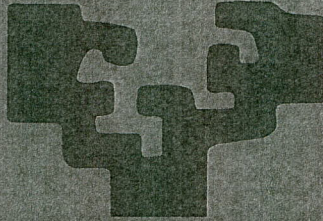


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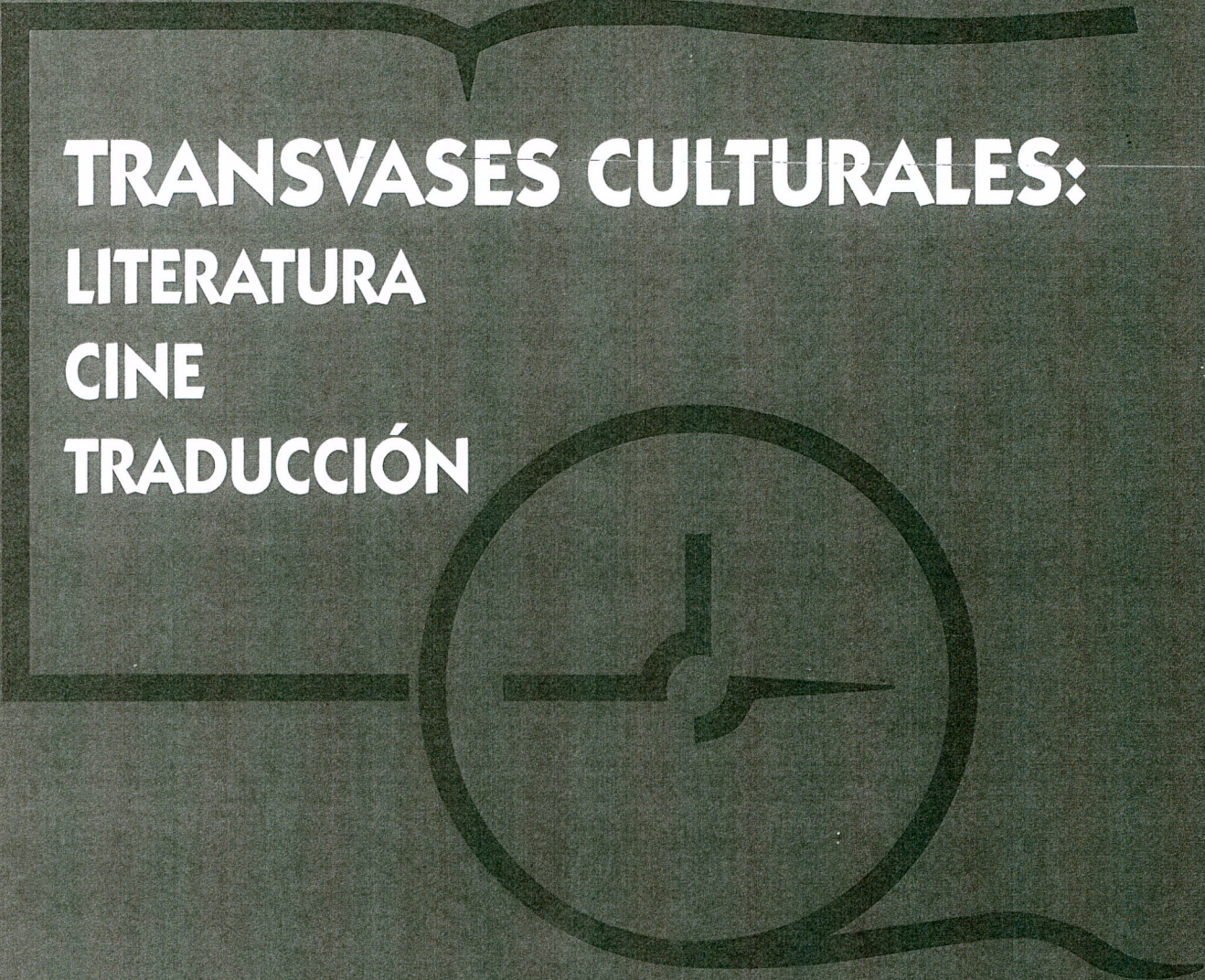


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**DEPARTAMENTO DE FILOLOGIA INGLESA Y ALEMANA
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ETHNOLINGUISTIC DEMOCRACY, TRANSLATION POLICY AND CONTEMPORARY WORLD ORDER (DIS)ORDER

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During a congress devoted to (apparently) particular kinds of translation, ranging from literary translation to theater and film translation, there may be good reasons for digging into general cultural problems that are supposed to have their impact on such kinds of communication. One of the reasons why theatre and film translation deserve to be linked is that they involve a systematic interaction between oral, written and non verbal communication (and would literary translation necessarily be a matter of written communication only?). The kind of oral communication involved here is of a special kind. It is no genuine oral communication because it is produced and used in societies that are familiar with various and sophisticated techniques of written communication and other techniques of recording to the point that we become aware (again?) of the fact that language standardization is not necessarily written. This is why Walter Ong's (Ong 1990) distinction between primary and secondary oral communication may be useful here. The translation of secondary oral communication (i.e. oral communication in societies with an established tradition of written communication) generates particular problems since it implies the use of equipment, hence of technology, hence money, organization, institutionalization and, in our contemporary age, the increase of internationalization, whereas oral communication of the primary kind is supposed to take place in more local frames, given the lack of writing and other technologies. The difference between both may look just technical, but in fact it is a matter of world views, world order and civilization. Mass communication is not that specific to our age, but in recent times it has become part of a particular organization of public communication. Obviously, our discussions on literature, theater, cinema, belong to the modern Western world and have probably not much relevance for cultures dominated by traditional oral communication.

Translational phenomena used to be discussed on their own, as problems merely of language(s) and translation. I shall rather stress the link between translational and/as linguistic phenomena on the one hand and the organization of societies, the organization of public discourse, institutional norms, etc. At first sight the matter is simple, but rather systematically overlooked: I assume that the institutional frame within which translations (and other transfer channels between languages) operate has an impact on the translation (transfer) strategy. If translations are the result of norms, they are part of history and culture, which

means that only an interdisciplinary approach can account for them. The theoretician of the norms concept in Translation Studies, Gideon Toury, was well aware of the diversity of norms and of the role played by institutions in translational activities. However, nearly everything has still to be done/investigated about the “external” norms - i.e. the norms that are not specific to translation but rather to more general communicational principles - and in particular the institutional norms. Since they are supposed to refer to collective behaviour and attitudes rather than to individual/idiosyncratic ones, the first kind of norms we have to take into consideration as scholars are the public and institutional ones. The more communication is public, the more chances there are that it is submitted to official organization principles and - hence - to monopolies ⁽¹⁾. The more communication implies technology, the more it implies institutionalization and hence also competition. In the case of literary translation scholars may be convinced that institutions are not really part of the game. Let us assume that in most cases they overestimate the autonomy of literature and translated literature without even having tested it out, i.e. without using scholarly arguments.

As far as film, theater, television and video are concerned, the relevance of the institutional frame looks more obvious in principle, given the infrastructure needed for this kind of communicational activities.

Strangely enough, translation scholars have hardly realized so far how new the phenomenon of compulsory linguistic norms appears to be from the point of view of the history of societies. Not just the particular kinds of norms to be applied to translation are compulsory, but rather the very fact of translation, not just by an individual decision, but on the basis of Constitution. Of course, such constitutional conditions were not unknown in previous ages, but they have rather suddenly spread out in recent times. According to well-known hypotheses, we have to accept that such general institutional conditions must have direct consequences for translation methods and then, of course, for the translational phenomenon as such.

In a very recent paper by a well-known sociolinguist, an attempt is made to put some order in the new language policies adopted in contemporary society all over the world and in particular in Western Europe (Fishman 1993). It would indeed be hard to ignore EC policies when tackling the general question of language policies in contemporary society. In the discussion of Fishman’s article that follows the question of technology and of the media will pop up again as a basic difficulty.

It is on the occasion of the (re)entry of several Eastern European nationalities on to the stage as independent polities that Fishman reexamines the concept of “ethnolinguistic democracy”, which links the official use of language(s) with the principle of collective (social/ethnic) democracy. “The centrality of language, not just in political or cultural identity, but in ethnolinguistic identity, has been a constant and long-recorded feature of Eastern Mediterranean and Eastern

European societies since our earliest records of them” (Fishman 1993: 11). The origins of ethnolinguistic democracy might even go back as far as the biblical Book of Esther: in its traditions ethnolinguistic democracy was a “modus operandi according to which people and peoples are not treated honourably unless their own languages are utilised, particularly in speech and to some extent in writing as well” (Fishman 1993: 11). But in ancient times the principle of reciprocity was not clearly established between the heads of states and their citizens. In contemporary Western Europe it is precisely the principle of reciprocity that has been officially recognized: the right of both parties to use their own languages and to receive in their own languages in return, regardless of the power or size differentials that differentiate between them (Fishman 1993: 11). It is clear that power differentials are not ignored here, but their impact is reduced to a minimum by the linguistic solution selected, which also implies the very systematic use of translation. It is even clear that we deal with the “preferred language implementation by the weaker party”. Fishman distinguishes between various degrees of the ethnolinguistic ideal, while stressing the historical importance of the EC rules, where for the first time and on a very large scale the general principle has been adopted. It is well known nowadays what the budget consequences and other consequences of the “principle of complete multilingualism” might be as soon as new member states would bring in more languages. It was only recently indeed (December 11, 1990), and on the basis of a Catalan petition, that the EC decided that all European languages - including those of the “non-state-building peoples” - deserve recognition. It remains true however that this linguistic equality principle does not necessarily apply to all functions within the EC: the democratic principle has certain obvious limits. Such limits are influenced by the observation that the democratic principle involves a complex constellation of values which exact a price in time, effort and resources. Most governments adopt different rules in their intra-state relations than in their supra-state relations. But generally speaking the EC policy is remarkable and noteworthy because it reveals a strong will to champion “the dignity of all languages”. And Fishman hopes that Western Europe will export from now on its ideal of linguistic democracy through the entire world after having promoted, long ago, the very concept of Democracy.

Without contradicting at all the basic argument, it seems relevant to stress how much the article (still) reduces the discussion to an ideal and to insist further on the limits of official language policies, however democratic they may tend to be:

1. It seems as if we had almost forgotten our starting point, i.e. the question of translation. In fact Fishman demonstrates that “ethnolinguistic democracy” cannot function without the proliferation of translations since they have to create the illusion of linguistic democracy. But it will become clear below that such a sociolinguistic view on language policy overlooks the complexity

and the ambiguity of translation as a key instrument in the democratic construction;

2. Although nobody will suspect sociolinguists to reduce languages and language use to the standardized language, there is no indication at all in this panorama of what I would call linguistic everyday life nor of its more loose relationships with governmental and EC policy. Fishman deals nearly exclusively with the political and institutional language model, which is never the only one and not the very real one either. Such a model indeed is an ideal rather than a real one. The question is what we find behind or beyond it, even in political life. As an illustration, let us take simply the diplomatic habits of the EC member countries as soon as they refer to relationships with nations outside of the EC. As soon as Spain deals with the USA in bilateral terms it uses (again) its own rules rather than the EC principles. In certain (legal) cases bilateral relations between Belgium and Spain may even be organized just as in the thirties, i.e. in a third international language rather than along the democratic principles recommended in the EC policy. It seems that the principle of ethnolinguistic democracy is as important and as ideal as say Human Rights. Not even public discourse is necessarily and systematically submitted to ideal principles. The real problems of language policy start exactly where we shift from public into private discourse: whatever the impact of governmental policy may be, everyday language use is necessarily different from normative rules, although there may be a heavy impact of one on the other. Hence it becomes clear that official EC language policy is only part of the game. What part exactly is not clear at all, the more since fluctuations and hesitations cannot be avoided.

One of the consequences of the "ethnolinguistic democracy" solution to the language problem is the inevitable development of translation. In the official EC policy as well as in Fishman's analysis it is implied that the democratic rules of the game are not threatened at all by the use of translation. Although the use of translations has increased in a spectacular way, both in the theoretical principles and in historical terms, it is not conceptualized at all in the new democracy construct. The difficulty is that translations may be less innocent in the new democracy than the EC (and Fishman?) tend to believe. At any rate no reference is made at all to socio-cultural research on the matter. Translation appears to be an unproblematic solution: when no mistakes are being produced, it is supposed to ensure communication.

Further on it is assumed that ⁽¹⁾ the equal rights principle applied to languages would be realistic and ⁽²⁾ that languages are a substantial/essential matter for the individual EC member states. Languages are in fact treated here in bureaucratic terms and taken for homogeneous tools for verbal communication.

What is at stake is just language (as communication) itself, both in its dynamics and in its relationships with states or nations. Languages do change, they

are submitted to fluctuations, conflicts, interactions with other languages, etc., partly already because cultural situations influence them. What is also at stake is the active but inevitably artificial role played by nations and governments in the development of languages, which explains why every nation and government has rather particular traditions. Pierre Bourdieu demonstrates why all governmental ambitions, (the linguistic ones included) illustrate the universalistic ambitions of politics and politicians: cultural and hence linguistic activities can just be planned and influenced by politics, but never reduced to it. It is hard to imagine how official (linguistic) policies could ever be representative of the whole cultural (and linguistic) picture (Bourdieu 1993). One of the main difficulties hence becomes the treatment of linguistic “minorities” within the various nations, given the fact that scholarship has not been able so far to establish what the real difference might be between language and dialect. According to sociolinguistics, such a distinction is after all a political rather than a scholarly matter: languages used to be those “dialects” which have been supported by a government and (generally also by) military power.

The most striking conclusion is that languages are much more linked with heterogeneity, with competition and with power games than the political ideal of ethnolinguistic democracy can indicate and it is even part of the political game to hide as much as possible the mobility and heterogeneity of language. It is part of canonization processes to decontextualize key values in order to give them the appearance of absolute values (De Geest 1991; Schmidt, forthcoming). But given the internationalization process in contemporary society as well as the crisis of traditional 19th century nations the differentiation principle has good chances to weaken the centralizing power of nations and supranational organizations. To the extent that “language” as a concept is heavily indebted to the (Western) nations principle, it is always threatened from inside and, especially in our media age, from “outside” (although “outside” is a very naive spatial representation of institutional frames). But the very distinction between outside and inside (or external/internal) has to be separated from spatial categories since contemporary technology has redefined space-and-time limitations: the territory principle has become fake. There is no reason for including EC rules into the traditional national worlds except to the extent that they represent a reshuffling of national rules against (more) external rules. In our modern world situation the idea of the isolated national “language” is outdated and ought to be systematically replaced by “languages” and hence by their coexistence, which is never just democratic, whatever the theoretical and/or real attitudes of the people in power may be. But it is true that the more political institutions may do their best in order to promote the pacific coexistence of languages, the more chances there are that translation will become a key instrument in the planning of democracy. In any case, translation itself does not and cannot escape the competition and power games described so far.

The reason why these general theoretical matters are important is that precisely in our age there is a systematic and spectacular reshuffling of political and institutional maps all over the world. The EC is just one of the many manifestations of the reshuffling of the society principle. Given the fact that most institutions seem to have at least a minimal language policy, we may assume that language strategies - and translations always are themselves the result of strategies - are used as privileged tools in the power games between institutions.

It will not be possible in this very general discussion to provide examples and references from contemporary (especially descriptive) translation studies ⁽²⁾. Let us just accept that the differences in the approach to language(s) are such that most of the political assumptions on language, language policy and translation are incompatible with the insights of this empirically oriented new discipline. Translation studies might provide a better basis for the analysis/revision of political language strategy than sociolinguistics; it will be interesting to see how also pragmatics would provide a relevant model.

Along these general principles about the role played first by (West-European) governments and secondly by communities of governments such as the EC, it is worthwhile to observe how various other kinds of public discourse and most kinds of private discourse interfere with government policies. Translation is involved in such interferences - which become competition - because the more recent and the most successful kinds of new public discourse belong rather systematically to international channels, just like EC discourse: the concept of language is transformed into the plural ("languages"), and the need for translation increases enormously also here, but along very different principles. After having been corrected and redefined by groups of governments, the traditional governmental language policy is threatened by other - often very international - institutions.

Let us first deal with public discourse. Only certain patterns of certain successful channels and their role will be discussed.

Public discourse is produced, distributed and used in public channels. In our modern world this implies the establishment of monopolies, but also the struggle against monopolies: the more communication becomes international and global, the more we notice that places and channels for advertising and for distribution are limited and that rules are needed. Those who produce public communication tend to require monopoly positions while realizing that communication (and language) give access to power ⁽³⁾.

Due to the internationalization process, the monopoly principle has become more and more crucial in modern times: more potential speakers/writers/production channels are in competition with each other while trying to reach the best audiences. Even when many television channels are accessible in the Western world, they partly distribute the same programs (partly because they depend on the same international agencies). Even the very diversity of channels illustrates

the monopoly trend. On the other hand even local channels inevitably are in competition with the international ones, which implies that they have good reasons for borrowing their principles and models from the international rather than from the national ones. The strange thing is that competition between the national language policies and the EC policy is hidden because the various institutions often just pretend to use the same national standard languages, but while doing so on a very different basis, e.g. as far as loan words and language interferences are concerned.

Given the general principle that struggle for power has become increasingly international, it would rather be astonishing when the language component would escape the general trend in communication or, in other terms, when the treatment of languages would become simply more democratic. On the contrary, it would be a better hypothesis that the number of “languages” in competition increases steadily, which means that the rules need to be rendered more open (and competitive) than before. Such a hypothesis makes sense both for individual countries (such as France or Spain) and for individual multinational societies.

It is an important task for empirical research to determine what the exact consequences of the new situation are for language/languages/translation. New hypotheses are needed, and it will be sufficient to mention here a few basic ones and to apply them in particular to translation in the new West-European world (which cannot be reduced to the EC communication channels). The “ethnolinguistic democracy” principle has obviously a certain relevance (only) for certain areas and phenomena. But a totally different principle is at least as illuminating, i.e. the principle of constant competition between the languages and (much more) the language policies that are dominant in the different EC member states. Translation and language also serve implicitly the dominance of the fittest. From this point of view the well-known solutions to the language problem in the audio-visual media (television, cinema, video) illustrate how ambiguous in fact EC-strategies are, precisely in those areas where cultural claims have been narrowly linked with the European democratic ideal ⁽⁴⁾. It is not clear how the democracy principle could ever be compatible with the fact that member states of the EC since the establishment of the EC have never considered revising their current dubbing/subtitling treatment of foreign languages. The EC and even the entire world are heavily divided in their treatment of “foreign” languages in any kind of audiovisual communication: when dubbing is used the foreign language is systematically hidden, whereas in subtitling the foreign language is accessible together with an obviously ancillary written translation at the bottom of the screen. It can be stated that dubbing is much less “democratic” than subtitling and that - by hazard? - it is generally used in those cultures/countries where a strong cultural and linguistic tradition has been established. Subtitling is generally (but not exclusively) the rule in countries with “minority” languages. But whether

dubbing or subtitling is preferred/better is not really the matter. The very treatment itself of foreign languages and of language standardization in these new kinds of verbal communication is open to many options: it offers us an interesting laboratory situation where contemporary societies and institutions work out their reply to their new international media environment. There are strong indications that the mass media channels are very influential - obviously more influential than traditional communication channels - and that they gather information and values all over the world from many different corners. They function like new institutions and like a new institutional power. Importation of products, people and/or discourse might be welcome to a given target audience as long as it does not overwhelm local traditions: from the moment it becomes pervasive - either in objective terms or just because the target cultures feel threatened - protectionist discourse and measures have good chances to develop. This is exactly the case in our contemporary world because the space-and-time factors are not (sufficiently) under control any more of the national institutions. When (other than national) institutions like the church and the EC react systematically against the new international media world in an attempt to preserve traditional values ⁽⁵⁾, it simply means that the new power channels are taken seriously (and considered dangerous for public order). Strangely enough our traditional institutions do not realize that also the treatment of languages is a key instrument in the struggle between traditional and new world views.

One of the most striking principles in international relationships is the tendency on the side of most institutions to favour the illusion that there is no language problem, that languages are just equal and exchangeable and that translation, when needed and provided, is neutral and innocent. The ideology supporting such views on communication is universalistic, illusionistic and technocratic because it tends to create the illusion that languages are mere technical options rather than the result of cultural (and also political) habits (Pierre Bourdieu has demonstrated how much such simplifications are also features of post-saussurean linguistics (Bourdieu 1982)). Such an ideology makes us overlook or forget how real power games aim at establishing our belief in genuine international communication and in the global village.

Many multinational societies have in fact realized that verbal communication is complex and that it requires more differentiated methods (Hermans & Simoens, forthcoming). But it is rather scaring that private enterprises organize research on these basic "cultural" matters which have not yet been taken into consideration by our political institutions and hardly at all by academic research.

Whatever politicians and business groups may do, international scholarship has strong reasons for taking the challenge seriously and for investigating systematically the rules of contemporary mass communication as well as its relationships with more traditional communication. Rather than making moralistic or political statements about the new communicational world map, scholars are

supposed to deal with it in empirical terms and to examine how old and new communication coexist and how they may change society.

Among the most influential channels we ought to consider advertising and television, given the fact that they penetrate our daily family life from the morning to the evening. It is true that the study of their real impact, especially their linguistic impact and in particular their impact via language transfer or translation, does not yet belong to the established patterns of research in the humanities. Let us just discuss in short one of the areas where the selection and the treatment of languages is a test of the democracy principle: dubbing and/or subtitling. It will be sufficient just to indicate what kinds of questions deserve to be investigated.

First of all dubbing and subtitling ought to be dealt with fully in terms of communication, rather than (exclusively) as a technical and economic matter. This implies that the use and the perception of dubbing and subtitling is probably the most crucial socio-cultural problem. In our contemporary society the perception and the use of subtitling and dubbing by particular groups like children (who want/happen to learn foreign languages) and immigrants (who may communicate with their new environment first of all via the television channel) may even be a matter of social order and integration. Since the nationalistic behaviour of our European television audiences ⁽⁶⁾ is a well-established phenomenon and since nationalism is one of the central difficulties for our politicians, the selection of television programs and their integration into our daily world, especially when dealing with foreign/exotic information, cannot be an innocent topic. Unfortunately we cannot go beyond such statements as long as so little is known about real situations.

Communication in general is supposed to be a technical and technological matter (which links it with economics), but also a socio-cultural one (which links it with values, habits, self-identification and hence cultural identity). The entire set of questions about the production, the distribution, the organization, the storage and the use of (translated) communication appears to be the global question for scholarship. The (still very reduced) empirical research carried out so far indicates that the answers to these questions are anything but universal, that they are differentiated by factors such as age, society, programs, genres, but also political circumstances, institutional policy (d'Ydewalle a.o. 1991; Danan, forthcoming). Economic principles in these matters often contradict the "cultural" ones (which implies that the representatives of culture and economics do not want to be mixed up), mainly because economics in our media age tends to be liberal and international whereas the advocates of cultural identity tend to be protectionistic and nationalistic. Such conflicts are obvious and quite predictable in most publications and statements about the "quality" of dubbing and subtitling, since mainly translators, producers, critics and business people are involved in these discussions and since they have excellent reasons for supporting

normative - and hence non-scientific - positions while ignoring what has been established in (empirical) translation studies about norms and quality, namely that there is no universal quality and that normative positions are always linked with power and prestige. For the entire communication activity the investigation can never be reduced to the question of language since language itself is a complex socio-cultural matter and since the inevitable confrontation of at least two languages and at least two socio-cultural traditions always generates conflictive situations and hence the necessity of decisions and priorities.

So far even the more or less scholarly discourse on dubbing and subtitling has been in the hands of those people and instances who organize and produce dubbing and subtitling. The world of production has been supposed to be more competent than others, exactly like translators and interpreters are supposed to have the best knowledge of their profession. The difficulty however remains that professional activities and scholarship are at least partly incompatible: *nemo iudex in propria sua causa*. Obviously the support of technical competence is needed here as much as anywhere else, but the people and the groups who are responsible for the production of dubbing/subtitling are supposed to be object of study as well as (in the best of cases) partners in scholarship.

The power games behind the positions about dubbing and subtitling are confirmed by the fact that dubbing and subtitling strategies do change as soon as the institutional channels change, especially when governmental channels are substituted or matched by private ones. Such an observation is of main importance since exactly in recent years the entire West-European television network has shifted from the government monopoly tradition into a mixed national/international and public/private situation. This is a sufficient starting point for an investigation of the instructions and policies adopted by the production networks in matters of language standardization, neologisms, moral and other standards.

Researchers in empirical psychology have demonstrated how much the attitude towards dubbing and subtitling is linked with cultural habits (d'Ydewalle a.o. 1991). In recent days most countries seem to adopt a more flexible policy than before (specialized audiences seem to require more and more subtitling), which is an interesting phenomenon in itself, especially in terms of cultural identity. It has also been demonstrated that the origins of the dubbing tradition in Western Europe reveal how heavily economic and political groups have influenced the initial options and how for a certain time the final option for dubbing has been the result of previous experimentations (Danan, forthcoming). Political impact appears to be decisive in many totalitarian regimes as can be illustrated by the Taiwanese cultural revolution, by the Franco, the Mussolini and the Hitler governments. To the extent that dubbing and subtitling have been considered from the beginning an important public matter in most countries the study of their historical development as well as their political status might be one of the

most fascinating topics for socio-cultural research about the evolution of contemporary societies.

To the extent that mass media communication has become both a public and a private matter, television, video and cinema cannot be approached either as a matter of economics or as a matter of public policy: these areas are interfering all the time, probably more than ever before ⁽⁷⁾. But it is worthwhile to notice how divergent public and private strategies may be and how differentiated commercial language strategies used to be. How different another area of international discourse might be, namely the international business communication in supermarkets, in advertising and elsewhere is another topic for investigation (Hermans and Simoens, forthcoming). As could be illustrated by laboratory situations such as Central Europe neither the question of television language nor the question of business language can be isolated from political matters: international business discourse, advertising and international television discourse are often directly linked with “americanization” and hence with value systems that are either attractive or rejected and that may favour particular economic behaviour as well as cultural protectionism.

If it is correct that societies and cultural identity are heavily indebted to the circulation of communication (De Wachter 1993: *passim*), the question of international discourse, its rules, its changes, its value systems and our attitude towards it belong to the most crucial topics of contemporary culture.

NOTES

(1) Dirk De Geest has suggested the use of the well-known Greimas square in order to represent the various ways in which constraints are rather private recommendations (prohibitions) of official rules canonized by societies in terms of laws, taboos, etc. (De Geest 1992).

(2) The journal *Target* (Amsterdam & Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 1989-) has been created in order to study translation as a cultural phenomenon from a descriptive (i.e. empirical) point of view and it is obvious that empirical research on translational phenomena has developed enormously in recent years to the point that even “machine translation” now takes into consideration empirical data.

(3) It is interesting to observe how West-European companies decide who will be allowed to advertise on Central-European television channels. Similar rules probably apply to various West-European television channels.

(4) The EC Media project devotes an impressive budget to the development of an authentic “European” television and to an authentic mass media tradition which is supposed to match the American, Canadian, Australian and other distribution networks.

(5) The Media project is obviously supported by moral views on what “good” (European) culture is supposed to offer via television and cinema and, hence, on what “American” programs do not provide. In recent speeches and texts, Pope John Paul has complained about the fact that mass media tend to be mere market products.

(6) Statistics have often established that in most countries people watch mainly their own national TV channels. Since more and more private channels match the official programs and question national borderlines it is predicatable that these habits will change more or less in the future.

(7) It is quite symptomatic that during the economic discussions between the EC and the USA the question of the media is treated either in cultural (and moral) terms (by the EC and by European artists) or in economic terms, and that politicians but not scholars decide about the exact position of such matters.

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