lexicon, word frequency, semantic context, syntax, and even an economy of phonetics (Heredia and Altarriba, 2001, pp. 164-169).

In this complex linguistic context, policy-makers have placed Spanish in a position of subordination. They have done this, in part, by making English the language of official business. They have also made English the language of education, which helps further said language's higher level of prestige. This prestige contributes to establishing and maintaining English's majority status. Some nuance is needed to understand this as well. Specifically, most students in the region are schooled through so-called "bilingual education" programs. Such programs effectively aim for non-native speakers to embrace English from early childhood through a methodology known as "early exit," a purposeful transition from the student's native language to English as the academic language (and, implicitly, to abandon Spanish in academic settings), with several degrees of immersion.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, in essence, the Rio Grande Valley is currently a majority-Hispanic area, where Spanish is widely spoken on a daily basis. But its position is subordinate to that of English. This is due to a history of racial prejudice against the numerical majority of the population, which led to the minoritization of Spanish. As will be explored in the next section, this resulted in cultural and linguistic tensions which, to some extent, remain unresolved.

### **On Minoritizing Spanish Speakers in the Rio Grande Valley**

What is now the Rio Grande Valley was originally populated by Indigenous groups which were largely absorbed by the conquering cultures. The first such conquering culture was the Spanish Empire. The area was part of Spanish America from the late 1600s, but it was in the 1740s that the region became actively colonized with the founding of several cities and the creation of a province called Nuevo Santander. In 1810, Mexico embarked on its War of Independence, and the area became then part of Mexico until 1836, the year when Texas successfully became independent from Mexico. Because the

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2. Newer "dual language" programs are emerging in which students use both English and Spanish as their language of instruction. These programs, however, still involve only an anecdotal amount of schooling centers in the region, and they are controversial among those who value the majority position of English.

border between Mexico and Texas was never fully settled, the region fell in a disputed area. After Texas accepted annexation by the United States in 1845, the dispute erupted into the Mexican-American War, which ended with the annexation of about half of Mexico's territory by the United States. The region then came firmly under U.S. jurisdiction, but culturally it remained different from the rest of Texas and the United States. Additionally, it was isolated from state and federal authorities. This, coupled with a constant movement back and forth across the border by the region's inhabitants, allowed for vibrant links with Mexico to continue. Nonetheless, prevailing racial attitudes in the rest of the state and the country were also felt locally in the region, and institutions established by the state and federal governments helped propel Anglos to a dominant position in the area (see Mayén Mena, 2013, p. 25), especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Indeed, the region's centuries-old ranching economy gave way in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to powerful economic and political forces that pushed agriculture.<sup>3</sup> The railroads came, canal systems were built, and the region was branded as a "Valley," a topographically erroneous designation intended to lure outsiders to this 12,500 km<sup>2</sup> floodplain. Washingtonian palm trees were imported, and a marketing campaign led by land development companies and chambers of commerce advertised this dry, desert-like region as a tropical paradise that promised riches just waiting to happen (Limerick, 1987; Brannstrom and Newman, 2009). A place myth was created, a windfall of Northerners and their money made their way into South Texas, and a two-tiered social and economic structure provided the labor and the leadership to turn the myth into reality (Brannstrom and Newman, 2009).

The Rio Grande basin was successfully transformed from ranching to agriculture. The impact would be profound and would shape regional institutions for the next century. The introduction of large-scale agriculture drew a large labor force that primarily came from Mexico. Wide displacement of Mexicans during the Mexican Revolution and its aftermath coincided with laboring opportunities

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3. Spanish settlers in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries found the region too dry and lacking in fresh water sources for large-scale agriculture to be an economic model for communities in the region (Miller, 1980; Robertson, 1985). However, the forces of 20<sup>th</sup>-century modernity prevailed, particularly as the region became part of a broader plan to include railroad expansion, and agriculture became a profitable economic model.

in South Texas, but the opportunities would also be dubious.<sup>4</sup> Big regional investment in building an agricultural economy established the conditions for the emergence of a two-tiered social structure (Montejano, 1987; Krochmal, 2016), with Mexicans as the laborers and Anglos predominantly as the ruling class.

This reality impacted the development of schools at every level. The narrative on grade school experiences of Mexican American children consistently points to schools as unwelcoming places. For example, in one story collected through an oral history project on education in the Rio Grande Valley, an elder described the time he was in grade school in the early 1930s. His father approached the school bus driver to ask if he could drive the bus closer to their home on rainy days. The bus driver responded by saying he would not, adding that “Mexicans didn’t have to go to school, because they were supposed to be working in the fields” (Guajardo and Guajardo, 2004).

Schools across South Texas in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century resembled other schools in the American South. Segregationist practices dictated the formation of Mexican Schools on the one hand and regular schools for Anglo children on the other. As a matter of public policy, communities were separated by the railroad tracks—Mexicans or Mexican Americans lived on one side, and Anglo Americans on the other. Schools were generally located in the corresponding neighborhoods (San Miguel, 1987; Blanton, 2004; Guajardo and Guajardo, 2004). Even after the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed racial segregation in public schools in the landmark 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* case, many public schools in the Valley continued segregationist practices.

Higher education was also exclusionary for Mexican American students during the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Quality grade school experiences for Mexican Americans were limited, so their path to college tended to be limited. One fact is telling: the inaugural class at the Edinburg Junior College in 1927 counted only 5 Hispanic students among the 196 enrollees (Welch, 1987). The population of the region at that time was majority Mexican American, but they were the conspicuous minority in higher education.

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4. Lloyd Bentsen—who represented South Texas as Congressman, US Senator, and Secretary of the Treasury—during the 1950s was wont to sell the Valley to outsiders as a place that offered “good year round weather, cheap land, and cheap labor” (Gause, 2010; Mycue, 2005).

World War II brought an increase of Mexican American students into the college's halls. Congress passed the GI Bill, which afforded veterans an opportunity to finance their college education, and many Mexican Americans returned home with a greater sense of confidence and esteem as Americans (Rivas-Rodríguez, 2005; Griswold del Castillo, 2008). Whereas Anglo-American students outnumbered Mexican Americans by almost 40 to 1 in 1927, by 1952, the ratio had lessened dramatically to 2 to 1 (Welch, 1987). Demography was becoming destiny at the fledgling college, but the demographic shift also introduced institutional practices aimed at continuing to minoritize the numerical majority.

In 1950, the college, by then called Pan American College, hired its first Mexican American faculty member, a Spanish professor named Amelia Schunior Ramírez. Others would soon follow. Concurrently, the College began to hire more speech professors to teach a growing list of speech courses. These courses were not innocent. One of their key purposes was to teach Mexican-American students to speak without an accent (Cole and Johnson, 2014), that is to say, to sound more like Anglo Americans. As more Mexican-American students enrolled, the College opened more and more speech classes. A "speech test" was also instituted and administered at the beginning of every semester. Typically, before a Mexican-American student completed registration, they were sent to the "speech test" table, where a panel of Anglo faculty members would listen to Mexican-American students read a selected text. Just about every Mexican-American student would then be dispatched to a remedial speech class. Gloria Anzaldúa<sup>5</sup> would later explore the humiliation she felt when being subjected to a speech test as she first enrolled at Pan American College in the mid-1960s, all in line with the College's goal to "tame" her "wild tongue" (Anzaldúa, 1987; Cole and Johnson, 2014).

The speech test at the university was the product of a value system of the times, manifest across the educational pathway. The dominant view coupled the English language with desirable values, so public institutions promoted the use of English. This included the use of schools that taught in English only, even when most students came from homes where the language of interaction was Spanish (Gawenda,

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5. Anzaldúa was a Mexican-American scholar who gained some additional visibility when Google spotlighted her in the September 26, 2017, doodle because of her global stature in critical studies. She is known in the field of Translation Studies under the rubric of post-colonial approaches (Robinson, 1997, p. 28).

1986, p. 191). Thus, education played a key role in spreading the use of English and also in raising its status, along with that of English speakers. In fact, in the public school system across the Rio Grande Valley, countless stories point to a pervasive practice of punitive behavior by teachers and principals against Mexican-American children because they spoke Spanish in school. Just about every elder interviewed in the oral histories on the education of Mexican Americans describes being spanked, admonished publicly, or disciplined sternly because, as one interviewee said, “we were using our mother tongue, the only language our parents knew” (Guerra, 2013).

A pattern of overt language oppression practices developed throughout South Texas public schools early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, intensified in the mid-century, and persists into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This *de facto* administration of language practices is less overt in the present day, but the impact of a century of this type of behavior in the schools had a palpable effect on the Mexican-American population. “I raised my children to be good English speakers, not Spanish,” said one elder, “because I didn’t want them to be punished for speaking Spanish in school” (Pérez, 2015).

The preceding paragraphs provide clear examples of how a numerically inferior group can minoritize the demographic majority through control of public institutions, especially schools. This can be done through language practices where the use of the language that the numerical majority speaks at home is deliberately oppressed by those with control over institutions. However, such language oppressive practices would not go forever unchallenged in the region.

### **On Pushing Back Against Minoritizing Practices**

Official language practices sought to minoritize Spanish, but some educators pushed back. Emilia Schunior Ramírez attempted to elevate the value of the Spanish language at Pan American, until her untimely death in 1960. Her son, Alfonso Ramírez, was a principal at an Edinburg elementary school and within a few years began to create materials for Spanish-speaking students. In 1966, U.S. Senator Ralph Yarborough approached Ramírez and Jesse Treviño, a local civil rights and education rights advocate, because he had heard about Ramírez creating and using bilingual education materials in elementary schools in the Rio Grande Valley (Treviño, 2013). Yarborough thereafter sponsored the Bilingual Education Act of 1968, which followed some of Ramírez’s ideas.

Students also pushed back. In 1968 more than 140 Mexican-American students at Edcouch-Elsa High School staged a historic walkout. They had been grieving about functional school issues, such as poor facilities, but also about things like not being allowed to use their mother tongue on campus. The walkout made national news, and the role of language and culture gained center stage. By the next academic year Edcouch-Elsa and other school districts introduced bilingual education programs, and Ramírez would act as a key trainer of teachers who would deliver bilingual instruction to Spanish-speaking children across the Rio Grande Valley (Guajardo and Guajardo, 2004; Guajardo, 2018). At the same time, Pan American University (the college had by now grown into a university) began to sunset its speech test and effectively ended the practice by the mid-1970s.

The bilingual education movement in South Texas was contentious since its inception. The loudest critics support the English Only philosophy: “this is America, so speak English.” Some critics are troubled by what they perceive as misguided political agendas that embrace a politics of ethnic solidarity and separatist ideologies (San Miguel, 2004). Others, including some Mexican-American school principals and teachers, articulate the position that they “made it and [are] doing just fine, so immigrants and other ELLs can make it too” (Guerra, 2013).

When Ramírez convinced Yarborough of the merits of bilingual education, he argued that schools should teach children in their native tongue because it was respectful, and forcing a second language at the explicit expense of the children’s mother tongue may have a negative effect on language development. He argued that once children were cognitively developed in their native language, they could then learn a second or third language with less difficulty because they were cognitively solid in their native language. When the U.S. Bilingual Education Act was hammered out, its substance and spirit did not match Ramírez’s theory on language development. The Bilingual Education Act outlined a process for English language acquisition, not for Spanish language development. The theory and the policy were in conflict, and that conflict persists half a century later (San Miguel, 2004; Ramírez, 2005).

Pan American University built a Bilingual Education program in the early 1970s to support teachers and schools as they experimented with the new instructional practices. The historical moment was marked at Pan American: as the speech test was being eliminated,

bilingual education was being introduced. The new program responded to an educational policy that called for the teaching of the English language to Spanish-speaking children<sup>6</sup> (González, 2013). Teacher training followed that dictate, and thousands of teachers and school leaders have been trained to implement bilingual education not as a means to raise bilingual or biliterate children, but rather to create English-speaking and English-literate children.

After decades of submitting to the assimilationist impulses of the Bilingual Education Act, the recently minted University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV)<sup>7</sup> has committed itself to a sustained analysis of the history of bilingualism in this region. During the past decade, faculty and administrators have gradually built a Center for Bilingual Studies,<sup>8</sup> a Center for Mexican American Studies,<sup>9</sup> and an Office of Translation and Interpreting, all of which are overseen by a B3 (Bilingual, Bicultural, Biliterate) Institute. The B3 Institute's broad goal is to create a bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate institution (see De la Trinidad *et al.*, 2017). This falls in line with UTRGV's inaugural strategic plan, which calls for the development of a bilingual university that also values biculturalism and biliteracy. From a historical standpoint, the explicit call for bilingualism directly counters the spirit and purpose of the speech test and the intentional work to "tame the wild tongue" of Mexican-American students.

A new value system is now at play in South Texas' higher education, but it does not come without resistance. The historical trauma of language oppression continues to grip the community, and the "speak English, you're in America" ethos persists in many quarters in the body politic. A newfound legitimacy for Spanish, a language that has been minoritized in the region into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, provides an opportunity to build a society with a new language tolerance. In this context, the Translation and Interpreting Office emerges as a critical

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6. The thinking is that if Spanish-speaking children learn English, then bilingual education programs have fulfilled their purpose. Even so, English language learners (ELLs) continue to lag behind non-ELLs in academic achievement. Additionally, ELLs who do succeed often do so at the expense of not gaining bilingual or biliteracy skills and thus miss out on the opportunities afforded by the mastery of two languages.

7. UTRGV was created in 2015 by fusing the University of Texas Pan American and the University of Texas at Brownsville.

8. The Center for Bilingual Studies works with public schools and community organizations to build the bilingual capacities.

9. The Center for Mexican American Studies engages in teaching, research, and service to build the cultural competence of faculty, staff, and leadership at UTRGV.

component of the B3 Institute's work. This Office holds the weighty responsibility of putting forth the public face of the aspirationally bilingual university. As part of the B3 Institute's institution-building thrust, the Translation and Interpreting Office works conscientiously to rehabilitate the debilitating history of the "wild tongue." How it goes about doing that is explored below.

### **On Translating Against Minority Status**

The Guiding Principles established by The University of Texas System Board of Regents encouraged UTRGV to produce "leaders who are bi-cultural, bi-lingual, and bi-literate," serving as a "Gateway to the Americas" (Dávila-Montes *et al.*, 2014). To contribute to this goal, the university undertook a gradual effort to bilingualize its operations, starting with the localization into Spanish of its inaugural website. Accordingly, translations in UTRGV are overwhelmingly conducted into Spanish, which responds, as will be discussed below, to Richard Jacquemond's hypothesis (1992) that translation typically takes place into the language of the dominated, not into the language of the hegemonic. In a sense, the way translation instantiates in the institution, and the nature of the challenges ensuing, becomes a sort of touchstone for broader sociolinguistic and sociocultural considerations. The "behavior" of translation in specific settings could help characterize those settings better, by comparing such instantiations with other documented behaviors of translation in previously well-defined environments. In this case, we propose that the behavior of translation in the institution points to a general sociocultural environment that is post-colonial in nature.<sup>10</sup>

Translating webpages into Spanish was a key task in the Translation and Interpreting Office's first two years of existence. To carry it out, the Office was originally staffed with qualified personnel of mixed national origins: three Mexicans/Mexican Americans from the border region, with differing number of years of schooling in the U.S., and all with university degrees from UTRGV's legacy institutions. There was also an Argentinian senior translator and project manager.

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10. The notions of post-coloniality and borderland culture converge similarly here as they do in Quebec, another region well known for its productive and intricate relationship with translation. Sherry Simon describes the characterization of this Canadian region during the 1960s as a "cultural colony, impoverished and alienated" (1999, p. 59), but that, in spite of its subsequent cultural and economic growth, it "can be said to participate fully in the contradictions and tensions of contemporary post-coloniality. [...] The culture of Quebec has always been that of a borderland" (*ibid.*).



Faculty from Catalonia/Spain and from Uruguay also lent support. All staff members, current and past, have formal education in the field, ranging from undergraduate certificates to Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degrees in Translation and Interpreting. The office was, since its inception, equipped with standard networked computers, and most translations and projects are completed with a fully licensed version of SDL Trados and MultiTerm. This information is relevant as to the nature and lectal variety of translations into Spanish produced, and, also, in order to illustrate a professionalized approach to the bilingualization of the institution, based on best practices and language industry standards.

In that regard, the office relied on standard production and quality control processes, including draft translation, revision by peers, copy editing, and at least two subsequent phases of proofing. From March 2016 to March 2017, the period roughly corresponding to its first year of full-fledged operation, 283,273 target text words were produced, which amounts to 26,700 translation units totaling 39,525 translated segments. Additionally, a term base of 1,141 terms was created, thus fixating a lexical body that meets specific challenges that will be outlined next. Most of these translations were destined to webpages or other materials that appeared bilingually, but they also included video subtitling and voiceover for radio and TV, as well as other audiovisual materials for presentations and online press releases.

The singular linguistic landscape in which the translation activity takes place encountered several challenges that will be described next. To some extent, these challenges can be seen as stemming from the highly contradictory colonial/post-colonial, majority/minority, bilingual/diglossic settings in which the translations are conducted. The following are recurring challenges:<sup>11</sup>

- Reciprocal linguistic influence/interference in everyday language *and* in translation.
- Assessment by stakeholders of translations as bilingual texts, subject to piecemeal (word-by-word) comparison and judgment.

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11. The issues listed constitute recurrent themes within a corpus of around 2000 email exchanges that took place routinely between participating individuals and staff translators, analyzed qualitatively over the course of two years. The authors of this article were associated with the Translation and Interpreting Office in different capacities, i.e., as Executive Director of the B3 Institute (to which the Office was affiliated), as the Founding Director of said Office, or as advisory faculty in UTRGV's academic Translation and Interpreting program.

- Differing literacies in Spanish, by which standard/international Spanish phrasings are perceived at times as “grammatically incorrect,” especially if they are complex.
- Lack of exposure in many users to high-register or academic Spanish: “I don’t understand *that* Spanish.”
- Sensitivity linked to identity, in which clients react negatively to the text, often considering it a “wrong translation,” if the Spanish sounds different than their own daily speech.
- Ownership of translations—translators are not “just” localizers, since the publisher defines its nature as a bilingual university: how translations are conducted ends up equaling the nature of that institutional bilingualism in the public scene.
- Generalized lack of knowledge of translation process, which tends to be seen especially as irrelevant in the region because nearly everybody can translate informally.
- Lack of perception on the importance of joint development of bilingual material as the best practice: texts are produced in English without any regard for the fact that the text will have a final output as a bilingual text often subject to comparison; slogans and similar texts are developed with syntactic structures or idiomatic choices that are difficult or “impossible” to fit in Spanish, resulting in target texts that do not meet client expectations of similitude of source and target texts.
- Differing perceptions on text relevance—rhetorically, culturally, and institutionally.
- Lack of reciprocity in quality expectations for texts published in English and in Spanish, with higher expectations placed in the English.
- Questioning of target texts frequently requiring lengthy negotiations and occasional disputes.

These challenges tend to prove Jacquemond’s hypotheses about North-South translation inequalities: namely, that, on the one hand, translations into the dominated language need to be “integrated without question” (1992, p. 155) or, as Douglas Robinson would put it, be “readily accessible for the masses” (1997, p. 21); and that, on the other hand, the materials and authors from the dominated language need

to exhibit some compliance with stereotypical representations of the dominated by the hegemonic (Jacquemond, 1992, p. 154).<sup>12</sup>

The process of reaching viable translation solutions to these challenges was based on mixed methodologies ranging from domain specific, corpus-style Internet queries to collegiate discussion between participating translation staff, directorship, and affiliated faculty, all of whom exhibited a diverse lectal background in Spanish. The need to educate translation clients about the intricacies of translation is a frequent professional concern, as illustrated by the spirit of the American Translator's Association widely distributed and translated booklet "Getting it Right" (Durban, 2011). Educative dialogue was sought between the Office and clients, sometimes resorting to a lengthy pedagogy of grammar, idiomaticity, and language use. Getting clients to trust the translation staff's competence was key to gradually build authority about subsequent translation choices—and to reducing the effort exerted on client pedagogy. However, the need to educate arose systematically with almost every new client. This points to the fact that the range of issues confronted has a broader base than a merely institutional one. It also indicates that the translation issues raised correspond to ampler sociolinguistic and sociocultural considerations. In a sense, educating clients became part of a broader pedagogical quest for racial and linguistic justice in settings of (post-colonial) linguistic imbalance.

In these settings, translation becomes problematized on the basis of questions that are usually unproblematically addressed when a "conventional" localization project is designed. As André Lefevere states apropos of literary translation in post-colonial settings, "[translation] rules were long thought to be eternal and unchanging," (1999, p. 75) but "the rules to be observed [...] depend on [...] the

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12. Jacquemond generalizes his findings on French < > Arabic translations of literary works and genres in terms of North-South, West-East, First World-Third World translation flows. He also proposes that dominated cultures translate more from hegemonic ones than vice versa (1992, p. 139) and suggests that hegemonic cultures are selective in choosing texts and authors for translation from dominated cultures, preferring those that satisfy cultural preconceptions of the hegemonic about the dominated (*ibid.*, p. 154). The first statement is applicable to the institutional situation described in this case study. The second is harder to prove in a non-literary, strictly functional environment. However, some of the very few texts translated into English from Spanish were related to festive cultural events held on campus and organized mostly by Spanish-speaking students and faculty, and which can be easily considered as fitting preconceptions about Hispanics—and therefore as establishing the "need" of translating them.

function of the translation, and *who wants it made and for whom*" (*ibid.*; italics added). How can an audience for the target text be defined when there are many actual (and not just potential) audiences? What register should be established for an across-the-board corporate style and identity when some registers (specifically the academic ones) are not "readily accessible" to some audiences? What terminological choices guarantee communicative success and adequacy of institutional purpose? What consensus (and with whom) can be reached in order to ensure long-term acceptability of translations? How can sustainable translation guidelines be developed? What translation policies can be put in place to ensure all of this? In short, the overall settings in which translation is performed entail an intrinsic difficulty in the negotiation and definition of the target text's "standard of acceptability," using Robert De Beaugrande's and Wolfgang U. Dressler's term (1981).

In general, the following conflicting factors in the definition of acceptability were identified inductively as translation work progressed:

- *International vs. local vs. dialect(s)*: Issues arose in terms of competing target audiences.
- *Community register vs. academic register*: Issues arose in terms of the perception of register and degrees of "formality."
- *Spanish-language university terminology vs. U.S. university terminology (calque)*: Issues arose in determining the best terminological approach.
- *Community empowerment, recognition, and self-recognition vs. individual (students') empowerment in the professional market*: Mastery of a globalized, **majority** language by the students (Dávila-Montes *et al.*, 2014, p. 12) played a role in determining the *skopos* of localization.

Each of these factors required choices to be made. These choices, as made systematically, led to the development of a series of baseline approaches, as follows:

- *International vs. local vs. dialect(s)*: "Transparent" formulations and terms found in the Spanish-speaking world's university tradition were privileged over "Local" and "Dialect" formulations and terms. These did not necessarily come out of


Mexico's academic institutions as the key was transparency (over regionalism). See example in Table 1.

- *Community register vs. academic register*: Depending on the product, "Academic" was privileged over "Community." Community register and some borrowings, however, were used in some promotional texts so as to reflect various degree of localism and provide a feel of approachability to the populace. See example in Table 1.
- *Spanish-language university terminology vs. U.S. university terminology (calque)*: Calque was intentionally avoided. Terminological tradition from the Spanish-speaking world was followed. In cases where there was great variety in choice, "transparent" terms were preferred over "look-alike" terms. See example in Table 1.
- *Community empowerment, recognition, and self-recognition vs. individual (students') empowerment in the professional market*: Long-term empowerment of communities was sought through shorter-term empowerment of individuals. This was to be achieved through sustained exposure to wider academic registers, global lexical variety, and syntactic complexity (e.g., intentionally aiming for hypotaxis in target texts).

These were politically motivated choices: the choice of stressing a difference as long as it was communicatively viable (see Table 1, next page). The systematic deployment of these choices was part of developing translation policy through practice.

A sustainable translation policy in the Translation and Interpreting Office was established according to criteria that had to go beyond the traditional benchmarks for localization or bilingual publishing of websites. The convergence of the sociolinguistic elements described above meant that answering the basic questions found at the threshold of any large localization project was more complicated than usual. The reality of working in a social context with English as the dominant language and Spanish as a minoritized language was felt from the start.

**Table 1. Summary of decision-making approaches to terminological acceptability in the localization of UTRGV's website, and specific examples**

| Approach                                                                            | Source term                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Terms chosen                                                  | Not used                                     | Comment                                                             |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>International vs. local vs. dialect(s)</b>                                       | Academic Advising Center                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <i>Centro de Asesoría Académica</i>                           | <i>Centro de Consejería Académica</i>        | Calque - Local vs. Intl. + MX + ES + CO - AR                        |
|                                                                                     | Sustainability Council                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <i>Consejo de Sostenibilidad</i>                              | <i>Consejo de Sustentabilidad</i>            | Morphological calque - MX + ES ± CO ± AR                            |
|                                                                                     | Student Union Lawn                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <i>Explanada frente al edificio de la Sociedad de Alumnos</i> | <i>Yarda de la Unión de Estudiantes</i>      | Localism & calque                                                   |
| <b>Community register vs. academic register</b>                                     | Counseling and Training Clinic                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <i>Centro de Asesoramiento, Terapia y Capacitación</i>        | <i>Clinica de Consejería y Entrenamiento</i> | False cognates                                                      |
|                                                                                     | Open House                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <i>Open House</i>                                             | <i>Jornada de puertas abiertas</i>           | Advertising material, daily use borrowing                           |
|                                                                                     | Mission/Vision                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <i>Vocación/Aspiración</i>                                    | <i>Misión/Visión</i>                         | Idiomatycity/calque                                                 |
| <b>Spanish-language university terminology vs. U.S. university terminology</b>      | Enrollment Center                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <i>Centro de Inscripciones</i>                                | <i>Centro de Enrolamiento</i>                | False cognates, misleading cultural reference                       |
|                                                                                     | Admission Form                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <i>Formulario de Ingreso</i>                                  | <i>Forma de Admisión</i>                     | Choice of non-calque: established & transparent term. International |
|                                                                                     | Office of the Dean                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <i>Decanato</i>                                               | <i>Oficina del Decano</i>                    | Non-calque traditional & transparent term                           |
|  | <b>Effect sought and overall results</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                               |                                              |                                                                     |
|                                                                                     | A balance between community empowerment, recognition and self-recognition and individual (students') empowerment in the professional market: mastery of a globalized, majority language by the students as a factor in the determination of the <i>skopos</i> of the localization. |                                                               |                                              |                                                                     |

### **Conclusion: On Not Taming the Wild Tongue**

Taking a step back from the day-to-day challenges of the Translation and Interpreting Office in order to regain a panoramic view of the Rio Grande Valley, several conclusions can be drawn. To begin with, Spanish speakers in the region do not fit comfortably in the traditional majority/minority dichotomy. While over time there has undoubtedly

been a concerted effort by the authorities to diminish, and extinguish even, the presence of the Spanish language in the Valley, such efforts have been only partially successful. The area's strong tradition of Spanish as a heritage language is strengthened by steady contact with neighboring Mexico and by a constant infusion of Mexican-born residents into the Valley. Even so, Spanish has not managed to stay in a position of power, as institutions brought in by the English-speaking conquerors have been very reluctant to budge in terms of language use. Thus, Spanish, in several varieties, remains a viable language for the community, but officialdom continues to occur in English. All of this has resulted in a place where the lines between minority and majority are not well defined, where bilingualism, diglossia, bilingual education, code-switching, translanguaging, lectal hybridity, and confluence of modern and traditional local cultures come together in complex ways.

It is fair to ask where translation fits in such a context. The previous sections have tended to show that translation policy can be developed by institutions as a way to fight back against minoritizing tendencies. UTRGV proclaimed its aim to produce bi-cultural, bi-lingual, and bi-literate graduates. This was a choice against the historical tendency to minoritize Hispanics and Spanish speakers in the region. For this proclamation to be more than a feel-good statement, specific steps needed to be taken. The creation of a B3 Institute, of an institution within the institution, to help pursue that aim was a step in that direction. Within that B3 Institute, a Translation and Interpreting Office was tasked with making sure that a good deal of the context created in English would also appear in Spanish, especially on the university's webpage. This Office, in turn, through its coordinated practice began developing an evolving translation policy to deal with the difficulties it faced and continues to face.

To properly understand the nature of these difficulties and how they affect the role of translation in this border region, a post-colonial paradigm needs to be invoked. Studies in the field have suggested the recurrent presence in such settings of a sort of "utopian narrative" (Robinson, 1997, p. 31) by which a recent colonial past is "taken as harmful," followed by a "conflicted present" in which nothing is simple, which precedes a decolonized future that is seen as beneficial. This corresponds to the ethos in which the *translation of a new university* is taking place: this "recent colonial past" would refer in the Rio Grande Valley to the increased presence of Anglo-American culture in the region after the annexation during the Mexican-American

War (1846-1848), and the increasing sociolinguistic, economic, and cultural pressure it brought on the populace during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. But there is an additional layer of complexity in the Rio Grande Valley, as the pre-Anglo, golden past is in reality *also* a colonial (Spanish) past, that simply pre-dated a more contemporary, Anglo colonization. It is, therefore, not surprising that, within the post-colonial reassessing of times past, a consciousness of a truly pre-colonial, Native American sense of cultural belonging has also started to arise in relation to controversial contemporary topics, as the very vocal reactions against the construction in the region of the border wall with Mexico, based on tribal territorial claims by Lipan Apaches (Aguilar, 2014).

Robinson discusses the idea of translating across power differentials, arguing that translation plays three sequential but overlapping post-colonial roles: (a) as a channel of colonization, (b) as a continuator of cultural inequalities, and (c) as a channel of decolonization (1997, p. 31). While many post-colonial theories apply to the translation of literary works, Jacquemond (1992) outlines a series of hypotheses describing the behavior of translations in the colonial/post-colonial paradigm that are useful in the depiction of the role of translation in the present setting. Robinson aptly synthesizes them in four broad categories: (1) translations abound into the dominated culture from the hegemonic language; (2) translations into the hegemonic are perceived as “mysterious, inscrutable, esoteric” while translations into the dominated language are perceived as readily accessible for the masses; (3) translations into the hegemonic are selections of materials from the dominated language that fit preconceived notions; and (4) materials and authors from the dominated language need to “require some degree of compliance with stereotypes” (*ibid.*, p. 32) in order to gain access to their translation.

This post-colonial theoretical paradigm helps make sense of several challenges faced by the Translation and Interpreting Office in terms of lexical choices, and of the overall translation policy being slowly developed in an attempt to overcome the situations described. With this understanding, translation questions the validity of the postcolonial sociocultural model by trying to reach a precarious, not always possible, balance between self-identification (“translations reflect us”), corporate identification (“translations reflect a higher education institution”), and individual empowerment (“I learn from translations”). Translation and specific lexical choices within the



production of the Translation and Interpreting Office are not only geared towards successful communicative reception but also aimed at becoming a channel of (at least cultural) decolonization (as opposed to a channel of colonization or as a continuator of cultural inequalities). As Vicente Rafael underscores about the post-colonial legacies of translation,

[t]he fact that translation lends itself to either affirmation or evasion of social order is what gives it its political dimension. It draws boundaries between what can be and cannot be admitted into social discourse, even as it misdirects the construction of its conventions. (1993, p. 211)

Consequently, decision-making includes a sense of cultural empowering that aims to do several things: problematize language; avoid calque and easy correspondence while facilitating reception by a wider audience (as a “Gateway to the Americas”); and take the use of local Spanish to a (somewhat) artificial register that would seem appropriate for a post-secondary education context to a wider readership. The typical post-colonial “utopian narrative” is placed on the stage, within this paradigm, as a “conflicted present” that embraces difference as uneasy and yet beneficial. This conflicted linguistic present reveals translation into the dominated as *not* “readily accessible for the masses.” Instead, translation is presented as non-compliant with the stereotype, actively seeking the avoidance of what Anthony Pym would characterize in terms of the localization industry as “[choosing] simple words to keep people in simple places” (2004, p. 193). Empowerment is sought by requiring qualified processing of translations, thus elevating the production of target-language texts (either translated or originally written) to the status of a professionalized, non-casual skill. This in turn requires active participation (perhaps an effort) by part of the intended, multifarious audience, assuming that “[t]here is nothing essentially wrong with the production of texts that are difficult to read (difficult for whom?), as long as the effort invested in reception is proportional to the value of cooperation facilitated” (*ibid.*, p. 195).<sup>13</sup> Perhaps that value can be simply boiled down to a renewed perception of the minoritized language as vehicle to academic sophistication.

The overall behavior and fit of translation in the context of the Rio Grande Valley responds to the paradigm of translation in post-colonial settings. Conversely, and probably more interestingly, it can also be said

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13. Both Pym quotes were brought to our attention by Katherine Shivers (2018), a graduate from UTRGV’s MA Spanish Translation and Interpreting program.

that translation in the Rio Grande Valley could help confirm that the social and cultural reality in the region fits a post-colonial model. The translation/linguistic situation echoes the “internal colony model” that some authors have reclaimed (Chávez, 2013; Bowman, 2015, 2016) to describe the situation of Mexican Americans in the region, namely, a situation of decades of cheap, frequently underpaid agricultural labor, of marginalization, of lack of basic services and utilities, of rigid social stratification, and of unequal access to education.

In this case, the description of other phenomena from the perspective of Translation Studies may help shed light onto *other* disciplines as, in general, post-colonialism “seeks to redress the balance or at least to alert us to the existing imbalance” (Tyulenev, 2014, p. 117). Thus, Gayatri Spivak resorts to narratological terms to describe textual interactions of colonial discourse with the colonized subject. She labels it a metalepsis by which “what is really an effect is presented as a cause” (Spivak, cited in Niranjana, 1992, p. 44). Metalepses entrap characters in a story, by making them impossibly aware of being part of a story: a character that reads about himself, a subject that can’t escape a *mise en abyme* of spiraling, subjugating narratives. Inspired by this thought, Tejaswini Niranjana states:

[h]istory, and translation function, perhaps, under the same order of representation, truth, and presence, creating coherent and transparent texts through the repression of difference, and participating thereby in the process of colonial domination. (1992, p. 43)

An institutional translation policy that actively seeks the enactment of differences (lexical, grammatical, textual) acts as a signpost that contributes to unveiling such a metaleptic narrative by which target texts would supposedly be “readily accessible to the masses.” In it, translations are presented as natural, obviously equivalent consequences of source texts, towards which correspondence is presumed by immediate piecemeal comparability. Conversely, when target texts insist in their presentation as intrinsically different entities that respond to *different and differing* cultural paradigms, they unfold two convergent—and therefore not parallel—textual narratives. This makes translation an active agent in the undermining of postcolonial, metaleptic narratives. Thus, the translation policy that was slowly developed during the period described in this study serves to counter that “internal colony” model in which translations are seen as unproblematic equivalents of and original set of statements, sometimes naturally

assumed as absolute values, or even simply as “truths” that need to be handed down to the colonized alter. By stressing difference, within the relatively safe boundaries of what is communicably viable, the Translation and Interpreting Office’s rendering of English-language texts in Spanish sought to push back against firmly entrenched minoritizing practices. These practices, of course, have been a part of the region for a long time, and the levels of success for this strategy are still to be gauged. For the time being, however, the aim is to break with tradition by *not* taming the wild tongue.

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