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AGATHA CHRISTIE TRANSLATED INTO SPANISH THROUGH FRENCH: A DIFFERENT AUTHOR?

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Introduction

It is no secret that Agatha Christie has been and still is one of the most widely read English authors. Although her detective stories have received a good deal of criticism (see, for instance, Winks, 1980; Knight, 1980), there is no doubt that millions of readers around the world are satisfied by her style and her way of developing stories “from within” (Knight, 1980:107).

The biography of this author is so well known that there is no need to give details here. She was a prolific writer. Agatha Christie (1890-1976), crime novelist, playwright and short story writer, published 66 novels, an autobiography, six ‘Mary Westmacott’ books, a memoir of her expedition to Syria, two books of poetry, another of poems and children’s stories, more than a dozen stage and radio mysteries and around 150 short stories (see Shattock, 1993: 100; Todd, 1989:141; Sage, 1999:131; Schlueter, 1998:145).

Agatha Christie’s novels have been translated into more than a hundred languages, amongst them, Spanish and Catalan. However, the Catalan translations were done at a much later period than the Spanish ones, and the social and cultural context was very different. This led to totally different translations in various aspects. These differences in the way the translations were carried out have caused the Spanish readers to perceive a universe that is very different from the one the author created for her novels, while the Catalan readers are much closer to that view of the world the author created. To be able to explain these differences, we must start by describing the general characteristics of Agatha Christie’s detective stories and the way the original English readers perceived them.

The original readers' perception of Christie's fiction world

There are two basic features that conditioned her novels. First, as Knight stresses (1980:107), Agatha Christie came from an upper-middle-class background and she firmly believed in the values of the English property owning bourgeoisie that she recreated in her novels. This background is reflected in her detective stories by giving simple and straightforward opinions about any issue: "Christie's power comes at least in part from her own simplification of issues. She recreates familiar folk patterns within a specific social setting" (Knight, 1980:125).

Secondly, she had almost no formal education, and therefore she offered nothing more difficult than sharp observation and orderly thought as the systems by which crime was detected and disorder contained. These orderly patterns were presented in a suitable style and Christie perfected a structure, best called the clue-puzzle, which invited and empowered the careful reader to solve the problem along with the detective.

Therefore, her novels encourage the reader to reflect, to use logic and think along with the narrator in order to solve the problems of the plot. Christie's novels do not require an intellectual or very active reader, because the logic behind the plot is very clear, even though the solutions are not revealed until the end of the book, of course. This has been a cause of criticism, because although the structure of her novels have been acknowledged as clever, the style and characterisation have been denigrated as plain and boring. As Knight puts it, "A literary simulacrum of vitality, originality and constant variety is not part of the equipment these novels offer to their readers; but her formal patterns are consistent and controlled, powerfully supportive of the ideology dramatised in the stories" (Knight, 1980:121).

This is a very important point, because the author uses this logic, this almost "boring" style to trick readers into misdirecting their sympathy and their suspicions by playing on their expectations.

Thus, we can conclude that there are two basic features that can be found in any detective fiction novel of Agatha Christie: (i) the overall logical background that the reader perceives thanks to the simplification of issues by the author and (ii) the description of a familiar world that gives no surprises and is absolutely normal, since the only deviation from normality is the crime and the puzzle surrounding it.

However, Spanish readers have a very different perception of Christie's novels, which are often described by Spaniards as full of exotic and eccentric features. The author of this article shared this perception when discovering Christie through the

Spanish translations. These different perceptions of her novels are surprising, and have motivated this study of the translations in order to find an answer to what makes us, Spanish readers, feel differently about Christie's novels.

The Spanish readers' perception of Christie's fiction world

First of all, it is important to explain that the Spanish translations were introduced in Spain in the 1940s, and at that time almost all literature that came into Spain was translated from French. French was the most widely spoken foreign language in Spain, practically the only foreign language, and thus it is no wonder that most of the literature translated at the time was based on French translations, as if they were the originals. However, this was not mentioned at all in the books, where the reader could see "title in English..., translator.....", but no reference whatsoever to the fact that it had been translated from French instead of from English. This is still true of the most recent re-editions.

Furthermore, during the 1940s, the French translations of Christie's novels were carried out by several translators under the orders of the *Le Masque* publishing house, directed by Albert Pigasse. *Le Masque* was much more low-brow than Collins, Christie's British publishers. The French paperback editions of her novels were aimed at a wider, younger audience. This may be why the French translations sometimes used the kind of vocabulary that young people would use, as opposed to the classical style of the original English author, and why some parts of the translations are not very precise, omitting words, sentences and even paragraphs of the original. However, there are also some additions and misinterpretations that had no reasonable justification, but distorted the classic, simplistic ideology Christie expressed in all her novels.

Nevertheless, this article does not aim to analyse how the novels were translated into French, but how the French translations were used as originals for the Spanish translations and how this affected perceptions of all Agatha Christie's work in Spain. An exception must be made for readers of the Catalan translations in Catalonia. Agatha Christie was translated into Catalan quite recently, during the 1980s, and these translations were done, of course, from the English originals, giving the Catalan readers a vision that was much closer to that of the original readers.

And then there were none

To illustrate the phenomenon observed in the Spanish translations, this article

will concentrate on the translation of one novel, *Ten Little Niggers*. First published in 1939 by Collins in England, the title was changed to *Ten Little Indians* for American readers and the final title in 1950 was *And then there were none*. There are several reasons why this novel has been chosen. Firstly, various authors consider it to be one of Agatha Christie's three best novels (see Winks, 1980:240). Secondly, it is one of the 21 novels that do not feature any of Christie's commonly used detectives. Furthermore, in this novel, there is no detective at all, and, what is more important, all the characters are victims, including the murderer. This feature makes this novel unique, and when it was published, in 1939, it raised an outcry from the critics, who said that the author was deliberately deceiving the reader and using the "least likely person" motif. Thus, she had not followed the famous 'detective's decalogue' that lay out the rules of fair play for detective fiction writers (Symons, 1962: 25-6). However, this had already happened with Christie's first famous novel, *The murder of Roger Ackroyd*, published in 1926, where the "Watson" of the story, a friendly country doctor who helps Poirot find out who the murderer is, ends up being the murderer himself.

And then there were none is a good example of Christie's technique, in that she does her best to mislead the reader and direct his/her suspicions away from the murderer, while, at the same time, it is a rare novel because there is no detective at all.

The plot of the novel is as follows: ten people receive a mysterious letter telling them that they should go to a lonely island off the Devon coast. They find themselves alone and isolated in the island and the murderer starts to strike, killing them one by one until "there are none", in the words of the children's rhyme.

The characters are introduced in the first chapter and we find this chapter especially interesting from the point of view of the translation because it is the basis for the readers' ideas about 'who is who' in the novel. Here the author creates expectations that she will play on in the rest of the book. However, in the Spanish version, we see that these expectations are not created, at least not in the way they are in the original text, because of various errors in translation, mainly omissions, incoherence, errors in meaning and word for word translations. In contrast, the Catalan translation does not have any of these errors, and thus allows the reader to perceive the same logic and to have the same data as the original readers in English in order to start solving the clue-puzzle of this story.

Analysis of the different translations of the English original: French, Spanish and

Catalan

To start this analysis, we should first make it clear that, when we talk about the English original, we are referring to the 1993 re-edition published by HarperCollins. Despite the innumerable re-editions since Collins' 1939 edition, apart from the title, no other changes have been made to the original. When we talk about the 'French translation', we are referring to the 1947 translation made by Louis Postif for the publishing house *Le Masque*, which is undoubtedly the text used as the original by the Spanish translator. The 'Spanish translation' refers to Orestes Llorens's 1951 translation, which is still being reedited in Spain by the publishing house *Editorial Molino*. It has hardly been modified over the years, and in any case, the new versions of this translation have not amended the errors we are going to comment on. In the last re-edition consulted (1994) the translator still appears to be the same and the fact that it was really translated from the French is not mentioned. As far as the Catalan translation is concerned, all the examples are taken from the 1985 translation into Catalan done by Jordi Civís i Pol for the publishing house *La Llar del Llibre*.

To start the analysis, we will concentrate on the contents of the first chapter of the book, where the readers' expectations are created about the setting of the story and about the people involved. Examples will be given of the English original compared with the French, Spanish and Catalan translations.

The examples are organised in the following way: first, the original English version is given, marked with [ENG] at the beginning, then, the French translation is given, marked with [FRA], thirdly, the Spanish translation is given, marked with [ESP], and then, the underlined fragment of the Spanish translation is back translated into English, marked with [spa-tr], so that this back translation can be compared with the original English text. Finally, the Catalan translation is given, marked with [CAT] and the underlined part is back translated into English, marked with [cat-tr]. In the examples cited in all four languages, the fragment we want to comment on is underlined. Furthermore, all the versions cited include the page number (p) and the line number (l) that correspond to the editions previously mentioned, whose full reference can be found in the bibliography of this article.

The first chapter is divided in eight sections, each introducing one of the main characters. The first is Sir Lawrence Wargrave, a Judge. He is travelling in a train and is reading a letter he has received inviting him to Nigger Island. In the English text, after this first section, the reader knows exactly where he is going (on a train to Oakbridge,

where the author of the letter will pick him up and take him to Nigger Island, off the Devon coast), but, in the Spanish translation, this information (Oakbridge and ‘off the Devon coast’) is not given and the omission of the destination of the train makes the sentence absolutely incoherent. Here are the two fragments we are referring to:

1.

[ENG] "... so much to talk over... old days... communion with Nature... bask in sunshine... 12.40 from Paddington... meet you at Oakbridge..." (p 6, l 6-7)

[FRA] "... tant de choses à nous raconter... du temps passé... en communion avec la nature... griller au soleil...12 h 40, départ de Paddington...à votre rencontre à Oakbridge..." (p 6, l 17-20)

[ESP] "... tantas cosas tenemos para contarnos...del tiempo pasado...en comunión con la naturaleza...tostarse al sol...a las 12 y 40 salida de Paddington... a" (p 6, l 29-30)

[spa-tr] departure at 12.40 from Paddington...to

[CAT] "... tenim tantes coses per parlar... d'aquells temps... comunió amb la natura... escalfant-nos al sol... 12,40 de Paddington... t'aniré a buscar a Oakbridge..." (p 10, l 12-14)

[cat-tr]12.40 from Paddington...I will meet you at Oakbridge

2.

[ENG] "...an American millionaire who was crazy about yachting -and an account of the luxurious modern house he had built on this little island off the Devon coast." (p 5, l 9-12)

[FRA] "...d'un millionnaire américain, fou du yachting, qui avait acheté cette petite île et y avait construit une luxueuse habitation moderne." (p 5, l 12-16)

[ESP] "...un millonario americano, loco por las cosas del mar, que había ocupado esta pequeña isla y había construido en la misma una lujosa residencia moderna." (p 5, l 12 - p 6)

[spa-tr] this little island.

[CAT] "...d'un milionari americà que estava boig per la navegació amb iot, i una descripció de la moderna i luxosa casa que s'havia fet bastir en aquella petita illa situada davant per davant de la costa de Devon." (p 9, l 9-15)

[cat-tr] that little island located off the Devon coast.

As can be seen in the first example, the sentence in Spanish is meaningless, since it ends with the preposition “a” (to), that the reader does not understand. In this case, the French version gives the same information as the English original, and it is the Spanish translator who, for reasons we cannot imagine or understand, leaves an unfinished sentence that is completely incoherent. However, in the second example, it is the French translator who omits the location of the island, and the Spanish translator, who uses the French text as the source text, copies this omission.

The second section of the first chapter introduces Vera Claythorne, a strong and attractive young woman. In this case, the changes in the perception of this character are greater and the consequences are more serious. The English reader perceives a confused

and anxious young woman, overwhelmed with remorse because she thinks she did not do enough to save a child from drowning. The Spanish reader concludes that she is a murderer, full of contradictions, not rational at all, who cannot find someone to love her. The two examples where these changes can be seen are the following:

1.

[ENG] " Suddenly, in spite of the heat in the carriage she shivered and wished she wasn't going to the sea (...) And herself, swimming in easy practised strokes after him - cleaving her way through the water but knowing, only too surely, that she wouldn't be in time..." (p 7, 1 27-33)

[FRA] " Soudain, malgré la chaleur étouffante du compartiment, elle frissonna et regretta de se rendre au bord de la mer (...) Véra, en nageuse experte, se rapprochait de lui, fendait les vagues avec aisance, mais persuadée qu'elle arriverait...trop tard..." (p 8-9)

[ESP] " De súbito, a pesar del calor sofocante del departamento, se estremeció y deseó encontrarse a orillas del mar (...) Vera, nadadora experta, se reprochaba por eso, al hendir fácilmente las olas, aunque persuadida de que llegaría...demasiado tarde..." (p 9, 1 16-24)

[spa-tr] she wished she was going to the sea (...) Vera, an expert swimmer, had blamed herself for that.

[CAT] " De sobte, malgrat la calor que feia en el vagó, va sentir una esgarrifança i va desitjar que no se n'estigués anant cap a la costa (...) I ella nedant amb facilitat i amb hàbils braçades darrera seu...obrint-se pas a través de l'aigua, però sabent prou bé que no hi arribaria a temps..." (p 12, 1 9-16)

[cat-tr] she wished she wasn't going to the sea (...)And herself, swimming with easy strokes after him.

2.

[ENG] "Hugo who had said he loved her..." (p 8, 1 2)

[FRA] "Hugo...qui lui avait avoué son amour." (p 9, 1 5)

[ESP] "Hugo...que le había vendido su amor." (p 9, 1 27)

[spa-tr] had sold his love to her

[CAT] "l'Hugo, l'Hugo que li havia dit que l'estimava." (p 12, 1 19-20)

[cat-tr] had said he loved her

The first example shows clearly how a bad translation from the French gives the impression of Vera as a cruel, irrational person who, instead of feeling sorry for having let a child drown, wants to go to the sea, where it had happened. In the first underlined part the Spanish translation gives exactly the opposite meaning to the sentence. This impression is confirmed for the Spanish reader by the second underlined part. This shows how another bad translation from the French (getting the wrong meaning of *se rapprocher*) causes the Spanish reader to think that she was sorry while she was swimming and trying to save the child – instead of feeling sorry later, once nothing could be done. This implies that she did it on purpose, that she did not want to save the

child, and thus was murdering him. Finally, the second example shows how the Spanish reader is led to understand that she had problems in finding a lover, since Hugo 'sold' his love to her, instead of transmitting the meaning of the original, according to which Hugo simply loved her.

The third section of the chapter introduces Philip Lombard, and here again we find two parts where the Spanish reader is misled. The first example makes the Spanish reader think that when Philip notices Vera in the same carriage he decides to be polite to her. However, this is just a bad translation from the French version (the translator must have confused *l'emmener* with *s'emmener*), because the English and the French text say clearly that he would like 'to take her on'. In this way, the personality of the character, who likes women, especially beautiful young women, appears very different to the Spanish reader:

[ENG] "A cool customer, he should imagine -and one who could hold her own -in love or war. He'd rather like to take her on..." (p 8, l 12-13)

[FRA] "Une femme à la tête droite, devait-il se dire, une femme capable de se défendre... en amour comme dans la guerre. Il aimerait bien l'emmener." (p 9, l 18-20)

[ESP] "Una mujer con la cabeza erguida, se dijo, es una mujer capaz de defenderse... tanto en el amor como en la guerra. Procuraría conducirse bien." (p 10, l 5-7)

[spa-tr] He'd try to show good manners and be good to her.

[CAT] "... Una persona equilibrada, diria; el tipus de persona que es fa valer tant en l'amor com en la guerra. Em faria gràcia d'endur-me-la..." (p 12, l 29-31)

[cat-tr] I'd like to take her on.

The second example of this third section is a clear example of how the ideology of the author is changed, since Christie describes a Jew, Mr. Isaac Morris, who is the person who gives Mr. Lombard the brief of going to Nigger Island. Christie talks about the Jew as 'the little Jew' and it is true that there is a comment made by Mr. Lombard that could be said to have a hint of racism: 'that was the damnable part about Jews, you couldn't deceive them about money'. However, the French translation (and thus the Spanish translation, which translates literally from the French) goes well beyond this, making Mr Lombard appear clearly anti-Semitic, by adding an insult that was not at all in the original:

[ENG] "Damn the smooth little brute, he had smiled! It was as though he knew very well that in Lombard's past actions legality had not always been a *sine qua non*..." (p 9, l 19-21)

[FRA] "Peste soit ce juif mielleux! Il avait souri. Sans doute savait-il que, dans le passé, les actes de Lombard n'avaient pas toujours revêtu un caractère légal..." (p 10, l 29-32)

[ESP] "¡Vaya al cuerno este judío meloso! Había sonreído. A buen seguro sabía que en el

pasado del capitán Lombard no todos los actos habían revestido caracteres de legalidad." (p 11, l 22-25)

[spa-tr] this sickly Jew

[CAT] "Maleït sigui, aquell animalàs tan polit li va somriure! Com si sabés del cert que en les accions anteriors d'en Lombard la legalitat no havia pas estat sempre una qüestió *sine quae non*..." (p 13, l 34-37)

[cat-tr] that little brute

The fourth section of the first chapter introduces Emily Brent, an elderly woman. In this case, there is one very important change in meaning that disrupts the logic of the plot. Miss Brent receives a letter inviting her to Nigger Island, just like the rest of the characters who go to the island. But in the Spanish translation, the person who writes to her asks for a 'cousin' to go to the island, therefore, logically, the reader thinks that the person writing to Miss Brent is her cousin. However, this is just because the translator has misunderstood the French term *cuisine*, which means 'cooking' and not 'cousin'... This 'little' change makes the whole novel meaningless, because when the reader discovers who the murderer was, and who sent all the letters, at the end of the book, it is obvious that there is no cousin at all. Furthermore, if Miss Brent thought she was going to meet her cousin on the island, she would be surprised when she gets there and finds no cousin ... unless, of course, and that is what most readers would think, Emily Brent is a very strange person or the plot is incoherent. The fragment we are referring to is the following:

[ENG] "*I think there is really an opening for a place where there is good plain cooking and a nice old-fashioned type of person.*" (p 10, l 24-25)

[FRA] "*J'ai toujours pensé que, pour réussir dans ce genre d'entreprise, il fallait une cuisine simple mais excellente et la présence d'une aimable personne de l'ancienne école.*" (p 11-12)

[ESP] "*Siempre he pensado que para alcanzar el éxito en esta clase de empresas era preciso una prima sencilla, pero excelente y la presencia de una persona amable de la vieja escuela.*" (p 13, l 6-9)

[spa-tr] a simple but excellent cousin.

[CAT] "Crec que hi ha bones possibilitats per a un establiment on hom hi trobi una bona cuina casolana i la classe de gent agradable de l'antigor." (p 15, l 2-4)

[cat-tr] some good, home-made cooking

The fifth section of the chapter introduces General MacArthur. The problems we find in this section are not easy to explain because they have to do with literary quality and with the selection of words in Spanish. That is, in this section there are not any changes in the plot, in the logic behind the characters or in the expectations of the reader, but there are many expressions and words that give the reader the feeling of something very strange or eccentric. Even though it might be difficult to understand it in English, we will give some

examples, citing only the Spanish version, since in this case the English original and the French and Catalan translations would not give any useful information.

There are problems of register in the language used by the General, a widely travelled and cultured army officer. Some expressions sound very strange in his mouth, e.g., '*de fiijo*' (p 14, l 20) which is very colloquial, or '*chinchorrerías*' (p 14 l 32), which is very affected. There are also problems with expressions which are not correct grammatically and could be said by a foreigner but not by a native speaker, e.g., '*serán de los nuestros*' instead of '*estarán con nosotros*' (p 14 l 26) or '*el ruido*' instead of '*los rumores*' (p 15 l 8). Other expressions do not make any sense at all, as they have been translated literally from the French and the meaning is not coherent with the context, e.g., '*se había imaginado que sus amigos le ponían en cuarentena*' (p 14 l 31) or '*la píldora era dura de tragar*' (p 14 l 32). Finally, there is a mistranslation of 'the War Office' (in French '*la Guerre*') which in Spanish is absolutely incoherent. In Spanish '*la Guerra*', which is literally 'The War' (p 15 l 9) usually refers to the Spanish Civil War, which of course does not make any sense within the context of this book, and thus the Spanish reader is once again before a strange text.

In fact, these kinds of problems appear throughout the book, at least one can be found on every single page. Unfortunately, all the Spanish translations of Agatha Christie's novels are plagued with problems of this kind. Obviously, we cannot provide an exhaustive list of errors of this type that can be found in this and other novels, so we will just acknowledge that they exist.

The sixth section of this first chapter introduces Doctor Armstrong, and here again there are some serious errors in the translation that mislead the Spanish reader. In this case, there is a whole paragraph that has been omitted by the Spanish translator. The paragraph is important because the reader learns that Dr. Armstrong had a problem in the past. This is essential to the logic of the plot, because all the characters invited to Nigger Island have some dark incident in their past that was not punished or solved by human justice. This is the nexus between all of them, different as they are in all other aspects. This fact, of course, does not become evident until some chapters later, but it is here, in the first chapter, where the expectations of the reader start to be formed. Thus that paragraph is essential to the line of logical thinking that makes the smart reader start forming the clue-puzzle in his mind. In fact, this is one of the purposes of detective fiction, which is not achieved at all for the Spanish readers. The paragraph we are referring to is the following:

[ENG] "Lucky that he'd managed to pull himself together in time after that business ten - no, fifteen years ago. It had been a near thing, that! He'd been going to pieces. The shock had pulled him together. He'd cut out drink altogether. By Jove, it had been a near thing, though..." (p 13, l 21-25)

[FRA] " Par bonheur, il était parvenu à s'imposer une ligne de conduite juste à temps après que cette affaire qui remontait a dix... non plutôt à quinze ans. Il avait bien failli y succomber. Devenu une vraie loque humaine, il s'était ressaisi sous le choc. Du jour au lendemain, il avait cessé de boire. Mais il l'avait échappé belle !" (p 15, l 20-25)

[ESP] [This paragraph is missing] (p 17, l 4/5)

[CAT] "Havia estat una sort que hagués aconseguit sobreposar-se a temps a allò de feia deu...no, quinze anys. Va anar-li ben just! S'estava enfonsant completament. I el xoc el va fer reaccionar. Va deixar de beure del tot. Déu meu, per poc hi deixa la pell..." (p 18, l 10-15)

The seventh section of the first chapter introduces Tony Marston, a young businessman. The first example shows an omission that makes the Spanish reader miss one of the features of this character, namely, that he is out of money. The second part, again, is an example of how the Spanish translation gives an eccentric perception to the reader, far from the logical background we find in the English original. In this case, the error has been caused by a mistranslation of the French, which makes the Spanish text absolutely incoherent, with swimmers instead of cars crawling about the road:

1.

[ENG] "Who *were* these Owens, he wondered? Rich and stinking probably. Badger was rather good at nosing people like that out. Of course he *had* to, poor old chap, with no money of his own..." (p 14, l 10-13)

[FRA] "Mais qui donc étaient ces Owen? se demanda Tony Marston. Probablement d'infects parvenus. Il n'y avait que Badger pour dénicher ces sortes de gens. Le malheureux en était réduit là, car il était absolument sans le sou." (p 16, l 14-18)

[ESP] "Pero, ¿quiénes serían esos Owen?, se preguntaba Tony Marston. ¡Probablemente unos infectos nuevos ricos! [the rest of the paragraph is missing]." (p 17, l 29/30)

[CAT] "[Tony Marston] Es preguntava, qui *eren* aquests Owen? Segurament que eren rics i fastigosos. En 'Bagder' era una fura per a ensumar la gent d'aquesta mena. És clar que ja ho *havia* de fer, pobre xaval, si no tenia una pela.."(p 19, l 1-5)

2.

[ENG] "The amount of cars crawling about the roads is frightful. Always something blocking your way. And they will ride in the middle of the road!" (p 14, l 2-4)

[FRA] "C'est effarant le nombre de bagnoles qui traînent sur les routes et vous empêchent de filer! Le comble, c'est qu'elles roulent au milieu de la chaussée!" (p 16, l 1-3)

[ESP] "¡Es espantoso el número de bañistas que se arrastran por los caminos y os impiden desfilar! ¡Es el colmo que circulen por el centro de la calzada!" (p 17, l 18-20)

[spa-tr] the number of bathers that crawl about the roads and do not allow one to parade (...) they ride...

[CAT] "La quantitat de cotxes que van arrossegant-se a pas de tortuga per les carreteres és espantosa. Sempre hi ha algú que et barra el pas. *I van* pel mig de la carretera!" (p

18, 123)

[cat-tr] the number of cars that crawl about the roads at minimum speed is frightful (...) they ride....

Finally, the last section of the first chapter introduces Mr. Blore, who in the Spanish translation is incomprehensibly called Mr. Blove all throughout the book. In this section we can find two examples showing once more how the Spanish reader is deceived. Blore is the only character that knows who all the other guests invited to the island are because he has been ordered to bring them there. The first example is when counts them, thinking of their names (they are nine in total, since Mr. Blore himself is the tenth victim) and then notices a drunk man in the corner of the carriage and uses the expression 'had one over the eight' to say he's drunk. Unfortunately, the French translator, and thus the Spanish translator, who keeps translating literally from the French, have misinterpreted this expression and once again defied logic and common sense in the novel by saying that there is one more person than he had expected... This, of course, does not make any sense, and the reader must feel confused when, later in the novel, s/he discovers that the people in the island are exactly those supposed to be there.

[ENG] "Had one over the eight", diagnosed Mr Blore accurately." (p 15, l 11)

[FRA] "J'en comptais un de trop, dit-il tout bas." (p 17, l 18)

[ESP] "-Contaba uno de más -dijo muy bajo." (p 19, l 6)

[spa-tr] I had counted one more.

[CAT] "-Aquest porta una copa de més -va diagnosticar acuradament Mr. Blore." (p 20, l 4)

[cat-tr] This man is drunk.

The second example gives a terrible ending to the first chapter of the book, because it is absolutely incoherent in Spanish. Moreover, it hides important information from the reader, an essential part of the plot. The Spanish reader does not know that a terrible squall is coming which is going to confine the characters to the island for days:

[ENG] "There's a squall coming!" (p 16, l 5)

[FRA] "Un grain se prépare!" (p 18, l 23)

[ESP] "-Algo se espera." (p 20, l 4)

[spa-tr] Something is coming.

[CAT] "-Ve una torbonada." (p 21, l 1)

[cat-tr] A squall is coming.

Although we have not mentioned the Catalan translations during the analysis of every example, it is easy to see, just by reading the back-translation into English, that the Catalan translation functions well and gives the same meaning as the original text gives,

not misleading the reader.

Conclusion

All the examples seen, taken from the first twenty or so pages of the novel, where the characters are introduced and the plot and the expectations of the readers are set, allow us to affirm that the Spanish readers of Agatha Christie are systematically misled. The changes are so extreme that we could almost say they are reading a different author who is inferior to Agatha Christie, both in literary style and ability to build clue-puzzles.

It is incomprehensible why these poor translations are still on the Spanish literary market and still being reedited nowadays. We can only suppose or adventure that criticism of the literary quality of Christie as a writer in English, together with ignorance of British culture, which has been a distant culture for many generations of Spaniards, might have made the Spanish readers think that the problem lying behind all the lack of logic and eccentricity perceived by them was a typical feature of the author.

However, we think that both Spanish readers and Agatha Christie, one of the best sellers of all times, deserve a better translation of her works.

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The author explains how rendering the great English thriller writer into his own language taught him how to write fiction himself. Ragnar Jǎnasson. Tue 4 Apr 2017 13.00 BST Last modified on Thu 22 Feb 2018 13.14 GMT. I was 17 when I started working on my first Icelandic translation of an Agatha Christie novel. I had been reading her books for years and had already translated a few of her short stories for Icelandic magazines, but I was astonished when her publishers offered me the opportunity to translate a whole novel. I was even more delighted when they agreed to let me start with *Endless Night* (little did they know that my suggestion was because it contained far fewer pages than any other Christie novel I had come across).