

INTRODUCTION TO THE CLASS & BACKGROUND MATERIAL ON TRANSLATION AND TRANSLATION STUDIES

The material in this section should contribute to answer the following questions for students of *Cultura de la Lengua C Inglés*:

1. Why must I study culture in a Translation and Interpreting degree? In other words, how does *culture* fit in with the curricular design and the conceptual framework of this academic degree?
2. How do *culture*, *language* and *translation* relate to each other?
3. What is the place of *cultural studies* within the general field of *translation studies*?
4. What role does *culture* play in the kind of skills that I need to acquire to become a competent interpreter/translator?
5. How can I use these skills in my future professional career?

What this class is all about:

- **Translation** is, among other things, a process which involves the **appropriation of cultural and linguistic capital**. This is fundamental for the construction of *national, linguistic, religious, or gender identities*—of all sort of identities, in fact.
- In this class we shall follow **the evolution of English and British culture in its historical development**, to gain a better understanding of the reasons for the **global hegemony of English today**. Since this is a very large topic, we shall focus on a series of case studies that will illustrate how, in each of its periods, what we have come to call English national and cultural identity was built upon instances of cultural appropriation frequently conducted through processes that involved translation.
- One significant case of transfer / translation of linguistic capital in the context of a **multilingual society** was the situation of **England after the Norman invasion of 1066**. A new French-speaking élite, which also used Latin for their official business, ruled the British Isles, and coexisted with the language of the natives—i.e. with varieties such as late Old English, and early Middle English, as well as the other existing languages in the isles, such as Celt.
- Another significant event in the construction of English national identity was the **Protestant Reformation**. Some of the main topics we shall approach in this class will be the issues involved in **the translation and interpretation of the Bible**. This was a fundamental phenomenon in the Protestant Reformation, which in turn played a central role in the construction of English cultural identity.
- The Reformation coincided in time with the **Renaissance**, a period during which texts and ideas from **Classical Greece and Rome** were recovered, and gained enormous cultural prestige. We will also see how **Republican Rome**, on the one hand, and the **Roman Empire**, on the other, contributed to mould **political culture in England**, because they were used as sources of inspiration and models for those who wanted to construct a new cultural and political structure. We shall see how **the combined influence of Scripture and the Classical World of Greece and Rome** also played a significant role in the founding myths of the *United States*.

- English culture evolved into our current *Anglo-American global culture* as a complex storyline or narrative. This narrative resulted in part from **the cultural appropriation of linguistic, religious, literary, or political capitals from other cultures** (i.e. from other narratives) **through processes of translation / transfer**. As we have just mentioned, the two main sources of this capital were the *Classical Antiquity* (i.e. *Classical Greece and Rome*), and *the complex Jewish-Christian narrative inscribed in Scripture* (i.e. the Bible and its interpretation).
- With **the imperial expansion of Great Britain**, starting towards the end of the seventeenth century, and growing over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a series of cultural, religious, political and linguistic transfers circulated across the *British Empire*. This phenomenon created *a new English-speaking global culture irradiated from the metropolis*, which acquired specific features in each of the different areas where it was imposed. This generated **two main areas of cultural and linguistic influence: the United States of America, and the so-called Commonwealth**—that is, the group of countries and regions which were once under British imperial rule.
- In the same way as British rule imposed a certain type of language and discourse upon these regions, when the time came for their national independence, they engaged in processes of cultural appropriation—the transfer of cultural capital through translation and similar processes—that led to the construction of their own individual national identities.
- As we study English culture, we shall consequently approach the all-important phenomenon of how this culture and its language spread over a considerable portion of the globe, as a result of the imperial expansion of Great Britain, starting in the 17th century, and gaining a special momentum in the 18th and 19th centuries. **We shall see how the cultural values, the language, and the institutions of the English empire were transferred / translated into the culture of the United States, and the diversity of cultures that emerged in the post-colonial period (the so-called Commonwealth of Nations)**. During this postcolonial period, the new independent nations of the former British Empire engaged in the construction of their own independent national, religious, and political identities through similar processes of “translation” (i.e. the appropriation of all sorts of capitals)

In this class you will learn:

- About the origins of Anglo-American political, religious and cultural institutions.
- As you do so, you will also improve your vocabulary and your reading comprehension skills.
- One of the skills you need to acquire is close careful reading of the texts—which you will need to combine with more superficial reading. You are expected to become a critical, discerning reader, capable of reading between the lines. This means being able to read beyond the literal interpretation of the words on the page so that you can perceive the world-view, and the opinion from which the author of the text is writing.
- You will also need to compare different texts, different sources of information, gather information from them, and then put it together in a short written text, which you will then have to present in class. This is why you will also improve your written English

through the elaboration of short essays, and your oral expression through short class presentations.

- In your search for information to furnish your essays and class presentations—or to solve any doubts you may have in the course of the different tasks that you need to accomplish in this class—you must learn how to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant (or at least, not-so-relevant) information, with regard to the use you are going to make of that information.
- You are not expected to memorize anything in this class, nor is this class about learning techniques on how to pass an exam. We study not to pass exams, but to acquire knowledge and skills that we can use in our future professional career—and, let us not forget this, we acquire knowledge and critical thinking skills that can also turn us into responsible, critical citizens.
- The most important skill that you will learn in this class is how to be a good reader. If you do not become a good reader, in other words, if you cannot approach a text as a critical, discerning reader who can read between the lines, and compare that text with other texts, and conduct research on the assumptions that underlie that text, you will never become a proficient translator.
- Translation is not about memorizing contents, or learning how to pass an exam successfully. Translation is a process in which first we gather and interpret, then elaborate, and finally transfer / communicate information. Sometimes we can afford to perform this process slowly, but sometimes we also need to do so very quickly—even under pressure. If you do not learn how to gather, elaborate and communicate information in different ways, in different contexts, and under different conditions, you will hardly become a competent translator.
- In this class we shall focus on political and religious institutions in English culture, and the values that underlie them. We shall see how language is a practical tool that can be used in many different ways and can serve many different purposes.
- When you understand the underlying mechanisms involved in all the linguistic and discursive processes that intervene in the construction of a culture, and how the surface of language covers more than meets the eye, you will become aware of the fact that a successful translator needs to be able to understand the cultural background, the underlying values and assumptions, that sustain a text—be it a written text, an oral presentation, or a piece of discourse couched in new multimedia formats. The successful translator can properly identify the stance from which the speaker / author is producing the text in question and can therefore proceed to transfer that complex set of assumptions into the target language.
- This is why in this class we will start by learning about the concept of discourse, and related ideas, such as speech acts and pragmatics; we shall then examine the concept of cultural translation.
- A culture can be understood as a set of discursive practices, in other words, as a complex text made up of many different levels, styles, and values. These complex elements are woven together into narratives, or stories. And as a text, a culture is susceptible to translation: not literal, strictly grammatical or syntactic translation, but cultural translation, in which the values and the pragmatic processes that are an essential part of the text / culture are also translated into the target language / culture.

- In order to achieve all these goals, the University of Granada library has some very useful electronic resources that you can use, they include:
 - Oxford Reference Online
 - The Oxford English Dictionary Online
 - The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

On how to use *Oxford Reference Online* and other electronic resources

A practical exercise.

What do we mean by “*commonwealth*” when we use this term with regard to the British Empire and Postcolonial Studies?

TASK. Look at the following definitions, taken from the Oxford Reference Online electronic sources: decide which of them are relevant for our purposes, and which not. Once you have done so, look at the relevant definitions, and summarize all of them in a short paragraph with the sort of information we need on the commonwealth. These are some of the questions you will have to answer:

- How many different meanings are there?
- Which are they? Summarize them, and list them.
- Which of them may be relevant for a class which deals with the historical background of English and Anglo-American culture?
- Why do you think they may be relevant?

When you use resources like the Oxford Reference Online, you must be aware that you are going to find a variety of entries, like this one. And that, in order to use this resource properly, you must distinguish between relevant entries, and secondary, or not so relevant information, for the specific purposes you have in mind. Being able to distinguish between relevant and secondary (or irrelevant information) for your purposes is one of the main skills that you need to learn in this class. You will find it useful you in other classes too.

commonwealth /'kɒmənweɪlθ/

► **noun**

1. an independent state or community, especially a democratic republic. ■ an aggregate or grouping of states or other bodies. ■ a community of shared interests in a non-political field: *the Christian commonwealth* | *the commonwealth of letters*. ■ a self-governing unit voluntarily grouped with the US, such as Puerto Rico. ■ a formal title of some of the states of the US, especially Kentucky, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. ■ the title of the federated Australian states. ■ **(the Commonwealth)** the republican period of government in Britain between the execution of Charles I in 1649 and the Restoration of Charles II in 1660.

2. **(the Commonwealth)** (in full **the Commonwealth of Nations**) an international association consisting of the UK together with states that were previously part of the British Empire, and dependencies.

3. (the commonwealth) (*archaic*) the general good.

- ORIGIN **late Middle English** (originally as two words, denoting public welfare; compare with **commonweal**): from **common** + **wealth**.

"commonwealth noun" in *Oxford Dictionary of English*. Edited by Angus Stevenson. Oxford University Press, 2010. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Universidad de Granada. 15 December 2014 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t140.e0166750>>

Commonwealth of Nations Voluntary association of 53 states, consisting of English-speaking countries formerly part of the **BRITISH EMPIRE**. Headed by the British monarch, it exists largely as a forum for discussion of issues of common concern. A Commonwealth Secretariat is located in London.

"Commonwealth of Nations" *World Encyclopedia*. Philip's, 2008. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Universidad de Granada. 15 December 2014 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t142.e2668>>

Commonwealth (1649–60) Official name of the republic established in England after the execution of **CHARLES I** in 1649. After a series of unsuccessful attempts to find a suitable constitution, the **PROTECTORATE** was set up in 1653, in which Oliver **CROMWELL** was given almost regal powers. The Commonwealth ended with the **RESTORATION** of **CHARLES II**.

"Commonwealth" *World Encyclopedia*. Philip's, 2008. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Universidad de Granada. 15 December 2014
<<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t142.e2665>>

Commonwealth (*British*) The Commonwealth evolved from the meetings between Britain and the self-governing dominions of Australia, Canada, South Africa, and New Zealand during and after the First World War. The **Statute of Westminster**, 1931, confirmed the dominions' status as quasi-sovereign states, bound together voluntarily by the British Crown. During the Second World War the dominions assumed the powers of sovereign states (they, rather than Britain, declared war on Germany, and the dominion of Ireland decided to remain neutral). In 1947 India, Pakistan, and Ceylon became dominions and members of the Commonwealth, Burma chose not to join on gaining independence in 1948, and in 1949 Ireland left the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth is dominated numerically by poor states in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and the Pacific who joined on obtaining independence. Dependencies such as the Falklands are not members. Namibia, which was formerly ruled by South Africa, chose to become a member in 1990. Four states have left: Ireland, South Africa in 1961 (though it rejoined in 1994), and Fiji in 1987. Pakistan left in 1972 but subsequently rejoined.

In 1965 a small secretariat was established. Heads of government meet biennially to discuss a broad agenda, and other ministers also meet regularly. In the 1980s the Commonwealth's agenda was dominated by **apartheid**, and, on the issue of sanctions against South Africa, Britain was frequently in an awkward minority of one. However, the Commonwealth operates by consensus and persuasion, rather than by binding vote. About 70 per cent of Britain's state-to-state development aid continues to go to Commonwealth states. The organization also serves as a useful consultative mechanism for its members, but its significance in foreign and economic policies of its members, including Britain, is gently subsiding.

<http://www.thecommonwealth.org/> Site of the Commonwealth Secretariat, including a history and membership of the organization.

"Commonwealth" *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics*. Ed Iain McLean and Alistair McMillan. Oxford University Press 2009. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Universidad de Granada. 15 December 2014 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t86.e241>>

Commonwealth. (British Commonwealth) *n.* A voluntary association consisting of the UK and many of its former colonies or dependencies (e.g. protectorates) that have attained full independence and are recognized by international law as separate countries. The earliest to obtain independence (e.g. Canada and Australia) did so by virtue of the Statute of Westminster 1931, but the majority have been granted it individually by subsequent Independence Acts. Some (such as Canada and Australia) are still technically part of the Crown's dominions; others (e.g. India) have become republics. All accept the Crown as the symbol of their free association and the head of the Commonwealth.

"Commonwealth *n.*" *A Dictionary of Law*. by Jonathan Law and Elizabeth A. Martin. Oxford University Press 2009 *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Universidad de Granada. 15 December 2014 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t49.e720>>

Commonwealth. The Commonwealth of Nations is a confederation of 53 member nations that were formerly members of the British Empire (Mozambique is the exception), and was formerly known as the British Commonwealth. The appointed head of the Commonwealth is Queen Elizabeth II. The Declaration of Commonwealth Principles issued in 1971 stresses the need to

foster international peace and security, democracy, liberty of the individual, and equal rights for all, and also the importance of eradicating poverty, ignorance, and disease; it opposes all forms of racial discrimination.

"Commonwealth" *A Dictionary of Economics*. John Black, Nigar Hashimzade, and Gareth Myles. Oxford University Press, 2009. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Universidad de Granada. 15 December 2014 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t19.e3512>>

Commonwealth. The Commonwealth took its origins from a vote by the **Rump Parliament** on 4 January 1649, four weeks after **Pride's Purge**, 'That the people are, under God, the original of all just power', and that they, the Commons, possessed supreme authority as the people's representatives. Two days later they set up the High Court of Justice which tried and sentenced Charles I. The abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords followed, and another brief Act on 19 May formally declared England to be a Commonwealth. From February, executive authority was vested in a **Council of State**, accountable to the Rump, elected annually by it, and drawn mainly from its own members. The army's general council of officers adopted and presented a written constitution called an **Agreement of the People** (the second such), after modifying parts of it; it provided for biennial single-chamber parliaments, elected on a broad franchise by radically reformed constituencies. But the **Levellers**, who were part-authors of the agreement and resented the officers' tampering with it, wrecked any chances of its acceptance by denouncing the Commonwealth as a new tyranny and raising a serious mutiny in the army. In face of this and other threats, including Scotland's proclamation of King Charles II, the Rump shelved the agreement and forgot its promises of early elections. Enlarged by many newly readmitted members who had held aloof from the act of regicide, it settled into a more prolonged and conservative regime than the army had ever envisaged. It fought shy of reforms that might add to the Commonwealth's already disturbing unpopularity and restricted religious toleration with a Blasphemy Act, though it repealed the laws which compelled attendance at parish worship.

The Commonwealth expanded to include Scotland and Ireland after the army's conquest of those countries. Its foreign policy became expansive too, and the **Navigation Act** of 1651, which challenged Dutch domination of the carrying trade, was one factor that led it into war with the United Provinces in 1652. This dismayed **Cromwell**, whose ideal was a united protestant interest in Europe. The Rump's materialist outlook and evident aversion to 'a godly reformation' brought it under increasing pressure from the army during 1652 to make way for a successor. Eventually it did introduce a bill for a new parliament to meet in November 1653, but its contents (which do not survive) left the army unsatisfied, and Cromwell in a rage expelled the Rump on 20 April. The brief experiment of a nominated assembly (**'Barebone's Parliament'**, July – December 1653) ended in its own abdication, and on 16 December the Commonwealth gave way to the Cromwellian **Protectorate**.

It was briefly restored in May 1659, after a coup by the army against Richard **Cromwell**, but renewed quarrels between the officers and the Rumpers soon exposed the political bankruptcy of both. Republicanism had struck few roots in England, and General **Monck** was enthusiastically acclaimed when he opened the way to the Restoration by readmitting the members 'secluded' in Pride's Purge on 21 February 1660.

Austin Woolrych, "Commonwealth", in *The Oxford Companion to British History*. Ed John Cannon. Oxford University Press, 2009. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Universidad de Granada. 15 December 2014 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t110.e1068>>

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"Commonwealth", in *A Dictionary of British History*. Ed. John Cannon. Oxford University Press, 2009.
Oxford Reference Online. Oxford University Press. Universidad de Granada. 15 December 2014
<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t43.e859>

From pragmatics, speech acts, and discourse to culture and cultural translation.

TASK. Read the following texts (numbers 1 to 5), and summarize the way in which they define the following terms:

- *Discourse*
- *Speech-Act*
- The *performative* dimension or function of language

[1]

Discourse. Any extended use of speech or writing; or a formal exposition or dissertation. In linguistics, discourse is the name given to units of language longer than a single sentence; *discourse analysis* is the study of cohesion and other relationships between sentences in written or spoken discourse. In modern cultural theory, especially in the post-structuralism associated with the French historian Michel Foucault, the term has been used to denote any coherent body of statements that produces a self-confirming account of reality by defining an object of attention and generating concepts with which to analyse it (e.g. medical discourse, legal discourse, aesthetic discourse). The specific discourse in which a statement is made will govern the kinds of connections that can be made between ideas, and will involve certain assumptions about the kind of person(s) addressed. By extension, as a free-standing noun ('discourse' as such), the term denotes language in actual use within its social and ideological context and in institutionalized representations of the world called *discursive* practices. In general, the increased use of this term in modern cultural theory arises from dissatisfaction with the rather fixed and abstract term 'language' (see *langue*); by contrast, 'discourse' better indicates the specific contexts and relationships involved in historically produced uses of language.

Source: "Discourse" in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Chris Baldick. Oxford University Press, 2008. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Universidad de Granada. 15 December 2014
<<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t56.e325>>

[2]

Speech-act theory. A philosophical and linguistic investigation of the performative dimension of language. This includes the question of what language accomplishes in ordinary circumstances, such as conferring a new status (through naming) or asserting that something is true. Performative functions are distinct from semantic functions, the communication of meaning.

"Speech-act theory" in *Dictionary of the Social Sciences*. Craig Calhoun, ed. Oxford University Press 2002. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Universidad de Granada. 15 December 2014
<<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t104.e1580>>

[3]

Speech act. A verbal utterance defined in terms of its content, the intention of the speaker, and the effect on the listener.

"Speech act" in *A Dictionary of Psychology*. Edited by Andrew M. Colman. Oxford University Press 2009. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Universidad de Granada. 15 December 2014
<<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t87.e7869>>

[4]

Speech act. Goal-directed actions performed with words in **interpersonal communication**, defined primarily with reference to the speaker's intentions and the effects on the listener(s). The

term was introduced by Austin and is also associated with Searle in an analytical approach called **speech act theory**. Some regard speech acts as the basic units of discourse.

"Speech act" *A Dictionary of Media and Communication*. First Edition by Daniel Chandler and Rod Munday. Oxford University Press Inc. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Universidad de Granada. 15 December 2014 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t326.e2598>>

[5]

Speech act. An utterance conceived as an act by which the speaker does something. Originally of **performatives**: e.g. by saying 'I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth' a speaker will, in the appropriate circumstances, perform the act of naming it. Thence of utterances generally. E.g. in saying 'I will be there tomorrow' one makes a promise or a prediction: i.e. one performs an act of promising or predicting. If one says 'Stephen is my brother' the act is that of making a statement, if 'Is Stephen your brother?' that of asking a question, and so on.

"Speech act" in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics*. P. H. Matthews. Oxford University Press, 2007. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Universidad de Granada. 15 December 2014 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t36.e3161>>

TASK. Now read texts 6 and 7, and produce brief descriptions (in your own words) of:

- What speech acts are, and why are they relevant for translation studies.
- Cultural translation.

Answer the following questions:

- Why is culture described as a "text" that can be "read"? How does this notion of culture relate to the concept of "discourse", which we have discussed above?

[6]

Speech acts are those we perform when, for example, we make a complaint or a request, apologize or pay someone a compliment. The pragmatic analysis of speech acts sees all utterances in terms of the dual function of 'stating' and 'doing things', of having a 'sense' and a 'force'. An utterance, in this view, has:

- (a). a **sense** or reference to specific events, persons or objects
- (b). a **force** which may override literal sense and thus relay added effects such as those associated with, say, a request or an admonition;
- (c). an **effect** or consequence which may or may not be of the kind conventionally associated with the linguistic expression or the functional force involved

For example, 'shut the door' is in a sense an imperative that could conceivably carry the force of a request, which in turn could be used simply to annoy the hearer. To these three aspects of message construction Austin (1962) assigned the labels: **locution**, **illocution** and **perlocution**, respectively. These distinctions have proven to be extremely important in translation and interpreting studies, particularly when force departs from conventional sense, or when the ultimate effect defies the expectations based on either sense or force.

In pragmatics-oriented models of the translation process, the assumption generally entertained has been that striving to achieve 'equivalence' in the act of translation is an attempt at the successful (re)performance of speech acts. That is, in the quest to approximate to the ideal of 'sameness' of meaning, translators constantly attempt to (re-)perform locutionary and illocutionary acts in the

hope that the end product will have the same perlocutionary force in the target language (Blum-Kulka 1981)

(Basil Hatim, in Mona Baker & Gabriela Saldanha, eds., *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*. 2nd ed. London & New York: Routledge 2009, pp. 204-205)

In attempting to apply speech act theory to translation and interpreting, translation theorists soon become aware of the fact that a text is not a one-dimensional, linear succession of elements glued one onto the other evenly; rather it is a complex, constructed edifice with some elements enjoying a higher communicative status, some a less prominent one, within an emerging, evolving hierarchic organization.

(Basil Hatim, in Baker & Saldanha, eds., 2009, p. 206)

[7]

CULTURAL TRANSLATION

(Kate Sturge, in Mona Baker & Gabriela Saldanha, eds., *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*. 2nd ed. London & New York: Routledge 2009, pp. 67-70)

“The term ‘cultural translation’ is used in many different contexts and senses. In some of these it is a metaphor that radically questions translation’s traditional parameters, but a somewhat narrower use of the term refers to those practices of literary translation that mediate cultural difference, or try to convey extensive cultural background, or set out to represent another culture via translation. In this sense, ‘cultural translation’ is counterposed to a ‘linguistic’ or ‘grammatical’ translation that is limited in scope to the sentences on the page. It raises complex technical issues: how to deal with features like dialect and heteroglossia¹, literary allusions, culturally specific items such as food or architecture, or further-reaching differences in the assumed contextual knowledge that surrounds the text and gives it meaning. Questions like these feed long-standing disputes on the most effective—and most ethical—ways to render the cultural difference of the text, leaning more towards naturalization or more towards exoticization, with the attendant dangers of ideologically appropriating the source culture or creating a spurious sense of absolute distance from it. In this context, ‘cultural translation’ does not usually denote a particular kind of translation strategy, but rather a *perspective* on translations that focuses on their emergence and impact as components in the ideological traffic between language groups.” (Baker & Saldanha, eds., 2009, p. 67)

The following is relevant for **post-colonial perspectives on the British Empire and its approach to native cultures** – the concept of cultures as “texts” that can be read, interpreted and translated (and how this concept is challenged)

“... the phrase ‘translation of cultures’ is a conventional metaphor in anthropological theory. Gaining ground from the 1950s, especially in British functionalist anthropology, the ‘translation of cultures’ approach saw its task as searching for the internal coherence that other people’s thinking and practices have in their own context, then re-creating that coherence in the terms of Western academia. Asad’s critical discussion of the metaphor shows that in the ‘translation of cultures’ perspective, the ethnographer-translator assumes authority to extract the underlying

¹ **Heteroglossia.** The existence of conflicting **discourses** within any field of linguistic activity, such as a national language, a novel, or a specific conversation. [...] This term addresses linguistic variety as an aspect of social conflict, as in tensions between central and marginal uses of the same national language; these may be echoed in, for example, the differences between the narrative voice and the voices of the characters in a novel.

(*The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Chris Baldick. Oxford University Press, 2008. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Universidad de Granada. 15 December 2014
<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t56.e538>)

meanings of what the ‘natives’ say and do, as opposed to the sayers and doers themselves determining what they mean. As a result, the ‘cultural translator’ takes on authorship and the position of knowing better than the ‘cultural text’ itself, which is relegated to the status of an unknowing provider of source material for interpretation. This imbalance of power arises from political inequality between source and target languages, and itself feeds into dominant ‘knowledge’ about colonized societies. Thus ‘the process of ‘cultural translation’ is inevitably enmeshed in conditions of power—professional, national, international’ (1986: 162). Although Asad does not reject the viability of cultural translation as a whole, he insists that it must always be approached through awareness of the ‘asymmetrical tendencies and pressures in the languages of dominated and dominant societies’ (ibid.: 164).

Asad thus challenges the model of cultural translation which assigns to a dominant target language the authority to survey the source culture and detect intentions hidden to its members. But the idea of cultures as being text-like, and thus susceptible to ‘translation’ in the first place, has also been questioned. The textualizing approach of interpretive anthropology was set out by Clifford Geertz in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), which takes a hermeneutic view of cultures as complex webs of meaning capable of being ‘read’. Much influenced by Geertz, the critics often labelled as ‘Writing Culture’ (after the title of Clifford and Marcus’s ground breaking 1986 collection) focus on ethnographic descriptions themselves as texts—‘fictions’ that conventionally make use of particular tropes and genres and that have served to reinforce hegemonic relationships between anthropologizers and anthropologized. The concept of translation is frequently employed by these critics, who are interested in the power of texts to form and re-form dominant knowledge (see also Clifford 1997). However, their detractors argue that culture should not necessarily be viewed as system or language, let alone as text, but perhaps rather as historically contingent conversation and interaction (Pálsson 1993). Additionally, *Writing Culture’s* focus on textuality has been accused of sidestepping the concrete political practices which far more powerfully determine the relationships between cultures (Abu-Lughod, 1991)” (Baker & Saldanha, eds., 2009, p. 68)

“In view of these thorough-going attacks on the model of cultures as distinct languages that can be translated into other languages, ‘cultural translation’ too is undermined, at least as a model of *inter-cultural* translation between bounded, quasi-national entities. Here a related but more figurative and far-reaching use of the term ‘cultural translation’ comes to the fore: the notion, common in postcolonial studies, that translation is less a procedure to which cultures can be subjected than itself the very fabric of culture. In this case, ‘translation’ is not meant as interlingual transfer but metaphorically, as the alteration of colonizing discourses by the discourses of the colonized and viceversa. For Bhabha, the resulting ‘hybridity’ in language and cultural identity means culture is both ‘transnational and translational’ (1994a: 5)—constituted via ‘translation’ as exchange and adaptation, especially through the phenomenon of migration. In this view, translation is not an interchange between discrete wholes but a process of mixing and mutual contamination, and not a movement from ‘source’ to ‘target’ but located in a ‘third space’ beyond both, where ‘conflicts arising from cultural difference and the different social discourses involved in those conflicts are negotiated’ (Wolf 2002: 190)

Cultural translation in this sense offers a dissolution of some key categories of translation studies: the notion of separate ‘source’ and ‘target’ language-cultures and indeed binary or dualistic models in general. Rather than being clear-cut *locations* of coherent identity, argues Doris Bachmann-Medick, cultures are processes of translation, constantly shifting, multiplying and diversifying: the idea of cultural translation can ‘act as an anti-essentialist and anti-holistic metaphor that aims to uncover counter-discourses, discursive forms and resistant actions within a culture, heterogeneous discursive spaces within a society’ and enable ‘a dynamic concept of culture as a practice of negotiating cultural differences, and of cultural overlap, syncretism and creolization’ (2006: 37)

Although this kind of approach does not specifically rule out the meaning of ‘translation’ as an interlingual practice, clearly it is interested in much wider senses of translation than the movement from language one to language two. The danger here, in Trivedi’s view (2005), is that the notion of ‘cultural translation’ might drastically undervalue the linguistic difference and co-existence upon which translation in the more traditional sense relies. Trivedi accuses Bhabha of marginalizing bilingualism and translation as specifically interlingual practices, the precondition for polylingual cultural diversity. He calls for translation studies to insist on the centrality of

translation's polylingual aspect and to refute the generalization of 'cultural translation' into an umbrella term for all aspects of mobility and diasporic life.

Trivedi's criticism might be extended to uses of the translation metaphor in anthropological and cultural studies which exclude or do not address language difference, thus potentially presenting a false sense of monolingualism to western audiences. Metaphorical usage could at worst hollow out the word 'translation', not just into something that need not necessarily include more than one language but into something that primarily *does not* include more than one language—a factor, instead, of shifts and layering within globally dominant English without the need for bilingual translation to take place. As Bachmann-Medick (2006) hints, in a nightmare scenario 'cultural translation' could mean the adaptation of everything to the dominant idiom of western capitalism, thus destroying difference or relegating it to unheard margins of global society. For critics such as Trivedi, the challenge to translation studies is thus to reassert the crucial role of translation in all its senses within interdisciplinary debates on cultural difference and globalization." (Baker & Saldanha, eds., 2009, p. 69)

CULTURE AND TRANSLATION STUDIES

In the following article, David Katan describes the concept of culture from the perspective of translation studies. Note that he describes *culture* as divided into three different layers, or levels. In this three-tier system, **culture is understood as semiotic system articulated through different symbolic codes**. As they go down the scale, the symbols or “culturemes” gradually lose specificity, their profile becomes more diffuse, they become less conscious, and end up as either irreflexive *habitus* or they even become subconscious reflexes. Its users become less aware of their values. **The total results in an idea of culture as a narrative, with a storyline, and different levels of awareness and of explicitness in the components (the agents, the culturemes, or the symbolic forms) of this narrative**. At the most explicit level, we find language itself, and together with it other sign-systems, such as the **visual arts, architecture, institutions of all kinds, or music**.

These three levels are directly related to Katan’s description of culture as **“a shared ‘model of the world’, a hierarchical system of congruent and interrelated beliefs, values and strategies which can guide action and interaction, depending on cognitive context”**

TASK: read the text, and provide a summary, in your own words, of the relation between culture and translation studies. Remember: you must only read for the main ideas in the text, and be able to identify the truly essential and relevant information for your purposes (i.e. a basic definition of the relation between culture and translation studies). This means that you need not understand every single word, and every single concept, just the important, central concepts.

[8]

CULTURE

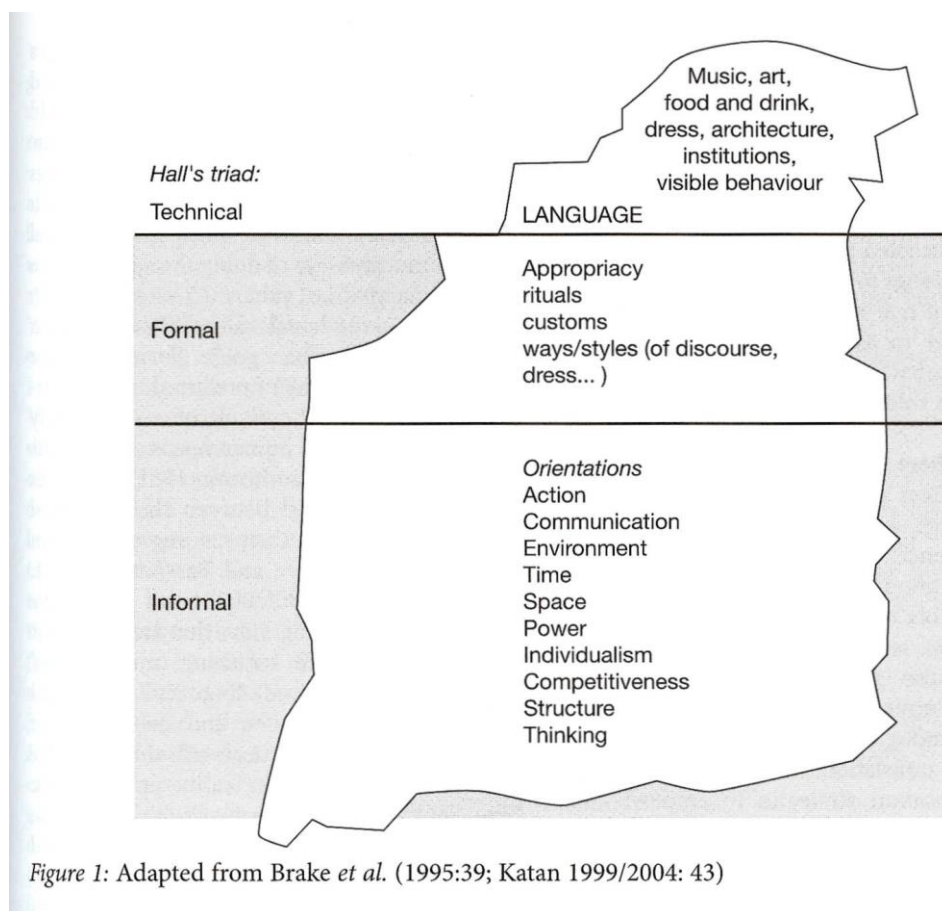
(David Katan, in Mona Baker & Gabriela Saldanha, eds., *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*. 2nd ed. London & New York: Routledge 2009, pp. 70-73)

Until the birth of anthropology, culture referred exclusively to (1) **the humanist ideal of what was considered ‘civilized’ in a developed society**. Since then, a second meaning of culture as (2) **the way of life of a people** has become influential. With the development of disciplines such as cultural studies, a third meaning has emerged which attempts to identify (3) **political or ideological reasons for specific cultural behaviour** (see Katan 1999/2004: 29). Hence, depending on the definition adopted, **culture may be (1) formally learnt, (2) unconsciously shared, or (3) be a site of conflict**. To complicate matters further, anthropologists themselves now seriously question ‘the old idea of ‘a people’ possessing ‘a shared culture’ ‘ (Erickson and Nielson 2001: 162)

In translation studies, theorists and practitioners are equally divided over the meaning and importance of culture, though most would tacitly accept that there is some form of ‘cultural filter’ (House 2002: 100) involved in the translation process.

We can clarify the apparently contradictory definitions of culture by presenting them as **hierarchical frames or levels, each one (to some extent) embedded within larger frames**. This hierarchy is based on the Theory of Types (Bateson 1972), which allows for each of the competing types of culture (i.e. definitions) to be valid for translation, albeit within their own level. In an extensive treatment of culture in the context of translation and interpreting, Katan (1999/2004: 26) proposes a definition of **culture as a shared ‘model of the world’, a hierarchical system of congruent and interrelated beliefs, values and strategies which can guide action and interaction, depending on cognitive context**; ‘[e]ach aspect of culture is linked in a [fluid] system to form a unifying context of culture’. The levels themselves are based on Edward T. Hall’s popular anthropological *iceberg model*, the ‘Triad of Culture’ (1959/1990), which serves to introduce one dimension of the system, dividing aspects of culture into what is visible (above the waterline), semi-visible and invisible (figure 1). **The frames below the water line are progressively more hidden but also progressively closer to our unquestioned assumptions about the world and our own (cultural) identities**. A further, sociological dimension may be described as operating on the iceberg itself.

The levels also reflect the various ways in which we learn culture: (1) technically, through explicit instruction; (2) formally, through trial-and-error modelling; and (3) informally, through the unconscious inculcation of principles and world views.



The extent to which a translator should intervene (i.e. interpret and manipulate rather than operate a purely linguistic transfer) will be in accordance with our beliefs about which frame(s) most influence translation. Translation scholars tend to focus on the more hidden levels, while practitioners are more concerned with what is visible on the surface.

(David Katan, in Baker & Saldanha, eds., 2009, p. 70)

The first cultural frame is at the tip of the iceberg and coincides with the (1) humanist concept of culture. The focus is on the text, dressed (adapting Newmark 1995: 80) in its best civilized clothes of a particular culture. At this 'Technical' level, language signs have a clear WYSIWYG (What-You-See-Is-What-You-Get) referential function, and any associated hidden values are 'universal'. The task of the translator at this level is to transfer the terms and concepts in the source text abroad with minimum loss (from literature and philosophical ideas to software manuals), so that 'what you see' in the source text is equivalent to 'what you see' in the target text. [...] The main concern of translators intervening at this level is the text itself and the translation of 'culture-bound' terms, or 'cultureness'—defined as formalized, socially and juridically embedded phenomena that exist in a particular form or function in only one of the two cultures being compared. These **culturemes**, or 'cultural categories', cover a wide array of semantic fields: from geography and traditions to institutions and technologies.

(David Katan, in Baker & Saldanha, eds., 2009, pp. 70-71)

Hall's second, 'Formal', level of culture derives from the anthropological definition, focusing on (2) what is normal or appropriate (rather than what is civilized). Hans Vermeer's definition of culture, accepted by many translators as 'the standard', belongs to this level: **'Culture consists of**

everything one needs to know, master and feel, in order to assess where members of a society are behaving acceptably or deviantly in their various roles" (translated in Snell-Hornby 2006:55).

Culture here is a predictable pattern of shared practices which guide actual language use, for example culture-specific genre preferences, prototypes and schemata, or even simply 'good style'; see, for example, Clyne (1991), Ventola (2000) and Candlin and Gotti (2004). What is judged as good translation practice is also guided by culturally-specific translation norms, rules and conventions, including, among other things: which texts are accepted for translation; the type of translation and compensation strategies to employ; and the criteria by which a translation is judged (Chesterman 1993; Toury 1995). Intervention at this level focuses on the skopos of the translation and on tailoring the translation to the expectations of receivers in the target culture.

(David Katan, in Baker & Saldanha, eds., 2009, p. 72)

Hall calls his third level of culture 'Informal' or 'Out-of-awareness', because it is not normally accessible to the conscious brain for metacognitive comment. At this level, (3) there are no formal guides to practice but instead unquestioned core values and beliefs, or stories about self and the world. As such, one's culture, inculcated for example through family, school and the media, becomes a relatively fixed internal representation of reality. Bourdieu's *habitus* (see sociological approaches), which then both guides and constraints one's orientation in the real world. [...] With their coining of the term 'cultural turn' Lefevere and Bassnett (1990: 1; see also Bassnett 1980/2002) were among the first to popularize the view that translation is a bicultural practice requiring 'mindshifting' (Taft 1981: 53) from one linguacultural model of the world to another, and mediating (or compensating) skills to deal with the inevitable refraction between one reality and another. Linguacultures have been studied through, for example, the description of their 'cultural grammar' [defined as] 'a set of subconscious rules that shape a people's ways of thinking, feeling, speaking, and interacting'.

(David Katan, in Baker & Saldanha, eds., 2009, p. 72)

Ultimately, →→→ culture has to be understood not only as a set of level or frames but as an integrated system, in a constant state of flux, through which textual signals are negotiated and reinterpreted according to context and individual stance ←←←.

(David Katan, in Baker & Saldanha, eds., 2009, pp. 72-73)

CULTURE, TRANSLATION AND GLOBALIZATION

One of the purposes of this class is to show how the processes of globalization and the cultural homogenization that they bring with them are facilitated by translation in combination with other phenomena and vehicles like mass media communication technologies, and global entertainment companies like Disney. The following article poses interesting questions on the role played by translation, and the cultural politics of modern global culture, dominated by popular products like the movie *Frozen*, which carry with them a certain set of values.

TASK: read text number [9], and answer the following questions:

- How has the original story been transformed into something ‘Disneysque’?
- What is the difference between literary translation and cinematic translation according to the text?
- What does the text mean by ‘diglossic language families’? What sort of cultural and linguistic implications does this situation create?
- What sort of reaction has Disney’s choice of Modern Standard Arabic elicited? Why is this version problematic for some Arabic viewers, and what does it tell about the cultural situation of a language spoken by many different national communities, in many different varieties, within a global culture?

[9]

Translating “Frozen” Into Arabic

by *Elias Muhanna*

Source: *The New Yorker Magazine*, May 30, 2014



For the past few months, I’ve lived my life to the soundtrack of Disney’s mega-hit musical “Frozen.” I wake up to the sound of my two daughters singing the Oscar-winning power anthem “Let It Go” at the top of their lungs as they get dressed for school. By breakfast, we’re on to “Do You Want to Build a Snowman?” followed by the peppy duet “Love Is an Open Door.” Between bites of oatmeal, my four-year-old chimes in with well-rehearsed counterpoint as her older sister closes her eyes and solemnly belts out the reprise to “For the First Time in Forever.”

On a scale of infectiousness, these songs are pestilential. This is a good thing; “Frozen” recently became the fifth-highest-grossing film of all time. The story of two orphaned princesses—Elsa (aloof, traumatized, cryokinetic) and Anna (headstrong, starved for companionship)—in the fjord-riven realm of Arendelle, the film spent many years in development, as one producer after another tried to adapt Hans Christian Andersen’s dark fairy tale “The Snow Queen” into something Disneysque. The result looks almost nothing

like the original story, thanks in part to “Let It Go,” which prompted a rewrite of Elsa’s character and turned her from a frigid hermit into a spunky feminist.

Not long after they’d made me memorize every syllable, every quavering crescendo and pregnant fermata, my kids moved on from “Let It Go” to their next obsession, “Let It Go in 25 Languages,” a behind-the-scenes video of the song being recorded by twenty-five foreign Elsas in studios around the world. The clip moves line by line from one language to the next, one singer to the next, each wearing a pair of headphones and standing in front of a condenser microphone with an Elsa-like look of resolve in her eyes.

My girls are mesmerized. They learn the polyglot version in a day or two and proceed to the ultimate level, “Let It Go in 41 Languages,” which includes Icelandic, Vietnamese, Turkish, Croatian, Estonian, Hebrew, Lithuanian, and Canadian French. By the weekend, the house sounds like a business-class lounge at an international airport terminal. Snatches of German and Cantonese waft downstairs from the second-grader’s bedroom, mingling with Danish and Russian phrases murmured by the preschooler making Play-Doh cookies on the kitchen floor.

Literary translation is challenging, and tends to work best when the translator has recourse to the amplifying and telescoping powers of periphrasis, poetic license, and, if it comes to it, a discreet footnote here or there. Few of these tools are at the disposal of the cinematic translator. The perfect dub must convey meaning within an allotted timeframe. It is often set to music and accompanied by context-specific body language, and must aim to fit the shape of characters’ mouths as they are speaking. Of course, songs also have to rhyme, jokes have to be funny, and cultural references have to be legible to an audience of foreign children. Dubbing is translation in four dimensions.

There has never been a Disney musical so widely translated (or “localized,” in industry-speak) as “Frozen.” There has also never been a Disney musical so loaded with American vernacular speech. Princess Anna may have spent her childhood in a remote Scandinavian citadel, but she talks like a teen-ager from suburban New Jersey. Singing about her sister’s impending coronation ceremony, she says, “Don’t know if I’m elated or gassy, but I’m somewhere in that zone,” and confesses to a need to “stuff some chocolate in my face” at the prospect of meeting a handsome stranger at the party. Ariel, Belle, and Jasmine were more demure in their longings, and sang in a register of English more readily amenable to translation.

One of the forty-one languages in which you can watch “Frozen” is Modern Standard Arabic. This is a departure from precedent. Earlier Disney films (from “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” to “Pocahontas” to “Tangled”) were dubbed into Egyptian Arabic, the dialect with the largest number of speakers in the region, based in a country with a venerable history of film production. Generations of Arabs grew up watching Egyptian movies, and the Disney musicals capitalized on their familiarity with this particular dialect.

Modern Standard Arabic is very similar to Classical Arabic, the centuries-old lingua franca of the medieval Islamic world. Today, it is the language of officialdom, high culture, books, newscasts, and political sermonizing. Most television shows, films, and advertisements are in colloquial Arabic, and the past several years have seen further incursions of the dialects into areas traditionally reserved for the literary language.

Ironically, though, children’s literature has remained deeply resistant to the trend toward vernacularization. “If we read to them in dialect, when are they supposed to learn *real* Arabic?” is the answer I usually get when I ask other parents about this state of affairs. As a scholar of Classical Arabic and a native speaker of Lebanese Arabic, I have always felt this to be a false choice. Setting aside the fraught question of what constitutes real Arabic, there is surely something to be said for introducing children to literature that speaks to them.

It’s tricky to describe the quality of a literary text in a formal language to a speaker of American English or any other language that does not contain the same range of linguistic variety as *diglossic* language families like Arabic, Chinese, and Hindi. One way to put it is that Modern Standard Arabic is even less similar to regional Arabic dialects than the English of the King James Bible is to the patter of an ESPN sportscaster.

The Arabic lyrics to “Let It Go” are as forbidding as Elsa’s ice palace. The Egyptian singer Nesma Mahgoub, in the song’s chorus, sings, “Discharge thy secret! I shall not bear the torment!” and “I dread not all that shall be said! Discharge the storm clouds! The snow instigateth not lugubriousness within me...” From one song to the next, there isn’t a declensional ending dropped or an antique expression avoided, whether

it is sung by a dancing snowman or a choir of forest trolls. The Arabic of “Frozen” is frozen in time, as “localized” to contemporary Middle Eastern youth culture as Latin quatrains in French rap.

Why Disney decided to abandon dialectal Arabic for “Frozen” is perplexing, and the reaction has been mixed. Many YouTube viewers are annoyed, with some fans recording their own versions of the songs in dialect. An online petition has called for Disney to switch its dubbing back to Egyptian Arabic, plaintively wondering, “How can we watch ‘Monsters University’ in the Heavy Modern Arabic while we saw the first one in Egyptian accent that everybody loved...?”

How indeed? Or perhaps the real question is: Why? Why is Disney willing to commission separate translations of its films for speakers of Castilian Spanish and Latin American Spanish, European Portuguese and Brazilian Portuguese, European French and Canadian French, but is moving in the opposite direction when it comes to Arabic? The answer cannot be that the dialect markets are too small. The population of all of Scandinavia is less than a third of Egypt’s, but is represented by five different translations of “Frozen.” There are nearly ten times as many Moroccans living in Casablanca alone as there are Icelanders in the whole world. The markets are there. What is missing is a constituency for cultural production in dialectal Arabic.

Of course, it isn’t Disney’s job to cultivate such a constituency. Nor is its assumption that Modern Standard Arabic is a lingua franca suitable for all forms of literature and all Arab audiences a species of Orientalism. It reflects, rather, an ideology propagated by linguistic purists in the region, rooted in many centuries of literary and religious history. The Arab world, however, is no longer culturally unipolar, with most of its films and music originating in Egypt. The most popular soap operas of the region are Syrian, North African films are staples of the festival circuits, and some of the largest media conglomerates are based in the Gulf. This is to say nothing of the effect that the Web and social media are having on the penetration of Arabic dialects into written communication, which is incalculable.

The age of the Arabic vernacular is here; someone just needs to tell the talking snowman.

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ON LANGUAGE, CULTURE AND POLITICS. THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE GLOBAL DOMINANCE OF ENGLISH AS A *LINGUA FRANCA*

Text [9] dealt with the translation of a global success like *Frozen* into Arabic, and the problems posed by the choice of dialect employed in its dubbing. The following article deals with the question of a political and economic community, such as the European Union, which, far from having common language, is made up of different national communities, each of them with their own language.

TASK

Read text [10] and compare the situations in the Arab world and the European Union, what both situations say about their respective cultures, and the challenges these situations pose from the perspective of cultural identities and translation. Then answer the following questions.

- What is Globish, according to the text, and which are its main features?
- Is politics best conducted in a single vernacular, or is it possible in a multilingual community? Which different opinions and examples does the text provide?

The globish-speaking union

Language, truth and European politics
The Economist, May 24th 2014

WHAT language does Europe speak? France has lost its battle for French. Europeans now overwhelmingly opt for English. The Eurovision song contest, won this month by an Austrian cross-dresser, is mostly English-speaking, even if the votes are translated into French. The European Union conducts ever more business in English. Interpreters sometimes feel they are speaking to themselves. Last year Germany's president, Joachim Gauck, argued for an English-speaking Europe: national languages would be cherished for spirituality and poetry alongside "a workable English for all of life's situations and all age groups".

Some detect a European form of global English (globish): a *patois* with English physiognomy, cross-dressed with continental cadences and syntax, a train of EU institutional jargon and sequins of linguistic false friends (mostly French). In Brussels "to assist" means to be present, not to help; "to control" means to check, rather than to exercise power; "adequate" means appropriate or suitable, rather than (barely) sufficient; and mass nouns are countable, such as advices, informations and aids. "Anglo-Saxon" is not a historical term referring to Germanic tribes in Britain, but a political insult followed by "capitalism" or even "press".

Ordinary Europeans got a first taste of Euro-globish in the televised debates among leading contenders for the European election on May 22nd-25th. The idea of the main European political groups picking "*Spitzenkandidaten*" to become the president of the European Commission is a novelty (and has created Brussels's first German neologism in years). It is meant to close the democratic deficit, stir excitement, arrest the fall in turnout and check the rise of anti-EU parties.

In contrast with popular music, though, Euro-globish has a long way to go before it dominates electoral politics. Of the five *Spitzenkandidaten* debating in Brussels on May 15th, Alexis Tsipras, champion of a far-left alliance, insisted on speaking Greek. Jean-Claude Juncker, Luxembourg's standard-bearer for the Christian Democrats, chose French. The three others gamely abided by the request to speak English: two Germans, Martin Schulz and Ska Keller from the Social Democrats and Greens, respectively, and a Belgian, Guy Verhofstadt, for the Liberals.

As they replied to the Italian moderator's questions about growth, austerity, the euro, economic integration, free trade with America and much else, the politicians showed remarkable fortitude in trying to reach out to voters in what was often their second language. And spare a thought for the viewers who, for the most part, were not native English-speakers (many broadcasters provided simultaneous interpretation). Inevitably, it made for a stiff and stilted exchange. The candidates were uninspiring and hard to tell apart in their desire for "more Europe". But language barriers added to a sense of strange remoteness. Europhiles are pleased that the final debate stimulated more than 100,000 messages on Twitter. But contrast that with

the 5m tweets around the Eurovision contest, and it is plain that European-level democracy has not gripped the public.

Politics is surely best conducted in the vernacular. John Stuart Mill, for one, thought multilingual democracy a nonsense because “the united public opinion, necessary to the working of a representative government, cannot exist.” Yet, as Switzerland shows, a country can have more than one vernacular. In theory that might work for Europe. Mr Schulz and Mr Juncker got more prime-time attention when they debated separately on French and German TV in the local tongue. However, even the finest polyglot would struggle to reach voters in 24 official languages.

Philippe Van Parijs, a professor at Louvain University, argues that European-level democracy does not require a homogenous culture, or *ethnos*; a common political community, or *demos*, needs only a lingua franca. Was Nelson Mandela less democratic for speaking English in multi-ethnic and multilingual South Africa? English is spreading fast, with more than 40% of young Europeans claiming to be able to speak it in some form. The answer to Europe’s democratic deficit, says Mr Van Parijs, is to accelerate the process so that English is not just the language of an elite but also the means for poorer Europeans to be heard. An approximate version of English, with a limited vocabulary of just a few hundred words, would suffice.

Yet European politics remains firmly national. There is often a gap between the *Spitzenkandidaten* and the national parties they supposedly represent. The Christian Democrat, Social Democratic and Liberal *Spitzenkandidaten* may believe in Eurobonds, but their German colleagues do not. Mr Schulz was told by Britain’s Labour Party not to show his face there. Mr Juncker has no real ally from his European People’s Party in Britain (the Tories left in 2009) and the wrong sort in Italy (Silvio Berlusconi’s Forza Italia is waging an embarrassing anti-German campaign).

And the English problem

The experiment with *Spitzenkandidaten* will probably end badly. If one of them wins, it will be seen as a power-grab by MEPs to take from elected national leaders the right to choose who runs the commission; if they all fail, the EU-wide democratic contest will look a sham. It also poses a dilemma for the British prime minister, David Cameron. He finds all the *Spitzenkandidaten* unacceptably federalist (Britain vetoed Mr Verhofstadt’s bid for the commission in 2004). But he cannot block anybody alone. Several leaders, including Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, have more or less endorsed *Spitzenkandidaten*, and few have criticised the idea openly. If Mr Cameron is isolated and an arch-federalist is chosen, that will increase the risk that Britain may leave. How strange if Europe were to become an English-speaking union without its largest English-speaking country.