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New Insights in the History of Interpreting
Edited by Kayoko Takeda and Jesús Baigorri-Jalón

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CHAPTER 2

Interpreting practices in the Age of Discovery

The early stages of the Spanish empire in the Americas*

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This chapter reflects on the evolution of interpreting practices of explorers and conquerors in Spanish America, comparing interpreters' roles and profiles during the initial journeys of discovery (1492–1524) and the period of early colonial administration in New Spain, where there was a complex mosaic of languages. The evolution is traced using primary and secondary sources. Initially Spanish explorers and conquerors resorted to Old World traditional strategies to solve their linguistic and cultural challenges, but after the conquest of Mexico-Tenochtitlan new strategies were designed, for instance those used at the *Audiencias*, where the *Laws of the Indies* contained specific legislation on interpreters. This regulation of the interpreter's trade can be seen as a pioneering initiative applied throughout the vast Spanish empire for centuries thereafter.

Keywords: linguistic intermediaries, interpreting practices, early colonial Mexico, Laws of the Indies, colonial *Audiencias*, staff interpreters

1. Previous research, sources and theoretical framework

My initial interest in the history of interpreting practices was focused on linguistic and cultural mediation in the first Spanish expeditions to the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico in the Age of Discovery. Based on a variety of sources, mainly chronicles of the Indies, but also on primary records from historical and administrative archives and the religious orders' internal correspondence, I tried to identify interpreters, to define their social origins, to analyze their professional (or non-professional) profiles and to describe and evaluate their role(s) in various social settings. Further research, mainly conducted within the Alfoqueque

* I am very grateful for the helpful comments provided by the two anonymous reviewers of this chapter.

Research Group, has contributed to broadening this field of study to encompass other colonial periods and geographical areas in the Americas, including Guatemala, Paraguay and Chile (Baigorri and Alonso 2007; Alonso, Baigorri and Payàs 2008; Payàs and Alonso 2009) and also to include new approaches and methodological tools for research into the history of interpreting, such as the analysis of visual images and the adoption of a historical and anthropological perspective (Alonso and Baigorri 2004; Payàs and Zavala 2013). The scientific debate on this topic has recently been enriched by research from the fields of history (Ratto 2005; Roulet 2009), ethnohistory (Schwaller 2012; Yannakakis 2008, 2012), linguistics (Malvestiti 2012), translation and interpreting studies (Payàs, Zavala and Samaniego 2012; Valdeón 2013) and sociology and visual syntax (Fernández-Ocampo and Wolf 2014). All of these studies have emphasized the prominent role played by bilingual intermediaries in the establishment of relations between cultures in conflict and in shaping both institutional and everyday life in early colonial societies.

The aim of this chapter is to compare the linguistic strategies used during the first stages of the Spanish expeditions to the Caribbean and to the territories of modern Mexico (1492–1524) and those that emerged when a new form of administration in New Spain, mainly the *Audiencia* (see 3.1), was established as a tool of colonial rule in the New World. The timeframe for this second stage would be between the establishment of the *Audiencia* of Mexico (1527) and the foundation of the Viceroyalty of New Spain with the appointment of the first viceroy, Antonio de Mendoza (1535–1550).

Combining chronicles of the Indies with legal documents, records from historical archives and Inquisition cases, among other sources, I examine the different ways in which linguistic intermediaries between Spanish and Mesoamerican cultures carried out their tasks. In doing so, I try to confirm the following hypothesis: interpreting practices in early colonial Mexico showed a rather fast evolution from the 1520s onwards toward the establishment of a series of official positions under specific regulations. Such evolution could be considered as a process of adapting the various ways of “being in-between” in social interactions to the new colonial order when demands for linguistic mediation arose.

Conflicting and converging interests were linked to the specific linguistic requirements of each person or social group at different moments, although the contours of those needs were often blurred. While I am aware of the major social and cultural role played by missionaries and religious orders in institutional and everyday life in the colonies – the imperial endeavor was indeed a joint venture between the Spanish Crown and the Catholic Church –, I will focus here mainly on the daily linguistic interactions between Spanish explorers, conquistadors, rulers or civil servants and the indigenous populations.

From a methodological point of view, it can be assumed that at this early stage of colonial rule, as in other historical periods, both oral and written mediation skills – applied to many extralinguistic functions – were required and were frequently performed by the same person (Alonso-Araguás 2010; Yannakakis 2012; Andres 2013). That is why an extensive typology of mediated situations managed by a variety of so-called interpreters (Pöchhacker 2004: 15) responds better to a general category of linguistic and cultural mediation, men and women in between (Yannakakis 2008), than to the concept of interpreter as an established profession.

2. Traditional interpreting practices during the first voyages of discovery

Planning to reach Japan and China sailing westward, Columbus included as an interpreter in his crew a recently converted Jew, Luis de Torres, fluent in Spanish, Hebrew, Chaldean, Arabic and most likely a little Latin (Colón 1995, 1st voyage, November 2, 1492). Torres had acquired his linguistic skills serving as a private clerk for the Fajardo family in the Christian kingdom of Murcia. For many years during the *Reconquista* (a period from the eighth to the late fifteenth century in which Muslims, Jews and Christians coexisted in present-day Spain and Portugal) he was in charge of writing and translating their private and official correspondence from and into Castilian and Arabic (Vilar 1995: 248–249). Columbus assumed that the languages covered by his interpreter would allow for sight-translation of the official letters, written in Latin, that he took with him as diplomatic documents to exchange with the Japanese and Chinese authorities. That high-level diplomatic interpreting turned out to be useless, and Luis de Torres failed on his first attempt to communicate with Taino peoples on Hispaniola Island (current Dominican Republic and Haiti) on November 2, 1492. But Columbus was aware of previous explorations by the Portuguese along the West African coasts in which the cooperation of interpreters (*os linguas*) from different backgrounds, including assistance in the kidnapping of natives, was a real priority for explorers and merchants. That is why, three weeks before his official interpreter first attempted to communicate with the natives, the Admiral took a native Indian¹ from Guanahani Island – the first crime of the New World according to Greenblatt (1990: 17) –, to be used later on as an interpreter (Colón 1995, 1st voyage, October 14, 1492). The young indigenous boy would be named Diego Colón.

1. The expression “Indian,” used in this chapter, is taken directly from the sources. It applies to various native peoples in the area of study who were identified by the first explorers as people from India, the intended destination of their early voyages.

Precedents of interpreting practices that used captives as interpreters during the early Spanish voyages of discovery to the Americas can be found in various instances. In the political entities created during the Muslim occupation of the Iberian Peninsula in the Middle Ages (711–1492), continued interaction between Christians and Muslims required sustained language mediation, often performed by Jews, the main intercultural intermediaries (Pym 2000:71; Alonso and Payàs 2008:44). The early Portuguese and Castilian voyages of exploration in the 14th and 15th centuries led them respectively to the West African coast (Russell 1980; Pinheiro 2008:30), and to the Canary Islands (Sarmiento-Pérez 2011:160). In both cases, the use of linguistic mediators was necessary to establish trading posts and routes and to put new territories under political control, and kidnapping was a medium-term strategy explorers put in practice to procure interpreters for subsequent voyages.

Those customary solutions were used during the four voyages of Columbus (1492–1504), the following trade-driven Andalusian voyages to the Caribbean coast of Venezuela and the Antilles (1499–1504), and the early campaigns of Grijalva and Cortés into the continent (1518–1524). They involved the kidnapping of young natives to be immediately used on site as guides and linguistic intermediaries, or to be trained in Spanish during a variable period of time to serve as interpreters.

It seems clear that the first spontaneous solution did not guarantee effective interpretation, as the kidnapped natives did not speak or understand Spanish. However, primary sources from that period show us many instances of kidnapped local young boys, recruited during voyages as guides and informants, to be used either on board ships or on the ground.² According to available sources, they were far from cooperative and usually eager to escape from their captors or to rise up against them. The case of Melchorejo, a young Mayan boy captured with Julianillo by Cortés in March 1517 in Punta Cotoche (Yucatan Peninsula) who escaped two years later near Tabasco (Díaz del Castillo 2000, I:88), shows that the quite logical reaction from captured natives did not contribute to facilitating on-site communication.

Regarding the second solution, there were many instances of local people being forcibly taken to imperial administrative centers, such as the city of Santo Domingo on Hispaniola Island, which became in 1511 the temporary headquarters of the first Royal *Audiencia*, or even to the court of the Catholic Monarchs in Spain.³ The aim was to teach them Castilian so they could be taken back to work as

2. As a matter of fact, we can find such a profile of intermediaries in very different places and times (see Karttunen 1994). Indeed, captivity in border territories became a phenomenon which promoted transculturation processes between cultures in contact (see Operé 2001:264).

3. The term “Spain” designates, for the purpose of this chapter, the kingdom consolidated under Isabella and Ferdinand around 1492, which included territories and peoples that exceeded

interpreters, after being baptized with Christian names, often with Spanish explorers or officers acting as godparents. Young Diego Colón, kidnapped on Guanahani Island with other natives and taken to the Indies as an interpreter one year later, was only the first in a long series of indigenous people captured for the purpose of resolving communication problems. Kidnapped on October 14, 1492, during Columbus’ first voyage, he received the same name as the Admiral’s legitimate son. After a one-year stay in Spain, he was considered fluent enough in Castilian to serve as an interpreter and thus was taken by Columbus on his second voyage in 1493 (Colón 1995:242).⁴

Hundreds of similar cases of kidnappings during these early years, especially after Columbus’s second voyage, are well-documented in primary sources such as Columbus’s logbooks,⁵ in many chronicles of the Indies,⁶ and in the General Archive of the Indies.⁷ Those abductions, encouraged by Columbus to provide interpreting services in the future, were tolerated and justified by the Spanish Crown and became a regular practice that immediately gave rise to an incipient

present-day Spain, but whose main administrative base was located in the former kingdom of Castile and Leon. The expression “Spanish language” should be understood as Castilian, as was specifically formalized by Nebrija in his 1492 grammar.

4. “(...) and after he had spoken with my Indian – Diego Colón, one of those who had gone to Castile and already speaks our language very well.” (Columbus 1994, I:281). For a more detailed description of the interpreter Diego Colón in the second voyage, see Alonso-Araguás 2012:51–53.

5. Columbus made in 1495, during his second voyage, a clear proposal to the Catholic Monarchs to send Indian captives to Castile in order to teach them Castilian and to use them as interpreters in the future: “Please consider whether it might be well worth it to take six or eight boys, set them apart, and teach them to write and study, because I believe they will excel at learning in a short time; in Spain they will learn perfectly and here we will learn their language, and our objective will be realized” (Columbus 1994, I:355). See also Columbus’s testimony about some natives captured during his first voyage who were taken back to the Americas in his second voyage: “I sent only one caravel to leave ashore [Samana] one of the four Indians taken last year – he had not died of smallpox like the others – when I left for Cadiz and others from Guanahani or San Salvador” (Columbus 1994, I:215).

6. For instance, Fernández de Oviedo (1959, I:31) provides detailed information about several captives’ stays in Spain, and Las Casas (1957, I, ch. 85–86) refers to the return of some of them as interpreters to the Americas.

7. See “Real Cédula a Cristóbal de Mendoza” (June 19, 1496) in Archivo General de Indias (AGI), Indiferente, 420, L.8. About the role played by Hispaniola Island in the provision of interpreters, see also “Asiento y capitulación que se tomó con Alonso de Ojeda para ir a descubrir a las Indias” (September 30, 1504) in AGI, Indiferente, 418, L.1, fol. 134r–137v; “Gente de La Española para la expedición de Tierra Firme” (1513) in AGI, Panamá, 233, L.1, fol. 55–57r; “Orden a Diego Colón” (May 5, 1513) in AGI, Indiferente, 419, L.4, fol. 146r–146bis r.

trade of Indian slaves. As a matter of fact, very few of these kidnapped Indians were taken back to their places of origin in the Americas.⁸ At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Catholic Queen Isabella tried to reduce the number of captives through a series of royal decrees and ordinances restricting the allowance to just a small number of linguistic intermediaries (the so-called *indios lenguas*) and to the rebel cannibals (the *Caribe* peoples). As was to be expected, many abuses occurred, and new decrees with a similar purpose had to be enacted through the sixteenth century.

From a strictly linguistic point of view, this approach seems to make sense: it is easier to teach the language when the learner is young. Besides, kidnapping was a common practice in internal local wars too, so the practice would not have been seen as something unusual by the indigenous peoples. Such a strategy brings to the fore the role played by translation in those cross-cultural contexts. Immediacy was of course a decisive criterion in recruiting interpreters to the detriment of others parameters, as accuracy or a high level of professional skills. But the tactical benefits of using captives in military conflicts, especially in colonial settings involving power balance and asymmetrical relationships, should not be overlooked. By ranking captive natives on their side, colonizers had a (forced) means of incursion in the Other's physical and mental territory: being seen in the company of members of the Other's own community was indeed a tactical advantage, at least in the initial stages of the encounter. In that context, local interpreters were perceived by colonizers as valuable repositories of – maybe limited, but privileged – inside information on their societies and cultures, that is, “not only because of *what* they do but because of *who* they are” (Cronin 2000: 72, my emphasis). Therefore, cultural mediation, information control and loyalty seem to have been more valued than translation quality, and the success of military campaigns and early colonial occupation was more linked to the mere presence of indigenous mediators on the colonizers' side than to their far from optimal translation skills. Apart from their role as language intermediaries, local potential interpreters could, within their “geopolitical” range, readily provide knowledgeable information about topography, customs and alliances or relationships between different native rulers and various population groups.

Certainly, the use of these natives as guides was based on the erroneous idea held by the Spaniards that the two types of societies worked on the same spatial

8. See “Carta de los Reyes al obispo Fonseca para que entregue cincuenta indios a Juan de Lezcano para el servicio de las galeras” (January 13, 1496), in Archivo General de Simancas (AGS), Cámara de Castilla, 1. 2º, 2ª, fol. 156. It is worth noting that at the end of the fifteenth century the slave trade from the Canary Islands and Africa was quite usual in the major cities on the Iberian Peninsula, such as Lisbon, Seville or Cadiz.

scale. The Spaniards had crossed the ocean, covering thousands of kilometers, while the small indigenous groups they met, especially at the beginning in the Caribbean, had a quite restricted area of movement, limited by the combination of powerful natural forces (storms, winds, heat, insects, and so on) and very simple technology (canoes, bows and arrows). If the Spaniards thought that they could be guided in their further explorations by people taken from these small hamlets, they were wrong, at least for two reasons: those children knew only their limited area, within walking or canoeing distance; and, since they did not speak Spanish, their potential explanations would be incomprehensible for the Spaniards. So the place-name system used by Spanish colonists in the American territories, commemorating religious figures or paying tribute to their places of origin (Hispaniola, Isabella, Nombre de Dios, Veracruz, Nueva Galicia, Nueva España, for instance), represents the contrast between the two worlds in contact. This new imperial cartography reflects not only the conquerors' symbolic power to name places, things and individuals that already had their own names, but also their ignorance of the natives' worldview and languages.

Kidnapping, as an extreme form of physical appropriation of the translator's body (Cronin 2000: 135), was certainly the first, fastest and easiest way to place translators or interpreters in a subordinate position within power networks.

In addition to the use of captives or abducted natives, the learning by sailors, soldiers and missionaries of a smattering of local languages was, of course, a complementary way to provide medium- to long-term linguistic solutions. Long stays inside indigenous communities afforded some of them the essential linguistic tools to communicate in daily affairs. Over the years, some became interpreters, including Cristóbal Rodríguez, a sailor with Columbus, whose nickname was *la lengua* (the tongue) (Las Casas 1957, I: 470–1; II: 97, 175); Cortés's page boy, Orteguilla, later on a highly valued interpreter between Montezuma and Cortés (Díaz del Castillo 2000, I: 92, 95); García de Pilar, the well-known sailor in Cortés's campaign (Thomas 2003: 133–4), or even the Franciscan friars Bernardino de Sahagún and Alonso de Molina, who acted as senior interpreters in ecclesiastical courts (González-Obregón 2009: 29).

Finally, potential interpreters and cultural intermediaries were also recruited from among the groups of women, children or young men offered by local rulers or *caciques* as servants or slaves.⁹ Among these “good-will gifts,” the Mayan princess Malintzin, *doña Marina*, is perhaps the most famous but by no means an isolated case, especially during the military campaign of Cortés in the Yucatan

9. This widely-used Spanish word *cacique* comes from Taino, an Arawak language spoken in the Great Antilles when Columbus arrived during his first voyage. It means an indigenous dignitary, a local Indian chief.

Peninsula. Data about other indigenous women that played an important mediation role can also be found in archival records and secondary sources (Karttunen 1997). In the asymmetrical relationship between the colonizers and the colonized, the role of these indigenous interpreters, with conflicting interests and allegiances, poses ethical questions (Valdeón 2013), such as their loyalty or impartiality as regards the two sides in conflict.

3. New communication strategies in the early colonial administration: Steps towards stable institutional interpreting practices

New approaches to the language barrier issue had to be tested once an early colonial administration was established in the territories gradually conquered overseas by the Spanish Crown. Local intermediaries contributed to shaping the colonial legal administration when, after the fall of Mexico-Tenochtitlan and the death of Montezuma (1521), the way to more stable and sophisticated legal and administrative practices was smoothed. Some of the administrative bodies that emerged during the Middle Ages in the Iberian Peninsula under the Christian *Reconquista* process, and the subsequent resettlement of the population, were adapted by the Spanish colonists in the Americas as a mirror image of the Spanish State administration.

The procedure used by the colonial administration to confiscate the natives' lands was basically the *repartimiento* and *encomienda* system.¹⁰ In both cases, native people were part of the reward received by the beneficiaries of those endowments, so a certain level of communication between Spanish masters and local servants was necessary for the system to function.

As a result of this process, a legion of functional bilinguals capable – sometimes barely – of understanding the orders given by the masters also acted as cultural and linguistic brokers or facilitators in informal everyday interactions. Among them, some would learn a little more Spanish than others, probably in a

10. The *repartimiento* system (meaning “distribution”) answered the need to provide Spanish colonists with a sufficient amount of indigenous manpower to allow them to work the land or to exploit the mines. To avoid conflicts among colonists, the Spanish Crown established a quota system to supply forced labor. The *encomienda* (meaning “to entrust someone with land and people in exchange for certain duties”) entailed the colonists' obligation to protect and educate native communities in exchange for their loyalty, tributes and labor. Educational obligations included the teaching of Spanish and instruction in the Catholic faith, the so-called *adoctrinamiento* (indoctrination). Needless to say, colonists more often than not failed to fulfill their legal obligations.

relatively short time, and they would eventually become overseers or foremen of their fellow workers. Those local intermediaries (i.e. speakers of local tongues and fluent in Spanish but not necessarily literate) or Spaniards fluent in local tongues provided a kind of mediation in routine affairs rather than in official administrative settings (Yannakakis 2012: 669). They were “people in between,” unofficial interpreters, who played a crucial role in preserving their traditions and in promoting hybridization among ethnic groups and cultures, as pointed out by Schwaller (2012: 710 ff.). This was a widespread modality of interethnic, intercultural and interlinguistic relations that coexisted with the more sophisticated language regime used, for instance, in the *Audiencias* (see 3.1). In fact, some of these people in-between participated as incidental interpreters in ecclesiastical courts and in collaboration with official (and perhaps professional) interpreters, as was the case with the two indigenous servants who interpreted in don Carlos of Texcoco's Inquisition trial in 1539 (Alonso-Araguás 2012: 53–58).

Furthermore, the establishment of new administrative bodies led to the replacement of the early mediated encounters (mostly isolated contacts which were common during the military campaigns) by institutionalized contacts in many sectors of the incipient colonial government in which better language skills were required: justice and law, tax collection, or, for instance, activities carried out by the Catholic Church (Pöchhacker 2004: 15–16). The preceding social structure, where asymmetrical power and class relations also existed on both sides before the conquest, did not disappear with the arrival of the Spaniards, and both oral and written skills in the new imperial language, Castilian Spanish, became a valuable asset to improve the social or economic status of those who mastered it. Those who became proficient were seen by the local population as part of the ruling elite and that gave them an exclusive advantage to exert political control over indigenous groups. Those intermediaries, often Indian natives or *mestizos*, who would eventually become staff interpreters in the *Audiencias*, played a crucial role in building colonial America. However, they were faced with an uncomfortable situation, derived from their ambivalence: they failed to be completely assimilated into Spanish society and they would be seen with suspicion by their own people, as collaborators with the colonizers and Spanish officials. Their condition was far from simple, because, as Yannakakis (2008: 6) has rightly pointed out referring to loyalties at the early stages of colonial Mexico, “the categories of ‘Spaniard’ and ‘Indian’ and their correspondence to the terms *conqueror* and *conquered* have little meaning.”

3.1 Appointment of staff interpreters in colonial *Audiencias*

For the purposes of this study, staff interpreters refer to those individuals who occupied official positions as language intermediaries within the colonial administration. Following a specific appointment, they carried out linguistic mediation tasks under the authority of the viceroy, the tax collectors, the town councils (*cabildos*), other colonial functionaries or even the ecclesiastic courts. Their salaries, duties and rights were stipulated in specific legislation (Giambruno 2008).

Some of the laws and regulations from medieval Castile, as well as some administrative and legal institutions that emerged during the Spanish *Reconquista*, were adapted to the needs of New Spain's early colonial society. Thus, in addition to the Laws of Burgos (1512) and the collection of ordinances and royal decrees enacted by Queen Isabella of Castile and King Ferdinand of Aragon (the Catholic Monarchs) regulating the administration of the Indies, a new legal system developed out of the legal dispositions promulgated by Emperor Charles V (the New Laws, *Leyes Nuevas*, in 1542) and by King Philip II, in 1585. In the following decades, successive laws and ordinances on the newly discovered territories were added, so that legal regulations required continuous compilations and updates (Francis 2006), mainly in 1681 and 1776, under the title of *Recopilación de Leyes de los Reynos de Indias* (Compilation of Laws of the Indies). They comprised four volumes arranged into several books and titles. This legal corpus was meant to cover every administrative and legal matter in colonial America, including governance and judicial processes.

The *Audiencia* was the specific institution charged with the administration of justice in colonial Spanish territories, as was the case in late medieval Castile. Between 1523 and 1587 the *Audiencias* were also concerned with administration, and their presidents held simultaneously the post of governor or viceroy. The first *Audiencia* in the Indies was established during Diego Colón's mandate in 1511 in Santo Domingo (temporarily abolished and reestablished again in 1526), followed by the one in Mexico in 1527. Similar institutions were established in Panama (1538), Guatemala and Lima (both in 1543), as well as in South American territories through the second half of the 16th century and during the 17th century (Polanco 1992; Schäfer 2003; Francis 2006).

Amongst the issues dealt with in the *Compilation of Laws of the Indies* were those concerning interpreting practices in official settings, in Book II, title 29, *Sobre los intérpretes* (*On interpreters*), which includes fourteen specific ordinances enacted over a long period of time, from 1529 to 1630. They laid the foundations for the provision of an interpreting services system, establishing the qualifications and working conditions for the interpreters at the *Audiencias*, including penalties for the breach of their duties, that is, a professional code (Alonso and Payàs 2008; Giambruno 2008).

Within the timeframe of this research, I will focus on two laws enacted by Emperor Charles V.¹¹ The earliest one is Law XIV, dated 1529, which focused on ethical issues related to interpreters (or *lenguas*) assisting the native population in the provinces or in towns outside the headquarters of the *Audiencia*:

Law XIV (1529):¹² Interpreters shall not request or receive anything from the Indians, nor Indians give more than required to their *encomenderos*.

(Translated by Giambruno 2008: 47)

This law originated in the reiterated complaints by the local people about frequent cases of arbitrariness by some of the interpreters of the *Audiencias*, who used the power derived from their administrative position to extort jewelry, clothes, women or food from the Indians (see Ayala 1946, vol. I: 409). As in many other daily dealings, language skills were used in the courts as a means to negotiate social relations by taking advantage of their perceived proximity to the colonial administration.

In order to prevent unfair practices such as blackmail, bribes or abuses of power by the interpreters, this law bans their acceptance of any kind of items from the Indians and establishes the following penalties: banishment and loss of assets. After this first regulation, at least five of the ordinances included in Book II, title 29, of this *Compilation of Laws of the Indies* refer with special emphasis to interpreters' salaries (Laws I, IX, X, XI), to the prohibition of accepting any amount of money or gifts (Law III), and to the obligation on interpreters to remain at the *Audiencia's* headquarters (Laws VI and VIII).

In 1530, just one year after the enactment of this law, Emperor Charles V explicitly confirmed the on-going suspicions of translation mistakes or intentional manipulation of messages by interpreters in the justice administration. The emperor's instructions to the New Spain *Audiencia* to get a tighter grip on those interpreters' frauds proposed the presence at court of two interpreters, who would act separately and whose versions could eventually be compared in order to ensure their accuracy with the original.¹³ Those instructions were almost entirely incor-

11. These fourteen ordinances are not presented in the *Compilation* in strict chronological order; the two earliest laws are placed at the very end of the Title. Giambruno (2008: 37–47) provides extensive comments accompanying the whole series of laws in Spanish and English.

12. [Spanish original]: "Que los Interpretes no pidan, ni reciban cosa alguna de los Indios, ni los Indios den mas de lo que deben á sus Encomenderos." (*Recopilación de Leyes...*, Libro II, título 29, Ley XIV: 275).

13. See *Instrucciones al Presidente y Oidores de la Audiencia de la Nueva España, Madrid* (July 12, 1530): "Acá se ha hecho relacion que en la interpretacion de las lenguas de los naturales de aquellas Provincias há habido algunos fraudes por culpa de los interpretes de ella, y que seria

porated in the second law of the series, Law XII, dated 1537. Thus the ordinance openly allowed the use of a second interpreter (*ladino cristiano*), a friend or relative of the Indian who was giving testimony, as a way to monitor the accuracy and good faith of the main interpreter when judicial and extrajudicial proceedings were taking place:

Law XII (1537):¹⁴ Any Indian who is required to give testimony is allowed to bring a person who speaks Castilian and knows the customs of the Spanish to be present at the hearing. (Transl. by Giambruno 2008: 45)

Thus, the Spanish authorities tried to ensure not only the right of the native population to be given linguistic assistance in legal procedures but also certain checks and balances as to professional quality and ethical conduct. Beyond the translation's quality and accuracy issue, the ordinance invites us to reflect on the role trust and loyalty would play in the appointment of interpreters. The ordinance in its original Castilian version refers to the option of using a second interpreter saying that he would be *un ladino cristiano, un cristiano amigo*, that is, someone who would not only be familiar with the language of procedure but who also shared the religion, an important collateral for those who administered justice. Once again, loyalty and mutual trust may be considered more crucial than impartiality or professional qualifications when it comes to asymmetric relations of colonial domination.

3.1.1 Nahuatlato and general interpreters

Official interpreters assigned to assist colonial authorities in the period covered in this chapter were often recruited among the children of local indigenous or *mestizo* nobility or from the selected circles of the Franciscans (mainly at the Tlatelolco College, in Mexico City). They were often highly educated people and some of them showed literary abilities in different languages. Due to their knowledge of two or more languages, they also had more chances of achieving a higher social status in the new colonial order. As members of the indigenous nobility, they had

remedio para escusar los inconvenientes que en ello ha habido que quando se hubiese de hacer alguna interpretacion de lenguas, fuese por dos interpretes, y estos no concurriesen juntos á la declaracion del Yndio, sino que cada uno por su parte declarase lo que dijese; y que de esta manera los interpretes no tendrán lugar de trocar las palabras, sino que cada uno declarase lo que digese; y otros son de parecer que mas verdad se podrá saver estando presentes ambos: Vezlo allá vosotros, y proveer en ello lo que mas convenga, como personas que teneis las cosas delante." (Ayala 1946, I:406–407).

14. [Spanish original]: "Que el Indio que huviere de declarar, pueda llevar otro ladino Christiano, que esté presente." (*Recopilación de Leyes...*, *Idem*).

an outstanding knowledge of local cultures and societies, particularly compared with the average Spaniard settled in New Spain. Promotion of these indigenous or *mestizo* individuals was a measure that allowed Spanish administrators to co-opt local rulers to the low ranks of imperial bureaucracy. Bestowing some official authority to the people who occupied those positions as intermediaries was a way to guarantee a smooth political transition that would facilitate the social control of native people.

This early institutionalization of interpreting tasks in legal, political and administrative settings led to the creation of other official positions, such as that of *escribano* (a municipal scribe in charge of correspondence who sometimes performed interpreter's functions), *nahuatlato* (originally meaning the speaker or interpreter of the Nahuatl language, and later identified as an official interpreter in the *Audiencia*), the *intérprete general del Juzgado de Indios* (general interpreter at the Indian Court) and the *intérprete general* (a general interpreter working in the provinces and mostly appointed by indigenous *cabildos*). At the beginning, the position of *nahuatlato* was usually held by Spaniards, a means to ensure loyalty and trust towards the elite of the colonial rulers.¹⁵

From then on, successive appointments of interpreters in the *Audiencias* were somehow linked with the provisions of the Laws of the Indies, specifically the legal dispositions on interpreters, which added new requirements and shaped a singular legal corpus concerning every detail related to interpreters' practice. Administrative positions like those of *nahuatlato* or general interpreter could eventually be assimilated to those of staff interpreters in institutionalized settings.

Over time, as we have shown elsewhere (Alonso, Baigorri and Payàs 2008; Alonso-Araguás 2015), well-known figures from local indigenous – and also *mestizo* – societies, like Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl and Hernando Alvarado Tezozómoc would become *nahuatlato*s. Chronicler and historian Hernando de Alvarado (ca. 1525–ca. 1560) was a former student with friar Bernardino de Sahagún at Tlatelolco College and a member of a former Mexican ruling family. The same applies several decades later to the Mayan nobleman Gaspar Chi (ca. 1539–ca. 1610).

The Mexican General Archive of the Nation (AGN, in Mexico City) and the General Archive of the Indies (AGI, in Seville, Spain) contain documents which

15. The General Archive of the Indies provides us with valuable information about several interpreters from the first *Audiencia* of Mexico. See, for instance, Patronato, 60, N.4, R.1 ("Méritos y servicios: Alvaro de Zamora: Nueva España." 21.01.1555), México, 203, N.9 ("Informaciones: García del Pilar) and México, 204, N.36 (Informaciones: Juan Gallego"). Before being appointed as official interpreters at the *Audiencia*, the three of them accompanied Hernán Cortés in his military campaigns.

allow us to keep track of many appointments, transfers and successions of this category of interpreter posts. Moreover, some archival records show us that their positions were included in the series of appointments which could be sold (AGI, México, 205, N.33), auctioned, or inherited (AGN, Indios, vol. 39, N.66, fol. 116) with a tendency to see the same families – frequently representatives of the indigenous nobility – holding such positions for several generations while combining the post with other administrative tasks in the Indies, such as mayor, scribe or bailiff (Alonso-Araguás 2015: 309–310).

All these circumstances point to the fact that language was perceived as a powerful tool both by indigenous or *mestizo* communities and by Spanish members of the colonial society. Mastering the two languages could open the way towards a new social oligarchy of local nobilities trying to ensure a privileged position in the extremely asymmetrical societies of New Spain (Nansen-Díaz 2003).

3.2 Interpreters of ecclesiastical courts in sixteenth-century colonial New Spain

Crown and Church shared many interests in the New World colonies – although discrepancies could arise, one example being the case of friar Bartolomé de Las Casas, bitterly critical with the administration – and that would yield a specific type of institution where oral exchanges and interpreters were necessary too: the Inquisition and other ecclesiastical tribunals (see also Sarmiento-Pérez (Chapter 3) in this volume).

Although the Inquisition in the Americas was not officially established until 1569 by King Philip II, from 1511 onward, bishops in the New World were expected to act as ordinary inquisitors in order to prevent heresy and to persecute Protestants and fraudulent *conversos* (converted) Jews or Muslims who fled Spain or other countries in Europe to the Americas. Prosecution cases against heathens, whether Indian or *mestizos*, were typically related to suspected practices involving witchcraft, magic or idolatry.¹⁶ Therefore, the ordinary work of the ecclesiastical Inquisition, whose competences fell under a government department, also required qualified interpreters in European and local languages in order to provide the compulsory linguistic assistance in ecclesiastical trials between a Castilian-speaking court and speakers of foreign languages.

16. Using records from the Holy Office in the Viceroyalty of New Spain, Schwaller (2012) analyzes two witchcraft cases from the second half of the 16th century and sheds light on the role of individuals of mixed ancestry operating between Spanish and native cultures during the trial. See also the inquisitorial process (1544–1546) against the *cacique* of Yanhuitlán, denounced for idolatry, in León-Zavala (1996).

The Holy Office case against the *cacique* of Texcoco, Don Carlos, in 1539, chaired by friar Juan de Zumárraga, the first bishop of New Spain, was one of the most famous of that period. Don Carlos, accused of heresy and apostasy, was tried and sentenced in the church of Tlatelolco and finally executed in the main square of Mexico-Tenochtitlan on November 30, 1539. This trial, whose full transcript was published in 1910 (González-Obregón 2009 [1910]), is an outstanding example of interpreting practices in American ecclesiastical courts. The oral hearings provide evidence of the fact that different categories of interpreters, *lenguas* or *nahuatlaltos* (ibid.: 98), were used to interpret a myriad of Indians' testimonies in the proceedings: (1) Spanish priests and monks, namely Franciscan friars; (2) language scholars – mainly Spaniards –, and (3) native servants. Three famous Franciscan friars, who assisted with interpreting throughout the first stage of the trial, were also present at the concluding statement made by the *cacique* at the end of the trial: friar Antonio de Ciudad Rodrigo, one of the famous Twelve Franciscans who arrived in Mexico in 1524; friar Bernardino de Sahagún, a widely respected scholar who arrived in 1529; and friar Alonso de Molina, the Spanish child (known as “Alonsito” or “young Alonso”), educated by Franciscans in Mexican settlements, who became a prominent expert in Nahuatl language and a teacher at the Imperial College of Tlatelolco (established in 1536). Alonso Matheus, one of the Inquisition official interpreters, worked at least once during the trial, sight translating the statement made by an Indian (ibid.: 96), and Alvaro de Zamora, an official interpreter in the *Audiencia* of Mexico, was assigned to interpret witnesses' statements (ibid.: 93). Besides, various native servants, who enjoyed the trust of ecclesiastical and colonial authorities, were also assigned as interpreters during the trial: Pedro, an Indian interpreter who was Bishop Juan de Zumárraga's servant (ibid.: 60), and a certain Diego (ibid.: 95), whose data are omitted in the transcript. All of them also acted as notaries public, swearing to be truthful and signing witnesses' statements. Those legal cases confirm that ecclesiastical courts required higher qualifications from their interpreters, who were asked to perform oral and sight translation (Lopes 2008; González-Obregón 2009).¹⁷

Since its official establishment in the colonies, one of the Inquisition's major tasks was to deal with heretics, either Spaniards who were suspected of following Jewish or Protestant beliefs, or foreigners who had fled to the Spanish empire (from France, Central Europe and Britain, among other countries). Therefore, interpretation between Spanish and other European languages was required, as was the case in the Canary Islands, a testing ground for practice in the Americas (Sarmiento-Pérez 2011).

17. For more details about interpreting techniques at this trial, see Alonso-Araguás (2012: 53–58).

4. Concluding remarks: Interpreters as critical links

This analysis of the evolution of interpreting practices in the early colonial administration of New Spain points to some key issues for discussion in our globalized world, where multilingual exchanges and multicultural coexistence are major challenges not always resolved in a satisfactory way.

The gradual institutionalization of linguistic and cultural mediation practices and the professional regulation of the interpreter's trade achieved in the early stages of Spanish colonial rule in the New World can be seen as a pioneering endeavor. This professional regulation was applied for several centuries throughout the vast territories of the empire: from the Viceroyalty of New Spain in the North, to the most remote colonial territories and boundaries of South America, promoting the emergence of profiles adapted to the circumstances and particular needs of every society, as described by recent research by Roulet (2009) and by Payàs, Zavala and Samaniego (2012) regarding the Araucanian border in Argentina and Chile respectively.

The materialization in laws of this system of appointments, access control, requirements and supervision shows the will of the colonial authorities to ensure legal and official procedures for non-Spanish speakers, even in a context of acutely asymmetrical power relations. That practice represents an obvious recognition of social and cultural diversity and a certain acknowledgement of the local population's linguistic rights after the sudden loss of status experienced by native tongues in the new colonial state. We may regard this initiative as a significant precedent of present-day public service interpreting, in particular in the field of court interpreting.

Further research is necessary to better identify the role(s) played by bilingual intermediaries as the "critical link" in the voyages of Discovery and in early New Spain, using, among others, these historiographical approaches: (1) microhistory case studies in different microspaces where interpreters' roles can be highlighted; (2) long-term sociological studies of intermediary agents, comparing the evolution of interpreters' profiles and practices through longitudinal historical periods; (3) case studies by areas of specialization: religious missions, military conflicts, administration and legal fields, among others; and (4) case studies of specific professional codes and the ethical challenges which interpreted interactions often entailed.

Historical research always approaches the past from the present, but as has been made clear in various parts of this chapter, concepts, values and feelings vary hugely across cultures and across historical periods. The language mirror may distort concepts such as loyalty, particularly when applied to a profession (or trade) of blurred contours, like that of cultural and linguistic intermediaries, where issues of

forced recruitment, acculturation through imposed submission, risk assessment of cooperation vs. resistance, etc. make it very difficult to figure out clear-cut identities and allegiances. It seems that the role(s) of interpreters in conflict situations always raise ethical questions, and this case study is no exception. The complexity of the communication between Spanish colonial authorities and their subjects in territories that were many times larger than the metropolis through a period of over five centuries is challenging enough to require further research by zones and periods. This chapter has tried to point at some potential lines of work in that field.

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CHAPTER 3

Interpreting for the Inquisition

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One of the singularities of the Spanish Inquisition was its multilingualism. This chapter looks at mediation in this institution, which carried out its activities throughout practically the whole of the Spanish Empire over three and a half centuries (1478–1834). After the initial delimitation of the historical, geographical and social areas in which it was active, the most common situations in which interpreters were needed are presented, together with the most relevant aspects of their work, including references to the regulations that governed their interventions. Although this is a first approach to this area of the history of linguistic mediation, we can conclude that the Inquisition involved a considerable amount of interpreting, most of which was of a legal nature.

Keywords: Spanish Inquisition, multilingualism, appointment of interpreters, court interpreting

1. Introduction

The Spanish Inquisition, fostered by the Catholic Monarchs (Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon), was established in 1478 by a Papal Bull issued by Pope Sixtus V and was abolished in 1834 by Decree of the Spanish Regent María Cristina de Borbón. During its three and a half centuries' existence, it carried out a significant amount of inter-linguistic activity in which, although translation and *calificación* – here understood as the drafting of a report in Spanish based on the contents of an original text written in a different language – were frequent, interpreting was the most common mode.¹

Although many of the Inquisition's trials were brought against Spanish speakers (for example, both San Juan de la Cruz and Santa Teresa de Jesús), in our

1. In essence, the *calificación* consisted of examining statements made by the accused and suspicious written texts, and issuing a judgment on them as to whether or not they contained heretic propositions. The *calificadores* had to be theologians (cf. López Vela 1989).