

Commemoration of the 55th Anniversary of SHE  
(Sistema Harvard Educacional)

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Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished guests and school authorities, and, dear graduating millennials:

What I'm about to say doesn't appear in Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Tinder, OkCupid, Grinder nor much less, in LinkedIn. So you'll just have to bear with me. #Sorry not sorry#

Thank you very much for inviting me to participate in this memorable event. It's a great honor for me to address this exclusive audience in this unique assemblage place of Mesoamerican History, the National Museum of Anthropology, in order to commemorate the 55th anniversary of Sistema Harvard Educacional's (SHE) language and translation school in México, founded by the Escobedo-Abascal family. It's also a great honor to speak at the graduation celebration ceremony of the first generation of Licensed Translators and Interpreters of English, Spanish, French and Mexican Sign Language in Mexico.

Today, as we are gathered here to pay homage to this new generation of professional translators, this context abundant with Mesoamerican historical collections surrounded with curators, brings to mind the setting that inspired the creation of Toledo's School of Translators in Spain in the XII century, by Francis Raymond de Sauvetât, Toledo's Archbishop, who nearly one thousand years ago housed Arab, Jewish and Latin

translators in Toledo's Archdiocese Cathedral to translate documents usually from Arabic into Castilian, and then, from Castilian into the official church language, better known as Church-Latin.



• Figure 1. The Cathedral of Toledo. Place of birth of the School of Translators

It must have been a very impressive sight in those days to be enclosed by thousands of mysterious manuscripts that hardly no one understood due to the language barriers that conflated the true sense of knowledge lost a thousand years earlier, written by ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato and Socrates.

Raymond of Toledo's dream must have been similar to that of the founders of the first translation and interpretation schools in Mexico City, i.e.; to create the means to bridge the communicative gap between super stratum languages in contact with a substratum one, as Uriel Weinreich (1953) described in *Languages and Cultures in Contact*.

Yet, that must've been the initial move that started to change the future. There was a second movement that came along some fifty years later, inspired by that first beginning event. In the case of Toledo's translation school, that second consequence came from the

king of Castile, Alphonse the X (1221-1284), who housed systematically Jewish, Arab and Latin translators in his court.



• Figure 2. The School of Translators in King Alphonse X Court.

According to Wikipedia, “Alphonse X fostered the development of a cosmopolitan court that encouraged learning. Jews, Muslims, and Christians had prominent roles in his court. As a result of his encouraging the translation of works from Arabic and Latin into the vernacular of Castile, many intellectual changes took place, perhaps, the most notable being encouragement of the use of Castilian as a primary language of higher learning, science, and law.”



Figure 3. King Alphonse X (The Wise King)

The same is true in our days. SHE has also moved onto a second moment. It is now facing another challenge with this new millennial generation in Mexico. A challenge that seeks to put emphasis on another aspect of intellectual interaction with the rest of the world. Just as Alphonse's translation School inspired a forthcoming renaissance generation, SHE is now confronted with inspiring the revamping of a "geek" generation.

According to Anthony Pym (1996): "Alphonse developed one of the first national translation policies in Europe. The wisdom of his patronage has influenced the translation policies of today, particularly those of the European Union." Briefly said, his translation policies consisted in confronting a dominating culture with translation policies aimed towards the promotion of the development of knowledge for the people of the dominated culture.

Alphonse the Wise counter-attacked with direct translations that targeted the Castilian language of the Mozarabs. Court translators stopped using Mozarab interpreters as a means to achieve Church-Latin documents intended for an elite marginal scholar reader, but rather, they aimed the translations to focus on the common everyday avid audience thirsty for knowledge.

At the beginning, "Alphonsin translations were from Arabic into an oral Romance version and then into written Latin, as had been the case for the church-sponsored translations." "However, that soon changed in 1254 when *El Libro conplido en los Iudizios de las Estrellas* was translated by Aly Aben Ragel into written Castilian."

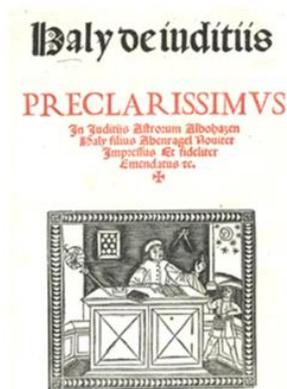


Figure 4. *El Libro conplido en los Iudizios de las Estrellas*

According to Georg Bossong (1987), during Alphonse X reign “and under his impulse, Castilian ceased to be a vernacular of limited use; it became a language capable of expressing all the nuances of thought and dealing with all the fields of human knowledge. In that second half of the thirteenth century, marked by the action of the wise king, Castilian became definitely a language of universal culture.”

To become a language of universal culture, such as the one required by science and technology, it needs to coin new expressions to convey newly discovered conceptual meanings by resorting to a great variety of word-formation-rules, most of which are inherent to the translation source language, but awkward to the target language. During translation, many source language interference errors find their way into the target language, thus enriching the lexicon and the grammar of the target language, consequently making it more robust; it works like a vaccine does to protect an organism from disease.

Pym mentions that in three translation analyses into Castilian, Bossong found that “65% of the new terms were Castilian forms with Arabized meanings, 30% were Latin forms with Arabized meanings, and 5% were direct loans from Arabic.” Consequently, he

deduces that Alphonse X acted consciously to develop a properly national translation policy in Spain, and thereby transformed a meager substratum language wave into a super stratum tidal wave.

Such translation policies injected their consequences a couple of centuries later when Isabel and Ferdinand, the catholic kings, lent their support to the Genovese Christopher Columbus and onto America's discovery and exploration. It was the beginning of the Spanish Golden Age. The Spanish culture swept the earth. The catholic kings' offspring, Charles the Fifth, Holy Roman Emperor, Roman and Italian King, and King of Spain, claimed that the sun never set in his empire. For over three hundred years, Madrid became more influential worldwide than Athens, Damascus or Rome had ever dreamt of.

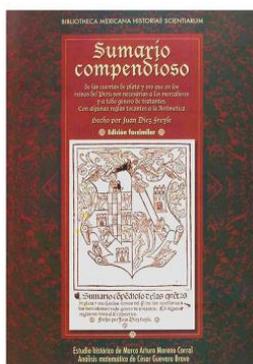


Figure 5. Sumario Compendioso delas quantas de plata y oro que en los reynos del Piru son necessarias a los mercaderes: y todo genero de tratantes. Con algunas reglas tocantes al arithmetica.

Mesoamerica reaped the translation benefits. To Mesoamerica, together with Hernan Cortes, arrived friar Juan Diez, who in his final days (c. 1556) published the first mathematics book in this continent: the “*Sumario Compendioso delas quantas de plata y oro que en los reynos del Piru son necessarias a los mercaderes: y todo genero de tratantes. Con algunas reglas tocantes al arithmetica.*” It was the first algebra that came to set a new perspective about enumerability on the Mesoamericans; something completely

different from the sacred Mayan-Aztec calendar computation days; something strange full of numerical notions and abstractions about wealth accumulation. The friar's book invited the readers to try out new perspectives about quantity. It was full of mathematical riddles expressed with modal verbs, subjunctive and conditional constructions that appealed to the enactment of self-imagination and creativity, and most of all, it was saturated with all kinds of new "numbers".



Figure 6. Tonatiuh and the Five Eras of Mesoamerica

According to Greville G. Corbett (2004) "number words are the source of number systems." The new focus on quantity drove the pre-Hispanic cultures away from the mystical dualistic rhetoric of the past and set them on the road to the world's future economics. It wasn't the horses and weapons brought by the Spaniards what changed Mesoamerican thought, it was a super stratum language what caused the revolution.

Undoubtedly, ever since western culture arrived to Mesoamerica, there has been an effervescent translation activity in our continent, mostly led by different catholic orders and some outstanding Mexican translators, such as Horacio Carocho, Ignacio Paredes, father Angel María Garibay and Miguel León Portilla, just to mention a few. The list is enormous, and they have contributed enormously towards the development of several

native Mesoamerican languages like the Mayan, Mixtec and Nahuatl languages. However, modern science and technology would be better served if translators were to target Mexico's main stream Spanish as their target for translation from modern English and French sources.



Figure 7. The National College (Mexico City).

This new target is clearly described in the Linguistic Atlas of Mexico; a most worthy document where exceptional scholars such as the late José Guadalupe Moreno de Alba, former member of the Royal Academy of Spain, and Luis Fernando Lara Ramos, National Academy member, have spent their entire life studying and describing. A language that urgently needs to be up-dated and enriched with new Spanish terms for science and technology if it truly is to become a language of universal culture.



Wise decisions such as the above entail serious thought about the social conditions of “international projection” and “contact between cultures”, says Pym. To embody them through the creation and maintenance of a school of translation implies much appreciation for the status of translators as members of intercultural communities, and a clear and present vision as to the future of the Mexican society as a whole.

Let me conclude by saying that the success of a mission is not only measured by the aspirations set forth, but also by the achievement of its goals. The entire SHE community have certainly completed this second task, and thus they have graduated the first generation of English, Spanish, French and Mexican sign language professional translators and interpreters! Wow! I predict these young translators a much more promising future full of success and greater challenges to come. Thank you.