

TRANSLATION AND EVOLUTION: THE TRANSMISSION OF CULTURE THROUGH “LITERARY SELECTION”

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Abstract: The focus of this article concerns the intricate tradition whereby translation has been historically affecting the evolution of human cultures. The emergence of language in the social interactions of our ancestors has been decisive for the evolution of their cultural environments; so decisive that trying to separate these realms (language and culture) is currently considered virtually unfeasible. Bearing in mind that my overall intention is to reflect upon the twofold relationship between the evolution of language and that of culture, my specific one is to establish such link in the specific scope of translation practices. In practical terms, when one thinks of the selection of discourses that occur through the process of translation, it would be plausible to affirm that many of them end up working not as a natural, but as an artificial selection. These translations, in the end, do not necessarily point to a supposedly innocuous and regular path taken by cultural evolution, but actually to one directly influenced by a few subjects’ interests – notwithstanding the possible social drawbacks for human culture in the long-term picture that might result from such interests.

Keywords: Evolution. Cultural Transmission. Natural and Artificial Selection. Translation.

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TRADUÇÃO E EVOLUÇÃO: A TRANSMISSÃO DE CULTURA ATRAVÉS DA “SELEÇÃO LITERÁRIA”

Resumo: O foco deste artigo concerne à tradição complexa dentro da qual a tradução tem influenciado historicamente a evolução das culturas humanas. O surgimento da linguagem nas interações sociais de nossos ancestrais foi decisiva para a evolução de seus ambientes culturais – tão decisiva que a tentativa de separar estes campos (língua e cultura) é tida como impraticável na contemporaneidade. Tendo em mente que minha intenção geral é a de refletir acerca da relação bilateral entre a evolução da linguagem e a da cultura, o meu propósito específico é estabelecer esta ponte no contexto específico das práticas tradutórias. Em termos práticos, quando se pensa na seleção de discursos que ocorre através do processo de tradução, seria plausível afirmar que muitos deles acabam por funcionar mais como uma seleção artificial do que natural. Essas traduções, afinal, não apontam necessariamente para um caminho pré-estabelecido, a ser tomado durante a evolução cultural, mas sim para uma direção influenciada diretamente pelo interesse de alguns sujeitos – independente dos possíveis danos sociais para a cultura humana no cenário a longo prazo que possam estar envolvidos com tais interesses.

Palavras-chave: Evolução. Transmissão Cultural. Seleção Natural e Artificial. Tradução.

“I’ve sometimes been accused of degrading mankind, of insulting human dignity, of making man beastly. This surprised me because I like animals, and I feel proud to call myself one. I’ve never looked down upon them, so to call human beings animals is not, to me, degrading. It’s simply being honest: putting us in our place as part of the scheme of nature on the planet Earth.”

Desmond Morris (*The Human Animal*, 1994)

Introduction: "Translation as the Locus of Cultural Difference"

The problem to be investigated in this article concerns the intricate tradition whereby translation has been historically affecting the evolution of human cultures. As many studies within the field of translation studies demonstrate (e.g. those concerning Even-Zohar's concept of polysystems), translation has for long been applied as a manner to allow a (supposedly democratic) dialogue between margin and centre to occur; another already given fact is that such dialogue is nonetheless not as egalitarian as it is depicted by representatives that advocate for certain cultural values – those who benefit from the erasure of some epistemes and from the reinforcement of others. Jay Maggio criticises such behaviour alleging that "the Western approach to the subaltern is either to speak for or to silently let them speak for themselves; but both strategies silence the subaltern because they ignore the positional relations of the dominant to the subaltern" (2007, 421). This brings us back to the discussion concerning a complex conundrum: to be or not to be (translated?). The subaltern, that who brings forth marginal cultural values and aims to share them with a broader audience, sees itself restrained to two (questionable) possibilities: to be ignored or to be assimilated by the hegemonic tradition. "Thus the amalgamation of the two notions of representation establishes a silencing of the subaltern. They can never speak because they are both being 'stood in for' and 'embodied' by others in the dominant discourse" (422). As a result, how translated discourses become represented within this dominant discourse – responsible for allowing them to be silenced, assimilated, or listened to – directly influence the evolution of human culture (in both micro and macro levels) – and it is this stimulus and response practice that shall be addressed herein.

First of all, and as Lesley Newson poses, it is important to bear in mind that "[h]uman culture is the inevitable result of the way our species acquires its behavior; we are extremely social animals and

an overwhelming proportion of our behavior is socially learned” (2007, 453). This factor per se is already an evidence of how complex the development of human cultures is – inasmuch as this rule apparently does not seem to apply when it goes to any other species. In fact, the functioning of most animals’ communities is largely a product of “innate evolved determinants of behavior combined with individual learning; they make quite modest use of social learning while we acquire a massive cultural repertoire [...] ‘absorbed’ from those around us” (454). Therefore, whereas most living beings have their cultural framework determined by their genetic preconditioning, humans have the advantage of relying on a fruitful dialogue between such preconditioning and this massive cultural repertoire which is gradually absorbed within – and outside – their cultural temporal and spatial context; hence the overall context of this research, which regards this rich cultural dialogue. Nevertheless, within the complexity of human nature and cultural development, this is a debate that has historically been placing obstacles in the paths’ of those theorists aiming at reaching an ultimate conclusion regarding how much is biological and how much is sociological. It seems thus essential to state and restate that, herein, this is not the purpose whatsoever; the general context of my investigation is not at all positioned in the sphere of biological or cultural repertoire as if they were delineated independently (or an attempt at “choosing a side”). I understand, on the contrary, that endeavouring to nourish the perspective of that sort of observer who gazes upon the abundant interaction between genes and cultural stimuli (not as opponents but as allies in the process of cultural evolution) would be much more effective than that.

In “Cultural Transmission and Evolution”, one of the last chapters of Luigi Cavalli-Sforza’s book *Genes, Peoples, and Languages* (2000), readers are given what seems to be pertinent at this moment of my discussion: a clear-cut definition of culture. In this text, which comprises the specific context of this article, the author puts it bluntly: “Culture is the ensemble of customs and technologies that played and continues to play an essential

role in the evolution of our behaviour” (Cavalli-Sforza, 172). Biologically speaking, this does not mean at all that such array of cultural artifacts (whose complexity and variety today prove to be mesmerising) makes us less “animal” than any other species in the globe – in this sense I agree with Desmond Morris when he defines us, humans, as basically “naked apes” (*The Naked Ape*, 1999). What I mean is that, even though any other animal community is also established through the advent of cultural traditions and interactions, the key to human uniqueness in the realm of cultural complexity resides in the fact that other species’ ones are simply “less developed because animal communication is clearly much more limited” (Cavalli-Sforza, 173). It would not be farfetched to assume, therefore, that it is mostly our communication which makes us so culturally different from other animals; as a matter of fact, any study wishing to elaborate on the issue of our cultural evolution should not only look at the development of human language but also at any other means which allow human communities to communicate with one another through distinct spaces and times. In this sense, and given George Steiner’s (1975) statement that “[l]ike mutations in the improvement of the species [...], acts of translation seem to have the same function” (*After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, 295), my specific context regards the historical relevance of translation for the bridge proposed by Cavalli-Sforza between genes, peoples, and languages to be effectively constructed; and it seems of paramount importance to have a glimpse at how the process of translation has gradually been entering the game.

When one looks at the cultural evolution described in Cavalli-Sforza’s work, therefore, it seems clear that the influence of human communication throughout its history cannot pass unnoticed; that is, for our culture to evolve, we need language to help us out. The emergence of language in the social interactions of our ancestors has thus been decisive for the evolution of their (and consequently our) cultural environments, so decisive that trying to separate these realms (language and culture) is currently considered not

only unfeasible but actually a complete utopia. Hence my overall purpose to problematise even more such questionable division, since, as brought forward by Tecumseh Fitch in the book *The Evolution of Language* (2010), the importance of language for the development of human communication throughout history should not be mitigated. Language has actually “played a central role in the rise of our species in the last million years” (12) due to the cultural interchanges it naturally ended up entailing. Nothing resembling our intricate methods of communication seems to emerge elsewhere in the animal kingdom; for instance, “[t]he fact that a chimpanzee with all the environmental input of a normal human child will not acquire speech [...] is one of the central puzzles we face when contemplating the biology of our species” (Fitch, 13). Concluding that “[t]he evolution of human language is one of the most significant and interesting evolutionary events that has occurred [...] during the entire history of life on Earth” (14), Fitch’s insight makes one reflect upon the idea that the uniqueness of human culture informs and is informed by the uniqueness of human language. How that occurs seems to be the cornerstone of any respectable elaboration upon such issue.

Bearing in mind that my overall intention is to pay a careful look upon the twofold relationship between the evolution of language and that of culture, my specific one is to establish such link in the specific scope of translation practices. This seems to me a crucial aspect of cultural evolution because, if language is a major source of social interaction between subjects, it is also true that “[t]hrough the translated text new elements are introduced into a literary system that would otherwise fail to appear” (Gentzler, 2001, 112). In Gentzler’s view, underestimating these elements would make it “impossible to determine the entrance of that which was new, different, or ‘mutant’” (113). Translation, therefore, sanctions transportation of mutant elements, among distinct literary systems, in the same fashion that our biological evolution has for so long been promoting the maintenance of mutant genes for our development as human subjects. Our cultural evolution, as a mobile process,

can be potencialised through the advent of translation as a means for not only the surfacing of cultural mutation, but also (and more importantly) for its influencing and even revolutionising in terms of human communities' organisations. Translating discourses from one language into another, in this sense, is seen here as inherently capable of becoming as decisive to our cultural evolution as any genetic and social triggers that have been accompanying human history since the appearance of the first *Homo sapiens*. Nevertheless, for my objective to be achieved as impartially as possible, it is of paramount importance to understand translation practices as liable to the manipulation of the same hegemonic pressure that impacts many other aspects encompassing our cultural evolution. This pressure still breathes in contemporaneity due to the "ethnocentric [...] movements that necessarily figure in every act of translation" (Venuti, 1991, 126). These movements are, according to Venuti, the very acts responsible for "raising questions about the role of translation patterns [...] in current geopolitical conflicts" (127). My purpose, therefore, shall be that of entering such geopolitical conflicts as to identify in which sense a "genealogical analysis of translation [...] questions its transparency and seek to construe translation as the locus of cultural difference, not homogeneity" (Venuti, 128).

The illusion of cultural homogeneity can then actually be easily discredited by the genealogical analysis proposed by Venuti (1991), not only because it is intrinsically mistaken, but also because "[s]ociocultural evolution has been considered thus far as an internal process of transformation that operates within the extra-cultural limitations already mentioned" (Ribeiro, 1971, 6). It is now obvious that, to the detriment of the cultural difference that defines our ultimate cultural locus, "cultures are not developed and maintained in isolation, but in continuous interrelation with one another" (Ribeiro, 7). That having been said my study tests two hypotheses; the first is that, if "cultural innovation is supplemented by diffusion, which adds new traits, and by social compulsions of external origin, which may alter the course of evolutionary development" (Ribeiro, 8), translation surfaces as a keystone in the

contemporary process of cultural evolution – given its all-embracing status in the globalised world. My second hypothesis, therefore, is that, if “[c]ultural transmission is easier, faster, and more efficient when a powerful, authoritarian chief forces the acceptance of an innovation” (Cavalli-Sforza, 182), our contemporary authoritarian chief forces have been shaping cultural evolution through translation by deciding what discourses deserve full attention and what are the ones that should be marginalised – generally for threatening what is supposed to be taken for granted. Bearing in mind that “[m]any societal changes are the result of the will of a powerful or a charismatic authority” (Cavalli-Sforza, 183) – and the author exemplifies this by suggesting that “popes have the ability to propose new dogma, which must be accepted by the faithful under penalty of excommunication from the Church” (183) – my hypothesis is that such authorities (disguised by their flamboyant façades) have been working in a rather much similar basis as Darwin’s notion of evolution through artificial selection¹ operates.

Antoine Berman had already noticed that “[t]ranslation ‘norms’ – literary, social, cultural, etc. – govern the translating act in every society” (1985, 295). These literary, social, and cultural norms – which apply to any practice whatsoever – have accompanied human cultural evolution since our ancestors left Africa; and, although contemporary ones might “no longer submit to neoclassical norms [...], the universals of ‘deformation’ are not any less in force” (Berman, 296). Berman’s well-known deforming tendencies’ categories can be herein brought in parallel with my usage of cultural mutation, even though any attempt at judging such process from a Manichean lens would nonetheless prove to be problematic. The survival and maintenance of such norms can be easily evinced; Susan Bassnett, in her article “History of Translation Studies” (2002, 52), suggests that “[w]ith the spread of Christianity, translation came to acquire [...the role...] of disseminating the word of God”. That is, in her view Christianity has given the translator “a mission that encompassed both aesthetic and evangelistic criteria” – which illustrates how translation came

to be used "as a weapon in both dogmatic and political conflicts" (53). The nature of these dogmatic and political conflicts that translation practices might generally be popped in – and the task it is given to take cultural evolution to one direction or to another – seems indeed to vary, but I agree with Berman when he asserts that, throughout history, they have never become less in force. If Bassnett successfully show how translation becomes a weapon in the hands of religiously motivated cultural representatives, Venuti avers that translation practices can actually also "be enlisted in the service of political agendas that hinder or promote cultural and social change [...]. At the same time, translations are also motivated by a significant commercial interest which [...] aims at profiting from such exchange" (1998, 65). The existence of these political agendas and commercial interests that haunt the realm of translation can now be considered second-nature; how detrimental and damaging they are to cultural evolution has nonetheless been underestimated hitherto, but not hereinafter.

Discussion: "An Ideology of Autonomy in a Geocultural Politics"

I reckon my attempt at connecting the evolution of human biology with the evolution of its culture (a necessary premise for the advent of translation as cultural transmission in the process) might still be taken as a little bit implausible, but it has actually never been. Nevertheless, emphasising the ambivalent discussion on genetic and social programming is not part of my agenda; as a matter of fact, "[i]n the very long run, cultures actually create the environments to which its members must adapt genetically; this leads to the co-evolution of genes with culture" (Newson, 2007, 457). Within this dialogue between genes and culture, and like the unconscious selection of genetic artifacts for the evolution of human species, our active "decisions about which elements to adopt of the culture we encounter and the effects of those

decisions upon our lives are the most important motors of cultural diversification” Newson, 458). Heterogeneity seems to be thus the ultimate result of cultural evolution, since that which has once been seen as isolated and particular is given the chance to interact with another also supposedly isolated and particular sphere. As a result, this interaction ends up ultimately strengthening both sides, which allow themselves to learn and teach those unique cultural issues that were initially limited to a specific space and time but which could finally be spread to other peoples. “Just as genetic evolution is the accumulation of small changes in genes [...], cultural evolution is a process that allows cultural variants to be acquired” (Newson, 459). As we have seen, and insomuch as language emerges as the most effective channel for such variants to be acquired, translation is perhaps one of the best evidences of the huge influence such interactions may have for human cultural evolution as a whole. This is so for translated discourses generally bring epistemes from distinct times and spaces to insert and proliferate them within a completely new system, entering and transforming the locations that harbours such discourses. If our contemporary culture has been evolving by following specific directions, this has not only occurred due to the natural selection of cultural aspects (purportedly beneficial for the evolution of the species), but also through an artificial selection of questionable texts. The advent of selected foreign discourses deliberately chosen through the act and, more importantly, through the politics of translation has been a vital aspect for the development of our literary market, systems, and expectations.

What I target by disclosing those artifacts, which guide the “artificial” selection of texts, is to put this distinction between what takes place randomly during human evolution and what is effected to interfere in such evolution in the spotlight. Whereas cultural mutations may result from random events, and thus be very similar to genetic mutations, “cultural changes are often intentional or directed toward a very specific goal, while biological mutations are blind to their potential benefit” (Cavalli-Sforza, 176). The difference would be that, “[a]t the level of mutation, cultural

evolution can be directed while genetic change cannot" (Cavalli-Sforza, 177). As I see, it is at this conduction of cultural evolution that one should look with greater care when it goes to interactions – which are everything but democratic – of different cultures through translation. It now seems clear that translating means defying linguistic barriers, a process that stands for a common practice for "the spread of cultural variants [...] especially in the current 'global village'" (Newson, 563) wherein we live. Newson exemplifies his argument by bringing some of these cultural variants (whose benefits are thoroughly questionable) that have been effectively spread to perhaps every corner of the globe; in his view, "a great majority of the world's people know that Coca Cola is a soft drink and that a Big Mac is a certain American-style meat sandwich" (Newson, 564). Nevertheless, that currently almost every person knows what a Coca Cola or Big Mac might be does not mean these are cultural aspects of paramount importance for our survival (actually, biologically and ideologically speaking, they can perhaps be even considered detrimental for our survival). If the logic of cultural diversity between communities must exist for a fruitful interchange of tools, techniques, and economic practices, in the globalised world the reason why less successful cultural variants (which never became as well-known as Coca Cola or Big Mac) are being forgotten or modified is far from being related to their evolutionary relevance. To put it bluntly: discourses are being translated not because they bring benefits, but because they make money.

"Language is not a monolithic whole, and from a biological perspective may be better seen as a 'bag of tricks' pieced together via a process of evolutionary tinkering" (Fitch, 2010, 5). Hence one's facility to acknowledge the advent of translated discourses, as they are pierced within the bag of tricks, as serving a major political, religious, and/or financial purpose (being the latter the most recurrent motivation for cultural transmission in contemporary times). This is a crucial factor for us to understand how human cultural evolution has become not only manipulated, but actually controlled by the needs of a very small echelon of society. The once

natural process of cultural transmission has ultimately been turned into one of the several institutions for social control (something that brings profit or power – in many occasions both). As a matter of fact, “[t]he creation of formal and informal institutions for social control, which leads inevitably to repression [...], significantly affects social development because they subordinate all activities to the objectives of the groups in power” (Ribeiro, 50). In the globalised world these groups in power might be understood as every cultural representative who sees the chance of profiteering out from certain cultural transmissions – when one thinks of the mentioned Coca Cola and Big Mac it is the strength of US financial/political interests that made them globally spread. Nevertheless, and since this may be considered a little bit too subjective for my reader to identify what I am talking about, Maggio demonstrates how powerful these contemporary formal and informal institutions have become. “[C]ultural objects and events – such as commercials, soap powders, cookery, and so forth – create subordinate connotations, which exist next to their standard meanings” (2007, 433). The emerging agenda is rather straightforward; the idea is that these “subordinate meanings subsequently help reinforce the values of the dominant capitalist-bourgeois system” (Maggio, 434). It is thus time to name and shame the dominant capitalist-bourgeois system criticised by Maggio; the very system that, for a long time now, has been deciding how our cultural evolution is doomed to occur. The problem, that is, is not to evolve artificially (in the end we have been doing that for quite a long time), but to regard the artificial as natural; learning that no directions precede our steps might give us a chance to walk differently.

Notwithstanding the fact that the role of translation might not seem yet as clear as I would like it to be for this picture to change and/or to be reinforced (being the latter what tends to take place), Venuti (1991) has done a thorough investigation regarding such issue. “Every step in the translation process – from the selection of foreign texts to the development and implementation of translation strategies to the editing and reviewing of translations – is mediated

by [...] cultural values" (145). This, which seems to be obvious, is actually a very intricate process since such cultural values generally "circulate in some hierarchical order" (146). Hence the advent of the unquestionably active agency of translating representatives that are compelled to enter the discussion, inasmuch as "[t]he translator may submit to or resist dominant values in the target language, with either course of action susceptible to ongoing redirection" (Venuti, 147). Therefore, when the translator (like anyone else dealing with similar enterprises) decides to ignore his/her responsibility for the maintenance or revolution of a cultural evolutionary aspect this is already per se a symbol of a political choice – that of alienation: the greatest plague and sin of global villagers. One needs thus first to identify the choices: "[s]ubmission assumes an ideology of assimilation at work in the translation process [...], pursuing a cultural narcissism that is imperialistic abroad and conservative, even reactionary"; resistance, on the other hand, "assumes an ideology of autonomy, foregrounding linguistic and cultural differences and pursuing cultural diversity so as to transform the hierarchy of cultural values" (Venuti, 148). Choosing neutrality is acting in coherence with the hegemonic functioning – it is as simple as that. Clearly Venuti (1991) seems here to be criticising the former positioning and advocating for the latter; his ultimate claim is that translation can only "be made to serve an ideology of autonomy in a geocultural politics by seeking to redress the grossly unequal cultural exchanges between the hegemonic nations and their cultural others, and by resisting [...] transparent discourses" (1991, 149).

Translation, by definition, makes any possible idea of transparent discourses a rather utopian one. In fact, "[t]ranslation stimulated the fashioning and refashioning of the great western languages only because it laboured on the letter and profoundly modified the translating language" (Berman, 1985, 296). To look thus for transparency and/or for purity in contemporary cultural transmissions through translation would thus be useless given the hybrid status of essentially every known language. This

brings us back to the impossibility of deeming language a simple – straightforward – communication channel, perhaps especially in this case since, “as simple restitution of meaning, translation could never have played its formative role” (Berman, 297). This formative role of translation during cultural transmission and, consequently, evolution – which has maybe never been as strong as it is today – makes it critical for the translating practice to be reflected upon. Such reflection seems appropriate given “the essential aim of the analytic of translation to highlight this other essence of translating, which, although never recognized, endowed it with historical effectiveness in every domain where it was practiced” (Berman, 298). It is important to have in mind that this other essence of translation had never been recognised beforehand because the notion that cultural milieu, economic conditions, or literary institutions might have an effect upon the evolution of a literary system was inconceivable for a large period of history. Inconceivable at the beginning, but apparently rather palpable some years later, we now live a moment when more complex and subjective “factors such as patronage, social conditions, economics, and institutional manipulation are being correlated to the way translations are chosen and function in a literary system” (Gentzler, 2001, 121). In this sense, translation issues, like many linguistic ones, have proven to be much more obscure than they were regarded by those who first analysed them.

At this moment I get to an interesting parallel that can be elaborated between cultural evolution and translation concerning the concepts of vertical and horizontal transmission of cultural artefacts. In order to understand how we acquire our culture from those around us and pass it on, in turn, to others, an important distinction between modes of cultural transmission must be conceived. According to Cavalli-Sforza there are “two principal routes of transmission: vertical transmission describes the passage of information from parent to child, while horizontal transmission includes all other pathways between unrelated individuals” (Cavalli-Sforza, 179). So it is wise to infer that the first and basic

sort of both biological and cultural evolution obviously has taken place majorly through vertical transmission, whose logic resembles that of humans' genetic inheritance. Horizontal transmission, on the other hand, requires a more complex structure of interaction between subjects – one capable of informing not only those belonging to a close generation (i.e., through an effective and present channel for dialogue), but actually those who belong to other spatial configurations. As a matter of fact one could say vertical transmission is a temporal exchange of ideas (from oldest to youngest) while horizontal transmission is a spatial one (between people who are unacquainted and/or not akin to one another).

Curiously, Bassnett makes use of the same categories to distinguish between two sorts of translation practices posing that the distinction “between horizontal and vertical translation is helpful in that it shows how translation could be linked to two coexistent but different [...] systems” (2002, 58). Even though, the only attributes she mentions concerning horizontal and vertical translation pertain to the fact that “the vertical approach splits into two distinct types, the interlinear gloss, or word-for-word technique [...], elaborated by Quintilian's concept of paraphrase” whereas the horizontal approach is understood to involve more “complex questions of imitation and borrowing” (Bassnett, 59). One could, however, perhaps take advantage of Cavalli-Sforza's definitions as to expand Bassnett's view on the matter. What I mean is that, while the vertical transmission of culture can also be associated to a vertical role given to translation (that is, when the translated discourse is directed to a distinct temporal construct – such as Shakespearean plays' being translated from old to modern English), the horizontal transmission of culture can be associated to those texts which are originally written at a given time and translated to another space in the very same time (now travelling not through time but through space – just like every literary book presently written in one language and subsequently translated into another one as for it to get to readers from varying nationalities). Horizontal translation would be, in these terms, understood as

any spatial translation (when discourses travel from one place to another); whereas vertical translation would stand for any temporal translation – when discourses are taken from one time into another.

Of course it would not be wise to try and determine what are those cultural aspects that travel through time and what are the ones that travel through space – such sort of peremptory division would end up proving to be inaccurate since in many cases both things happen interchangeably. It is interesting nonetheless to ponder upon such parallel when discussing the varying agendas of translation enterprises. The channels whereby translation practices go to and from are ultimately linked to the complexity of Sforza's cultural transmitters that, today, have turned us into the global villagers we are. Within our global village, just like several members (and sometimes all) often exert psychological pressure on new members, this logic keeps being the same when it goes to the marginal and/or central discourses that are translated from one time and space into another. The common subject, as a result, inevitably finds him/herself as becoming “the object of strong pressure from many sides, in what is often a more persuasive procedure than when a single transmitter is influenced” (Cavalli-Sforza, 183). These persuasive procedures operating within the global village – the most conservative mechanisms of all – are usually acting in unison and tending to “suppress [...] variation and to homogenise a social group” (Cavalli-Sforza, 184). Moreover, this will to homogenise social groups touches several realms of the global village, especially given the unavoidable colonised and/or coloniser statuses of its members. This is so for the idea of mitigating heterogeneity emerges especially during colonial and neocolonial enterprises – as a matter of fact it seems now clear that “the military or commercial conquest of culturally different populations, often leads to considerable reductions in diversity” (Newson, 463). Traditionally, nonetheless, this military and commercial conquest was allowed to control and make up subjects' minds about what direction their biological, social, political, financial, and cultural evolution should follow – but such an illusion could never be put

into practice for, in the long term, no sort of evolution can ever be tamed and/or calculated. This foxy endeavor – no matter how preposterously fanciful – is nonetheless historically (and perhaps even biologically) justifiable. In the end “[j]ust as those who share a niche in the natural environment share a desire to defend the physical resources present within their territory, those who exploit the same cultural niche share a desire to do likewise” (Newson, 467). When a mutant gene or cultural artifact appears, it is generally not instantly welcomed – notwithstanding the advantages it might be carrying – due to this defensive mechanism of every biological and cultural construct (the basis of xenophobia).

In the case of translation, it is clear that the atmosphere surrounding the needs and ambitions of a specific cultural niche is permeated by a dominant set of discourses; these would be discourses “that can be overtly manifest, but more frequently function covertly, as is perhaps true in many Western countries” (Gentzler, 136). Within a given cultural territory, translation has never been able to dodge such logic since “[w]hile various subsystems – the literary included – wrestle over often competing interests, they are all subject to, either consciously or subconsciously, a prevailing ideology characteristic of the society at a given point in history” (Gentzler, 137). Every cultural transmission is subjected to suffer from the objective and subjective interferences of this prevailing ideology which is responsible for controlling, manipulating, and crediting this or that sort of information; in the case of translation, as suggested, this could never be perhaps more crystal-clear. Currently the polysystem of translated literature as a whole is managed by a very specific agenda: that of economic interests; “publishers shape cultural developments at home and abroad; seeking the maximum returns for their investments [...]; their publishing decisions target specific markets for the sale of translations” (Venuti, 1998, 47). It does not matter therefore what cultural issues are most relevant to our survival or the fact that the notion of translation is that of maybe allowing us to have a better grasp on those who belong to other cultures. The publishing market is not worried about any of

that – such market does not take constructive decisions; it takes money-making ones.

A literary piece can be immensely rich in literary terms and have a great potential for making its readers better human beings – thus clearly providing a great advantage to our cultural evolution – but “publishers who purchase translation rights are more likely to focus on foreign works that are easily assimilable to domestic cultural values, to prevailing trends and tastes, targeting specific markets so as to avoid the potential loss involved in creating new ones” (Venuti, 48). In this sense if a culture has a flaw, prejudice, or defect, the economy of book-selling does not depend on improving such culture but on reinforcing anything it might already have taken as natural – notwithstanding its possible and probable ideological, social, and political drawbacks for human cultural evolution in the long-term picture. So, in a world where alienation reigns, the translation of those texts which keep alienating readers is understood as much more commercially desirable than the translation of those which might attempt to fight alienation; in financial terms the former means profit while the latter means loss – even though, in cultural terms, the logic is inverse (just like it always is). Here is where the ultimate paradox resides: regardless of how helpful it might be to put hegemonic discourses into question, it does not make any sense to allow something like that to happen, in profiteering terms. Discourses, in this sense, do not need to be right, fair or reasonable whatsoever – the more normative and conventional they are the better.

Final Remarks: Translation as “An Exemplary Case of Metamorphosis”

Notwithstanding the rejection and misunderstanding of some segments of society in what concerns any sort of evolution by natural selection (which, since Darwin published his work, have been accompanying Western civilisation), “issues of debate

in contemporary biology concern not the existence of natural selection nor its central importance to evolutionary theory, which are indubitable" (Fitch, 2010, 39). In fact, the most fruitful debates currently in process are the ones which "focus on what additional elements are required to apply this simple, powerful, and in retrospect obvious, concept to specific or ampler biological problems" (Fitch, 40). I have not addressed the issue of natural/artificial selection heretofore as if it were a possibility or untested theory – not simply because my conviction regarding such issue is a strong one, but due to how obvious and unquestionable Darwin's idea has proved to be. My article elaborates not on a possibility, but on a fact: evolution. When it goes thus to cultural transmission through evolutionary selection, one is already aware that "most aspects of culture communicate in a nonexplicit and nonrational way" (Maggio, 2007, 438); hence the importance of bearing the seriousness of cultural influences not only through language, but through any translated discourses in mind. If one pays attention to how marginalised cultural manifestations have overtly been disregarded – during what are erroneously taken as democratic and unbiased dialogues – it would not be an overstatement in this sense to aver that today "[i]t is the Western intellectual's duty to translate the culture and languages of the subaltern" (Maggio, 439). The reason why this can no longer be seen as a choice or an alternative (among others) is because it would only be when this sort of translation takes place that the centre might "have a somewhat open dialogue with the subaltern about values, ontology, oppression, and political theory" (Maggio, 440). Unfortunately, up to this moment the only values, ontology, and political theory that have been effectively divulged are still the ones promoted by those who position themselves in the spot wherefrom most oppressive systems surface.

If cultural transmission has been happening through an artificial and tendentious path, no other response can have a better effect than to change such biased directions – to make use of the ever-changing aspect of cultural evolution as for it to evolve in a less

detrimental fashion. It would be over-romantic to wish for the “natural” evolution of culture; this sort of evolution has never occurred naturally: it has always been lead by the social hierarchic structure in a given space and time. Regrettably, and as we are now aware, throughout history “the human species, originally small in size and divided into innumerable ethnic groups, has been multiplied demographically and reduced in cultural and linguistic diversity” (Ribeiro, 1971, 147). The number of people and of occupied regions has increased; but the heterogeneity of culture has been thrown in the melting pot wherefrom one single story was invented: one that must be listened to, believed in, and reinforced everywhere. Since “[o]ver the millennia this trend culminated in the creation of a single (or very few) racial, cultural, and linguistic entity” (Ribeiro, 148), the global village is today a village wherein only a very specific kind of villager is welcome. However, the picture not only can be transformed, it actually must be transformed; genetic inheritance, as cultural inheritance, is not as decisive and all-embracing as it is generally taken; evolution is a process of endless modulation whose basic characteristic is that nothing keeps being exactly how it had initially been. In fact, “Darwin recognized that variants continue in a population as long as they continue to be inherited” (Newson, 2007, 458). In this sense, such variants can, as a matter of fact, be maintained from one generation to another – or they can also travel as limpidly as possible through time and/or space – as well as they can be changed or even eliminated by the very same process. Furthermore, a number of forces can actually affect the probability of these variants’ recurrence in the next generations. Such argument has normally been directed for any notion of genetic evolution, but it can also be thought in the realm of the evolution of culture because “[e]xactly the same can be said about the information, technology, beliefs, ideas, preferences, habits, expertise, and all the other potentially variable elements that make up culture” (Newson, 459).

This article, in the end, is another one among the several attempts to advocate for heterogeneity to the detriment of narrow

approaches towards any sort of evolution – and perhaps especially towards the cultural one. As a matter of fact, any idea of unity as based on the evolutionary theory of one single ancestor existing in the past of every current living species is nothing but a misunderstanding and misinterpretation of evolution (a thorough misuse of Darwin by political agendas that have nothing to do with his theory and/or motivations whatsoever). It is not questionable that “a vast array of anatomical similarities between diverse species suddenly became intelligible as resulting from common ancestry” (Fitch, 35); nevertheless, this does not leave room for any sort of homogeneous understanding of biological and cultural transmission in the evolution of human species. This is so inasmuch as, in addition to explaining unity as due to common ancestry, the idea of evolution also makes sense of diversity: “differences between species that reflect their differing ways of life” (Fitch, 36). It is this notion of the incomparable differences between species given their varying manner to survive and evolve (instead of the mistaken superiority complex of hegemonic culture) both in the biological and cultural scopes that invite what Venuti (1991) names a more genealogical comprehension of translations’ impact on the globe. Genealogy is an argument of evolution; an approach which respects the fact that, even though we once probably spoke the same language and shared rather similar cultural traits, the heterogeneous and nonlinear paths of evolution through cultural transmission can never be tamed or divided in chronological and sensible boxes (e.g. from the worse to the best, from the simple to complex, or from the inferior to the superior). This is so for cultural genealogy emerges as a kind of historical representation “that depicts, not a continuous progression from a unified origin – an inevitable development in which the past fixes the meaning of the present – but a discontinuous succession of division and hierarchy, domination, and exclusion” (Venuti, 124). It seems that any dispassionate and unprejudiced conceptualisation of both genetic and cultural evolution – which no longer can be seen as separate realms but as eternally dialoguing spheres – is liable to call for a research tool capable of surpassing mistaken assumptions on the

logic of evolution – e.g. Hitler’s repulsive appropriation of Darwin’s concept of the survival of the fittest. One needs first to “destabilize the seeming unity of the present by constituting a past with plural, heterogeneous meanings” (Venuti, 125) as to acknowledge the hybrid and ever-changing functioning of evolution.

However, for the seeming unity of the present to be effectively destabilised by this constitution of a past with plural meanings translation can no longer be brought to the discussion as a trouble-free aspect of communication within the global village. For this hybrid and heterogeneous move towards the temporal and spatial divisions between humans’ evolutionary past, present, and future in evolutionary terms to gain shape, “an understanding of translation in and of itself is crucial; translation ceases to be an elite intellectual ‘game’, a footnote to literary scholarship, and becomes fundamental to the lives and livelihood of everyone in an entire region – and maybe the world” (Gentzler, 105). No longer configured as an elite intellectual game nor a simple footnote to literary scholarship when it goes to literature and, more specifically, to translated literature, “intraliterary relations within the structure of a given cultural system and actual literary and linguistic evolution are thus made visible by means of the study of translated texts” (Gentzler, 106). In this sense this inherent potential of translation to make the evolution of languages, literatures, and of actually every cultural system something traceable and more easily apprehended is due to a rather central fact: “[t]ranslation is an exemplary case of metamorphosis. It exhibits that process of an organic unfolding towards the harmonic integrity of the sphere or closed circle [...] of nature” (Steiner, 1975, 259). Within this that Steiner calls the harmonic integrity of nature – the ultimate result of the necessary balance that human evolution inevitably seems to entail – it would be wise to suggest (as he does) that translation appears as a symbolic illustration of the metamorphous facets of genetic and cultural transmission because it makes it impossible for evolution to be deemed in a normative, chronological, and/or hierarchical fashion. The parallel is feasible in this sense since “[i]n translation

as in the genetics of evolution there is a paradox of fusion and new form without the abolition of component parts [...]. The life of the original is inseparable from the risks of translation; entity dies if it is not subject to transformation" (Steiner, 260). When it goes to both translation and evolution there is the original and the necessity for this original to be transformed for it to keep evolving. The "common ancestor" of translated literature, in this sense, would be a synonym of the source text – whereas the target texts would consist in the fittest and more adapted mutations that inevitably follow the first breath of such ancestor. In both instances entity does not survive if not subject to metamorphosis; survival requires change: there must be this fusion between the old and new, between the source and the target; one could assume, therefore, that if evolution is compulsory – as it unquestionably is – so is translation.

Even though the specialists brought herein for my discussion on the evolution of culture and of language (e.g. Cavalli-Sforza, Fitch, and Newson) do not effectively mention processes of translation as relevant for their main theses, most of their arguments supporting cultural transmission through hybridity and heterogeneity leave room for readers' inferences concerning such elaboration. In fact, one of the central tenets of the concept of cultural transmission is that "[i]f cultural diversity is defined as the number of cultural variants available to members of a population, changes in diversity can be analyzed by looking at the balance between the forces that generate new cultural variants and those that select between them" (Newson, 463). Translation, whose balance between the forces that generate new cultural variants and those that select between them, can effortlessly be placed within this category defined by Newson. Moreover, not only translation as process but actually every other power relations that pervade its restructuring of an original textualisation have proved to fit in the evolutionary features within the nature of cultural transmission. In the end, "[i]f cultural diversity is defined as the extent of cultural difference between groups or regions, it can be analyzed by looking at the balance between forces that disperse variants and those which

create barriers to their dispersal” (Newson, 464). Currently, the biased usage of translation as responding to the needs of the publishing market and directed to promoting profit – as if this were its only foreseeable objective – has thoroughly (and unfortunately) overlooked its political, social, and evolutionary attributes. The hegemonic “victorious” tradition (whereto we have deplorably evolved) is one wherein “translators continue to be squeezed by unfavorable, if not simply exploitative, contracts” (Venuti, 1998, 65); contracts which contribute to the overall picture of translating enterprises whereby “publishers around the world continue to support the unequal patterns of cross-cultural exchange that have accompanied economic and political developments” (Venuti, 66). Acknowledging the importance of a stronger reflection upon evolution through cultural transmission – as directly influenced by translation choices and practices – has proved thus to be not only feasible, but actually indispensable for the global market to stop controlling and manipulating the exchange between heterogeneous cultures (cultures which can only be listened to through a less inequitable approach towards translation practices). Inasmuch as “[i]t is the sheer global reach of translation, its strategic and irreplaceable value in negotiating cultural differences, which lends urgency to the need for a clarification and improvement of its status” (Venuti, 1998, 66), I can only hope this article to become one more piece for the panorama of cultural transmission through translation in the process of cultural evolution to be ultimately devised. No matter to what direction, and no matter in which terms: as long as we keep translating, our cultures shall keep evolving.

Note

1. Charles Darwin's concept of artificial selection (*On the Origin of Species*, 1859) stands for the opposite of natural selection. That is, through this process evolution is said to occur not through a natural selection of the fittest biological and/or cultural aspects in a given temporal and spatial configuration, but through the arbitrary choice of that which is most desirable to some echelons of a given society – regardless of how profitable or detrimental such aspects might be for the rest of society as a whole. As an example of natural selection one could think of some desert snakes which – due to the idiosyncratic functioning of their skin and to the awkward manner they move around (so that their bellies do not get burnt) – are able to thrive in a very inhospitable environment due to their attributes of survival. This would be an evidence of natural selection since the characteristics that make such animal fit to the region wherein it finds itself consist, more than anything else, in the decisive factor for its success. As an illustration of artificial selection, on the other hand, one could think of domestic dogs and cats, whose existence in contemporaneity is due not to a purported capacity to adapt in every corner of the globe (as a matter of fact these are biologically rather limited species which, in a natural environment, would probably face a greater risk of extinction or be at least limited to a much smaller part of the planet if compared to many other animals), but to humans' interest in having them as companions. This would be an evidence of artificial selection inasmuch as the active and direct influence/manipulation of humans has been a critical detail for these animals' survival – and without which they would probably no longer be here (and the same goes for our cattle, sheep, swine, chickens, turkey, horses, goats, etc.).

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