



Translation, the Inn of the Remote

The French translation theorist **Antoine Berman** invited us to view translation as the «inn of the remote» (*l'auberge du lointain*), recalling the reference by **Jaufré Rudel**, the medieval troubadour, to *l'ostal de lonh*. Hundreds of definitions of translation have been suggested, but this one offers particular scope; in effect, since the dawn of humankind, translators and interpreters have helped surmount the barriers of remoteness.

In the words of **Santiago Kovadloff**, the ability to translate is «a gift that facilitates proximity»², turning the *other* into a neighbour, thus translating means offering others that marvellous singularity of the neighbour, which they could otherwise not enjoy. In other words, he views translation as a service that encourages coexistence: As well as helping us recognise that the world of the other is not inscrutable, it tells us that it holds something of interest to us too, insofar as it reveals what we are.

Speaking of distance, two subjects have aroused increasing interest in translation studies in recent years: translation and gender, and translation and colonialism. It has taken some time for both of these issues to awaken the interest of researchers and theoreticians and for the shortfalls and asymmetries that exist in both terrains to be addressed.

Having touched on the distances evidenced in gender and colonialism, following the path taken by **Dora Sales Salvador** in *Quaderns*³, it is only right to mention the Indian writers

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), **Chandra Mohanty** (1988) and **Vrinda Nabar** (1995), and the African-American **bell hooks** (1981). Spivak's labours to make the work of her compatriot **Mahasweta Devi** known in the West have become paradigmatic, in the sense of the concept of *affidamento* coined by the Italian lawyer **Lia Cigarini** (1995; 200).

The criticism levelled in one way or another by all of these writers is that in laying some of its foundations, Western feminism has failed to transcend the Eurocentric model and to take into consideration the differential experiences of women from other races and cultures. **Chris Weedon** (1999) reminds us that the key issue is «who speaks for whom». Similarly, Spivak criticises the universalist arguments of feminist thinking in claiming to speak on behalf of all women, but she is also critical of those whose reaction to Third World discourses are based on pity. In her famous article *Can the Subaltern Speak?*⁴, Spivak argues that the subaltern female subject is not permitted to speak on her own account. However, she goes on to qualify this idea by saying that the subaltern has no capacity to *speak politically*, and that the important thing is the extent to which women in privileged positions are accomplices to this silencing. In this respect, she says that «When a line of communication is established between a member of subaltern groups and the circuits of citizenship or institutionality, the subaltern has been inserted into the long road to hegemony». In other words, she recognises that it is important for that voice silenced by hegemony to find a way to be heard—and

translation offers an excellent opportunity for just this.

It should come as no surprise, then, that Tejaswini Niranjana (2002) should be very aware of the importance of translation in that it builds political strategies around feminism among her Indian compatriots, and she therefore argues that the postcolonial political subject, including the feminist subject, should be submitted to constant translation.

Closer to home, while these issues have not yet generated the debate they deserve, reading Bakartxo Arrizabalaga⁵, we can hope that in years to come we may see the same interest in gender, colonialism and translation research that was awakened elsewhere in the 1990s and which continues to spread further and deeper.

Until such a time, here in the Basque Country—where women make up more than half of society—Arrizabalaga offers us some food for thought: What is the presence of women in Basque translation? Arrizabalaga notes that of the ten winners of the Euskadi Prize for Translation between 1997 and 2006, only two were women. But this does not mean—as Michaela Wolf shows in a study of the German language carried out at the University of Graz⁶—that there are just as many—if not more—female translators than male, even if, as is the case in Austria, it is difficult to obtain official figures, since many women work from home.

Even when translations are reviewed in the media, there is clearly a greater focus on male translators than their female counterparts. Having said this, it is worth noting that the participation of men and women appears to be more balanced in the Association of Basque Translators, EIZIE, especially in its organs of government.

To the best of my knowledge, the issue of the linguistic, cultural and translation relations between metropolises and colonised peoples has aroused less interest here than in other

countries, but here, too, it would be interesting to analyse the reception afforded to texts in Basque among the main languages of the region and to examine in greater depth the mechanisms that are implemented for this purpose, in the same way that Spivak does in *Can the Subaltern Speak?*

Last but not least, with a growing number of immigrants and over a hundred languages now spoken on an everyday basis on the streets of the Basque Country, what is our relationship—in terms of culture and translation—with those languages? What have the health authorities, legal establishments and reception centres done to channel the linguistic relations within this variety? As in so many other fields, the first initiatives are likely to come from society itself, making great efforts on shoestring budgets—though further backing from public institutions will be essential later on.

I began these lines with a reference to Rudel and Kovadloff, and, before concluding, I would like to say that the search for an ethical balance between genders and between more or less widespread cultures in and through translation is not only a desirable goal; it is a mission which we should already be implementing so that all of us who live in that multicoloured megalopolis stretching from Bayonne to Greater Bilbao can enjoy a welcoming inn that does not require anyone to renounce his or her own culture.

- 1 **Berman, Antoine**, «La traduction et la lettre ou l'auberge du lointain», *Les tours de Babel, essais sur la traduction*. Mauvezin: Trans-Europ-Repress, 1985, 31-150.
- 2 **Kovadloff, Santiago**, «La emoción de traducir», Ceremonia de entrega de la segunda edición del Premio Panhispánico de Traducción Especializada. Buenos Aires, 2006. → http://dtil.unilat.org/panhispanico/edicion2/santiago_kovadloff.htm
- 3 **Salvador, Dora**, «Traducción, género y poscolonialismo. Compromiso traductológico como mediación y affidamento femenino», *Quaderns, Revista de traducció*, 13, 2006, 21-30.
- 4 **Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty**, «Can the Subaltern Speak?», Cary, Nelson/Larry, Grossberg (eds.) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988, 271-313.
- 5 **Arrizabalaga, Bakartxo**, «Itzulpena eta feminismoa», *Senez*, 32 zk., 2007, 81-95.
- 6 **Messner, Sabine/Michaela Wolf** (Hg.), *Übersetzen aus aller Frauen Länder*. Graz: Styria, 143-151, 2001. «The female state of the art», Anthony Pym, Miriam Shlesinger & Zuzana Jettmarová (eds.) *Sociocultural Aspects of Translating and Interpreting*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2006, 129-141.