

Language as Contested Terrain

Philosophy in Spanish?

Nayelli Castro Ramírez

PhD, School of Translation and Interpretation, University of Ottawa

The translating mission of Spanish refugees in post-revolutionary Mexico

In 1939, at the wake of the republican defeat in Spain, a number of refugees left the country and exiled in Mexico and other Latin-American countries. José M. Gallegos Rocafull, Luis Recasens Siches, Eduardo Nicol, Adolfo Sanchez Vázquez, Ramón, Joaquin Xirau and José Gaos came to Mexico and had a huge influence in its intellectual life. Translating, though not only philosophy, was one of their main concerns. Having been a student of José Ortega y Gasset, José Gaos had learned the need to think in Spanish, that is, to have a philosophy written in Spanish.

The refugees' intellectual project had strong coincidences with Mexican intellectuals. Both considered important to produce intellectual works out of Europe. For José Gaos, for example, it was a matter of showing that philosophy can be read, taught and written in Spanish. For Mexican thinkers (Samuel Ramos, Leopoldo Zea) philosophy should lead to the definition of the Mexican being-in-the world and this necessarily brought about philosophical reflexion in Spanish.

In both cases, translation plays an important role. The translating mission was part of Gaos teaching, but it had already been envisaged by José Vasconcelos as minister of public education, and as member of Ateneo de la Juventud. Translation was then a mission for post-revolutionary Mexican intellectuals too. How are these translations to be considered? As translations of (German, French, English) philosophy or as philosophy written in Spanish? What are the consequences of these two possibilities? How does translation contribute to the universality and/or particularity of philosophical writing?

Spanglish: a new language in the making?

Mara Reich

PhD, Education, York

The substantial immigration influx from Hispanic countries into the United States of America during the twentieth century has generated a phenomenon of cultural and linguistic cohabitation. Within a North American context, Spanish has had to survive in an environment where fluency in English equals socioeconomic success, a linguistic capital that many Spanish immigrants would not have access to given the educational and linguistic experiences they had in their countries of origin.

The constant social and economic interactions between Spanish and English speakers produced a certain tension between the two languages. As a result, a linguistic phenomenon, typical of a bilingual situation was generated. "Spanglish",

commonly known as the “unofficial” combination of English and Spanish, became a form of spontaneous contact language, making regular oral communication possible between English and Spanish speakers of varying degrees of bilingual competence. This linguistic phenomenon gained momentum through mass media and the internet. Many linguists, intellectuals, and leading personalities within the various Spanish language communities reacted by challenging the validity of this phenomenon and its possible consequences for the preservation of the Spanish language. Consequently, a widespread impassioned debate both in support of and against “Spanglish” premised on the concern: “Will Spanglish ever become a language in and of itself?”

This presentation will address the question of the viability of “Spanglish” as a force for destabilizing the Spanish language, with potential implications on the Hispanic culture in general and with special focus on the power of the English language as a tool of hegemony.

Eating your words: The social and historical etymology of the word Cannibal

Leah Stewart
Humanities, York

The colonization of the Americas can trace its way back to the word cannibal. This one word, which was spoken in a moment between strangers, ushered in an entire world along with European contact. Used first as a descriptor of a misunderstood signified, the word soon came to be a synonym for “indigenous Caribbean person” and in time to be the sign for a type of “savage” indignity that opposed colonial authority. By examining the word cannibal in a socio-linguistic, historical and literary context this paper will show that post-colonial deconstructions of the colonial legacy ought to properly begin with a decolonization and deconstruction of the word cannibal. The importance of this work lies in the fact that the word continues to be used as a sign and as a signifier that has never actually existed, except within the minds of people who supported colonial rule. This is inherently problematic for both indigenous people in particular and for Caribbean people as a whole.