

Intersemiotic Translation and Censorship in Catalan Poetry: Minority Language Marginalization in Francoist Spain

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Abstract

Translation has undeniably enhanced cross-cultural exchanges in times of political repression. This essay aims to demonstrate the politicization of translation in Francoist Spain and the degree to which intersemiotic translation influenced the linguistic practice of translation in Catalonia. First, I will be looking at intersemiotic translation as a tool that allows a text to escape the repressive language policies imposed by the Francoist regime while preserving its underlying meaning. My essay will focus on Jacint Verdaguer's intersemiotic translation of the poem "L'emigrant" and Salvador Espriu's poem "inici de cantic en el temple" and analyze the ways in which the poets erase themselves from the literary landscape in order for the poem to survive censorship. I will be looking at the biblical allusions used and the recontextualization of the poems in different time periods. The next section presents the success of intersemiotic translation in bringing engaging a transnational dialogue and epitomizing the politicization of translation. In the case of Catalan, the use of intersemiotic translation sets the tone for the language-power relationship reinforced by the Francoist repression. Finally, my paper rethinks translation in its practice to compensate for the minority status of Catalan and the potential aesthetic concerns arising from this need to translate to preserve a language from disappearing.

Keywords: Intersemiotic translation, self-censorship, minority languages, Jacint Verdaguer, Salvador Espriu

The translation industry had experienced a golden age in the history of the Iberian Peninsula. The *Convivencia* movement in Spain had been historically renowned for its interest in preserving ancient literary texts by translating them. Unlike the translation prohibition law adopted shortly after the censorship policy exercised by the Spanish Inquisitors, the authors practicing translation in the first half of the 20th century have shifted towards intersemiotic translation as a strategic tool to deceive Franco's language policies by deploying new strategies to overcome the censorship obstacle such as translating literary texts to musical pieces

The dawn of the Francoist regime marks the beginning of a tragic era for Spanish literature. The purpose of these restrictive language policies was to transform modern languages like Catalan and Basque into dead classical languages. Catalan literary production witnessed then one of the most precarious periods of its history. In the context of intersemiotic translation, the source language and the target language are the same and the cultural correspondences are intact.

The aim of this research project is to demonstrate the ways in which hybridization and politicization of translation lead to the marginalization of the Catalan language. The first section of my essay will analyze the biblical allusions in Salvador Espriu's *Inici de càntic en el temple* and the recontextualization of Jacint Verdaguer's poem *L'emigrant* as two distinctive intersemiotic translation methodologies. The second part of my essay intends to understand intersemiotic translation's performance of the antagonistic relationship between a minority language and political ideology. Finally, I will explore the contemporary role of translation in Catalonia and the extent to which its politicization affects the publishing market.

My goal is not to conclude whether a translation is faithful or not but rather to analyze the role of intersemiotic translation in transgressing Franco's language policies. The recontextualization of literary texts triggers the question of whether something is gained or lost in translation.

The poem, *L'emigrant*, was published in 1894 and was later musicalized, as it depicted well the pain of expatriation. Thus, one of the characteristics of intersemiotic translation is to incorporate many implicit, unspoken allusions that

are clear for the native receivers but still obscure for the censors. Intersemiotic translations, which aim to transform literary texts to songs, have the power to perform linguistic operations lost in the written translation, and to give the foreign reader access to the underlying meaning of these literary works. The afterlife of *L'emigrant* became a patriotic and nostalgic symbol for those who were forced into exile and has become an emblematic reference of what characterizes Catalan national identity. The Spanish national identity became then defined by “the suppression of cultural diversity as an ‘obsessive dogma’ in Franco's conception of national unity” (Mainer 74). In other words, the Spanish government demonstrated a sympathetic attitude towards writers that promoted the dictatorship.

While the novel usually prevails over other literary genres in the publishing industry, the figurative nature of poetry gave it an advantage in bypassing censorship. *Inici de càntic en el temple* is a poem extracted from the collection of poems *Les Cançons d'Ariadna*. In Salvador Espriu's poem, the dissenting messages hidden between the lines is skillfully hidden by its biblical allusions. Espriu uses a lexical proper to the Bible such as “fatherland”. Salvador Espriu writes “I'll stay here till my death, for I too am full of cowardice and savagery, and also in despair and pain love this poor land, my sad, unclean, unlucky fatherland” The narrative in the poem strongly suggests that the narrator could be a prophet suffering on its path before reaching salvation. Its religious façade aside, Salvador Espriu's poem brilliantly synthesizes the journey of Catalans forced into exile.

In the middle of the poem, Espriu refers to a prosperous unknown land “how it would delight me to leave and go beyond the farthest north, where the people, they say, are noble and clean, cultured, rich and free, unsupervised and happy!” I believe that this anonymous reference was simply a way for the poet to contrast a cultured and rich land with the deplorable socio-economic conditions in which Spanish people are trapped. Salvador Espriu's poem successfully preserved its subtle criticism of Fascist Spain. This intersemiotic translation reflects the cultural experience of Catalans within the social hierarchy of Spain. Verdaguer's Romanesque poem ‘L'emigrant’ was more of a homage to his homeland. In the first three verses, he says “Sweet Catalonia / land of my heart / where one is far

from you / of longing one dies”. In these lines, Verdaguer attempted to mystify the pain of exile.

In contrast to Espriu, Verdaguer elegantly expresses the expatriate feelings being torn apart by this separation and sets an emotive tone throughout the whole poem. He also recalls some visual elements such as Barcelona’s cathedral and the Montserrat Mountain surrounding the city to represent the nostalgia of a distant place. The recontextualization of Verdaguer’s poem into a different time period – from 1894 to 1940 – revealed the long battle Catalonians have led against repression.

The great Valencian singer, Raimon, musicalized Salvador Espriu’s poem. The power of intersemiotic translation lied in the ability to give a literary text a vocal strength. The musical performance of this poem seemed to speak for all the younger generations struggling in an unstable Europe. Verdaguer’s poem was adapted to a choral work by Catalan musical composer, Amadeu Vives and was interpreted by a choral society. The harmonization of poetry into musical pieces enabled a transnational dialogue in Europe. Inter-language translation widened the circulation of Catalan culture and entailed that the receiver living across the border was aware of Catalonians marginalized status. Intersemiotic translation was less subject to censorship because the songs remained very interpretive. The meaning deferring within intersemiotic translation was as evocative to the receiving audience as the literary one.

The success of the poem’s musicalization, and its exposure to the rest of Europe, greatly contributed to the transnational discourse of linguistic repression in Europe, and to its cross-border movements. The song’s infusion with a foreign audience stimulates transculturalization and speaks to the warscape dominating the old continent. To quote literary scholar Simon, “translation research maps out the intellectual and linguistic points of contact between cultures and makes visible the political pressures that activate them.” (Simon 463). The reception of these two songs in Europe hints to a larger cultural movement and to a foreignization in the process of translation, as well as to a similar cultural and linguistic pattern repetition. The musical version of Jacint Verdaguer’s poem translates well the deferring feeling of exile and nostalgia.

The Spanish economy had experienced its first recession with the loss of its last colony in Latin America, and books thus became a luxurious and rare commodity. The literary selection on the bookshelves was narrowed down to spiritual, religious and patriotic narratives. Moreover, the percentage of illiteracy in Spain was fairly high, despite the pedagogical missions led by Spanish writers during the Second Republic. Only the elite had access to literary works while the poor did not. These pedagogical missions were unfortunately interrupted by Franco's obsession with unifying the educative system in accordance to the Catholic morality. The education policy aimed to eliminate deviancy and maintain a conformist discourse. With the disappearance of pedagogical missions, education was at the mercy of Catholic conservatives who promoted patriotism. The advantage of a musical intersemiotic translation is that it dismissed these class differences.

In fact, the people responsible for censoring literature were ecclesiastical members, who judged the extent to which literary works perverted a person's soul and was considered unorthodox. Censorship followed a strict questionnaire produced by the church to stay in line with the Francoist political agenda to produce an apolitical translation. Unfortunately, very little attention is paid to the ways a censor can set boundaries during the censorship process, thus becoming a third party in the translation framework. Therefore, these loopholes in the censorship policies indicated that censorship was not arbitrary and was still influenced by the ways in which a censor's personal experiences responds to a text.

The football culture remains a much underestimated factor in the survival of Catalan. Given that Franco's language policies prohibited the verbal practice of Catalan, the stadium was a sanctuary for Catalans that wanted to escape the hostile political climate. The underlying meaning of the Football club motto *Més que un club*, which can be translated to "more than a club" refers to a physical space for marginalized voices. Beyond what Spaniards may call *aficionados*, *Més que un club* implies the idea that the stadium becomes a lieu for freedom of expression where the spirit of Catalonia lies. This cultural icon of Catalonia was and is the epitome of popular culture, proudly embracing Catalan cultural codes. Translation is subject to manipulations, which are "socially conditioned" and thus offer significant information about "individuals and communities performing the

translative operation” (Mainer 80). Interpretation embodied a more significant role in creating a space for ideals that could not be expressed explicitly. The foreignization of the two poems and their inter-lingual translation was a way to loosen the borders between the nations and engaged in a cross-cultural understanding of minorities.

Damrosch’s World Literature theory illustrates well the globalization of world literature as “a mode of reception uniquely situates second-order practices like editing and translation at the center of global literary relations” (Bermann 125), thus, prioritizing ethical and political issues within the transnational diaspora.

Despite the European publishing industry being less conditioned by the accumulation of capital, and more eager for interlanguage translation than the American industry. The constant power equilibrium and hierarchy between major and minor languages in Spain. A particular translation in the publishing market may trigger a stronger competition. In arguing that translation is inherently political, we acknowledge the ways in which word choice may be biased, and more so when it is published by a publishing press that been distinguished by its autonomy and resistance against Francoist policies. In the contemporary translation industry in Catalonia, the translator seems committed to his political goal at the expense of the text’s aesthetic beauty. As a counter argument, the politicization of translation has given autonomy to the translator to articulate the oppressed voice and overcome their stigmatization. The strategic direction towards intersemiotic translation was very revealing of the writer’s vulnerability. The Francoist language policies had reduced the writer’s agency to publish books.

Domestication and foreignization are two important elements in promoting Catalan language. While it is important to preserve certain cultural patterns during the translation, foreignizing a literary work overcomes some cultural obstacles and differences. As literary critic Pascale Casanova once said “translation acquires the meanings, values, and functions that are decisive in providing the source text with an afterlife in a different language and culture. This process of reception, in other words, is transindividual or collective, fundamentally social in significance” (Bermann 276).

Indeed, the current situation towards minorities in Spain has improved greatly since the 70’s. However, there is still a visible gap between the diversity of

languages and cultures within the nation and the disproportionate representation of Galician, Catalan and Basque literature as part of Iberian literature. Thus, the pace to which the translation industry is evolving raises a slight concern with the quality of translated texts to the source language, as well as the degree to which the translator's personal motives are visible. The translation methodologies in the context of minority languages are developing differently because of their deep engagement with a post-colonial position in literary translation.

To conclude, translation is a form of resistance against the silencing of linguistic minorities. The Spanish state refused to acknowledge the non-homogenous nature of Spanish identity and to co-exist with its minority languages for over a century. Unfortunately, this linguistic narcissism is still questionable today. With the sudden disappearance of pedagogical missions' in Spain, the people remained easily controllable by the church state and the lack of literacy compromised the preservation of minority languages and cultures. The intersemiotic translation of Jacint Verdaguer and Salvador Espriu became part of a larger voice to denounce the ways in which minorities are still marginalized. In this vision, translation and literature were remarkable tools to fight against cultural oblivion. Due to their intersemiotic translation, *L'emigrant* and *Inici de càntic en el temple* became two essential canonical texts in the darkest years of Spain. This exposure raised awareness on minority treatment and reminded us of the forgotten power of literature.

References

Bermann, Sandra. Sandra Porter, and Porter, Catherine. A Companion to Translation Studies / Edited by Sandra Bermann and Catherine Porter. 2014. Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture. Web.

This is a great academic paper for me to understand the ways in which translation functions as a medium for cross-cultural exchange. In my case, I want to connect the Catalan revolution to a transnational dialogue.

Castellet, J. (1971). *Iniciación a la poesía de Salvador Espriu*. (Persiles).

Espunya, Anna, and André Clas. "Contrastive and Translational Issues in Rendering the English Progressive Form into Spanish and Catalan: An Informant-based Study." *Meta* 46.3 (2001): 535- 51. Web.

Clas and Espunya draw close attention to the methodological aspect of translation. The authors look at the translation task from a translator perspective, but also from a literary critic. This is interesting for me because I will be close reading and explaining Salvador Espriu's choice to use biblical language. In contrast to this essay, I am looking at translation from the censor's perspective.

Mainer, Sergi. "Translation and Censorship." *Translation Studies* 4.1 (2011): 72-86. Web.

In his essay, Mainer sought to understand the role of the Francoist regime in re-contextualizing poetry in a translation process. He also looks at the different strategies deployed by authors to escape censorship and speak up for the minority simultaneously. As Mainer words it, the essay "reveals how dissident ideas within the regime were expressed through literary translation as early as 1940" (Mainer 74).

Simon, Sherry (1997). « Translation, postcolonialism and cultural studies », *Meta: journal des traducteurs / Meta: Translators' Journal*, 42 (2), 462-477.

Translation, postcolonialism and cultural studies is a thought-provoking article that discusses the rise of postcolonial studies. It is relevant to my research because I want to understand the ways in which the struggle of minority languages is represented in contemporary Spain from a post-colonial lens.

Verdaguer, Pупpo, Verdaguer, Jacint, & Pупpo, Ronald. (2007). *Selected poems of Jacint Verdaguer / edited and translated from Catalan by Ronald Pупpo ; with an introduction by Ramon Pinyol i Torrents*. (Bilingual ed.).

Venuti, Lawrence. "Translation, Publishing, and World Literature: J. V. Foix's Daybook 1918 and the Strangeness of Minority." *Translation Review* 95.1 (2016): 8-24. Web.

Venuti's article is a stable theoretical ground for my research. In his essay, he argues the development of translation and how it becomes part the world literature framework and emphasizes the transnational production / reception of literary texts from a language to another. He also rethinks translation in its practice and the ways in which translation methodology "compensate for the minority status of the Catalan language, culture and traditions in general and, in some cases, even with the very existence of Catalan as a language in its own right" (Venuti 10).



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