

## **Translation, the mainspring of culture**

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To be asked to deliver the opening speech at a conference is a great honour, but it also faces the speaker with a number of problems. He has not yet been able to assess the «tone», the «feel», of the conference; he is not in possession of any feedback to earlier papers; in short, he is setting out (with not much of a compass) into as yet uncharted territory. He must therefore crave his audience's indulgence.

The role of translation as a source of culture is, moreover, such a vast subject that, in a short address, only a few aspects can be highlighted.

The concept of culture, or civilization, presupposes communication first between individuals and next between groups of individuals. Such communication is unthinkable without translation or interpreting. Biblical and archaeological records testify to an early awareness of the multiplicity of languages and to the esteem enjoyed by those who had mastery of more than one language and were able to perform what we now call translation and interpreting. Increasing mobility in our modern age—both physical mobility and the electronic mobility of the spoken and written word—have raised translation to a level unknown in the past.

Before this audience it is probably unnecessary to dwell at length on the achievements of translation as a source, or as a channel, for culture. We all know that what we call western culture, or European civilization, or the Judaeo-Christian tradition would have been unthinkable without the work of our colleagues in the dim and distant past. What we call the Renaissance, i.e. post-medieval Europe's re-discovery of the work of the ancient Greeks and Romans, was very largely based on translation. And —this needs pointing out because it is often overlooked or forgotten, and it needs pointing out especially here, on the territory of Spain— the Italian Renaissance, that explosion of rediscovered ancient knowledge and culture, would not have been possible without the work of Arabic, Jewish and Christian scholars and poets, writing and translating at some of the Moorish courts in southern Spain during the two centuries preceding the Renaissance in Italy. Indeed, many of the works of the ancient philosophers, astronomers and mathematicians have come down to us thanks to the translation work of Arabic and Jewish scholars in medieval Spain.

Whatever our beliefs are, or if indeed we are unbelievers, the fact remains that the Christian Bible is the most translated work in world literature. (Soviet propaganda used to claim that Lenin's works had been translated into more languages than the Bible, but I find this hard to believe, considering the countless African, Asian and South American Indian dialects into which the Bible has been translated, often by linguistically not highly qualified missionaries.) But there are a few interesting reflections that offer themselves in connection with the translation of the Bible. Of its colossal cultural effect there can surely be no doubt —no matter whether the spread of Christianity is seen as a good or questionable aspect of world civilization. But while the cultural effect of the translation of the New Testament was enormous, from a professional translator's point of view the achievement is not all that impressive. Disregarding the cases where the translators of the New Testament first had to invent an alphabet, a script, for their target language —like Mesrop Mashtotz, who translated the New Testament into Armenian about the year 400, although it would be more accurate to say that he revised the translation done

by a team of scholars, and Cyril and Methodius, who translated the New Testament into the Slav language which we now call Old Church Slavonic—the translation of the New Testament would have hardly taken a modern professional translator more than four or five weeks.

There are, of course, other cultural aspects to the translation of the Bible: in many instances—like for example Luther's translation into German, or the translation into Czech known as the Bible of Kralice, interestingly enough again the work of a team of scholars from the community of the Bohemian Brethren—the language of the Bible translation became the standard literary form of the target language, which, until then, was frequently a conglomerate of different dialects. Although written English was a fairly codified language by the time King James instructed—again—a team of churchmen and scholars to produce the translation we now know as the Authorized Version of 1611, the authorized Bible similarly had an important influence on the development of literary English.

There are even more far-reaching aspects to Bible translation: in some instances translation mistakes, or presumed mistakes, had a profound effect on Christian theology. Some scholars—and I of course am not qualified to take any sides in this argument—have suggested that the entire doctrine of the immaculate conception and virgin birth is due to a mistranslation of the original word, which they claim did not necessarily mean «virgin», but simply «young woman».

Another instance of a possible mistranslation, or misinterpretation, of the original text is the concept of angels—and this, too, has had a profound effect on Christian iconography and art throughout the centuries. The point made by some scholars is that the Greek «angelos» means simply «messenger». Nowhere in the Bible are they described as the flying creatures with Boticelli's delightful butterfly wings.

Whether we accept these arguments or not, they illustrate the enormous effect, the far-reaching consequences, which translation, and indeed mistranslation, of a work carrying prestige, or regarded as sacred, can have.

Let us also remember that some of the early translators of the Bible —Mesrop Mashtotz, Cyril and Methodius, Jerome— were declared saints for their translation efforts. Indeed, in medieval Armenia the term «translator» became an honorific, a name given to religious leaders and holy men whether they had translated anything or not. There is a Church of the Holy Translators in Armenia —I have stood in it myself and laid a small bunch of carnations at Mesrop Mashtotz's grave— and there is a Feast of the Holy Translators in the calendar of the Armenian Church. It would be pleasant if our contemporary governments and rulers displayed similar respect for our profession.

One of the main differences, it seems to me, between translators of the past and those of the present is that those in the past were translators «on the side»: they were principally churchmen, or writers, or poets, or just gentlemen of leisure with a taste for literature. By contrast, we have, since the Second World War, become a profession—even if only a few of us literary translators can actually make a living from translation. Our scientific-technical colleagues, on the other hand—and let us not underestimate their contribution to culture, to the spread of knowledge— mostly make a very adequate living from translating.

But I do not wish to spend too much time on what you know, or on what can be read in any book on translation. Instead, I would like to draw attention to some aspects of the cultural role of translation that have received less publicity in the past.

It seems to me that, in addition to the cultural enrichment that stems from the «straight» translation—a kind of secondary enrichment arises from the tensions between language systems and cultural systems, tensions of which the working translator is very well aware. In fact, I believe that literary translation over the last fifty years or so has benefited greatly from the fact that translators as well as translation scholars have increasingly become aware, and have studied, what we might call «the untranslatable within the translatable». I am convinced that the enormous qualitative improvement of literary

translation in our own lifetime, certainly over the past half-century, is due largely to an increasing realization by translators that, while their macro-text is translatable, there are in it micro-textual elements which are not strictly translatable, either because of the non-convertibility of the two language systems concerned, that of the source language and the target language, or, and perhaps more often, because of the non-transferability of the cultural elements involved. Thus, while the translator at the beginning of our century was still happy to translate, on the whole, in a literal manner, the modern translator, conscious of the «untranslatable» elements in his text, and aware of the need to convey them in a manner that would hand across, from the original to the translation, a comprehension of the cultural background of the source-language text, the modern translator brings a new dimension of cultural enrichment to his translation activity. Perhaps this is a topic for philosophers of language and philosophers of culture rather than for translators, but it seems to me important in that it marks a new, a higher level, of modern literary translation. If I may illustrate my point by quoting just one —I think: typical— example. Constance Garnett, the English translator who translated the major Russian classics into English at the turn of our century —she lived from 1861 to 1946— a lady who deserves the highest respect from every translator to this day, a translator who has truly opened the English readership's windows to the treasures of Russian literature, and, most importantly, who, by the standards of her own day, was a brilliant translator— well, Constance Garnett invariably translated the Russian exclamation «Bozhe moy» with the English literal equivalent of «My god!». Now these of you familiar with English linguistic usage, more particularly with the social colour of English idiom, will know that no English lady, or the social class described by Tolstoy or Turgenyev, would ever have exclaimed «My god!», a most un-ladylike expression in English, almost indeed an expletive. The functional equivalent of «Bozhe moy», which in Russian is a mild ejaculation, is «Oh dear», or «My goodness», or even just «Oh well!» This is what I meant when I spoke of the transcultural aspect of modern translation. This is not a mistake a good modern translator from Russian would make.

Another aspect of translation that seems to me worth thinking about is the fact that our culture continues to be largely Eurocentric. We seem quite happy to accept the fact that what we regard as civilization had its origins in the eastern Mediterranean: the Biblical Middle East, Crete, ancient Greece, and Rome. It is less than 200 years that the Rosetta stone was found—in 1799—and it was as relatively recently as 1822 that its text was published. Only since then have we been able to read the enormous amount of hieroglyphic inscriptions on walls and clay tablets—in other words to include ancient Egypt into our realm of civilization. And this process continued to days. Not so long ago Sanskrit was regarded as the most ancient Indo-European language we had any knowledge of. But earlier this century—in 1915 to be exact—Professor Hrozny succeeded in deciphering Hittite—or at least one of the two Hittite scripts—and we now know that Hittite represents an even earlier stage of an Indo-European language than Sanskrit. The linear B script of ancient Crete was deciphered by Ventris and Chadwick in our own half-century, and a lot of new light shed on the early Mediterranean civilization.

But glorious though this civilization is, one would surely wish it to encompass a wider sphere, and ideally to be world-wide. The virtual monopoly which Christianity has had in Europe over the past two thousand years has, I would suggest, prevented us from looking towards Asia. The civilizations of China and India are older than that of Europe—yet how much does the educated European, apart from a small number of specialized scholars, know about the philosophy or the poetry of China and India? Surely nobody doubts the enormous wealth of these ancient cultures. But where are the translators? Of course, there have been some translations of classical Chinese, Japanese, and Persian poetry—but the accuracy even of these is now rather suspect.

Now if the literatures of such vast countries with an ancient civilization is so inadequately represented in translation, what chance is there for the literature of much smaller countries or ethnic groups? What chance is there for the literature written in, say Finnish, or Czech,

or Macedonian, or —since we are gathered here in Donostia— Basque to become an accepted part of our world culture? And what is there that we, the translators from languages of limited diffusion, can do to let the literatures of our source languages flow into the broad stream of world culture?

The question is often asked whether literary translation is making any greater inroads into the publishing world. Are any more translations published today than 50 years ago, or 20 years ago, or 10 years ago? And are readers —ordinary readers of books, not academic specialists— reading more translations than in the past? The answers you get from translators differ a great deal; they seem to depend almost entirely on whether you ask a successful translator or a struggling one. But the statistics provide an interesting answer. I am familiar only with the statistics for Britain, but I suspect the situation in other major countries is similar. Now in Britain the number of translated books published has risen quite appreciably over the past few decades. Mind you: the number. But the percentage represented by translated books in the total of books published in Britain has remained constant. More translated titles, but still only the same, rather low, percentage of all books published.

I don't know whether I should be happy or unhappy about this result. A country like Britain, with a centuries-old tradition of great native literature, and with an impressive number of great living writers, is bound to publish primarily its own authors. And the same is obviously true of any country, even an LLD country.

What worries me about the publication of translated books, and indeed about the publication of all books, is that publishing houses concentrate their publicity and sales drive on a selected small number of titles, some of which then become best-sellers. I have nothing against best-sellers: most of them are excellent books and deserve to be best-sellers. But do they deserve to be best-sellers at the expense of other, possibly equally good, books?

Let me read you an extract from a very interesting article published a few weeks ago in *The Author*, the quarterly of the British Society of Authors. It is written by the Yugoslav writer Dubravka Ugresić. She writes:

«Thanks to the media revolution in the last forty years, literature has changed its character. World literature is today, to put it literally, the literature of best-sellers. Ten years ago, I came across a small, unspoiled Adriatic island, temporarily inhabited by nudists. The naked bodies were scattered all over the rocks, and were reminiscent of a new species of animal. They were Italian, German, French, Dutch, Swedish, Yugoslav. How did I know? I knew because every one of them was holding a copy of *The Name of the Rose*, translated into his or her mother tongue. Since Umberto Eco appeared on the Covers, it wasn't hard to guess. That was, for me, the picture of world literature.»

Perhaps in the end literature will be divided into what is translatable and what is untranslatable. In fact, even writers have begun to think about this.

So far Dubravka Ugresić. Her last remark—that even writers have begun to think about translatability—was, at the time she wrote it, truly prophetic. In June this year, when Milan Kundera was interviewed in connection with his winning of the 10,000 pound Translated Fiction Prize of *The Independent* newspaper, he stated quite openly that, while writing, he was constantly thinking about his translators, and therefore tried to strip his language of anything that was so specifically Czech that it wouldn't readily translate.

Nobody who cares for literature, or the culture of the word, can be happy with the idea that there are some writers who earn millions of pounds or dollars with a single book, while other authors—and by no means bad ones—have to eke out a meagre livelihood by opening church bazaars or village fêtes, or giving poorly-paid readings to schoolchildren. But I can see no solution to this particular problem. In a market economy publishers must make a reasonable, or even a



big, profit on certain books in order to be able to publish other books at all.

When it comes to publishing a translated book — unless this is by an already famous best-selling author, like Umberto Eco, García Marquez, Milan Kundera — publishers, at least those in England, are always hesitant. And one cannot, in fairness, blame them. To publish a translated book of average length will cost a publisher about 3000 pounds — or \$ 5000, or 550,000 pesetas — more than to publish a book written in English. With the average price of a hard-cover book in England now somewhere around 15 pounds, this means that he must sell at least 300 copies more to break even. That doesn't sound a lot of copies, but with an unfamiliar foreign name it does seem to present a genuine problem. This means that a translated book, in order to compete on equal terms with a book written in the language of the country where it is to be published, needs financial support to the extent of the cost of translation. There exist appropriate support mechanisms in many countries — including Britain, where I have the honour to be a member of the Translation Advisory Panel of the Arts Council, and am therefore personally involved in discussing and deciding what subsidy should be given to a particular publisher for the publication of a particular translated book. In most cases, we cannot afford to grant the whole sum asked for, but quite often even a lesser subsidy will induce a publisher to take the risk of publishing a translated book. To my mind this is not a case of charity: I believe that translated literature is just as deserving of being brought to the English reader as literature written in English, and I believe that it is quite proper, in the interest not just of the foreign author but of the enrichment of English literature through translated books, that public money, in other words: taxpayer's money should be spent for that purpose. One should also bear in mind that this is not a case of helping some struggling foreign-language literature to establish itself with the English readership: the economic non-competitiveness of a book in a foreign language is a built-in handicap, a systematic handicap, and any measures or mechanisms designed to offset that handicap are to be welcomed on moral, literary and cultural grounds.

In view of the difficulties besetting the publication of translated literature we should ask ourselves if publication in book form is really the only way in which translation can make its impact on general cultural. The answer, of course, is that there are a few other channels—though not, I think, for major prose works. But translated poetry and translated short stories is—I am speaking of the situation in England and the United States—occasionally published in literary periodicals and even, though less frequently, in non-literary periodicals (such as women's journals, good living journals) and even in daily or Sunday newspapers. Of course, in these areas too, they have to compete with work written in the language of the publication.

Translated poetry—though not, in my experience, prose—is sometimes, in recent years even quite often, read at international literary and poetry festivals, at special reading events held at the Poetry Society in London, and occasionally in other cities. Translated poetry, including unpublished translated poetry, is sometimes included in poetry programmes on the radio. I have even been personally involved in all these activities, and I can assure you that it is by no means easy to get such exposure for translated poetry. For the simple reason that there is a lot competing for a very limited space in publications or in broadcasting time.

Now and again, though not very often, it is possible for a translated play—even when it has not appeared in print—to be staged at a theatre, sometimes at a small theatre, or for a translated radio or television play to be broadcast on those media.

But I believe that the main channel for translated literature to make its mark on the culture of the receptor audience is still the printed book. For lengthy prose works, such as novels, biographies, etc., it is the only channel.

There are in our contemporary world a number of social obstacles to a general spread of culture through translation. A recent study commissioned by the Arts Council of Great Britain—a government-funded body which in turn makes financial grants to cultural bodies

such as theatres, orchestras, and, most important from our point of view, for the publication of translated literature— has shown that literary culture is, unfortunately, still largely the property of the educated sections of society. Not, as in past centuries, of the «leisured class», but still of the top three of the six socio-economic sections into which sociologists and economists divide Western Society. Statistical surveys have clearly shown that the habit of reading books, of buying books, or of borrowing books from our vast network of public libraries is still predominantly confined to the section of society that could be broadly described as non-manual workers. Among bottom three socio-economic groups (skilled, semi-skilled, unskilled manual workers) the culture of the word is totally outweighed by television, video, discos, etc.

Some progress has been made in recent years towards redressing that balance, towards making culture, so to speak, more democratic, or rather: more widely accessible. There are a number of initiatives, among others by the trade unions, and some progress appears to have resulted from the simple administrative step that some local authorities have switched public libraries from the control of their education departments to that of their leisure activity departments. But a vast amount of work still remains to be done in this respect.

There is another aspect that worries me about the future of literary translation, and more particularly about the translation from languages of limited diffusion, and about the publication of such translations. The great human tragedies of the middle of our century, the great waves of emigration which followed the rise of fascism in Italy, Germany, and Spain, and the occupation of large parts of Europe by fascist armies, actually provided a stimulus to translation. On the one hand, they focused world attention on what was happening in those countries, and on the other, more importantly, they swept a huge number of foreign-language speakers into the countries of western democracies. Many of the best, of the most successful translators of my own generation —and indeed including myself— were either former refugees who acquired a new, second, mother tongue in the

countries of their choice, or else they are the children of such people. I know of a whole string of translators—especially perhaps translators from poetry— from German, Czech, Polish, Hungarian, Russian, Greek, and even Chinese, who come from that background.

Surely we all hope that these enormous tragedies will not be repeated in the future. So who will translate literary works in the future? As far as the major languages are concerned, the languages which educational authorities decide should be taught in the schools, the problem is not so serious. I believe that there will be sufficient number of translators, for instance into English, from French, German, Spanish, and perhaps Russian and Italian. But what about the smaller languages? The languages which, because of their limited commercial importance—which is very different concept from their literary importance— will not be widely taught or learnt. Or perhaps hardly at all. There will, obviously, be no problem in bilingual or multilingual areas, of which we have quite a lot in Europe. There will presumably be no problem about suitable translator from Basque into Spanish, or from Basque into French, from Slovene into German, or even from Italian into German. But what, for the sake of argument, about translation from Basque into English? From Serbo-Croat into French? From Greek into French?

I fear that the future of translation between such language pair does not look too promising. There will, presumably, always be a handful of academics who will study minor languages, who will spend several years at universities in countries of languages of limited diffusion, and who might, at least occasionally, then translate from those languages. I say «might» because most of their time, obviously, will be taken up with their academic duties, with teaching, research, and writing. Already there is one such translator from Czech in England—alongside his academic work at the University of Oxford—and another in the United States of America. Neither of them has any Czech ancestry or connections, not even a Czech wife or (as far as I know) mistress, but they have studied and acquired Czech «from outside», as it were. I find it hard to believe that the number of such,

even part-time, translators from the small languages will be very great in the future.

One possible way in which the literature of small languages can be translated into world languages is one which is already being practised—and often very successfully—in the case of poetry. This is a collaborative translation between a native source-language speaker and a target language speaker. This method works in the case of poetry because a translator of poetry does not expect to get paid much for his work anyway. His work is, almost invariably, a labour of love. But quite obviously this method cannot work for the translation of prose books, when the cost of the translation, in other words the translator's fee, would have to be divided between the two translators. To work for half the (anyway not over-generous) translation fee would be economic suicide for a translator, and to pay each of the two translators a full fee would be economic suicide for the publisher.

There used to be a two-stage method in which languages of limited diffusion were translated into world languages in the Soviet Union. The work of regional authors—Bashkir, Tadjik, Turkmen, Azerbaijani, and so on and so on—were first translated into Russian, and published in Russian, and these translations were then in turn translated into other minority languages of the Soviet Union and, occasionally, into major languages. I find it hard to believe that the final product—without live-cooperation between author and translator—can have met the high standards which we, including the Russians, now apply to literary translation. But even if they did, it is obvious that this procedure was possible only in a system where both translators would be paid for their work, ultimately, out of state money. In a market economy this method—except for some very exceptional work—would almost certainly be a non-starter.

I would not like you to think that I am exaggerating the grimness of the outlook of literary translation from small languages in the future. In fact, I have a reputation among my friends for being an incurable optimist—but on this issue I am truly pessimistic.

Meetings of translators, congresses, and courses such as this one are important not only because they enable translators to meet each other, to listen to and discuss one another's problems, but also, I believe, as occasions for the adoption of resolutions, appeals to cultural institutions, and to Ministers of Culture. I should very much like to see this conference adopting an appeal, to whatever public or governmental institution it considers appropriate, for the establishment of a support or funding mechanism for the publication of translations into, not just Spanish, but all the four languages of Spain. It is largely up to us translators to ensure that translation, which has been a source of culture for at least three thousand years, should continue to be a source of culture in the future.

## LABURPENA

### Itzulpena, Kulturaren oinarri

#### I. HURBILPEN HISTORIKOA

«Kultura» eta «zibilizazio» kontzeptuek berengan ukan dute, betidanik, gizabanakoen arteko eta gizamultzoen arteko komunikazioaren a prioria. Ez da pentsatzekoa, komunikazio hori, itzulpen edo interpretaziorik gabe lor daitekeenik. Mendebaleko kultura edo Europako zibilizazioa bera itzultzaileei zor zaie hein handi batean. Horren adierazgarri, beste askoren artean, adibide bi:

– Errenazimenduaren oinarriak, bi mende aurrerago, Espainia hegoaldeko jakintsu eta poeta arabiar, judu eta kristauen itzulpen lanek jarri zituzten, zeinak filosofo, astronomo eta matematikari klasikoen pentsamendua ezagutzera eman bait zuten.

– Biblia mundu osoko literaturan libururik itzuliena dugu.

#### II. ITZULPENAREN FUNTZIO KULTURALEN ARTEAN, GUTXIEN IRAGARRITAKOEI BURUZKO IRUZKINAK

Literatura batetik bestera itzultzeak bigarren kultura horretara dakarren zuzeneko etekinaz gain, bada bestelako onurarik ere, atezuan jartzen diren hizkuntza-sistema

eta kultura-sistema desberdin horien arteko ondorio dena. Mende erdialdetik hona egindako literatur itzulpenaren hobekuntza kualitatiboaren arrazoietakoa bat izan daiteke itzultzailea zerari buruz jabetu izana, makro-testua itzulgarria den bitartean, mikro-testuaren zenbait elementu, aldiz, ez direla zuzenean itzulgarri. Izan ere, itzuli beharreko elementu kulturalak ez bait dira, askotan, XHra aldagarri.

Bestalde, aitortu beharra dago halaber bizi dugun kulturak arras eurozentrikoa izaten jarraitzen duela. Kristautasunak Europan zehar aintzinatek egikaritutako monopolioak Asiako kulturen harrera eragotzi izan digu. Inork ez du, antza denez, dudarik egiten kultura horien aberastasunaz; non dira, ordea, itzultzaileak? Eta aipaturiko zibilizazio erraldoi horren berririk, itzulpenaren bitartez behintzat apenas badugu, zein aukera geratzen ote zaie, orduan, herrialde edo eta talde etniko txikiei, mundu zabalean ezagutzera emateko?

### III. LITERATUR ITZULPENAREN ETORKIZUNA

Literatur itzulpenaren beste alderdietako bat argitalpenei dagokiena da. Egun, Britainia Handiko liburudendetara, duela berrogeita hamar urte baino liburu gehiago iristen da. Horien artean asko itzulpenak izanagatik ere, portzentualki, itzulitako literatur kopurua lehen bezain txikia da.

Egun, ordea, argitalpen mundu horretako fenomenorik kezkarriena, «best-seller» direlakoan merkatu sistema bera dugu. Argialetxeek liburu gutxi batzutura biltzen dute beren ahalegin osoa. Itzulitako lanak iristen zaizkienean, duda egiten dute beti argitarazleek («best-seller» autoreen obrak salbu, noski); izan ere, itzulitakoak, SHan kaleratutako liburuen aldean, askoz garestiago gertatzen bait dira. Hori dela eta, itzulitako obrak argitaratuko badira, nolabaiteko diru-laguntza behar izaten dute; itzultzearen kostua kitatzeko adinakoa bai, behintzat.

Hedadura Mugatuko Hizkuntzetan (HMHetan) produzitzen den literaturak berriz, badu, oraindik, bestelako ajerik; izan ere, etorkizunean nork itzuliko du literatura berezi hori? Arestirarte, Europako herrialdeek jasandako hondamendiek (hala nola, goseteak, mundu-gerrak, etab.) eragindako migrazioak kanpotar ugari erakarri izan du mendebaleko demokrazietara, usu, HMHdunak, zeinetariko asko herrialde berriko hizkuntza ikasi-hala itzulpen lanetara jartzen bait ziren. Hedadura Handiko Hizkuntzak (HHH) nork itzuliko, ez da, oraingoz, inoren kezka; hizkuntzok eskoletan irakasten bait dira anitz herrialdetan. HMHeK berriz, nahiz eta eskualde elebidunetan beti izango duten nork itzulia, hizkuntza bakarra diren lurraldeetan hainbat zailtasunekin egingo dute behaztopa. Horien ebazpiderako, bestalde, orainarte erabili izan diren medioekin ez da atarramendu onik atera:

— Poesia mailan lankidetzan aritu izan dira egilea bera eta, normalean, HHHarako itzultzailea; bietarik inork ez duelarik bere lana diruz ordainduko zaionaren esperantzarik izaten. Edonola ere, prosa lanetarako, garestiegia eta geldoegia gertatzen da metodo hori.

– Sobietar Batasunean, HMHetako literatura bertako beste HMH batean emateko, errusiarara itzuli izan dira lehendabizi lanak. Bi urratsetako metodo horrek, ordea, ez du inola ere bermatzen azken produktuaren kalitatea.

## SINTESIS

### *La traducción, fuente de cultura*

#### I. APROXIMACION HISTORICA

*Los conceptos de «cultura» y de «civilización» conllevan desde siempre a priori la comunicación entre el individuo y la comunidad. Es por ello impensable que dicha comunicación se produzca sin traducción o interpretación. Incluso, la cultura occidental y la propia civilización europea se debe en gran medida a los traductores, como lo demuestran, entre otros, dos hechos:*

*– Las bases del Renacimiento las establecieron con dos siglos de anterioridad las traducciones realizadas por sabios y poetas árabes, judíos y cristianos habitantes del sur de la península ibérica, quienes dieron a conocer el pensamiento de filósofos, astrónomos y matemáticos de la Edad Clásica.*

*– La Biblia es el libro más traducido en la literatura de todo el mundo.*

#### II. COMENTARIOS SOBRE ALGUNAS DE LAS FUNCIONES CULTURALES MENOS CONOCIDAS DE LA TRADUCCION

*Junto con el beneficio directo que supone para una determinada cultura traducir la literatura de otra lengua, hay también otra ventaja que se deriva de los dos sistemas lingüísticos o culturales que se ponen en tensión. Una de las razones de la mejora cualitativa experimentada por la traducción literaria desde mediados de siglo hasta ahora puede deberse a que el traductor es ahora consciente de que mientras el macrotexto es algo traducible, algunos elementos del microtexto no lo son de forma directa, ya que ciertos elementos culturales que aparecen en el texto no son trasladables a la lengua receptora.*

*Por otra parte, hay que reconocer que la cultura en que vivimos continúa siendo totalmente eurocéntrica. El monopolio que el Cristianismo ha ostentado en Europa desde la antigüedad ha sido un obstáculo para la recepción de las culturas asiáticas. Nadie duda de la riqueza de dichas culturas, pero, ¿dónde están los traductores? Y si apenas conocemos mediante la traducción esas grandes civilizaciones, ¿qué*



*posibilidades les quedan a los pueblos o grupos étnicos pequeños de darse a conocer al mundo?*

### III. EL FUTURO DE LA TRADUCCION LITERARIA

*Un aspecto importante de la traducción literaria es su publicación; así, actualmente llegan a las librerías de Gran Bretaña más libros que hace cincuenta años, y, aunque muchos de ellos son traducciones, porcentualmente éstas continúan siendo igualmente pocas.*

*Sin embargo, el fenómeno más preocupante que se registra hoy en día es el propio sistema de mercado de los llamados «best-sellers», ya que las editoriales limitan sus esfuerzos a unos pocos libros, y cuando les llegan traducciones, los editores suelen mostrarse muy reticentes (excepto en el caso de que sean «best-sellers», naturalmente); ello se debe a que las obras traducidas son más caras que las publicadas directamente en la lengua original, de forma que se precisa algún tipo de subvención para publicar obras traducidas, que sufraguen al menos el coste de la traducción.*

*La literatura producida en lenguas de difusión limitada (LDL) se enfrenta además con otros obstáculos, porque, quién traducirá en el futuro ese tipo peculiar de literatura? Los avatares sufridos hasta hace poco tiempo por los pueblos de Europa (hambre, guerras mundiales, etc.) provocaron la migración a las democracias occidentales de gran número de personas, hablantes muchas de ellas de LDL, algunas de las cuales han trabajado como traductores. La traducción de lenguas de gran difusión (LGD), por el contrario, no preocupa a nadie, porque estos idiomas se enseñan en muchos países, pero no sucede lo mismo con las LDL; éstas tendrán traductores en aquellos lugares en que exista el bilingüismo, pero no así en donde sean idioma único. Además, los medios que se han venido utilizando hasta el momento han revelado no ser los más adecuados:*

*- En la traducción poética han solido colaborar el propio autor y el traductor a la LDL, sin que ninguno de ambos albergue la esperanza de obtener compensación económica alguna por su labor. Por otra parte, este método es demasiado caro y lento para la traducción de prosa.*

*- En la Unión Soviética, por ejemplo, para verter la literatura de una LDL a otra, primeramente se traducían las obras al ruso, con lo que era muy difícil que este método de doble paso garantizase absolutamente la calidad del producto final.*