



## IMPERIAL LANGUAGES AND THE PANORAMA OF WORLD LITERATURE

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### ABSTRACT

What is the primary aim of translation? The primary aim of translation is to convey the message or the meaning of the original text and why does the need for translation arise? The need for translation arises when people want to read material/texts written in a language they do not know. We also need translation when a writer wishes to communicate with readers of another language. I developed the analytical and critical skills to begin to view translation as something more than the semantic and syntactic transfer from one language to another. This analysis explores the role of translation in the production and manipulation of identities in the contemporary imperial structure underscoring the instrumentality of borders with reference to dominant constructions of identity and in connection with questions of language, race, and citizenship, I argue that translation not only functions as an agent of hegemonic superiority and oppression, but also as a locus of plurivocity and hybridization.

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## INTRODUCTION

World literature and world languages are something that concerns our spirit, it is not something meant for specialist, and it is something that affects our soul. First let us begin with world literature, is there a world literature to which the answer is obviously, there is. Is there a world literature and that depends much on the languages in which it is translated? Is there a world with its own national literature? Yes it is, do we know all about them, we don't, and the reason we don't is because very little is actually translated from most of the cultures and languages of the world in to the major languages that exist now, which is of course the dominant imperial language today as English spoken different parts of the world than any other languages. So what is this is creating in essence a cultural conformity and uniformity that is quite damaging to world literature taken as a whole and it is very dependent now on language. If we look even in European countries like France in particular, who proud of its language from the time of enlightenment onwards in particular, they used to look down on other languages, because they saw the French language as the epitome of the most enlightenment in the world, now many French Academics, writers, novelists queue up outside English Language publishing houses pleading to be published in English which they never used to do and the main reason they do it is they want to be read it in the English language , they want to be read it especially in the united states of America. So the level and the thrust of this linguistic hegemony, which is based on a consensus, accepted emotion after the collapse of communism in terms of economics and politics, an ideology that essentially, following the same root.

Then we have the world literature that is created by the Nobel prize for literature, the Nobel prize committee decides that a beautiful novel written by let's say for the sake of argument by an Ethiopian or Somali writer, someone points out then the first question they ask, if this novel is so good, why hasn't been it translated into French? Because the Nobel prize committee prefer to take books which are all translated into French as one of their key criteria for

whether book is good or not, if it has been translated into French then it is considered for the Nobel prize and once it gets the Nobel, then this book becomes part of the world literature and world literary network.

Now I want to point out that the official world literature, created by prizes and recognition from a tiny group of people based ironically in Scandinavian and named after the inventor of dynamite is not a sufficient criterion for us determining what constitutes great literature. So the question of what literature becomes available is very dependent and constitutes a world literary space is determined really by how much of these literature is translated into the main languages of the world.

The colonial legacies in the Americas and the role of translation in situations of Language hegemony as shaped by forces of assimilation and diversification and translation as a crucial agent for the production and legitimization of Latin American identity throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In "Resisting through Hyphenation: The Ethics of Translating Pure Texts," Africa Vidal discusses questions of power, ideology, and identity, and points to translation as "an ideal territory for bringing to light a borderland of conflicts, feelings of superiority and the subsequent oppression that some languages exercise over others". Vidal's problematization of translation reflects some of the major issues that the discipline of translation studies has pursued in the last decade, particularly in relation to the role of translation in the perpetuation and confrontation of asymmetries of power and the construction of identity illustrates this new focus on translation as a crucial agent not only for the evolution of culture, but also for the formation, maintenance, and transformation of local identities in an increasingly "borderless world," as inspired by advances in transportation, technology, and communication.

The border is a space of translation, albeit not between languages but *within* languages, translation on the border cannot operate from "source" to "target" languages, but languages instead



perennially feed into each other. Translation produces new forms of cross-cultural interaction and reveals the fundamentally hybrid character of languages and cultures.

One of the main concerns that the advent of globalization, understood as a phenomenon of late modernity, has raised is the hegemony of English as the so-called “Esperanto of the twenty-first century” (Vidal 2007). Such hegemony implies the increasing minoritization of languages other than lingua francas, also called a bridge language, trade language, or vehicular language, is a language systematically (as opposed to occasionally, or casually) used to make communication possible between persons not sharing a native language. Indeed, if languages inherently underlie specific forms of understanding the world or, to put it differently, their own cosmologies, the currency of the English language and Anglo-American values.

In contemporary global settings threatens to dissolve not only those languages *ipso facto* relegated as minoritarian, but also the cosmologies they reflect. However, languages are not homogenous entities and, as I argued previously, they hold the capacity to interrogate dominant language ideologies in more than one way. The anxiety derived from the spread of a hegemonic language as a lingua franca is not particular to the current stage of globalization. The legacies of European colonialism have been affecting indigenous languages for centuries before the paradigm of globalization as such began to permeate the imaginary of the contemporary world systems – world language and world literature.

Keeping this in mind, I want to talk about some writers to make the discussion more comprehend, of course, long before the Nobel Prize was invented. All the questions are related to world literature- for instance Don Quixote of Cervantes in 17<sup>th</sup> century Spanish literature gets universal recognition and has been debated and discussed for the last four and half centuries. The most of the way we know the novel and the other part of the world it is because, it was the first real novel that has to be translated in lots and lots different languages long

before the world was seen as a global entity. There is a Chinese translation published in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and a Japanese translation, so this novel made its sway and what is interesting about this novel is that for those of us who do not know Spanish, do not read Spanish, perfectly or imperfectly it is impossible to understand what this novel is all about and yet it is very important novel.

Harold Bloom and Edith Grossman, great US experts on world literature have written an introduction and a beautiful new translation in English, really stunning, it is a fantastic translation which gives us a feel of the rhythm of the Spanish language and Cervantes his own rhythm and his humor and his satirical bits which you have been not understood by everyone from earlier translation. But this great translation is wrecked by an introduction by Harold bloom because he does not tell you anything about the context in which that novel was written, he is essentially says, “well this is one of the greatest novel of humanity, some people liked it, loved it, stunned out of it. A book of did not like it and goes on like this”; it is a really bad introduction we really want to know is why did Cervantes write this novel? What was the context of Spain in which that novel was produced? And what was this great writer trying to tell us? And if you read the novel carefully trying to tell us many things that the Spain in which he is writing, Spain in which three cultures co-existed for several hundred years. And so when Cervantes sat down to write this novel what does he say the early pages of the novel he says basically it is not a novel written by him, the reader gets shock and then he says one day when I was in the market a boy came by to sell some note books and old papers to a silk merchant and as I am very fond of reading even tore papers in the field, I was moved by natural inclination to pick up one of the volume the boy was selling and I saw it was written in characters I knew to be Arabic and since I recognized about could not read them I looked around to see if some **Moriscos**, Muslim convert who knew **Castilian** and could read them for me was in the vicinity and it was not difficult to find this kind of interpreter for even if I had sought the speaker of better and older language



I would have find them, and the better and old language for Cervantes was of course Hebrew, so he is aiming two points, he is giving a hint to the reader this is where I am coming from and this novel actually been written in Arabic. Now why does he say this it is not for amusement, it is not to make us smile, it is to register a literary protest to once we had a culture in which these languages flourished and these languages are no longer there. This was actually a statement could be read many ways in the new global context where linguistic and cultural hegemony is being created by the imperial language.

Now, Is Abdul Rahman Munif, famous Arabic writer part of world literature? Yes he is part of world literature because we know something of what he has written and he is accepted by serious literary critics as one of the great masters of the Arabic language, but how many more are there which we do not know about, how many are writing now who might never get translated and you can see the pattern from continent to continent all depends on what the world who is the proprietor of the world languages and what will be the impact of this on the culture, world culture by the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the answer is we do not know, some people say Arabic is divine language it will last forever. Well, I hope it does, because it is a very fine language. But will it? The other divine languages disappeared, Latin after all used to be divine language and it disappeared. So will Arabic disappear, that is the way languages just rise and fall; it is not simply linked to the beauty of the language because Latin was a very beautiful language, all the great Roman poets wrote in it. Languages can disappear if the culture on which they are based crack up, disappear, or taken over by other cultures then that can happen. The big languages today the English and Spanish will probably last for a long time.

The other point I just want to put to is who gets the Nobel Prize for literature. Peace we know, Nobel prize for peace is given to people who make war, the Nobel peace prize recently given to a Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobe, of course the west is going greater the Norwegian retired politician are saying we gave this prize to this writer because we

want to teach China a lesson, China has to reform itself, well no one in no way is going to reform China, it is the Chinese people who can I hope will be able to transform China, it is not going to be done a tiny country in Europe, of course the Chinese is not able to resist this writer but who is this writer he is a writer says the big problem china that it was not colonized and that we need at least 300 years of colonization, for china to recover and someone asked him recently you know through various mechanism, he said that is my political position. Fine it is a crazy position this is the writer whom the Nobel peace prize is given, they have no idea of what is this politics.

And what about literature, For example an Indonesian write Pramodia Ananta toer novelist, poet, literary critic and communist, locked up by the military dictatorship for several years, tortured, suffered from malnutrition they kept him like other political prisoners because the state wanted them die but they did not have the guts to kill them directly. And in prison he was told to give stories to other prisoners to keep the prisoners moral high and those stories became the basis of book which he wrote when he was in prison, once he was released came back from the prison and treated as a hero by ordinary people who had read his books, now why did he ever get the Nobel prize if any one who deserves it, he did because of the quality of the literature not his politics. There are some who think that literature has to be political, I don't accept that, I think all great literature as I have been trying to explain is usually linked to history and the world is contextualized every novel has to have form, style and Pramodia Ananta toer certainly had that, and it applies to the other parts of the world for the writers of this caliber and milieu.

So we only know a set people and their work because they have been translated and so the struggle for the right to translate is an important struggle and the European union could do a set up a huge fund for translation, have a group of experts who will tell you what is good and what is not good but without this we will lose the global touch of this



panorama of world literature because we are living in a globalised culture today.

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