Article

"Nationalism Studies Applied to a Register of Mexican Colonial Translations. Interim Report"

Gertrudis Payàs

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Nationalism Studies Applied to a Register of Mexican Colonial Translations. Interim Report

Gertrudis Payàs

This paper is part of the methodological framework of my research in the history of translation. Its purpose is to show, with reference to a catalogue of translations written during Colonial Mexico (1521-1821), how translation is present in the representation of a new identity and in its consolidation. I intend, therefore, to explore historically the translation field through the looking glass of nationalism and national identity. The path I am taking combines two theoretical approaches: cultural studies in translation and nationalism studies.

In my research, translation is treated as a cultural phenomenon capable of producing and reproducing collective representations, such as an idea of nation. In this sense, translators are considered as cultural agents. Precedents of this idea can be found in various case studies (Brisset, 1996; Tymoczko, 1999; Venuti, 1995). More generally, J. Delisle and J. Woodsworth (1995) explained the relationship between translation and the creation of national literatures, a phenomenon that had been thoroughly studied by A. Berman (1984). From the colonial studies field, some historians and anthropologists have lately explored the formation of new identities and hinted at symbolic interchanges akin to translation in the constitution of the imaginary of the nation (Klor, 1997; Alberro, 1999; Gruzinski, 1988). My contribution strives to explain the precise role of interlingual translation in identity

formation and to trace it over the long span of three centuries in the main former Spanish colony: New Spain, now Mexico.

This long span means, as far as method is concerned, that, although I am examining some translations in detail, the focus is larger: it is the general picture that my research addresses. I am monitoring a large territory, trying to locate translations and understand their functions, in a way analogous to taking and interpreting satellite images and trying to understand, say, desertification.

For this purpose, I have compiled a list of translations of all types, both literary and non-literary, both from and into indigenous, foreign and classical languages, manuscripts and print. The collection overlaps adjacent fields: philology and lexicography, which coexist with translations most notably during the peak years of the missionary period (1520-1580), i.e., approximately the years of the "spiritual conquest" (Ricard, 1966). I am also collecting evidence of borderline cases, which I call "transwritings", that is, versions, transformations, hybrid texts and presumed translations. There are two important limitations in my study: first, I will not touch upon pictorial texts, which were produced during the first colonial decades, and which undoubtedly have translation components. They were produced by Indians under colonial rule, and could therefore be considered the other side of the colonist's translation; their iconographic character places them outside the scope of this study. Serge Gruzinski has analyzed them from the perspective of cultural translation (Gruzinski, 1988) and I would wish to be able to replicate that kind of analysis for written texts. Another limitation is that non-authorial texts (administrative or legal texts), many of which could also fall within our scope, are not considered here. Although by being produced by the colonial bureaucracy, they could shed light upon our subject, it is in the production of authorial translations that I am interested in identifying a national discourse.

A few words regarding the problem of obtaining data for translation history in Latin America: in general, we are talking about a new field, the objects of which, being considered of minor historical or literary relevance, are neither registered, nor clearly
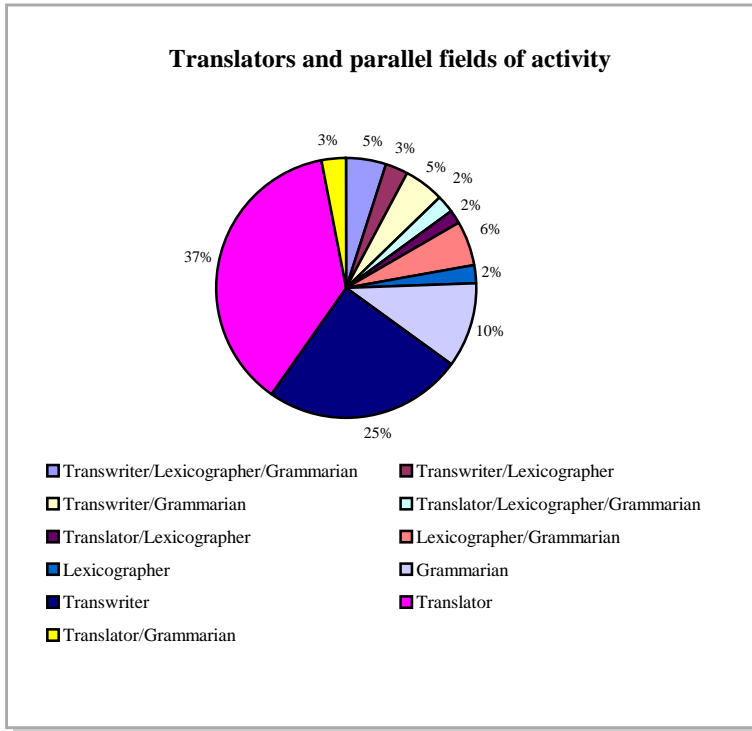
14

identified in library catalogues or repertoires. Sometimes they are acknowledged, but only superficially treated. For the appraisal of the field and the identification of its components, we depend largely upon secondary sources belonging to other fields: philology, anthropology, and history of literature, science and education. This dissemination of data makes the task of searching and selecting time-consuming. I do not think it is an overstatement to say that in Latin American translation history, we find ourselves in the process of creating information by patiently gleaning from materials belonging to other disciplines.

There is, luckily, a strong bibliographical and biographical tradition in Latin America since the 18th century,[1] a distinctive passion for book and authors' lists, which is extremely useful for translation history, since it gives us a starting point for research. It is also symptomatic that this tradition is rooted in the patriotic desire to attest to the intellectual capability of the Hispanic overseas empire, at least in Mexico's two largest bibliographies: the *Biblioteca mexicana*, by Eguiara y Eguren ([1755] 1986), and Beristáin de Souza's *Biblioteca hispano-americana septentrional* ([1821] 1947), my main source. It is, therefore, a national discourse which motivated these compilations, the belief in a unique culture, which was at the same time original and ancient, both separate from the metropolis and part of the continuum of civilization.

In spite of the doxological constraints that kept translation as a secondary creation, the presumed exhaustiveness of Beristáin's bibliography has proven useful for our purpose, since it has so far yielded data for 334 translators and 604 translations.[2] In a first stage, the catalogue was translator-based and devised for the

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[1] I have prepared a preliminary list of some eighty titles as part of the project "Traduire les Amériques," under the direction of Clara Foz, from the University of Ottawa.

[2] R. Rueda undertook the first extraction under my direction in her BA dissertation: "Registro preliminar de traductores, posibles traductores, filólogos y lexicógrafos del periodo 1521-1821 en México" (2002, unpublished). (Preliminary register of translators, presumed translators, philologists and lexicographers in Mexico, 1521-1821).

Translators and parallel fields of activity

Legend:
- Transwriter/Lexicographer/Grammarian
- Transwriter/Lexicographer
- Transwriter/Grammarian
- Translator/Lexicographer/Grammarian
- Translator/Lexicographer
- Lexicographer/Grammarian
- Lexicographer
- Grammarian
- Transwriter
- Translator
- Translator/Grammarian

purposes of seeing what their translation activity had consisted of. Consequently, the following classification was created:

a. Translators proper (translations duly identified, sometimes with information on the originals)
b. Transwriters (authors of versions, paraphrases, hybrid texts, intersemiotic translations or presumed)
c. Lexicographers (authors of bilingual lexicons, regardless of size)
d. Grammarians (authors of grammars of languages other than Spanish: indigenous and Classical languages)
e. Combinations of the above (a-c / a-d / a-c-d / b-d / b-d / b-c-d / c-d)

This classification was the primary factor in the elaboration of translator master registers, such as the one in the following box:

16

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1. Name          Arenas, Pedro
2. Activity      Lexicographer
3. Dates         1600?
3. Origin        Unknown. Non indian
4. Adscription   Layman
5. Titles                  Vocabulario manual de las lenguas
                           castellana y mexicana
6. Printed                 Mexico, 1611
7. Language                Nahuatl
8. Other info.             Conversation manual, bilingual. Many
                           editions (last one in 1887).
9. Sources                 Beristáin, vol. I, p. 164, vol. V, p. 306
                           Porrúa, vol I, p. 134-35
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Once these data were transferred to an MS Access database, it became easy to attempt some groupings and statistical exercises. The potential of this type pf research is quite impressive, when, for instance, we can draw smaller *corpora* as the basis for further research, such as the one below which gives a list of Franciscans who compiled lexicons in the 16th century:

Sixteenth century Franciscan lexicographers						
Fam. name	Christ. name	Century	Adscription	Origin	Source 1	Source 2
Ayora	Juan	XVI	Franciscan	Non indian	BER: I, 195 – 196	POR: I, 185
Castro	Andrés	XVI	Franciscan	Non indian	BER: II, 89	POR: I, 405
Espinareda	Pedro	XVI	Franciscan	Non indian	BER: II, 238	

Sixteenth century Franciscan lexicographers						
Fam. name	Christ. name	Century	Adscription	Origin	Source 1	Source 2
Landa	Diego	XVI	Franciscan	Non indian	BER: III, 86 – 88	POR: I, 1154
Molina	Alonso	XVI	Franciscan	Non indian	BER: III, 257. V, 396	POR: I, 1374
Olmos	Andrés	XVI	Franciscan	Non indian	BER: IV, 45	POR: I, 1514
Palacios	Pedro	XVI	Franciscan	Non indian	BER: IV, 82	
Sahagún	Bernardino	XVI	Franciscan	Non indian	BER: IV, 275 – 277	POR: II, 1829
Solana	Alonso	XVI	Franciscan	Non indian	BER: IV, 362	POR: II, 2003
Toral	Francisco	XVI	Franciscan	Non indian	BER: V, 34	POR: II, 2046
Villalpando	Luis	XVI	Franciscan	Non indian	BER: V, 154	POR: II, 2271

But the kind of analysis I could derive from the database, as it was organized originally, was unsuitable for my purpose of monitoring the long-span presence of translations because it was translator-based instead of translation-based. The reason for this bias is that when I started to build the catalogue, thrilled by my discovery, I was following the vindication of the author of the *Biblioteca*: Beristáin de Souza had challenged those who doubted the existence of an intellectual life in the colony, and I was asking: who said there were no translators in New Spain? This way of appraising the field, looking for the individual and his biographical features first, did not

lend itself to establishing relationships with other texts and locating translations within the general discursive formation. As it turned out, however illustrative and fruitful, the register had to be reshaped and tested against the purpose of the research. It had to reflect an approach to the functions of the works rather than the personalities of the translators, and translation had to be seen as a discourse within a more general discursive formation.

Consequently, the database was reshuffled by shifting the position of the fields. The result was a list of 712 titles, which could give me an idea of the contents of the works, an important breakthrough from my point of view, since this could lead to a tentative classification that would facilitate the identification of representative translations for in-depth analysis.

Now, how could the 712 translations be classified so as to expose the hypothetical relationship to a discourse on the nation? Different ways of classifying could stress either the conceptual or the temporal aspects, or be an approximate combination of both. I explored the following options in search of sufficient explanatory potential:

a. As a mainly conceptual classification, I could resort to the classical genres in translation studies (scientific, religious, general, literary, to which I could add some subdivisions). These categories have traditionally served to establish different ways of translating. They could give an immediate sense of the kinds of works that were predominant at different times, but I was not at all sure that I could prove that national discourse building had anything to do with them or that I could derive any meaning from the intersection between times and concepts. I discarded also contemporary classifications devised primarily for evaluation or pedagogical purposes, namely the functionalist's typologies (Reiss and Vermeer, 1984). Although I am researching into functions of translations, the perspective is larger (i.e. ideological functions) than the one provided by functionalist approaches to translation (i.e. contextual functions).

b. As a classification stressing the temporal aspect, I could attempt a periodization derived from the *date* field in the original database. In fact, two translation periods could be clearly distinguished: a period of activity related to the indigenous languages and to the conversion endeavor, from the 1520s until 1770 (year of the Royal decree banning all indigenous languages), and a second period from that year on, when we see more translations from European languages, and more diversity in the subjects (science, enlightened thought, literature). Coincidences are attractive: the first period corresponding approximately to the Habsburg dynasty, concerned above all with battling reformed ideas, while the second period is related to the Bourbon monarchy and the emergence of the Enlightenment.

c. David Brading's periodization (Brading, 2000) in his seminal study on Mexican nationalism, is roughly coincidental with periodization b as above, with the advantage that he takes us directly into the field of nationalism: a period of "patriotismo criollo" (1520-1769), characterized by a revival of the Aztec past (neo-aztecism), stirring of anti-Spanish sentiments, and the cult to the Virgin of Guadalupe; and a second period, of "indigenismo histórico" (1760-1855), in which these traits become fixed in a nationalistic rhetoric.

d. James Lockhart (1991) also, from the historical point of view, proposes three stages for the hispanization of Indian Nahuatl-speaking society based upon language contact: 1519-1540/50 (virtually no change in Nahuatl), 1540/50-ca1640 (massive borrowing of Spanish nouns only), ca1640-1800 (broader Spanish influence). It is also an aspect that touches upon translation as well as identity. But not only did I want to see how Indians were hispanized, but also how Spaniards were indianized, and how other languages, both dead and alive, were brought into the picture. This periodization would lead to a partial picture and could be misleading.

Temporal classifications are teleological per se: they pretend to explain evolutions towards a moment, which is considered a final

stage. In Brading, the final stage was contemporary nationalism, the official ideology that prevailed in 20th century Mexico. In Lockhart, the stages show progressive acculturation of Indian society until modern times. But my purpose is not to determine any evolution from a particular date towards either a state of national consciousness or the final constitution of *métissage* through translation, but to see the mechanisms through which, along three centuries of translation practices, the nation represents itself. After careful analysis, therefore, I discarded both translation genres and temporal-historical frameworks, and looked elsewhere.

The next thoughts put me on a new track: if translation had anything to do with the emergence and upholding of a national identity, if I could say that translation production is part of that aspect of social discourse that reinforces belonging to a national entity, it had to be because translation production shared some conceptual base with national identity. In other words, if I could understand how this representation of the nation or national discourse is construed, what its ingredients are, maybe I would be able to see the relationship with translation and, consequently, I could devise a classification method that would stem from the purpose of the research itself, so I turned my eyes towards nationalism studies.

There is agreement in modern scholarship on nationalism that nations are complex phenomena, sometimes older than it was traditionally supposed, and that they derive their strength primarily from a continuous revitalization of myths of ethnic descent, and from drawing upon other nations' (past and present) cultural accomplishments in order to build a high culture for themselves. It is in this sense that nationalism was characterized by the theorist Tom Nairn (1977) as Janus-faced: looking at the past, deepening its origins in the roots of tradition, and looking at the present and the future for the building of a modern culture, able to compete with other nations. This last feature is particularly pertinent for non-western nationalism, i.e. in nations formerly under colonial rule, which have considered themselves to be culturally ill-equipped to become full-fledged nations unless they imitate other cultures (Chaterjee, 1986).

These two aspects of national identity: a belief in a common, prestigious past, and a drive towards innovation, can be directly related to translation, in so far as translation is particularly suited to perform the kind of arrangements needed for "myth-making" (Smith, 1986) and "invention of traditions" (Hobsbawm, 1983) and because it is the means by which a culture appropriates foreign model products, thereby helping to create and consolidate a modern "high culture" (Gellner, 1964). A number of Mexican colonial translations fall in these conceptual categories, namely the historical works, mostly transwritings by *mestizo* scholars who helped reconstruct the past, the translation of Greco-Latin classics and the translation of European contemporary intellectual works (science, literature, philosophical, political and religious essays). A quick glance at the register shows that from one third to a half of the translations registered can be safely related to these categories, once duly defined.

But the largest part of the register consists of a hotchpotch of materials dealing with indigenous languages and catechization. As a common denominator, they were produced by Catholic missionaries, they appear very early in the period, they thrive particularly during the first hundred years, and they decline afterwards, without, however, disappearing. Another characteristic, which prevents further sub-classification, is that a large proportion of doctrinal translations come in combination with lexicographic and philological works, as can be seen in the preceding graph, so they are physically and intellectually related, for the simple historical reason that in many cases it was the same friar who, in one breath, prepared the grammar, the lexicon and appended miscellaneous doctrinal texts to the whole.

For a while I took this part of the register to belong to what in historical linguistics is known as "missionary linguistics", a scholarly field that has been the object of independent attention.[3] However, missionary linguistics has devoted its attention mostly to

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[3] There have been several annual international conferences organized by the Oslo Project on Missionary Linguistics (OsProMil), a research group at the University of Oslo.

the description of the languages by the missionaries, its focus is mainly philological and does not seem to include translations per se. In my register, it is clear that grammars, lexicons and translations have a common ground, and that they belong to a same logic. Aside from the quantitative importance of the field (461 out of the 712 titles in the database could be said to belong to it), and the characteristics just mentioned, other observations prompted me to differentiate it from the rest: in the first place, the large amount of languages covered (25 if we include Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Spanish), a characteristic of the first missionary years, which disappeared gradually with the loss of influence of the monastic orders, the rise of the secular branch of the Church and the subsequent imposition of Spanish as the official language. Moreover, a number of these works (in particular the earlier ones) are the fruit of a collaboration between natives and friars, as acknowledged by the friars themselves.[4]

Now, if we leave history and turn to translation studies, these works also share various interesting features, namely: 1) that translations into the indigenous languages were mostly prompted by the source culture, and not by the target culture; 2) that it is normally difficult to establish the original text, i.e., the text or texts where the translations or transwritings derive from; 3) that the status of the translator is unclear, since sometimes the texts are combinations of translations with original material (additions, commentaries), written in collaboration with native intermediaries; 4) that the intended readers are not the potential readers of the target culture (the Indians) but the agents of the source culture themselves. These historical characteristics and translational features seem to me to justify a separate treatment for this large corpus of linguistic and doctrinal material linked to catechization.

So, in concluding this part, clearly Greco-Latin translations (74 titles) can be linked to a discourse on civilization, and translations of science, arts and humanities can be related to a discourse on a modern high culture (150 titles). Finally, the

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[4] Schools for training noble Indian boys were soon established, notably the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco (1536) by the Franciscan friars and the names of some of these Indian scholars appear in the friars' chronicles.

transwritings (inter-semiotic translations, hybrid texts) linked to the knowledge of the past that tell the Mexicans who their ancestors were, can be related to the foundation myths (27). But what about the role that the largest group of translations, namely the linguistic and doctrinal materials, plays in the national discourse? How could it be defined?

Benedict Anderson introduced the notion of "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991) to refer to the different means by which a group of people come to imagine themselves as a community. He stresses the importance of print capitalism as part of the basis for this collective formation: a common language, common readings, common religion, censuses, maps and museums, which are elements of a national discourse. In Mexican colonial history, translation intervenes at least in some of these constructions: it is chiefly present in the fate of the different indigenous languages and in the subsequent imposition of a national language. Translation is also the means by which a new religion is imposed upon the colonized peoples. These two aspects, language and religion are tightly interwoven and constitute the canvass of an imagined community in which other discourses will be embroidered. This canvass of an imagined community is by no means a terse, homogenous fabric; the concept of community itself will prove problematic, as well as the determination of the imagining subjects of this presumed community. But clearly this canvass is of a translational nature because it is the product of the earliest transactions between two or more cultures, with their respective languages. It is there from the first contacts, and it will remain there, sustaining other productions, translational and non translational. It will eventually fade away.

So, after the general functions of the translations have been hypothesized on the basis of *prima facie* evidence provided by the titles, by the presumed contents of the books and the historical context in which the translations were produced, I propose the following categories for my catalogue:

- The translational canvass, which includes 1) translational products that transformed the structure of the indigenous languages so that they could receive the outpour of

European cultural materials (grammars and lexicons) and 2) translations of doctrinal material (bilingual confession manuals, catechisms and sermons). This translational canvass served as the groundwork for an imagined community, and it comprises 461 titles.

- The Classical continuity, which includes the translations from the prestigious Greco-Latin tradition that placed the colony in the continuum of civilization. This category comprises 64 titles.
- Founding myths, which includes translational products that helped reformulation of past narratives (pre-Hispanic history, genealogies, calendars…) directed to establish a mythical common origin, linked both to the venerable domestic traditions and to the origins of Christianity. This category comprises 27 titles.
- Modern high culture, including translations that incorporated new narratives useful to build a high culture (European literature, essay, medicine and other sciences, as well as religious books) and with the purpose of placing New Spain among the modern civilized nations. I have placed 150 titles under this category.

Conclusion

In his article *Translation as a Discourse of History,* Paul St-Pierre (1993) suggested the possibility of monitoring translations in the long term, with the help of statistical tools. Some time later, Anthony Pym devoted a chapter of his *Method in Translation History* to the collection and use of lists (Pym, 1998).[5] The examples they used illustrated the usefulness of quantifications and gave orientation as to how to extract meaning from them. Classifying and periodizing are ways of extracting meaning from

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[5] It is of foremost importance that quantitative work be undertaken having in mind the technological changes that may affect it. The very impressive computer-assisted repertoire prepared by Van Bragt (1989 and 1996), designed to collect all the information possible about French translations during the 1810-1840 period and prepare it for statistical analysis, cannot be consulted in its digitalized format because the software used is no longer compatible with present-day computer tools.

lists and catalogues, and therefore these are operations that cannot be performed arbitrarily. They are not automatic and have to be guided by some preconceptions about what we are looking for and what we want to prove. In this sense I believe that, in translation history, classifications or periodizations should not be general (unless we want to show merely that translations are there) but driven by specific purposes.

The classifications I am proposing here allow for a glimpse into the functions that translations are called to perform with regards to the self-representation of the nation. Once plotted against time (in half centuries, as for many of them the dates are approximate), I elaborated the following graph, in which the presence of the translational canvass (*Transcanvass*), made of linguistic and doctrinal materials, is dominant along most of the period, with a peak in the first decades and an abrupt decline at the end. It is interesting to note that as it starts to decline, the translations belonging to the "modern high culture" category (*Highcult)* start their upward movement, a move also observable in the Greco-Latin translations (*Clasmod*), which are nevertheless consistently present throughout the period. And the production of translational products relating to the foundation of myths of ethnic descent (*Foundmyth)* is circumscribed to the sixteenth century.[6]

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[6] The period in which most chronicles of the Conquest were written.

Translation activity by categories along time

Legend: ☐ Classical continuity ☐ Foundation myths ☐ Modern high culture ☐ Translational canvass
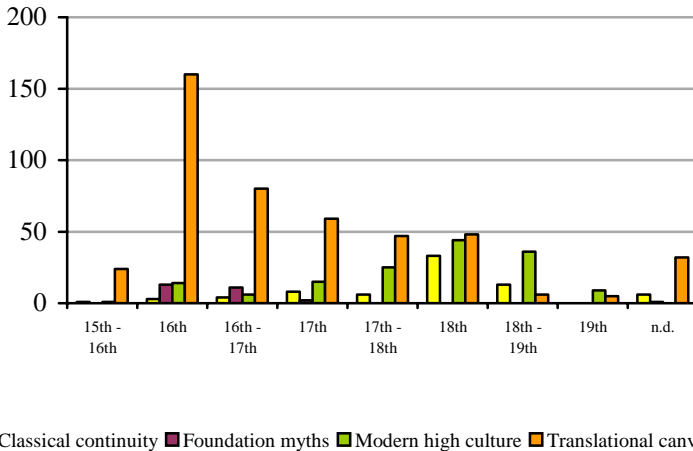
Observations: 1) The register covers the period 1521-1821. This is why the columns in the 19th century are almost flat. 2) Probably most of the undated translations belong to the earlier periods since, as we go back in time, data tend to become scarcer, particularly in the case of less significant authors or texts. 3) When dating of the translation was not possible, I have relied on biographical data, and vice-versa. 4) Because of the difficulty of dating translations, the time factor has been distributed in overlapping half-centuries, corresponding to the translators' approximate life-spans.

Further research will have to answer the many questions that are asked by a simple graph like the one above. So far, let's simply recall that for a long time translation has grown within its own field, and therefore has created its own definitions, classifications and periodizations, which have been suitable for the purpose of saying to ourselves who we are. But translation history widens translation's horizons, because it forces us to see beyond our field and prevents us from taking our conceptual tools for granted. As soon as we risk some multidisciplinarity, our traditional categories for delimiting, identifying and classifying (source culture, receiving culture, text, author, and reader) are put to a hard test.

I have tried to show here that for the purpose of understanding the link that translations, as part of the general discursive formation, entertain with that aspect of social discourse which is the discourse on the nation, using the conceptual tools of nationalism studies can help organize a large corpus of translations and prepare it for a more focused analysis.

This is not to say that we should invent new tools; rather this article is meant as an invitation to incorporate the tools of other disciplines into our own, and to see if there is room for merging or combining. In following the translation movements in history and trying to elucidate the functions that it has been called to perform, instead of looking at translation per se, I am trying to avoid also an essentialist tendency to view translation as a unique, different phenomenon, for which we have to invent new parameters of understanding. Translation as a form of representation produces meanings, but it is not the only form of representation and we can truly take advantage of the tools of other disciplines to investigate these meanings.

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ABSTRACT: Nationalism Studies Applied to a Register of Mexican Colonial Translations. Interim Report — To study translation as a representation of the Mexican nation on the basis of a catalogue of translations spanning three centuries, I propose a classification method inspired by some concepts of nationalism studies. I will try to contribute an analysis of the possible ways of handling such a catalogue while stressing the importance of classifications. I will also highlight the interest of establishing a dialogue between translation studies and other disciplines, such as nationalism studies.

RÉSUMÉ : Études sur le nationalisme appliquées à un registre de traductions du Mexique colonial. Rapport intérimaire — Pour étudier la traduction comme représentation de la nation mexicaine à partir d'un catalogue de traductions couvrant trois siècles, je propose une méthode de classification inspirée des concepts employés par les études sur le nationalisme. La contribution de cet article consiste, d'une part, à analyser les possibilités de maniement d'un tel catalogue pour conclure sur l'importance des classifications et, d'autre part, à justifier l'intérêt de faire dialoguer la traductologie avec d'autres disciplines, notamment les études sur le nationalisme.

Keywords: nationalism studies, translation history, translation register, classifications, New Spain.

Mots-clés : études sur le nationalisme, histoire de la traduction, catalogue de traductions, classement des traductions, Nouvelle Espagne.

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