
Pym, Anthony. *Negotiating the Frontier: Translators and Intercultures in Hispanic History*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 2000, 265 pp.

Negotiating the Frontier: Translators and Intercultures in Hispanic History is written by Anthony Pym who was born in Perth, Australia in 1956, and who received his doctorate in sociology from the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris. The book is composed of two sections: before August 3, 1492 and after. It is a well-organized chronological overview of the role of translators in Hispanic history, addressed in twelve chapters. This is a key date in the history of translators in Hispania because it was during the reign of Queen Isabel that Castilian started to stand out as a world language. It was on this day that Christopher Columbus set out on his intercultural endeavour to explore the New World. Furthermore, on the previous day, more than 4,000 Jews were expelled from Hispania, and they were to be the first of other influential cultural groups to undergo such treatment. Overall, Pym explores intercultural

relations and the role of translators as intermediaries in a world where geographic and economic borders are constantly in flux. As the title of the book suggests, frontiers are both physical and symbolic. The frontiers are physical in that there are real boundaries that divide intercultures, but they are also symbolic since there are, according to the author, "conflicting ways people seek to belong together." Pym refers here to the specifics that "must be known or done in order to belong to a social group...its terms need not be territorial."

In his introduction, Pym claims that cultures do not relate to each other directly. Instead, he affirms, they employ intermediaries that work out of a neutral space between cultures, which Pym calls *intercultural space*. This space has limitations because interculturality requires "the transfer of cultural products across borders" as well as a dependence on a "more primary cultural division." Another important concept he introduces is that of "mediators as negotiators." Intermediaries help negotiate understandings of what translation is, should be and how it should come about across intercultural frontiers.

In the first section of his book, Pym offers that translation is a nec-

essary human activity, but that it is not simply a transposition of a text from one language to another. He suggests that the study of translation often leaves out other aspects of the translation process, such as a hidden agenda. One hidden agenda of translation that Pym addresses is the power and manipulation that comes with the ability to translate texts within a national intercultural context, such as Spain over the centuries. He distinguishes the translator as a negotiator of the boundaries or “frontiers” of a translation. In other words, he or she exercises power upon making decisions as per the “rules” and guidelines that will be used in his or her translation. This is similar to the ideas that Tejaswini Niranjana addresses in her work entitled *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism and the Colonial Context*: “History and translation function...creating coherent and transparent texts through the repression of difference, and participating thereby in the process of colonial domination.” (43) Pym sees an example of this colonizing behaviour in Petrus Venerabilis, the Abbot of Cluny in 1145, for it was the venerable abbot who ordered a Latin translation of the Qu’ran under the pretext that he wanted to communicate to ‘the Arabs.’ How-

ever, with further examination, Pym reveals that Venerabilis wanted, in fact, to build an arsenal of literature on the subject of Islam to better protect Christianity from the “heresy” of Islam.

The power of manipulation in translation is also visible in Pym’s chapter on Rabbi Mose Arrangel who was requested to carry out a translation of the Old Testament into Castilian. The notion of hybridism is certainly present here because the *Biblia de Alba* manages to communicate both Christian and Jewish religious ideology. The work contains over 6,000 glosses that help readers from either cultural group to understand terminology. Rabbi Mose did not smooth over any specific cultural differences. In this case, the Rabbi chose glosses thus making visible the creative decisions and steps he took in his translation. Pym highlights the exceptional nature of the Rabbi’s ‘intercultural’ work considering that, upon the empowerment of Fernando and Isabel in 1492, over 4,000 Jews were expelled and massacred.

In the second section of the book, Pym talks about Queen Isabel, the Catholic Monarch who used her power to introduce Castilian as the official target language of translations, taking her lead

from Alfonso X, more than two hundred years prior. Alfonso's translation policy was geared toward the construction of a nation – toward gaining Castilian unity. Pym says about Alfonso's approach to translation: "Alfonso's insistence on Castilian as a written target language was part of a nation-building policy, regulating the frontier with Islamic knowledge at the same time as it attempted to unify Castilian diversity."

According to Pym, Isabel the Queen Monarch and Antonio Nebrija, a grammarian, worked together to make a standard language that would withstand change "without interference and without dependence on internal varieties or other languages...this was an imperial programme for future nontranslation." This pertains to Pym's statement about the importance of intercultural exchange because Isabel's policy (expulsion / inquisition) threw out all possible interactions with significant intercultural groups, and was detrimental to the society of Hispania. Pym says that when the "empire might ideally have needed more translators and greater competence in foreign languages, it proceeded to expel precisely the intercultural or outward looking social groups that

tended to produce the required intermediaries."

One of the biggest assets of this book is that Pym's work also addresses more modern times. In the chapter about authorship in translation anthologies, he cites anthologies such as *La poesía francesa moderna* (1913) and *Las cien mejores poesías (líricas) de la lengua inglesa* (1918.) He suggests that translation is a strategy of liberation, specifically by disseminating French poetry in Spanish.

The Olympic games held in 1992 in Barcelona also serve to illustrate the intercultural importance of translation. Pym believes that this event facilitates the communication between athletes of all nations, but, paradoxically, ensures the existence of such symbolic national divisions. In Spain's specific case, there was a dilemma on a linguistic level because of the presence of Catalunya in Barcelona, and the city's bilingual nature. This posed problems for national identity because although the "host country" was Spain, the host language could not uniquely be Castilian. This example demonstrates our society's unfortunate tendency to associate one language with one country and one culture. In this sense, there is a tendency to

forget the presence and importance of interculturality.

In the final chapter entitled "Training for globalizing markets," Pym talks about how globalization is creating distance between intercultures and the negative effect this has on the labour market for translators. Pym highlights the importance of transport and communication technology, which implies facilitated communication and the disappearance of any original or target text because of a constant state of revision. Also, Pym says that if globalization continues as a phenomenon, "frontier dynamics would potentially operate within every production process, [and] all agents would constantly be crossing cultural borders." For the translation market, this means segmentation. That is to say that Spanish four-year undergraduate students will fall into the "notoriously underpaid segment" because of a minimal com-

petency in the language and generalized programmes. Meanwhile, the globalized and specialized end of the market remains in shortage of good translators adequately prepared to perform "...fairly advanced marketing and computer skills through the handling of ethical dilemmas." However, Pym does seem optimistic about the development of translation schools because they may, he says, "promote critical thought on the nature of globalization itself."

Pym states that he did not write this book solely to address Hispanic culture and identity. In fact, he says his goal is to remove the notion of "territory" from that of translation and language. Pym believes that it is surely the intermediaries who live on "contemporary borders" and who hold enormous power in today's information-based society that contributes to the creation of identities.

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