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Translating to Convert, Translating to Describe and Create: The Many Roles of translation in Mexico's Multilingual Landscape

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Abstract
Mexico's rich linguistic diversity, which includes sixty-eight indigenous languages in addition to Spanish, remains dramatically absent in the national literary and publishing fields, as most materials are only published in Spanish. The efforts to preserve and promote this diversity include the founding of public cultural and educational institutions and a few translation projects from and into these languages. Although most of these initiatives have been historically state driven, other players have also organized and implemented a myriad of projects involving the translation of political, educational, religious and literary materials. Drawing on a sociohistorical approach, this paper offers an overview of said translation initiatives to offer insight into the different roles played by translation and how it has been a key practice for the positioning of Mexican indigenous languages and literatures. Likewise, to highlight the tension derived from the competition at stake between the agents trying to position their languages in the national literary canon, I refer to the written and literary production in P'urhépecha which, unlike other more prestigious languages such as Nahuatl and Maya, has not benefited from a sustained effort of study, preservation, or diffusion.

Introduction

Translation has long been one of "the main consecrating practices" (Casanova 291) in the international literary field. However, some languages are less translated than others (Branchadell 8). As a result, the international publishing field is dominated by only a few languages (Heilbron 444-494) and literary traditions. Multilingual states also tend to exhibit a similar structure (García González 105-123). That is, a language, generally designated as official or national language will dominate translation[1] and publishing flows. This is the case of Mexico, a country where the official multilingualism has not permeated the different fields composing its social space, and Spanish is the language that dominates textual production and translation flows. Some of the reasons behind this are, for example, the lack of a comprehensive, long-term national project to address the country's multicultural and multilingual reality, the tardiness with which public policies have considered this reality, and the little social value placed on indigenous populations, their cultures, and languages. Nonetheless, intercultural contact and communication have required the implementation of linguistic policies to enhance the interaction and exchanges between the different communities. Over time, these policies have varied according to the "linguistic ideologies" (Snow 121) of the political, cultural and religious elites; for it was not until very recently that the indigenous communities, who were directly affected by these policies, began to voice their needs and demands. Translation has played key, yet varying, roles in these policies, as the languages, the type of texts and production and recipient agents have also changed in accordance with the

[1] This dominance applies to both intranslation, the importation of foreign texts via translation, and extranslation, the exportation of translated texts (Ganne and Minon 55-96).

objectives of said policies; confirming translation, as the practice that supports and enables the prosecution of political and religious projects and ideals, and, lately, the emergence and development of literature in the Mexican indigenous languages (Lepe Lira). Other factors (Sapiro 82), such as the small number of writers, editors and readers, as well as the fact that most of these languages have only recently adopted a textual system, necessary to access the national and international literary scene (Lefevere 76-89), have hindered the production and circulation of literary texts produced in these languages.[2]

Mexico's rich linguistic diversity, which in addition to Spanish includes sixty-eight indigenous languages, remains dramatically absent in the national publishing field (divided into two major sectors – the private and the public), as most books and reading materials are published only in Spanish. To date, there are no reports that offer a comprehensive account of the production, circulation, and marketing figures of both sectors. However, to illustrate the proportion of production between them, I refer to a survey conducted by the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs (ProChile), which indicates that out of a total production of 300 million copies, the public sector produced or distributed approximately 217 million (72.3%). Together these sectors produce and distribute most books. However, the public sector, via the Ministry of Public Education and other public organizations such as the National Institute of Indigenous Languages, the National Autonomous University of Mexico, is practically the only one involved in the publication of books written or translated to the Mexican indigenous languages. Among the reasons that could explain the relatively late emergence of literature written in these languages, one might consider its anonymous character as literature "is considered as a collective creation and it is disseminated via non-institutionalized mechanisms, i.e., via oral tradition from generation after generation – every time a story is narrated a variant takes place at the same time, the stories have different versions according to the narrators or the geographic origin" (Scheffler 7-8).

Following the main roles played by translation in the configuration and positioning of Mexican indigenous languages, the article is divided into four sections. The first section offers a brief panorama of the role that translation held during the colonial period (1521-1821), emphasising its subordination to religious and political ends. In this scenario, indigenous languages are the target rather than the source language, and the translation of literature from or into these languages is practically non-existent.[3] The second section follows the trajectory of the projects that were implemented in Mexico to homogenize the population, both culturally and linguistically, and thus create a single Mestizo (mixed race) Nation. I argue that, in this period, translation was used to elicit data from the indigenous languages as they were considered as objects of anthropologic and linguistic concern. The third section follows the emergence of actors of the academic and cultural fields to illustrate the launch of the first literary projects translating and/or producing literature in these languages. By way of conclusion, the last section outlines recent addenda in Mexico's legal and educational

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[2] There are no records documenting Mexico's editorial production in Spanish or in the indigenous languages. Therefore, the data for this article has been collected from catalogues and indexes of Biblioteca Nacional de México, Biblioteca Daniel Cosío Villegas of El Colegio de México, Enciclopedia Mexicana de las Letras, *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl*, *Estudios de Cultura* Maya, *Índice Bibliográfico sobre tradición oral* (Scheffler), *Catálogo de obras escritas en lenguas indígenas o que tratan de ellas* (Ugarte), Biblioteca de la Universidad Michoacana, and Biblioteca Luis González of El Colegio de Michoacán. Unless otherwise stated, I have translated to English the Spanish and French references used in this article.

[3] During the first stages of the Christianization, the friars translated to indigenous languages biblical excerpts such as the Nativity and the Last Judgement, which were represented by the natives (Vázquez). This Missionary theatre, however, did not have literary or entertaining purposes (Vázquez). Linguistic and other scientific texts constitute the only instances where indigenous languages are the source language.

frameworks to emphasize the significance of translation for indigenous language writers and speakers.

In order to exemplify the changing roles of translation, in this article I offer examples of the texts whose source or target is P'urhépecha, the main indigenous Mexican language of the state of Michoacán whose number of speakers ranges between 150,000 and 120,000. P'urhépecha, along with other languages such as Nahuatl and Mayan, has records dating back to colonial times and, more recently, it has been used as a source and target language of both literary and non-literary texts. P'urhépecha has been the subject of studies of a linguistic or historical nature; however, little attention has been paid to translation. This article therefore sets out to explore a vein that has been little explored. With this purpose, in each section, I will refer to instances that illustrate the relationship between P'urhépecha and translation in order to highlight the importance of this practice for the gradual positioning of P'urhépecha as a literary language.

Translating to convert

Diversity has been a defining feature of Mexico's linguistic landscape. Before the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors and missionary groups, scholars estimate that there were 200 indigenous languages (Castro et al.). Centuries of ideologies privileging Spanish as the national and literary language have significantly diminished the number of these indigenous languages and its speakers. Nowadays, there are eleven linguistic families, sixty-eight indigenous languages, and 364 linguistic variants (INALI, *Catálogo* 10). The total number of speakers, of at least one of these languages, is approximatively 7,364,645 people, which represents 6.14% of the Mexican population (INEGI).[4] With a number of speakers ranging between twenty (Lancandon) and 161 (Papago) to 1,544,968 (Nahuatl) and 776,306 (Mayan) (INALI, *México* 21-25), these languages face varying degrees of risk of extinction. Although at the present time there are governmental actions directed to their preservation, languages such as Nahuatl and Mayan have received more attention historically. P'urhépecha is the main indigenous language of the Mexican state of Michoacán. From the early texts documenting P'urhépecha up to the present day, there has been an oscillation between designating the language and its speakers as P'urhépecha or Tarascan. In this paper I have opted to use P'urhépecha as is the currently accepted designation amongst the academic and indigenous communities (González 17). Currently, its number of speakers ranges from 120,000 (INEGI) to 150,000 (Lafaro), as such, it does not face an immediate risk of extinction. However, like most indigenous communities in Mexico, the P'urhépecha have experienced political neglect, social rejection and have struggled to preserve their culture and their language via literary expression, "as it is through literature, that the continuity of culture is guaranteed, both from one generation to the next" (Aguilar quoted in Hernández-Vargas).

During the colonial period, the linguistic diversity of the new territories was considered as an obstacle for conquest, exploitation, and evangelization (Castro et al.); as well as for the so-called civilization aim of said processes. The imposition of one language, Castilian, and one religion, Catholicism, were considered as key for the consolidation of the Spanish Crown in the new territories. Yet, the political and social particularities of the New Spain, and those derived from the difficulties and misunderstandings of daily coexistence between the Spaniards and the local indigenous population led to a wide range of linguistic policies. Such policies included "from the prohibition of the indigenous populations to speak their own language, to the prohibition of them to learn Spanish" (Cuarón 689). Before the arrival of the Spaniards, the Aztecs dominated most populations inhabiting the Mesoamerican region. Nahuatl was the

[4] At the onset of the nineteenth century, 26% of the Mexican population spoke an indigenous language.

lingua franca of the Aztec empire, composed of thirteen different linguistic families.[5] The political and cultural power of the imperial language was thus preserved and used by the Spanish conquistadors to deal with the linguistic diversity of New Spain, and "to facilitate [its] civil and religious administration" (Cuarón 692). However, as Castilian was thought to be the only language via which Evangelization was possible, the Spanish Crown went through great lengths to educate the new populations.[6]

The imposition of a single language was also aimed at securing political stability (Cuarón 691-692). This single language linguistic policy proved to be difficult to apply and, after a few years, most Indians remained attached to their languages and beliefs.[7] The friars then opted to learn the local languages to convert the Indians; by so doing, they also secured maintaining "their role as mediator[s] between the government and the Indians" (La Rosa 10) and the control on their education and spiritual conversion.[8] To this end, they produced religious materials, glossaries and other texts relating to the grammars of indigenous Mexican languages to enable the evangelization of the new colonies. These texts were published in monolingual, bilingual or trilingual editions, and Castilian was the only source language: *Doctrina Cristiana Breve y Compendiosa por Vía de Diálogo entre un Maestro y un Discípulo, sacada en Lengua Castellana y Mexicana* written by the Dominican friar Domingo de la Anunciación and published in 1565 by Pedro Ocharte, and *Doctrina Cristiana Traducida de la Lengua Castellana en Lengua Zapoteca* written by the priest Francisco Pacheco de Silva and published in 1687 were the main type of texts circulating in translation at the time. However, according to Castro et al., they may not "correspond to what we considered as a translation nowadays: an original text does not always exist, and many of the texts were actually versions or adaptations of other texts".

The first records of P'urhépecha date back to the sixteenth century (A. González 23-47). The first printed materials that document P'urhépecha date back to the sixteenth century when the Franciscan Friars produced the following texts about the vocabulary, ceremonies and political traditions: *Arte de la Lengua de Mechuacan* (Gilberti 1558), *Vocabulario en Lengua de Mechuacán* (Gilberti 1559), *Tesoro Spiritual en Lengua de Mechuacan*, *Diccionario Grande de la Lengua de Michoacán* (Unknown), *Relación de las Ceremonias y rictos y Población y Gobernación de los Indios de la Provincial de Mechuacan* (de Alcalá 1540), *Arte y Dictionario con otras Obras en Lengua Michuacana* (de Lagunas 1574). By 1570, there were more than eighty books describing the indigenous languages (Cuarón 693). The friars also translated doctrines, catechisms, and sermons.

The next significant changes occurred after the Mexican Independence from Spain in 1821, when the new political and cultural elites, mostly composed by Creoles, American born descendants of European born Spaniards (García-Martínez 56-111), and Mestizos, tried to impose Spanish as the official language (González and Maria 94) and to integrate the Indians

[5] With thirteen families, the linguistic landscape of the Aztec empire was significantly more complex than that of the Spanish peninsula, where most languages except Basque derive from the Indo-European family (Cuarón 690-691).

[6] Nonetheless, in the case of more established cultures, the arrival of the Spaniards had an imprint on their literary traditions and legacies. Most of the printed materials were burned as they were considered "as bearers of idolatrous beliefs" (Portilla xi).

[7] Promulgated in 1512, the *Laws of Burgos* obliged "the *encomenderos* (concession holders) to teach the Indians to read and write" (Mignolo 196) and to Christianize them. With this purpose, they hired friars also referred to as *doctrineros.* However, the number of Indians at the *encomienda*, however, was too large for the friars to handle. Thus, they selected a few Amerindians with the hope that they would teach it to the other members of their communities.

[8] In 1565, the Crown ordered that the missionaries were obliged "to know the language of the natives who lived in the territory to which they were sent" (La Rosa 11).

as citizens of the New Mexican state. Translation should no longer serve to gain new converts, but to create Mexican citizens. Consequently, the indigenous languages were circumscribed to the domestic spaces and were no longer perceived as a religious or political instrument. Instead, they were seen as obstacles to the recently constituted Mexican nation. Once again, the ruling elites considered that the Indians could only be civilized and lead into modernity if they learn Spanish. Nonetheless, "the different governments […] disregarded the linguistic problems of the natives" (Cuarón 705), and no long-term plans were implemented. By the end of the century, the indigenous languages became the object of philological studies; and gradually, they were "disassociated from the catechisms and notebooks useful to Catholic preaching in its evangelising-translating mission" (Castro et al.). With regards to P'urhépecha, this scientific veneer is illustrated by the publication of texts such as *Onomatología del Estado de México*, published in Nahuatl, Otomi, Mazahua and P'urhépecha and *Toponimia Tarasco-Hispana-Nahoa* [Nahuatl], written by the philologist Cecilio Agustín Robelo in 1902. Ancient texts, such as *Arte de la Lengua Tarasca* (Basalanque, c1714, 1886) and *Diccionario de la Lengua Tarasca* (Gilberti c1559, 1891) were also reprinted, probably to study this language.

The Mexican revolution broke out in 1910, ending thirty years of relative political stability. This had been sustained by the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz and laborers and peasants' exploitation, as there was no legislation to protect the workers and agrarian properties were concentrated in a few individuals (Speckman-Guerra). The Revolutionary wars (1910-1920) involved the Mexican urban middle and lower classes as well as the indigenous communities. However, at the end of the armed conflict, the presence of indigenous languages and cultures were once again considered as an obstacle for national unity. Spanish was to be spoken for the members of the Mestizo nation and, "like the friars during the Spanish colonization", teachers became the "missionaries of education" (De la Cruz 177).

Translating to describe, educate and convert [to Protestantism]

Trusting in the cohesive force of a single language, a national education program was created to teach Spanish language and literature. To implement the plan, institutions such as the Ministry of Public Education (1920), the Department of Indigenous Culture and Education (1923), Rural Teachers' Schools, and Cultural Missions were founded. Under the direction of José Vasconcelos, the Ministry of Public Education also organized the first massive editorial production of literary and educational materials, which included several translations of European literary classics to Spanish. This was the SEP's first massive production of free state books, publishing between 6,300 and 38,940 copies of each volume. The translation of the texts, which included *The Odyssey* and *Divine Comedy*, were done by Mexican and Spanish scholars (Hernández-Hernández 85-86). However, as the use of indigenous languages was prohibited in the schools (A. Guerrero Galván and L. R. Guerrero Galván 294), all the books were written and printed in Spanish, "the contents were reduced to basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills and especially to the learning of Spanish, without translating it into the students' native languages" (Jiménez Naranjo).

During this period, a few magazines such as the *Journal of American Folklore* (1888), *Ethnos* (1920-1924) and the bilingual bimonthly *Mexican Folkways* (1925-1937), published a few traditional stories that, until then, had only been transmitted orally amongst the indigenous communities. For example, "Cuentos en mexicano de Milpa Alta D.F." (1920), were collected by Franz Boas and translated to Spanish by the Mexican Philologist José María Arreola; and "Ten Folktales in Modern Nahuatl" (1924) by once again by Boas was written and translated to Spanish on the spot with the assistance of the Nahuatl informants. Both compilations were published in Nahuatl and English in *The American Folklore*. In addition, "Fábulas mexicanas" (1925) was translated from Nahuatl to Spanish and published in *Mexican Folkways*; and "Un

cuento griego en el folklore azteca" (1925) was published in Nahuatl with a summary in Spanish in the Mexican journal *Ethnos*. Most of these publications imply firstly, that indigenous literature is orally produced by individuals who are not "authors" but transmitters of a collective tradition; and secondly, that translation is a collective activity which involves the participation of both the informant and the surveyor. Another element that is also visible in what has been considered as the early stages of the Mexican indigenous written literary canon is that most stories have Nahuatl as the source language and Spanish as the target language.

In the coming years, the works of friar and philologist, Ángel María Garibay and the historian Miguel Léon Portilla, which recovered and translated ancient texts written in Nahuatl by indigenous descendants such as Fernando Alvarado Tezozómoc, Chimalpain and Ixtlixochitl, consolidated Nahuatl's prestige as the literary language, and as a result, displaced the other indigenous languages. The translation of *Popol Vuh* (1950) by the Guatemalan historian, Adrián Recinos and the launch of the semestral journal *Estudios de Cultura Maya* (1961) played a similar role for Mayan. In any case, these texts and others that were produced in a similar fashion were still valued as objects of anthropological research rather than as literary expressions. In the following years, there was a slight variation in this perception as the linguistic interest in these languages grew stronger.

In the 1930s, a bilingual approach was gradually adopted to teach Spanish as well as other subjects to the indigenous communities (Jiménez Naranjo). This method required the linguistic description and study of the languages as well as the elaboration of vocabularies and textbooks to support the learning process. To contribute to the development of these materials, the Mexican government enlisted the services of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL).[9] The Mexican government also expected that the contact with the Protestant missionary group would undermine the presence of the Catholic church within the indigenous communities, whose influence was perceived as backwards and opposed to social progress. However, SIL's missionary linguists were more interested in learning the native languages in order to translate the Bible and other religious texts into these languages, and then to convert the locals to Protestantism (Pozas 434). To some extent, the first publications of SIL comply with the expectations of the Mexican government as they consist of linguistic descriptions or of materials to learn the Mexican indigenous languages, e.g., *Materials on Mayan languages of Mexico. Texts and dictionaries in Chol, Tojolabal and Tzotzil* (1939); *Mixteco de San Miguel el Grande* (1944); *Latin American Courtesy: A Guide in Manners for Americans South of the Rio Grande* (1944), co-edited with UNAM; and *Aztec (Golfo I)* (1945). The same applies to P'urhépecha, as the texts *Cartilla de bolsa* (1948) and *Máru uandántskuecha* (1948), a monolingual text co-edited with the SEP, also have similar contents.

A few years later, other Mexican institutions such as the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) (1939), the Escuela Nacional de Antropología (ENAH) (1942), Dirección General de Asuntos Indígenas (1946-1968), and the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI)[10] (1948) were founded to contribute to understand and find solutions to "the indigenous problem",[11] thus nationalizing

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[9] On 22 March 1983, accused of spreading "foreign ideologies contrary to the national cultural identity" and "promoting division and clashes between the indigenous communities" ("Expulsado"), the Mexican president, Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988), expelled the SIL from Mexico.

[10] The INI followed the policy of "indigenismo" which was based on the belief the anthropological research and findings will facilitate the "acculturation" of the indigenous population. In this context, acculturation implied the voluntary adoption of Mexico's Mestizo culture (Skrobot 50).

[11] After the independence from Spain, the new regime declared equality amongst all the citizens of the Mexican nation. This turned against the indigenous population as well as against other non-Mestizo or non-Creole groups

and institutionalizing "the indigenous sphere within the political and academic apparatus" (Jiménez Naranjo). These institutions released books and journals specialized in documenting oral sources and texts in the Mexican indigenous languages, such as *Cuentos indígenas* (González Casanova), *Tlalocan* (1943), and the book series "Investigaciones Lingüísticas" translated by linguists with the assistance of speakers of indigenous languages. The resulting texts were printed in the indigenous original language with a translation in Spanish, and sometimes in English. Including a Spanish translation, *Tlalocan* published "The Phantom Lover" (1945) in P'urhépecha and Nahuatl, which "were recorded by natives trained to write their own languages by the SEP in two distinct projects of native language education […] Both compositions show the literary talents present in the native soul, which await only the means of expression" (Barlow 29). "The Phantom Lover", translated to Spanish by the same P'urhépecha informant, José Ramos B., as "Cuento de Pascual Campos" is the first literary expression transcribed to P'urhépecha and translated into Spanish, and perhaps one of the first exercises of self-translation recorded for this language. However, there is no information available about the translator or the translation process. I can postulate that, in prior examples, the informant considers himself more as a transmitter than as an author.

In the 1950s, the Institute of Historic Research of the National Autonomous University of Mexico hosted the first Seminar of Nahuatl Studies which conducted research and translation of Nahuatl rhetoric and poetics. However, the results of the seminar "are confined to the academic sphere and have not had the objective, at least not explicitly, of promoting indigenous literature or participating in its reception through literary translation" (Lepe Lira). Also founded by the Mexican historian and Nahuatl specialist, Miguel Léon Portilla, the journal of the seminar, *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl* (1959) opened a space for the publication of new literary texts, referred to as "yancuic tlahtolli" (new word) that were translated by the author or by León Portilla himself.

Excepting the religious motivation of SIL's work, most of the projects developed by the Mexican institutions predominantly had a linguistic, pedagogical, historical, or anthropological approach which, without a doubt, was visible in the documents and texts they produced. In any case, these institutions published a myriad of texts that were studied and/or translated to and from the national indigenous languages. For the first time, these languages were the source of translation. The launch of individual and collective literary projects coming mainly from the artistic and the academic fields further consolidated this position in the following decades.

Translating to write

The literary awakening in these languages could be considered as one of the most significant cultural events of the 1980s and 1990s. For the first time, bilingual texts and monolingual translated texts appeared in the pages of national newspapers and supplements such as the "Ojarasca", "México indígena" (*La Jornada*), "Etnias", "Cultura Norte", "Cultura Sur", "Tequio" (*El Universal)*, and "Nuestra Palabra" (*El Nacional)*, a supplement subsidized by the Mexican government to recognize and promote Mexico's ethnic diversity. The supplement published mostly poetry which were self-translated by the authors.

The translation of literature became more frequent as writers and speakers in indigenous languages acquired training as translators in a more consistent specialized manner (Lepe Lira). Some of them participated in the book series "Cuadernos literarios" (1986-1988), translating key authors of the Mexican literature written in Spanish to indigenous languages. Published by INI, authors like Rosario Castellanos, Fernando Benítez, and Ricardo Pozas were translated

as equality was considered as synonymous of homogeneity: "all the Mexicans should have the same Western culture, speak the same language and practice the same catholic religion" (Skrobot 57).

and published in this collection. Six of Juan Rulfo's short stories compiled in *El Llano en llamas* (1967) were translated to and published only in P'urhépecha: "Nos han Intsingasikachi echeri [They have given us the land]" (1986), "Norti nirani [Paso del Norte]" (1986), "Jimbokachi kani komu jamasinga [We are so poor]" (1987), "¡Arhia eskajtsïni no uandikuaka! [Please tell them not to kill me!]" (1987), "Nori kurhaauasïni uichuechani ua ua arhini? [Can't you hear the dogs barkin?]" (1987), and "Anacletu Morones" (1987). Although some of the translators such as Romualdo E. Campos, Rosendo Estrada Rodríguez and Esdivel Lorenzo Molina translated most of the texts, little information has been found about them.

The defence of multiculturalism and intercultural education gained momentum in the early 1990s. In 1992, the Fourth Article of the Mexican Constitution was amended to give constitutional status to the "pluricultural composition of the Mexican nation", thus compromising the Mexican Law "to protect and promote the development of its languages, cultures, uses, customs, resources and specific forms of social organization" (Diario Oficial de la Nación). Introduced without considering the indigenous communities, this addendum did not meet their expectations (A. Guerrero Galván and L. R. Guerrero Galván 294-295). On 1 January 1994, the uprising of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN, Spanish acronym) voiced the dissatisfaction of years of poverty, genocide, abuse, and neglect.[12] It followed a period of a tug of war between the political regime and the Zapatista insurgents. Despite having the support of the national and international opinion, their demands were not recognized until 2001, when the Second Article of the Constitution was modified to recognize the indigenous population rights; thus, the indigenous communities were given the right to self-determination. The monocultural national paradigm was progressively replaced by a multicultural one.

Political opening to multiculturalism was particularly favourable for the development of indigenous literature. In 1993, the government created the Programa de Lenguas y Literaturas Indígenas, which led to the publication of two bilingual series: "Letras Indígenas" and "Lenguas de México". Carlos Montemayor, Mexican writer, translator of indigenous languages and social activist, played a crucial role in the visibilization and the diversification of the indigenous languages and the authors that were translated and published in Spanish. In 1992, Montemayor published *Los escritores indígenas actuales I*, *II* and *III*. These bilingual volumes compiled narratives, poetry and theatre in thirteen languages: Nahuatl, Mayan, Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Tojolabal, Chontal from Tabasco, Isthmus Zapotec, Zapotec de la Sierra, Ñahñu, Totonaco, Huichol and P'urhépecha.[13] Also in 1992, Diana, a non-governmental publishing house, co-edited twelve bilingual volumes in the series "Letras Indígenas Contemporáneas". The authors often present themselves as authors, bilingual writers and self-translators, while some of them "have stated the double effort involved in translating their texts or writing twice, since instead of one hundred pages they had to produce at least two hundred" (Lepe Lira). These texts are the first cases in which the indigenous people have ceased to be informants or transmitters of a text, in which its literary value is overshadowed by its consideration as a linguistic or anthropological object. These individuals now have the linguistic and literary resources to produce literary texts. In 1993, they created the Asociación Civil de Escritores en Lenguas Indígena (ELIAC) in Mexico City,[14] and, in collaboration with the SEP, they created the Premio Netzahualcóyotl, the first national award recognizing literary

[12] In the international arena, the discussion on the linguistic rights of the indigenous communities of the world resulted in the approval of the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights in June 1996.

[13] These volumes were republished with an English translation in 2004 and 2005.

[14] The Association gathered indigenous writers from all over the country and inhabited spaces to promote the dialogue, translate and publish literary magazines, books and other indigenous languages and Spanish.

authors in indigenous languages.[15] In sum, these mechanisms have contributed to the emergence and positioning of indigenous writers and self-translators, as individual authors whose production is no longer necessarily anchored in a collective traditional experience.

These years were also particularly productive for literary production in P'urhépecha. In 1991, a short story contest that associated writers with institutions involved in the learning, preservation and diffusion of P'urhépecha, such as the Centro de Investigación P'urhépecha, the Instituto Michoacano de Cultura, the Instituto Nacional para la Educación de los Adultos, the radio station XEPUR of Cherán, the National Council for Culture and Arts via the General Direction of Popular Cultures, the newspaper *La Voz de Michoacán* (which has a bilingual section "Página P'urhépecha/P'urhépecha Jimbo" devoted to general and cultural information of the P'urhépecha community), received fifty-one texts, twenty-two of which were written in P'urhépecha. A further eleven were received in bilingual format, and eighteen in Spanish. The jury only selected the texts written in P'urhépecha or in bilingual format, as they were considered as "closer to the particularity of traditions, legends and characters" (Rojas 10). The winning short stories were compiled and published in the volume *Cuentos purépechas* (1994) in bilingual format.

Educating to translate: by way of conclusion

In 2003, the General Congress of Mexico passed the General Law on the Linguistic Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which recognizes and protects "the linguistic, individual and collective rights of the indigenous peoples and communities" and promoted "the use and development of indigenous languages" (Cámara de Diputados). More importantly, it designated Spanish and indigenous languages as national languages, and gave them equal validity in Mexico.[16] Also in 2003, the General Law of Education was amended; and, in addition to acknowledging the multilinguistic landscape of the country, the addendum guaranteed the speakers of indigenous languages the "access to compulsory education in their own language and in Spanish" (Cámara de Diputados); and the Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas (INALI) was created to support this new constitutional status by designing, recommending and implementing programmes and workshops to professionalize the legal translators and interpreters of indigenous languages. This institution has compiled a national census of these agents (INALI, "Padrón") and it has been responsible for the translation of the Mexican Constitution to the national indigenous languages. The Constitution is now available in forty indigenous languages. However, INALI's contribution to literary translation – along with other recently-created state institutions to support the development of indigenous populations – has been limited. It has only published a few works of children's literature in bilingual and monolingual format. These include *minu xi kuatsura chichjána kui anima xi bantiya yajura/ Qué cosa dice mi tata. Seres que se transforman* [What is my grandfather saying? Beings that transform themselves] written by Filogonio Casimiro in Mazatec and Spanish (2013), *Laknawti tan Ch'intamakan Xanti, Ixhuatlán de Madero, Veracruz/ Cuentos tepehuas de Pisaflores, Ixhuatlán de Madero Veracruz* [Tepehua shortstories of Pisaflores, Ixhuatlán de Madero, Veracruz] written by Camerino Tesillos García in Tepehuan of the North and Spanish (2015); and *Tu'un ndatu'un ñi cha'ni* written in Mixtec by Hermenegildo F. López Castro (2011).

The changes in the national linguistic policies and the new institutions have continued to promote the development of literature written in indigenous languages. As such, the once highly localized and rather scattered efforts have progressively surpassed the boundaries of the

[15] Mexico is the Latin American country that has created more awards as well as fora to recognize the literature created in these languages.

[16] This however does not imply that these languages have the same political, social, or literary value; indigenous languages are considered to be "spoken by poor and uneducated people" (Skrobot 351).

indigenous, political, and academic communities, and have conquered other positions in the Mexican cultural field.

This panorama has illustrated the roles played by translation on the production of indigenous languages, identifying four main functions which have changed according to the objectives of the political, religious and cultural elites, but also depending on the own linguistic and cultural resources of the indigenous population. As they acquired the linguistic and translatorial competence in Spanish as the official and literary language in Mexico, the indigenous communities also appropriated and developed both the skills and materials to write their own languages, and by doing so, recover or create their literary expressions. This process also implied changes in the roles and positions available to the individuals and their languages: from the position of informants, which restricted their contribution to the oral transmission of collective traditions, they progressively were able to position themselves as writers and translators, with more agency in the source and the target texts.

Education, whether driven by the State or the Church, has been instrumental for all these processes. More recently, SEP's indigenous programs in early- and primary-level education include translation as a learning objective, and frequent practice is promoted for language acquisition. For example, the fourth learning objective for primary-level students is "to translate texts from their language into Spanish and vice versa, respecting the meaning and sense of the original text" (Secretaría de Educación Pública 32).[17] As such, this opens the dialogue with a long-standing discussion in Translation Studies, but, most importantly, it incorporates translation in the personal trajectory of the speakers of indigenous languages, and in that, of potential future writers. To some extent, this imprint is already visible in the literary and non-literary productions studied in this article, thereby, it seems like the access to the Mexican literary canon will still forcibly be mediated by Spanish, as it has been configured as the main translation language of the indigenous literatures. Perhaps, in the next stage, the indigenous languages will be the translation language of other indigenous literatures; and all the Mexican written literature will also be available in the other Mexican languages.

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[17] SEP has also continued its labour as book publisher and enabler, e.g., it has published the books series "Libros del Rincón. Bibliotecas Escolares y de Aula" and "Voces Nuevas de la Raíz Antigua" which contain bilingual fiction and educational texts (Cfr. Lepe Lira; Valckx).

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