

EMPOWERING NATIONALISM: THE NEED FOR A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL
APPROACH IN COSTA RICA'S TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION STUDIES¹

Bianchinetta Benavides Segura

Adriana Zúñiga Hernández

Abstract: The objective of this presentation is that of advocating the need to analyze the contribution of translation and interpretation to Costa Rica's national history and development in order to provide professionals in these fields and the general public with a series of historical facts that would not have been possible without appropriate translations or interpretations. By analyzing a variety of sample texts from different periods of our country's history, a timeline is drawn up to show the presence of the work of those translators and interpreters present in the history of our country. It is striking that, despite the existence of a nationally and internationally renowned graduate program in the area and a recent improvement in the laws governing the practice of translation and interpretation, most of the Costa Rican population continues entrusting this important work to people without any specific training in translation, simultaneous interpretation, or any of the other sub-disciplines of the profession. This presentation aims to empower the identity of the oral and written linguistic/cultural mediators throughout the historical evolution in order to understand the different profiles adopted according to the social demands of certain moments in history. **Keywords:** Translation, Interpretation, Costa Rica, Historiography, Applied Linguistics.

Resumen: El objetivo de esta presentación consiste en abogar por la necesidad de analizar el aporte de la traducción y la interpretación en la historia y el desarrollo costarricense, con el fin de que los profesionales de estas especialidades y el público en general cuenten con una publicación acerca de hechos históricos que no hubieran sido posibles sin una oportuna traducción o interpretación de los mismos. Por medio del análisis de una variedad de textos políticos, comerciales, científicos, técnicos y religiosos, se propone la conveniencia de trazar una línea cronológica que demuestre la labor de aquellos traductores e intérpretes presentes en la historia de nuestro país desde

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1502 hasta la primera década del siglo XXI; y el resultado final sería una publicación que identifique, en forma objetiva, aquellas condiciones laborales y competencias de los intérpretes y traductores desde la conquista hasta la actualidad. Sorprende el hecho de que, pese a la existencia de un programa de posgrado en el campo ampliamente conocido a nivel nacional e internacional y una reciente mejora en las leyes que regulan el ejercicio de la traducción e interpretación, se continúe confiando tan importante labor a personas sin ninguna formación específica en traductología, interpretación simultánea o cualquiera de las demás subdisciplinas de esta profesión. **Palabras clave:** traducción, interpretación, costa rica, historiografía, lingüística aplicada.

Introduction

Unlike many countries of the European Union and Latin America, the role of translators and interpreters in its national history has not been assessed in Costa Rica. It is widely believed that being bilingual suffices to be a translator or an interpreter. However, in other countries with a better established tradition of translation studies, it is clear that these professions require much more than knowing a second language. This historical ignorance exists not only among the general public, but also among the professionals of these disciplines.

To date there is no reference source in Costa Rica specifying the contribution of translation and interpretation in history. This represents a serious problem, because the lack of said assessment has an impact on the professional recognition of translators and interpreters before the law and the general public, unlike what happens with other professional groups, whose fees and obligations are clearly established. Therefore, this presentation has the objective of advocating the development of a project to fill a gap in Costa Rica's translation studies by systematically analyzing the participation of translators and interpreters throughout the most important events in our country's history in a source from a prestigious publisher.

Until recent years, due to the lack of formal education options, people thought that being a "self-taught" or "empirical" translator or interpreter was sufficient to perform successfully in these fields. While no one can question the value of practice and experience, currently there is no excuse for not obtaining an academic degree to be better prepared. In this sense, the country has different programs (including one at the graduate level) that can provide many theoretical and practical tools that will assist us in our professional performance.

At a curricular level, the need to professionalize translators and interpreters has been fully recognized as programs of study, for instance, that of the Professional English-Spanish Translation Master's Degree Program at the Universidad Nacional, have included in their curriculum courses that raise awareness in trainees about the fact that translation is a science and, therefore, is subject to research. However, customers in the market, far from knowing this reality, rather equate empirical translators and interpreters to those who have formal academic

training in Translation Studies. This situation forces the latter to make constant efforts to gain respect for the profession.

The proposed project seeks to support institutions devoted to translator and interpreter preparation, through the development of a source that complements all the existing literature on the history of translation and interpretation in other countries. Thus, it is expected to reassess the meaning, scope, history and importance of professional translation and interpretation to assert its role nationally and internationally: first, through the interaction of the researchers with embassies, ministries, museums, and related agencies; and, then, through effective outreach activities and distribution of the document that results from this process. This project hopes to achieve a real assessment of the contributions that these disciplines have made to the political, social and economic development of our country through the analysis of texts translated and interpreted from and into English, French, German and some Costa Rican indigenous languages, among others. At the same time, it strives to create a solid foundation that will allow other researchers, students and teachers to delve into specific areas of the national history of translation and interpretation.

Inquiring into the Role of Translation and Interpretation in Nation- and Profession-Building

Historiography refers to the bibliographical and critical study of texts (oral and written) about history, their sources, and the authors who have dealt with this matter. The development and analysis of translation and interpretation as disciplines have their origins in antiquity. Thus, the first step in the process of assessing the role of translators and interpreters at the national level is to review the beginnings of both professions.

Even though people usually talk about Translation and Interpretation, in that order, as Novo points out, speech precedes the written language; hence, it is logical to think that interpretation took place long before translation, and that since the dawn of civilization man has probably needed someone to interpret when encountering speakers of other languages (3-4). Therefore, it can be said that interpretation has been present in the history of mankind since immemorial times if understood both as the *process* of linguistic and cultural mediation conveying the message of an oral (original) discourse to an oral (target) discourse—preserving equivalence in meaning, tone, register and intent of the original text—, and the *product* of this process.

There is evidence that the footprint of interpretation in the history of mankind is longstanding. Harris says that interpretation as an activity is documented in hieroglyphs from the time of the Pharaohs (Carr et al. 1). According to Greek mythology, Hermes was the first representative of the profession as he was responsible for interpreting, in an intelligible and meaningful way, the messages from the gods to mortals. Furthermore, as he used a magic hat

that made him invisible, Hermes was capable of doing his work without interrupting speakers (Bleicher at Taylor-Bouladon 7). Paradoxically and unfortunately, this quality of invisibility, still very expected of any good interpreter, coupled with the ephemeral nature of the product of interpretation, left the great and ancient heritage of this work unnoticed for many years, leading to a lack of records and formal research of this profession.

According to Daniel Gile (cited by Shlesinger in Felix 752), it was not until the 1950s and 1960s, with the emergence of multiple international organizations that constantly required this type of competent and quick oral mediation (Setton 25), that people began to show a consistent interest in this line of work, leading to the development of some studies on interpretation—which took advantage of the then newly developed equipment and the permits to record and play the original speech and the interpreted one—, and initiating the first efforts to establish academic and professional credentials for practitioners (Setton 26).

During the discovery of the Americas, there were interpreters who accompanied and helped the conquerors and settlers from Genoa, Portugal, Spain, France, Holland, and England. For example, Christopher Columbus had the support of Cristobal Rodriguez, who was given the nickname "the Tongue" having learned the language and culture of the Taino indigenous people of Hispaniola (Taylor-Bouladon 11). Rosenblat says that when Columbus arrived to American land, he was faced with a thousand languages grouped into some 133 families, among which the most important were the Aztec (with more than twenty varieties) in Mexico, the United States and Central America; the Maya-Quiche and Nahuatl in Mexico, Guatemala and Central America; the Chibcha in Colombia; the Caribbean in the Antilles and Venezuela; the Tupi-Guarani in Paraguay, Uruguay and northern Argentina; the Aymara and Quechua in Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia; and the Araucan in Chile. Without a doubt, though reliable data are lacking, contacts were established between the various indigenous tribes which, in turn, strongly suggests the existence of interpreters (72-74).

Now let us consider the case of translation. Just like interpretation, translation is also a process of linguistic and cultural mediation, but it works with written discourse, and it includes different specialties: technical, standard, and specialized translation. Steiner claims that a significant part of the history of translation in the Western hemisphere has to do with the translation of biblical texts as the first attested written translations were of the Holy Scriptures (35). Translation also played an important role in the dissemination of scientific knowledge in Europe as the translations about science and philosophy were translated into Arabic. This learning spread throughout Europe from the 8th century until the 15th century (Bastin 2008). In Latin America, however, there are no records of translation activity as well documented as those that exist for Luther's translation of the Bible into German. An extremely important fact, attributed to translation during Columbus' America, is the implementation of the use of Spanish (the language of Castile) as a regional language. However, it is noteworthy that almost all the books had a very transient life in America (Bastin 2009). Although many valuable European

works were translated into indigenous languages, as required by colonialism, perhaps the most important translations are the ones of texts of the now vanished American cultures.

Why is it recommended that interpreters and translators be the ones who inquire about the past of their profession? Because, echoing the words of Drallny, being an interpreter or a translator is a way of life, a daily routine of reading and gathering information through all available means in today's world; it is to have a calling towards faraway lands and adventures in unknown worlds, nostalgia and thirst for knowledge, eagerness to learn everything, endless curiosity to live everything on this planet, endless desire to continue learning and humility, above all, to admit that one knows little of nothing (17-18).

Given the above, it is likely that interpreters and translators, as dedicated researchers and people who know very well the many features of their work, will have a greater chance of "finding out" about themselves than any layperson. Bowen wonders if the knowledge of the history of interpretation—and translation—can contribute, directly or indirectly, in their teaching and learning and if the lessons of the past can help us to reach conclusions about the ethics of those who currently belong to these professions (Dollerup 167).

According to Drallny, interpreters [and translators] are not only born, but now are also created (25). To paraphrase Van Hoof, studying the history of translation and interpretation involves reviewing the history of the world and cultures (Dollerup 170). Therefore, we share the idea that the teaching of the history of these fields will enable students and practitioners not only to expand their general knowledge, invaluable in this profession, but also to be motivated to understand the consequences of their professional performance and understand the importance of working conditions. Moreover, we also agree with Bowen's idea that every profession requires a sense of perspective (as cited in Dollerup 172). Without it, translators and interpreters may not have a self-image and, hence, will not know how to fully assess the importance of their work, as doctors, lawyers and other professionals who know well the history of their professions do.

As clearly pointed out by Gile, and taking into account the various studies on the work of translators and interpreters in the history of mankind, it is easy to see the great diversity that exists, even by period and geographical location, in terms of performance levels (high and low) and conditions (social prestige, responsibility, exposure, and education, among others) of interpreters (1, 2). It will be worth having all this in mind during the historiographic analysis of translation and interpretation services in Costa Rica to see if the current lack of recognition of high level translators and interpreters is the result of a negative effect generated by the low level ones of the past or the present.

According to Setton, the task of the interpreter, and the translator, is to appropriate and recreate the extended discourse of the sender (6). Contrary to what many people think, it is not "a job about the language, but the language is the tool that translators [and interpreters] use to get the message across to others in a fully comprehensible way" (Florence Herbulot in Siu 4). In order to achieve an equivalent effect, it is essential to master both the languages and the cultures

involved, as the ideal role for those engaged in this profession is to serve not only as a linguistic mediator, but also as a cultural one (Kondo in Gambier et al. 158).

Adler makes the following assertion: The larger the differences between the culture of the sender and the receiver, the higher the probability that an error of intercultural communication will take place. If accepted as true, it is necessary to consider the six levels in which, according to David Katan, any culture can be defined: environment, behavior, abilities, values, beliefs and identity (Kondo in Gambier et al. 151-152).

Jones, meanwhile, warns that cultural difficulties, which every interpreter [and translator] faces, can manifest themselves both explicitly and implicitly (3). We must keep all this in mind when looking for and analyzing historiographic data on interpretation and translation activities in Costa Rica because of its importance in terms of the competence of the practitioner and the impact it can have on the product. Mascuñan and Alonso assert that each university is framed within a socio-economic, linguistic, and cultural context, and thus, universities should address, not exclusively but among other things, their needs based on their environment. Furthermore, they add that to meet those needs, it is necessary to know that context, reflect upon it and its needs, analyze its requirements, and think about the things it can be offered and the way to improve the training of professionals who will join that environment (in Felix 804).

These words lead to the idea that it is of the utmost importance to carry out historiographic research within the Universidad Nacional that allows students, professionals and the general public to learn the origins, evolution, role and level of recognition of these professions in the country. As teachers and *practiseachers*, employing Gile's term—which Mascuñan uses in Felix—to appoint professionals who in turn are researchers (805), it is hoped that this knowledge will improve. Below Lieven D'Hulst explains the image and the current conditions of those exercising this profession: "History is virtually the only means by which the discipline of translation studies can achieve some measure of coherence – by showing how divergent traditions of thought and activity are in fact similar or interconnected, by linking the past to the present" (Woodsworth in Dollerup and Appel 12).

Iciar Alonso states that knowing the answers designed in the past to facilitate communication between heterogeneous linguistic groups might help us avoid repeating other people's mistakes and better understand an increasingly multilingual and multicultural society (1); and this would enable comprehensive training in this field. As Baigorri, who notes that interpreters [and translators] interested in history are the ones who should bring forward this recovery work by themselves (1), it is agreed that the historiographic analysis of the work of pioneering interpreters and translators cannot and should not be delayed any longer.

Alonso states that translation and interpretation, as daily practices, have supported all those historical events whose protagonists, main and/or secondary, did not share the same cultural and linguistic identity, and as a cultural practice, the jobs of the interpreter and the translator, consciously or unconsciously, have helped shape that identity (3).

Furthermore, we concur with Alonso that these studies also allow one to discover the identity of the oral and written mediator throughout the historical evolution in order to understand the different profiles adopted according to the social demands of certain moments in history (12). Such adaptation will be followed in the future to respond effectively to the changes and market needs and to continue assisting political, economic, social and cultural exchanges in Costa Rica and the rest of the world. Unfortunately, as Margarita Novo explains, in Costa Rica these disciplines are not given proper recognition or value due to ignorance on behalf of the professional, the public and the government itself, of the effort, the quality of knowledge and the conditions that this professional must meet (6). Based on all of the above, it is possible to see that translators and interpreters do not value their work due to the lack of knowledge about their origins, and this is why carrying out this type of research is so urgent.

The objective of the proposed project *Historiographic Reconnaissance of Translation and Interpretation in Costa Rica: Analysis of the Contribution of these Disciplines to National Development* is to analyze the contribution of these two disciplines to Costa Rica's national history and development, and to provide professionals in these fields and the general public with a document about historical facts that would not have been possible without appropriate translations or interpretations. As mentioned previously, only by means of the critical analysis of their origins will T&I professionals gain total awareness of where they come from, truly value their work, and believe in what they do; this is where the relevance of this research lies.

This research will be conducted as an empirical, exploratory study. So its hypothesis is framed—as defined by Williams and Chesterman—in the scope of a predictive hypothesis (77), aimed to compare the T&I work that occurred between 1502 and the early 21st century that influenced national historical development. By considering the lack of recognition of the work of translators and interpreters as a research variable, one can predict that such condition is a result of ignorance of the general public on the role that these professionals have carried out in the historical development of our country.

The process used to test this research hypothesis is what Anthony Pym called a descriptive methodological process of documentary corpus, which includes oral and written texts from in a specific time frame. Its chronological extension is justified by means of a stratified random corpus of analysis during the first year of the project, which will be paired with a parallel non-randomized corpus of analysis during the second year.

The historiographic nature of the present research arises from the qualitative scope of the problem: studying the historical moments that allow a constructive understanding of the meaning and significance of social actions. On the other hand, the research problem variables are linked directly with the general objective in proposing, from a historiographic perspective, that: the role of a study of oral and written texts from early Costa Rican history opens space for an analysis of the context of translation and interpretation; it results in the basis for obtaining correlated,

explanatory and analytical research findings about the reasons which have led to a lack of operational definition of the professions studied.

Given the documentary nature of the corpus, procedures for data collection will begin with an indirect sequential observation to be structured and distributed equally between the two researchers, each for the sake of analysis of the facts of each one's specialty. Data collection includes monthly review sessions of the historical archives at the National Archives, the National Museum, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the United States Embassy, the consulate of several countries, among many others. As research progresses, this distribution will be revised to ensure its relevance and complemented by weekly visits to the various specialized libraries and on-going visits to online databases, such as the Virtual Library at the University of Alicante, Spain. Collection procedures will also include regular interviews of national and international experts in the field of translation studies and history, by means of structured interviews during the first year accompanied by non-structured interviews in the later stages of the research process.

Finally, office work shall be used to validate the collection and study of data, so that its interpretation be consistent with the conclusions and the nature of historiography itself. Through reference to contemporary theories on translation and history, the project's key findings will be drawn, hence fulfilling the initial objectives and achieving objective observance of the entire process from a historiographic perspective.



The variety of articles and projects on translation in Costa Rica from the last 15 years shows a significant advance in research developed in the country's academic context. Although there are fewer products in the field of interpretation, they have been significant contributions to the research of this discipline. However, in both cases, the investigations have been conducted in the framework of university studies so that those results are known in the context of the corresponding sponsoring institutions. The Costa Rican public generally is unaware of the complexity and nature of translation and interpretation, not to mention its impact on national development. This situation creates an unfavorable environment for those individuals and entities that seek to regulate and professionalize our work environment.

Just a simple historical review of some general political, economic and cultural events within the development of Costa Rica envisions the impact of the work done by the translators and interpreters involved. That's why the proposal is to develop a historiographic analysis to be compiled into a reference source for ambassadors, business leaders and other professional groups in whose hands lies the ability to generate a change in the labor market in Costa Rican translators and interpreters. Thus, it is expected to achieve a breakthrough in empowering our profession.

The recent events surrounding the territorial conflict in Calero Island² have brought to the attention of all Costa Ricans the impact a poorly translated text can generate. Our research takes advantage of this fact as the reference point to start a historiographical analysis process that will undoubtedly generate a change not only in the perception that the general public has of translators and interpreters, but in the perceptions translators and interpreters have of themselves.

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² Calero Island, a continental island located between the mouth of San Juan River and the Caribbean Sea, is administratively part of the Costa Rican province of Limón and the largest island in the Central American country. The Cañas-Jerez Treaty of 1858 established the boundary between Costa Rica and Nicaragua would be the San Juan River. The difficulties to establish accurately the boundary of the San Juan River caused historical incidents between Costa Rica and Nicaragua, until the award of President Cleveland in 1888 clarified many confusing points of the treaty. In November 2010 a diplomatic incident occurred between the two countries due to allegations of Costa Rica for the military invasion of Calero Island, by the Nicaraguan army. Nicaragua rejected allegations by arguing, among other reasons, the presence was valid and within their boundaries as shown using the service of "Google Maps". According to Costa Rica, the wrongly-demarcated border in the service was the product of an error in the Spanish translation of the specifications in the maps. Four months later, on March 8, 2011, the International Court called on both countries to the reading of the resolution measures requested by Costa Rica, which was awarded with the environmental stewardship of the disputed territory and ordering the output of Nicaraguan military and civilian area occupied by them. This fact has become a historical moment of great impact in the history of Costa Rica as an act of territorial invasion without precedent which makes evident the implications of using a poorly translated document.

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About Bianchinetta Benavides: Lic. and M.A. in Translation - Universidad Nacional, Costa Rica. Thesis director and reviewer of the M.A. in Translation since 2005. More than 15 years of experience as university professor of TESOL, linguistics and translation. More than 10 years of experience in technical and specialized translation in different fields such as Computer Programming, Finance, Business Management, Marketing, and Biology. Coordinator of several teaching, research and extension projects at Universidad Nacional and other institutions. Coordinator and researcher of the project *Historiografía de la Traducción e Interpretación en Costa Rica*. Bianchinetta Benavides' address Apdo 2809, Heredia, Costa Rica; Universidad Nacional, Costa Rica; bbenavid@una.ac.cr

About Adriana Zúñiga. Lic. and M.A. in Translation - Universidad Nacional, Costa Rica. M.A. in Conference Interpretation - Monterey Institute of International Studies (on a Fulbright Scholarship), United States of America. Former university professor and thesis reviser at the Lic. and M.A. level - Universidad Nacional. Co-founder and owner of Servicios Profesionales Tradinter S.A. +15 years of experience as conference interpreter, medical interpreter and translator, sworn interpreter and translator (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship of Costa Rica), liaison and over-the-phone interpreter in different fields, such as IT, Medicine, Pharmacology, Social and Political Sciences, Environment, Energy, Disarmament and Conflict Resolution. Co-researcher of the project *Historiografía de la traducción e interpretación en Costa Rica*. Adriana Zúñiga's address Apdo 8-4910, San José 1000, Costa Rica; a.zuniga@tradintersa.com

