

Translation, (Post)colonialism, Empire

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Key Issues

- Translation as an instrument of domination – involves translation both *into* and *out of* the language(s) of the colonised
- Translation and the ‘civilising mission’ (past and present empires)
- Anthropology/ethnography and cultural translation
- Translation as defamation, demonisation, and ‘stereotyping’
- Diversity of positions among subjects of colonial society
- Forms of resistance (including bilingual poetry)

Translation as a Tool of Colonialism/Empire

Into the colonial language

William Jones. Know them better in order to control them better (see Niranjana 1992).

Into the language(s) of the colonised:

Large-scale translation of Western scientific texts into Indian languages in the mid 19th century, and their use in government educational institutions, with a view to the ‘intellectual and moral improvement’ of north Indian society (see Dodson 2008/2009).

Literary translation – providing models of behaviour and legitimate aspirations (see Niranjana 1990/2009).

Translation & the Civilising Mission

- In the colonial situation, ... the dominant power appropriates only those texts that conform to the preexisting discursive parameters of its linguistic networks. These texts are then rewritten largely according to a certain pattern that denudes them of their complexity and variety; they are presented as specimens of a culture that is “simple,” “natural,” and in the case of India, for example, “other worldly” or “spiritual” as well. Such a rendition clearly justifies the colonizer’s “civilizing mission,” through which the inherent superiority of the colonizer’s culture is established.

Sengupta (1995/2009:248-49)

Translation and the 'Civilising Mission' – The Religious Angle

- ... the translated Bible, while translating souls from a 'heathen' to a 'godly' state, also translated their depraved minds, morals and bodily states to a superior level of existence.

(Israel 2006/2010:186)

Civilising Mission Requires Moulding the Colonised in the Image of the Coloniser

- Since language is one of the markers of identity, one of the primary tasks of the missionary translators was also to build a suitable Protestant vocabulary in each language, so that the new Indian Protestants would be able to express their religious practices and identity in a vocabulary that was distinct from their previous religious affiliations.

(Israel 2006/2010:177)

Translation and the 'Civilising Mission' – The Development Angle



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Global Americana 1

- The classics of American thought and history have been little translated into Arabic. We have therefore begun a project to translate important books by great Americans and about America into Arabic, and to subsidize their publication so that they can be bought inexpensively.

Global Americana 2

- ... We intend to have all the founding fathers translated — Madison, Franklin, Washington, Paine, and so on. We would also like to see works that treat issues in democracy and multiculturalism, as well as engaging histories of the United States.

Nextpage Foundation Report 2004

- On domestic publishing in the Arab World, p. 38:
- The prevailing attitude in the design of translation projects is that it is good to know about the outside world rather than that it is necessary to promote the transfer of knowledge in certain areas to confront development issues in the Arab world.

Anthropology and Cultural Translation

... inequality in the power of languages, together with the fact that the anthropologist typically writes about an illiterate (or at any rate non-English-speaking) population for a largely academic, English-speaking audience, encourages a tendency ... to read the *implicit* in alien cultures.

Asad (1986/2010:24)

Question of Ethics

- the ethnographer's translation/representation of a particular culture is inevitably a textual construct, ... as representation it cannot normally be contested by the people to whom it is attributed, and ... as a 'scientific text' it eventually becomes a privileged element in the potential store of historical memory for the nonliterate society concerned.

Asad (1986/2010:26)

Charity vs. Coherence

(important ethical issue beyond anthropological settings)

... the good translator does not immediately assume that unusual difficulty in conveying the sense of an alien discourse denotes a fault in the latter, but instead critically examines the normal state of his or her *own* language. The relevant question ... is not how tolerant an *attitude* the translator ought to display toward the original author (an abstract ethical dilemma), but how she can test the tolerance of her own language for assuming unaccustomed forms.

Asad (1986/2010:22)

Defamation, Demonisation



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Monday, 8 January, 2001, 15:38 GMT

Extracts from Tiananmen Papers

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Pro-democracy students rallied in Tiananmen Square

The following are extracts from the secret Chinese official documents on the 1989 Tiananmen Square uprising, published this week as *The Tiananmen Papers*

Meeting between Premier Li Peng and paramount leader Deng Xiaoping, 25 April, 1989:

Li Peng: "The spear is now pointed directly at you and the others of the elder generation of proletarian revolutionaries..."

Deng Xiaoping: "This is no ordinary student movement. A tiny minority is exploiting the students - they want to confuse the people

Bilingual Poetry as Form of Resistance

- **Barry Jean Ancelet (Jean Arceneaux)**
- **Cajun poet**
- **Cajuns = ethnic group in Louisiana**
- **See also**
http://www.brown.edu/Research/Equinoxes/journal/issue2/eqx2_bruce_ang.html

Schizophrénie linguistique

Barry Jean Ancelet (Jean Arceneaux)

- I will not speak French on the school grounds.
I will not speak French on the school grounds.
I will not speak French...
I will not speak French...
I will not speak French...
Hé ! Ils sont pas bêtes, salauds.
Après mille fois, ça commence à pénétrer
Dans n'importe quel esprit.
Ça fait mal ; ça fait honte ;
Puis là, ça fait plus mal.
Ça devient automatique.
Et on ne speak pas French on the school grounds
Et ni anywhere else non plus.
Jamais avec des étrangers.
On sait jamais qui a l'autorité
De faire écrire ses sacrées lignes
À n'importe quel âge.

Linguistic Schizophrenia

- *I will not speak French on the school grounds.*
I will not speak French on the school grounds.
I will not speak French...
I will not speak French...
I will not speak French...
Hey, those bastards aren't stupid.
After a thousand times, it starts to get beaten
Into anybody's head.
It hurts; it makes you feel ashamed;
And then, it doesn't hurt.
It becomes automatic.
And you don't *parler français* on the school grounds
Or anywhere else *non plus*.
Never with strangers.
You never know who has the power
To make you write those goddam lines
At any age.

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