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TEXTE

1 Over several decades, extended notions of translation that go beyond the strict understanding of interlinguistic translation have become central for a variety of theoretical frameworks and approaches across the humanities and the social sciences. However, politics and political theory are rarely taken into account when discussing these extended understandings of translation. This is particularly striking if we consider both the rich corpus of this tradition—with highly influential thinkers such as Antonio Gramsci (cf. Boothman, 2010, Lacorte, 2010) and Judith Butler (2000)—and the recent surge and popularization of the concept of translation in activist circles. To address this gap, I follow a line of analysis that derives from my most recent monograph, *Translating the Crisis* (Fernández, 2020), which studied the importance of translation—as both a linguistic and conceptual practice—in the 2011 Spanish movement known as "15M" or "indignados" and its political aftermath.

2 The political and cultural atmosphere that emerged in Spain after the 15M was decisively shaped by translation practices. This is expressed, for instance, in the high number of translations released by politically committed publishers, the visibility and status of translated intellectuals such as Silvia Federici and David Harvey, and the adoption of key political concepts such as *comunes* and *cuidados* that have been shaped through complex processes of translation. This drive has also been expressed in the use of translation as a political concept by a number of activists and political representatives from the new leftist organizations, notably in the case of Podemos, a party that was created in 2015 as a response to the 15M demands but that has had a rather complex and tense relationship with the movement, as well as with other political groups. It is worth noting that an important section of Podemos initial cadres were academics in the fields of politics and sociology; this might have played a role in the adoption of

these uses of translation, which bear the imprint of thinkers such as Gramsci, Butler, Bauman and Boaventura de Sousa Santos (Fernández, 2020, p. 107–128).

3 In this article, I address the opposition between what I call *hierarchical* and *horizontal* political translation. Both usages are based around a similar point of departure: the language of mainstream politics and the language of the 'common people' are so strongly and profoundly separated that any meaningful interaction between them needs to be based upon practices of translation. Across my fieldwork, I have studied how left-wing politicians, activists and citizens in post-15M Spain frequently resort to this extended notion of translation to highlight the divide between institutional politics—or other key sources of power such as finance and the media—and general citizens. Furthermore, some of these practices involve what I call "political exposure": the person who understands the official message and translates does not only aim to expose this divide, but also to reveal a hidden ideological reality that the original message aimed to conceal. These practices are thus epistemologically relevant for at least two main reasons: first, they imply that political intervention requires the possession of a certain knowledge (in this case, familiarity with the different languages); second, they demonstrate that translation is decisively enmeshed within relations of power, as the act of decoding and recoding places translators in a political position, either as mediators between institutions and citizens or as dissenters that challenge messages produced by these institutions.

4 Despite their similarities, there is a clear distinction between uses of translation that I call "hierarchical" and those that are "horizontal", with both epistemological and political implications. Hierarchical translation happens top-down and is generally based on a subtle distinction between those who 'understand' (critical intellectuals, leftist politicians) and those who do not (general citizens). This is a trope that has reappeared frequently in the discourse of Podemos cadres, who legitimize their role as political representatives in terms of their ability to translate. For instance, Íñigo Errejón—one of Podemos' leading figures until his departure in 2019—claimed that an intellectual is "eminently a translator" who "has the duty and the ability to take abstract concepts and translate them" (Errejón, inter-

viewed in Soto-Trillo, 2015). In a similar vein, Pablo Iglesias, Podemos' General Secretary until 2021, argued that political communication is "a pivotal work of translation: to transform your diagnosis into a discourse that people can understand" (Iglesias, interviewed in Guedán, 2016, p. 120). Finally, philosopher Germán Cano (2015, p. 196) praised Iglesias for his ability to translate "technocratic jargon" into "a simpler" language that is accessible to everyone. These arguments place the emphasis on the mediating or even gate-keeping role of intellectuals and politicians, based on their acquired knowledge: citizens are placed in the passive role of receiving translations generated by these mediators; the possibility that they might also have translational ability is never addressed.

5 By contrast, horizontal translation happens when the translator does not speak in the name of any collective : he or she simply demonstrates the ability to translate politically when confronted by an institutional message. To be sure, this demonstration of ability involves a claim to be in possession of a given knowledge: in order to decode institutional language, one needs to have mastered its fundamental features. However, this claim is not made at the expense of other subjects and forms of knowledge: the translator only questions the political validity of the original, without preventing the emergence of other translations. The political and epistemological implications of this practice are completely different: the translator does not establish a political hierarchy based on knowledge (or its perceived absence), nor does he/she derive a position of power or privilege from this knowledge.

6 Examples of horizontal translation can be harder to find because of the typical settings in which they take place—they rarely happen within those prestigious genres that favor political representatives, such as interviews or books—and because of their radical departure from standard notions of translation. As many of my examples (mostly taken from social media) show, citizens invoking their right to translate a given institutional message tend to fully decouple denotative and connotative meaning: what the original text 'says' at its most basic level bears little resemblance to what the translation proposes. What matters for these citizen-translators is the emergence and revelation of a secondary set of meanings and suggestions that they assume many people would fail to see under the surface of the

original statement. At the same time, the traditional relationship between 'author' and 'translator' is completely reversed: the potential intentions of the author of the original utterance are disregarded, as the translator sets out to emphasize his or her understanding of the message and its implications.

7 This horizontal practice of translation has played a notable role in the opposition and criticism of concepts generated by companies and 'gurus' to mask an undesired reality, a debate that has peaked in recent years with the emergence of numerous neologisms for new working conditions. After the coinage of the word *trabacaciones*—a portmanteau of *trabajo* ("work") and *vacaciones* ("holidays") that translates the English neologism *workcation*—many Twitter users reacted critically, with one user (Jorge(r), 2018) claiming it should be actually translated as "exploitation of labor" (explotación laboral). The translation does not only break the linguistic relationship between source and target, but it also reverses the ideological discourse around concepts: the neoliberal allure of the original, with its promise of combining work and pleasure, is presented in a crude and negative light in the translation.

8 In their affinities and differences, these extended understandings of translation need to be understood within the context of the 15M 'atmosphere' and, particularly, in connection with an issue that the movement brought to the fore: the critique of the system of expertise upon which contemporary democracies are based. This is a key point where epistemology and politics interact, as decision-making decisively depends upon knowledge: how it is defined, who has legitimate access to it, and how the power that derives from it is stratified. While politicians from the 'new' left, with their espousal of hierarchical translation, are merely proposing an improved system of experts, other activists and citizens are defending, through their practices of horizontal translation, a horizontal conception of politics in which political and professional categories are contested rather than enforced.

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