

Translating Venezuela's University Law: Strategies to Translate Ideological Differences

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Abstract

Translation allows messages to be communicated from one language to another (Shaw 22), acting as an intervention where communication issues arise due to language differences (Chesterman 151). However, translations do more than relay a message. They also allow what Carbonell calls a "cultural transmission" (85) that explains what "some aspect of the world is like" (Baker 195) in the source culture and how a text's message functions within that culture (Lefevere 51) in a way the target culture can understand (Carbonell 85). When attempting to make this transmission, translators often encounter lexical, cultural, and ideological differences that can pose translation challenges. Understanding the source culture and the document's place within that culture is essential to choosing appropriate phrases to communicate the text's message, but other translation strategies can also be employed to help such a transmission take place coherently.

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Translation allows messages to be communicated from one language to another (Shaw 22), acting as an intervention where communication issues arise due to language differences (Chesterman 151). However, translations do more than relay a message. They also allow what Carbonell calls a "cultural transmission" (85) that explains what "some aspect of the world is like" (Baker 195) in the source culture and how a text's message functions within that culture (Lefevere 51) in a way the target culture can understand (Carbonell 85). When attempting to make this transmission, translators often encounter lexical, cultural, and ideological differences that can pose translation challenges. Understanding the source culture and the document's place within that culture is essential to choosing appropriate phrases to communicate the text's message, but other translation strategies can also be employed to help such a transmission take place coherently. Venezuela's higher education system, specifically Title I of the University Law, provides multiple examples of how understanding the culture and history along with employing certain translation strategies can solve many cultural and lexical challenges.

Several laws govern higher education in Venezuela, including the Constitution, the Organic Education Law, and the University Law, which was written in 1970 to cover circumstances "unforeseen" by the other laws (Pineda 341). The University Law comprises regulations for public and private universities, as well as other guidelines and instructions for higher education institutions. The language used in this law reflects the University's place in Venezuela's history and the State's role in it (Albornoz 34) and reveals ideological differences within the higher education system. Analyzing the University's history and the government's purpose for it provides a more complete understanding of these differences. Venezuelan universities were developed for two reasons: to solve a need for human resources and for modernization propelled by rapid economic growth in the oil industry, and to offer educational opportunities to the disadvantaged (Lorey 71-74). Understanding this history gives translators the context they need to search parallel texts for existing translations, find similar, meaningful target language terms, or introduce terms with no equivalent in the target culture by literally translating them. These strategies will help translators provide accurate translations that give the target audience the sense of the University Law without excessive footnotes or explanations.

The concept of a University Law and its provision for substantial government involvement may be uncommon in the target culture, and texts such as this that highlight governmental influence and policies particular to Venezuela may cause several translation challenges. To address these challenges, translators can begin by studying laws and institutions within the Venezuelan and U.S. higher education systems. Research by authors such as Lorey, Pineda, and Albornoz provides a history of Venezuelan universities and explains differences in the educational system that also appear in the University Law, offering target language options for several terms. For terms with no direct equivalent, or for which parallel documents yield no existing solution, translators can use their

role as a “privileged reader,” or someone who understands the language and the cultural system (Liddicoat 358), to find options that make the translation meaningful to the target audience (Furmanek 66-67).

After investigating the historical context and institutional differences, one can search for comparable terms and concepts in the U.S. higher education system. In some instances, near-equivalent translations may be available, such as “solution for national concerns” for “el esclarecimiento de los problemas nacionales” (Art. 2). In instances where no exact equivalent can be found, one strategy is to choose similar or “adequate interpretations” (Jakobson 127) or the “nearest equivalent” that functions in the target language to convey meaning (Altay), using terms with which the audience may be familiar (Furmanek 66). An example from the University Law is using “community college” for “colegios universitarios” (Par. único). Finally, for those concepts with no equivalent in the U.S. system, a solution is to literally translate those phrases and add a paraphrase (Russell-Bitting 29) or expansion (Liddicoat 358), if necessary, to explain the unfamiliar concept (Altay), such as with “experimental national universities” for “universidades nacionales experimentales” (Art. 10). This last option introduces new terms and concepts to the target audience, yet refrains from making any educational evaluation, allowing academic evaluators to do so if necessary (Fletcher 32, Searls-Ridge 18). These three strategies, along with a historical and cultural analysis of the document, allow translators to make accurate translation choices for the challenging phrases found throughout the University Law and to provide a translation the target audience can understand.

THE UNIVERSITY LAW

One of the first issues to be addressed is the law’s title itself, which is a challenge because no equivalent national university law exists in the U.S. The closest law is the “Higher Education Act of 1965,” which primarily discusses higher education finances. The literature discussing Venezuelan education offers no consensus on accepted translations of the law’s title. Orlando Albornoz, a professor at the Central University of Venezuela who has written prolifically about Venezuelan higher education, treats the title differently in different articles, simply italicizing the Spanish term in some instances (“Steering” 34) and translating it literally as “Law of Universities” in others (“Higher Education” 303). Indeed, these are “faithful” translations of the title (Lefevere 49) but may not clarify the concept for the audience or may be excessively wordy in the target language. Lilian Pineda, another author who evaluates higher education in Venezuela, offers “University Law” as another option (341). I propose using Pineda’s solution, as it presents a new concept but informs the audience of its content and purpose in a clear, concise manner.

“INTERESES ESPÍRITUALES”

Several other interesting phrases in the University Law become translation issues due to ideological differences that result from the University’s history and purpose. These seemingly unremarkable phrases may have straightforward translations but may also give the target audience pause, especially in the context of government regulation of higher education. One such expression refers to the University as a community of “intereses espirituales” [spiritual interests] (Art. 1). Research analyzing Venezuelan higher education does not provide a specific translation for this phrase but does elaborate on its meaning. For example, Professor Marcel Doubront affirms that Venezuelan universities are intended to maintain a spirit of transformation, quoting former President Chávez’s insistence that universities uphold the “transcendental values of mankind” in service to the nation (“De la Universidad”). Long-time political columnist Ramón Azócar notes the University’s responsibility to connect society with the truth (“La Extensión Universitaria”). These explanations are validated by The Organic Education Law, which declares that universities are designed to contribute to society by developing certain ideals, including democracy, social justice, and human rights, among other things (Article 33). Though this phrase’s appearance in a national education law may be unexpected, the concept of spirituality in universities is not foreign in the target culture. Several studies propose that spirituality helps U.S. university students find meaning and purpose and create a better future (Astin, et al., Waggoner 149-150). Many U.S. universities’ mission statements also often incorporate “[s]piritual ideals,” such as “curiosity, wonder, interconnectedness, meaning, and resilience” (Raushenbush), clearly referring to academic and social aspects of the human “spirit” rather than religious values (“Spiritual”). Following this academic emphasis, I propose using “spiritual concerns,” rather than “spiritual interests.” Avoiding a literal translation of this phrase captures the focused attention of attaining these qualities without expressing any religious tendencies (“Interest”).

“ESCLARECIMIENTO DE LOS PROBLEMAS NACIONALES”

Another seemingly unremarkable phrase that may cause issues is “el esclarecimiento de los problemas nacionales” [clarification of national problems] (Art. 2). A literal translation of “clarification,” which means to make understandable (“Clarify”), may be understandable but does not align with the University’s purpose of addressing the nation’s human resource or modernization needs (Lorey 71-74). Researching laws and institutions in the U.S. higher education system reveals a similar phrase in the U.S. “Higher Education Act of 1965” that allows funding to help in the “solution of community problems.” Modeling this target language phrase with “solution of national problems” fits the Venezuelan University’s overall purpose, though “national problems” may have a negative

connotation implicating the existence or prevalence of problems. I propose translating the phrase as “solution of national concerns.” Using “concerns,” a synonym of “problems” (“Problemas”), addresses the issues that Venezuela faces and wishes to solve with no negative connotation.

“EQUIPOS PROFESIONALES” AND ONE NATIONAL PURPOSE

Two other interesting phrases highlight the government’s invested interest in the University. Article 3 of the University Law explains that universities are to form “equipos profesionales...que necesita la Nación para su desarrollo y progreso” [professional teams that the Nation needs for its development and progress], and Article 6 states that “[l]a finalidad de la Universidad...es una en toda la Nación” [the purpose of the University is one in the whole Nation]. Once again, these appear to be straightforward translations, but their appearance in a national law makes the phrases noteworthy for the target culture. U.S. higher education was designed to limit the federal government’s involvement and to give states the freedom to govern public universities (Eckel and King 3), which has resulted in a multitude of universities with diverse mission statements. However, all Venezuelan universities, public or private, are created for a single purpose (University Law, Art. 6, 8). Understanding the University’s purpose gives perspective to the historic, economic, and ideological reasons for the inclusion of this statement in the Law. Translators can convey this unfamiliar concept with direct translations, making small changes in syntax and grammar to allow the University’s purpose to be clearly visible in an understandable way that adheres to target language norms. My proposed translations are “to form professional...teams that can be used to develop the Nation” and “the University has one National purpose.”

NON-UNIVERSITY SECTOR

“*Universidades Nacionales Experimentales.*” The ideological differences found in the University result in a final challenge of meaningfully translating several titles for the target audience. Professor Albornoz points out that this Law created a “non-university sector” (“Steering” 35) that includes several institutions with no direct equivalents in English. He specifically mentions “Universidades Nacionales Experimentales” [National Experimental Universities] (Art. 10), explaining that they are “experimental, or non-autonomous,” institutions (“Higher Education” 305; “Steering” 35) described by Montgomery as centers for “educational experimentation and innovation” (664). These institutions offer an alternative to traditional schools (Herrera Abache 382) and allow for flexibility and exploration of new trends in education (Azócar “Universidades”). In the U.S., several institutions consider themselves “alternative colleges” that offer something different from traditional universities, advertising more flexibility and creativity (“Hampshire College”). This concept corresponds to the description of “Universidades Nacionales Experimentales,” but the term “alternative university” has no official usage in the U.S. higher educational system. Furthermore, Fletcher (32) and Searls-Ridge (18) promote a more faithful or literal translation of educational terms, cautioning against translations that make evaluations of titles or institutions. Therefore, I propose leaving the translation as “Experimental National Universities.” This choice introduces a new term to the target culture, indicating its purpose, but leaves the option of evaluation or determination of equivalency to professional evaluators or admissions officers if necessary (Fletcher 32, Searls-Ridge 18).

“*Colegios Universitarios.*” Within Albornoz’s “non-university sector” (“Steering” 35), there are also “Colegios universitarios” [University colleges] (Par. único), which are three-year technical degrees after high school (“Steering” 35). Responding to national needs for qualified workers and technicians, these colleges offer short, terminal degrees in technical fields in preparation for service to the community or for further education (Castellano de Sjöstrand 10). This is very similar to U.S. community colleges, which offer degrees or certification in careers that need qualified workers (Rosenbaum) in shorter amounts of time (Grove). Professor Navarro, from the Central University of Venezuela, refers to them as “university colleges” (178), an option that is understandable in the target language but risks being confused with the usage of “college” as a division of a U.S. university campus (“College”). Pineda translates them as “junior colleges” (341), which is familiar to the target audience (Furmanek 66) and causes no confusion. However, I propose “community colleges” as a more comprehensive choice that encompasses the University’s purpose of serving and giving back to the country (Lorey 74).

CONCLUSION

Venezuela’s higher education system has many ideological differences due to a different history and a distinct purpose. Communicating these differences to the target audience can be challenging, but certain strategies can help translators make appropriate terminology choices to coherently convey these foreign concepts. Venezuela’s University Law is a good example, providing many phrases that appear to be straightforward translations but highlight cultural and ideological differences. Careful investigation of the history and purpose of the University gives translators a context from which to work as they choose from existing target language options, find similar target language substitutions, or literally translate new terms into the target language, resulting in a meaningful translation that presents an accurate rendering of the message of Venezuela’s University Law.

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