The lexicon of oral mediation in a contrastive and historical study I: the case of [interpret-]

Juan José Calvo García de Leonardo
Universitat de València Estudi General
calvojj@uv.es

Abstract

International relations and commerce have always relied on either one of two pillars: an accepted koiné or trustworthy linguistic mediation, with the various pidgin attempts as an interesting tertium comparationis. This linguistic mediation has had to fall back upon individuals capable of shedding light upon an otherwise opaque code of communication and thus of facilitating mutual understanding. From the point of view of the lexicon and so as to better define this vital activity, the corresponding culture imports foreign lexemes, coins new ones, surcharges others with additional semes, or even puts past currency back into circulation. The present paper offers an onomasiological and a semasiological overview of the present and historical values of the verb, noun and agent nouns of the Latin root [interpret-] in Spanish and English with greater detail, but also touching upon other major West European languages: Italian, French and German.

Key Words: contrastive linguistics, historical linguistics, onomasiology, semasiology, register

Resumen

Estudio contrastivo e histórico del léxico de la mediación oral I: el caso de [interpret-]

Las relaciones internacionales y el comercio siempre han descansado sobre uno de dos pilares: una koiné aceptada o una mediación lingüística digna de crédito; con los diversos intentos de pidginización como un interesante tertium comparationis. Esta mediación lingüística ha tenido que recurrir a individuos capaces de proyectar algo de luz sobre unos códigos de comunicación opacos y, con ello, facilitar el entendimiento mutuo. Desde el punto de vista del léxico y con el fin de definir con mayor exactitud esta actividad vital, la cultura correspondiente importa lexemas foráneos, acuña nuevos, sobrecarga otros con semas nuevos, o incluso vuelve a poner en circulación algunos pretéritos. El presente artículo ofrece un panorama onomasiológico y semasiológico de los valores presentes e históricos del verbo, el nombre y el agente de la raíz latina [interpret-], más detalladamente
en castellano y en inglés, pero también en otras lenguas principales de Europa Occidental: italiano, francés y alemán.

Palabras clave: lingüística contrastiva, diacronía, onomasiología, semasiología, registros

0. Introduction

In its etymological origin, [interpret-] is Latin interpres (from interpretium, “commercial benefit”): a transparent derivative referring to the middleman, the go-between necessary to establish the barter value, the ‘price’, in trading with barbarians. This individual was usually a captured native, a hostage or any other person forcibly brought into contact with the alien language and culture. Consequently ‘contaminated’ and ‘tabooed’, he was despised by his fellows, who would always sense treason. But at the same time, for the ‘superior’ culture he remained a barbarian, generally a de facto or de jure slave, and likewise despicable. This universal contempt has adhered not only to interpretar itself but also to many of its synonyms and lives on e.g. in the deep-seated scorn felt by many Mexicans towards Cortés’ nahuatlato	extsuperscript{i} and mistress Malinche. From the very beginning, in Latin culture, the initial meaning and social value became augmented, by analogical and associative derivations with other senses, that delved into various intermediations, including those of deciphering secret codes and symbols and reformulating and explaining something in one’s own language. Yet the technolectic values and their translation functions are never totally abandoned. Throughout its historical development, [interpret-] —albeit not always prima facie— continues to be associated with registers: that of law (also of legal aspects of international relations and trade) from Latin times onwards. Eventually, the registers of philosophy, and, at least in English, those of computer technology shall also find their nook in the general array of the derived senses. Today as in the Roman Empire, [interpret-] is the adequate root for inter-linguistic, oral mediation. But the profession is, by nature, ancillary and its practitioner remains a human tool: either the anonymous intermediary inside the dark booth, scarcely visible—if at all—by speaker and audience alike; or the discreet figure behind and askance the ‘great person’, an icon that does not come across as the sombre raven whispering knowledge to the omniscient ears, but rather looks like the enclosed character of Hamlet’s dumb show dripping poison into the sovereign ears. When we now turn both to historical and to present-day dictionaries, we shall see that this sense, our core and departure value, neither is nor has been foremost or principal.
1. The synchronic values

1.1. The present-day lexicographic values in Spanish and English

Bearing in mind the two principal languages of our analysis and in order to start off with what is known, before proceeding to less well known, we shall start with the bilingual comparison as given today. To do so we shall consult two dictionaries in Spanish and two in English. The 22nd edition (2001) of the Real Academia’s Diccionario de la Lengua Española (henceforth DRAE) gives “traducir de una lengua a otra, sobre todo cuando se hace oralmente” and “persona que explica a otras, en lengua que entienden, lo dicho en otra que les es desconocida” for the verb and agent noun senses in second place, between “explicar o declarar el sentido de algo y principalmente el de un texto” and “explicar acciones, dichos o sucesos que pueden ser entendidos de diferentes modos” in the verbal senses and the obvious “persona que interpreta” and the rather vague “cosa que sirve para dar a conocer los afectos y movimientos del alma” in the agent noun ones. The second dictionary used, the 1st edition of Moliner’s Diccionario de uso del español (1975) gave “traducir” in the third place out of six (pointing out that the sense was ‘not frequent’), while “persona que traduce o explica a otras en lengua de éstas lo que alguien dice en otra” was the first of three agent noun senses. Among the English dictionaries, the Collins English Dictionary in its 5th edition (2000) leaves “to act as an interpreter; translate orally” in the fourth and last place, while “a person who translates orally from one language to another” comes first among the agent noun entries. Similarly, the 2nd edition of the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1987) left “to put (something spoken) in one language into the words of another language” in the third and last place, while “a person who interprets especially as a job –compare translator,” also came first. Quantitatively speaking, both languages stress the marked language aspects of this oral mediation, the mantic, artlectic (poetry, drama, music, dance) and technolectic senses; but, while the latter values correspond to the register of philosophy (logic) and computer technology in English; in Spanish, they concentrate in the registers of law with five noun and agent noun and four verbal senses respectively versus only one philosophical (metaphysical) sense.

1.2. Synonymy

The first two groupings will gather those found in Spanish, the third and fourth those found in English. In each case, the sources are separated by the copula “and.” The fifth and last group lists those synonyms that are common to Spanish and at least one of the other four languages of our study.
The verbal synonyms

The verb *interpretar* gives the following Spanish synonyms:

- explicar, comentar, entender(se), traducir, comprender, descifrar, glosar, parafrasear, alegorizar, exponer, leer

and

- actuar, captar, comentar(se), parafrasear, representar(se), comprender, entender, glosar

The verb *to interpret* gives the following English synonyms:

- interpret, diagnose; construe, put a construction on; infer, deduce, draw and infer; understand, understand by, be given to understand, gather from, take to mean; read, read into; read between the lines

- explain, explicate, expound, exposit, enucleate, spell out, unfold; account for, give reason for; clarify, elucidate, clear up, make clear, make plain, simplify, popularize; illuminate, enlighten, shed/throw light upon, shed new or fresh light upon; tell/show how; show the way; demonstrate, show, illustrate, exemplify; solve; explain oneself; explain away

- define, describe, delineate, determine, formulate, give the meaning, tell the meaning of comment upon, remark upon; annotate, gloss

- translate, render, transcribe, put/turn into, transfuse the sense of, make a new version of paraphrase, rephrase, reword, restate, rehash, give a free translation

and

**EXPLAIN** with the following, derived synonyms:

- elucidate, expound, explicate, clarify, make clear, make plain, illuminate, shed light on, throw light on, gloss, simplify, spell out

**UNDERSTAND**, with the following, derived synonyms:

- construe, take to mean, take, read, see, regard, explain

**DECIPHER** with the following, derived synonyms:

- decode, solve, resolve, untangle, unravel, make intelligible, understand, comprehend, make sense of, informal crack

**TRANSLATE** with the following, derived synonyms:

- transcribe, transliterate, rewrite, convert, paraphrase

**PORTRAY** with the following, derived synonyms:

- depict, present, perform, execute, enact, render
These are the plurilingual, contrasted, verbal synonyms:

explicar, explain, spiegare, expliquer  
glosar, gloss, gloser

comentars(se), comment, commentare,  
comenter  
parafraasear, paraphrase, parafrasare

entender(se), understand, intendere,  
entendre  
xponer, expound, esporre, auslegen

traducir, translate, tradurre, traduire  
leer, read, lire

comprender, understand, capire/  
comprendre, comprendre  
sacar, trainer

descifrar, decipher, déchiffrer  
actuar, perform, jouer

captar, saisir

representar, enact, représenter

The noun synonyms

The noun *interpretación* gives the following Spanish synonyms:

glosa, lección, intelección, comentario, exégesis, cábalan, inteligencia, sentido,  
significado, paráfrasis, hermenéutica, comprensión, explicación, impugnación,  
justificación, sugerimiento, tergiversación

and

alcance(s), captación, comentario, comprensión, entendimiento, exégesis,  
glosa, hermenéutica, inteligencia, paráfrasis, sentido, significado, valor

The noun *interpretation* gives the following English synonyms:

interpretation, construction, light, way of putting; diagnosis, prognosis, prophasis  
[med.]

rendering, rendition, reddition; version, reading, lection

translation, transcription, paraphrase, free translation, amplification, restatement,  
rewording; metaplace, literal verbal word for word translation, gloss, interlinear,  
interlinear translation; key, clavis, Bohn; pony [U.S.], horse [Eng.], trot [U.S.], cab  
[Eng.], crib [all school slang]; Targum, Chaldee paraphrase

explanation, explication, elucidation, clarification, illumination, enlightenment,  
*éclairissement* [F], enucleation, simplification; exposition, expounding, exegesis,  
illustration, demonstration, exemplification; reason, rationale; solution

definition, description, delineation, determination, formulation, meaning

(explanatory remark), comment, commentary, commentation, word of explanation;  
gloss, exegesis, scholium
interpretability, construability, explicability, explainableness, accountableness; definability, determinability, describability, translatability

(science of interpretation), exegetics, hermeneutics, diagnostics, prognostics, symptomatology, pathognomy, semiology, semiotics [all med.]; physiognomics, physiognomy; metoposcopy; oneirology, oneirocriticism; epigraphy; glossology; paleography

and

EXPLANATION with the following, derived synonyms:

elucidation, expounding exposition, explication, exegesis, clarification, definition, simplification

MEANING with the following, derived synonyms:

understanding, construal, connotation, reading, explanation, inference, conclusion, supposition

ANALYSIS with the following, derived synonyms:

reading, evaluation, review, study, examination, diagnosis, decoding, decoding, deciphering, rare anatomization

TRANSLATION with the following, derived synonyms:

transcription, transliteration, paraphrasing

RENDITION with the following, derived synonyms:

rendering, execution, presentation, performance. reading, playing, singing, enactment, portrayal, depiction

These are the plurilingual, contrasted, noun synonyms:

glosa, gloss, glosa, glose
lección, lection/reading
comentario, comment/commentary,
    comentario, commentaire,
    Kommentar
entendimiento, intendimento
exégesis, exegesis, esegesi, exégèse
cabala, cabale
sentido, meaning, sens
paráfrasis, paraphrase,
    parafrasihermenéutica, hermeneutics,
    ermeneutica, hérmenéutique,
    Hermeneutik
inteligencia, intelligenza
comprensión, understanding,
    comprensione
explicación, explanation, spiegazione,
    explicación, Erklärung
adaptación, adaptation
**The agent noun synonyms**

The agent noun *intérprete* gives the following Spanish synonyms:

- comentador, exégeta, expositor, lengua, parafraseador, parafraste, decretalista, escriba, faraute, vocabulario

and

- comentador, exégeta, glosador, parafraseador, traductor, trujamán

The agent noun *interpreter* gives the following English synonyms:

- interpreter, interpretress [fem.], dragoman [Near East & Persia], exegete, explainer, definer, explicator, exponent, expositor, expounder, demonstrator; linguist [obs. exc. local] linguister/lingster [dial. U.S.]; interlocutor, interlocutress/interlocutrice /interlocutrix [fem.]; go-between; translator, translatress/translatrix [fem.]; metaphrast, paraphrast; oneirocritic (interpreter of dreams)

and

- TRANSLATOR and the following, derived synonyms:
  - transcriber, transliterator, decipherer, *rare* dragoman

- PERFORMER and the following, derived synonyms:
  - presenter, portrayer, exponent, singer, player

- ANALYST and the following, derived synonyms:
  - evaluator, reviewer, commentator, annotator, *rare* exegete, *rare* scholiast, *rare* glossator

These are the plurilingual, contrasted, agent noun synonyms:

- comentador, commentator, 
  - commentatore, commentateur
- exégeta, exegete, esegeta, exegete
- expositor, expositor, espositore
- parafraseador, paraphraseur
- parafraste, parafraste
  - faraute, porte-parole
  - glosador, glossator
  - traductor, translator, traducteur,
    - tradutore
  - trujamán, dragoman, dragomanno,
  - drogman/truchement, Dragoman

**1.3. Semantic fields**

Semantically speaking, three main fields result from our stem [interpret-]: CREATION, RECODING (with the two linguistic subcategories INTRALINGUISTIC RECODING and
INTERLINGUISTIC RECODING and a SYMBOLIC RECODING in third place) and MANCY (divination):

Creation is very similar to symbolic recoding, but derives from the values that associate [interpret-] with the poetolectic capacity of the human being to express its own ideas, concepts and thoughts through verbal or non-verbal means.

INTRALINGUISTIC RECODING includes any explanation or reformulation within the same language, be it a standard pattern or any geolectic, sociolectic or technolectic variety.

INTERLINGUISTIC RECODING corresponds to our core and departure sense: oral translation between natural, human languages.

SYMBOLIC RECODING includes any verbal transformation of ‘meaningful messages’, either sensed or else manifested through non verbal optical, aural, olfactory or tactile means. It logically is highly subjective.

MANCY is one of the core values of [interpret-] as it implies making sense out of and giving meaning to unuttered, ciphered or otherwise incomprehensible manifestations, be they written or spoken. Like the previous field, it is highly subjective.

All three were already present, as we shall see in a moment, among Classical Latin authors and largely remain extant, albeit suffering gaps and undergoing wavering emphasis throughout time.

2. The diachronic values

2.1. Latin

The Classical and Low Latin authors

As mentioned above, in Latin literature interpres also numbers different senses. For Cicero it means “mediator,” “agent,” “oral translator” and “text translator,” though with the same blurry distinctions we shall find half a millennium later in Luther’s Dolmetschen, Dolmetscher and, two thousand years later, among the lay persons today. Within the wider range of the transferred senses, interpres ectorum is the soothsayer, the haruspex capable of extracting information of things to be from the entrails of a recently sacrificed animal; interpres caeli is the astrologist who obtains that self-same information from gazing at the stars, but also the astronomer; and the interpres pacis is the political mediator in peace talks. Lastly, Cicero identifies the fundamental function of language as ‘translation’ of ideas and concepts when he states: interpres
mentis est oratio. Another of the Classical prose authors, the historian Livy, coincides with Cicero in his understanding of interpres pacis, though he will typically refer to interpretēs in the core sense mentioned in the Introduction. They are mediators with the others, the aliens, the barbarians, the enemy … those outside the latinitas, the civilised orb: peruenērunt litterāque lecte per interpretēm sunt et ex captinis percontatio (Ab urbe condita’ xxvii, 8, 43). For the scientist Pliny, the interpreter can also be identified, say, with the Biblical decipherers of dreams and wonders, with Joseph and with Daniel, when he talks about interpretatio ostentorum et somniorum. But, there is still one major sense worth commenting, that of the Homeric tradition of the interpres diuinum that we find among poets and rhetors. Virgil uses it several times in the ‘Aeneid’, notably in iv, 356 Nunc etiam interpres diuinum Iove missus ab ipso (Testor utrumque caput) Celeres mandata per auras Detutis: ipse demum manifesto in lumine uidi, where the image reproduces the Socratic hermenēus, evokes the steppe and prairie shamans and forebodes the Pauline (‘1 Corinthians’, 14) glossolalia. When illustrating in the 4c A.D. the rhetorical figure of the zeugma in the ‘De schematibus’ of his ‘Ars grammatica’ (also known as ‘Ars maior’), Donatus falls upon another of Virgil’s passages: Zeugma est unius verbi conclusio diversis clausulis apte coniuncta ut Troiugena interpres diuinum, qui numina Phebe, qui tripodas Clarii aurrosqui sidera sentis et cetera. As we said above, for Latin authors [interpret-] already presents our three principal semantic fields: CREATION (Cicero’s interpres mentis est oratio), LINGUISTIC RECODING (the general sense found in Cicero, Livy and others), SYMBOLIC RECODING (Pliny’s interpretatio ostentorum et somniorum) and MANCY or divination (Cicero’s interpres ectorum, Virgil’s interpres diuinum).

The Canon Law

The ‘Codex (or Corpus) Juris Canonici’ of the Roman Catholic Church understands two different things under interpres. For Caput IV, canon 1090 it will be the legal representative, the proxy or solicitor, when it states that marriage is valid through the mediation of an intermediary (matrimonium per interpretēm quoque contrahi potest). Caput IV, canon 1106 retakes our core meaning, when it allows marriage to be celebrated with the mediation of an oral interpreter –though only if the parish priest ascertains his fidelitas; his linguistic skills and technical know-how.

The rhetorical values

For the traditional, Classical and Alexandrian rhetoric, interpretatio entails a kind of amplificatio by means of rewording: Rempublicam radicītus evertisti, civitatem funditus deieisti, to quote the example included by Lázaro Carreter (1974: 244). In this rewording it will coincide with the figure of the expūlitio. A further rhetorical value is
that of the typically Low Latin and Medieval ‘etymological’ decoding of terms (e.g. *cadaver: carnem data vermisbus*, again taking Lázaro Carreter’s example) that we still observe in the Modern Period among theologically constrained lexicographers like Covarrubias trying to prove Hebrew etyma, or among ardent linguistic nationalists like Verstegen1 inventing a Germanic, monosyllabic, Adamitic *Ursprache* apparently meshed with the roots of the tree of life and the tree of knowledge.

2.2. Dissemination in the vulgar languages

The basic Latin terms will disseminate in the different Western European languages during the Middle Ages, Humanism, Renaissance and the Modern Period, alongside with those stemming from other linguistic sources like Greek, Germanic and Syriac, that we shall consider elsewhere.

The etymological dictionaries used are the following (acronyms between parentheses): Corominas’ *Diccionario crítico etimológico de la lengua castellana* for Spanish (Cor); Prat’s *Vocabulario etimologico italiano* (P); Miglorini and Duro’s *Prontuario etimologico della lingua italiana* (MD), Battisti and Alessio’s *Dizionario etimologico italiano* (BA), and Cortelazzo and Zolli’s *Dizionario etimologico della lingua italiana* (CZ) for Italian; Bloch and Wartburg’s *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue française* (BW), Picoche’s *Nouveau dictionnaire étymologique du français* (Pi) and Rey’s *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française* (Re) for French; the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) -by default- together with Onions’s *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (O) and Skeat’s *Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (S) for English; and, both Kluge’s *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* (K) and Dudé’s vol. 7, *Herkunfts Wörterbuch* (D7) for the German language.

**Verb values**

Classical Latin interpretare results in Renaissance Spanish interpretar (1490, Fernández de Palencia; 1493 or 1495, Nebrija) (Cor). Together with interpretari, it gives Medieval (1294, Guitrone d’Arezzo) (CZ) and Modern Italian interpretare. On its own, interpretari will give Old French entrepreter and both interpreter (1155) and interpréter (1321) (B). The latter will further result in Middle English interpret (1382, Wyclif).

**Noun values**

Classical Latin interpretatio gives Renaissance Spanish interpretación (1490, Fernández de Palencia; 1493 or 1495, Nebrija) (Cor) but also Medieval (14c, ‘Fatti di Giuseppe Ebreo’ e D. Cavalca) (BA, CZ) and Modern Italian interpretazione. The derived form interpretationem gives Old Northern French/Anglo-Norman interpretation (1160-1174,
Wace, ‘Roman de Rou’) (Re; not documented in OED) and Old French *entrepretation* (BW, Re) and ultimately Middle English *interpretation* (1390, Gower) though Old French popular derivation gives Anglo-Norman *interpretsoun* (1292, Britton) a century before.

**Agent noun values**

The agent noun offers the widest range. *Interpres -etis* results in an Old Spanish *interpretdor* (1220-1250, Berceo, ‘Milagros de Nuestra Señora’; ca. 1270-1290, ‘1ª Crónica general’) that continues into Renaissance Spanish *interpretdor* (Cor) and a Medieval Italian *interpretdatore* (14c) (BA) with a Renaissance feminine *interpretdatrice* (1546) (BA). The Latin form reappears in Renaissance Spanish *intérprete* (1490, Fernández de Palencia; 1493 or 1495, Nebrija), *interprete* (1493 or 1495, Nebrija) and the feminine *interpretdora* (1625, Vélez de Guevara) (Cor), today reduced and levelled to *intérprete*. Similarly, *interprets -etis* lives on both in Medieval Italian *interprete* and Medieval *interpreta* (e.g. 1342, D. Cavalca and 1364, ‘Zanobi de Strata’) (CZ) and Modern Italian *intérprete*. In the medieval French and English chronicles the [interpret-] agent nouns can stem from two different lexemes. Firstly *interpreps, -etis* deriving both into *interpreite* (1321) (Re) and (14c) *interprete* extant today. Secondly, Low Latin *interpretdorum* results both in Old French *interpreteur/interpreteur* (14c) (Re) –that does not outlive the Classical French period– and in Anglo-Norman *interpretour* that derives into Middle English *interpretour* (1382, Wyclif), *entrepertor* (1400, ‘Apology of Lollards’), *interpretour* (1400, ‘Secreta Secretorum Gov. Lordsh.’) and Modern English *interper* (1535, Coverdale), the latter out of analogy with the other agent nouns ending in -er. The feminine, *interprettess* (1717, Lady Montagu) and *interprettress* (1775, Adair) were late Modern English options that did not prosper, the last OED entries being 1792 and 1865 respectively.

**3. The changes in meaning**

The second part of our paper studies the historical process and progress in order to establish the ‘inherited’ semasiological homogeneity or diversity of the [interpret-] *onomata*. Diachronically, we usually distinguish two main types of semantic change: that of quantity and that of quality. Among the first we include changes in polysemy and oligosemy, generalisation or specification, with addition or loss of sememes. The second relates to changes in evaluation: ameliorations and pejorations. Here we shall only deal with the first type of changes and, while doing so, regret the fact that the existing lexicons should so radically differ in their approach and exemplification.
3.1. Historical values in Spanish

Concentrating once more upon our polar languages, Spanish and English, the diachronic analysis for Spanish will start with Covarrubias’ (1610) *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española* (henceforth (Co)) and make a first stop at the first edition (1726-1737) of the Real Academia’s *Diccionario de la Lengua Española*, commonly referred to as *Autoridades* (henceforth (A)). A second survey will pinpoint the incorporations or losses as reflected in the subsequent editions of the DRAE.

The senses until 1734

*The verb senses*

*interpretar*

(Co)

1. “declarar”

(A)

The first sense of *Autoridades* coincides with intralinguistic recoding:

1. “explicar o explicar alguna cosa y el sentido de ella”

The second sense is that of interlinguistic recoding:

2. “volver en otro idioma, ó traducir en orden al sentido de lo que se dice, ó está escrito en idioma distinto”

The third sense refers to symbolic recoding:

3. “significa asimismo dár otro sentido, ó entender de otro modo lo que se dice, ó el ánimo con que se dice o se hace algo”

*The noun senses*

*interpretación*

(Co)

Covarrubias first meaning corresponds to interlinguistic recoding, while the second can be understood as intralinguistic recoding or mancy and the same can be said of the first entry of *Autoridades*.

1. “declaración o versión de una lengua en otra”
2. “declaración de cosa oscura, como enigma”

(A)

1. “declaración ó interpretación de alguna cosa oscura y de difícil inteligencia”
The agent noun senses

intérprete

Covarrubias first entry retakes our core meaning of interlinguistic recoding:

(Co)

1. “el que buelve las palabras y conceptos de una lengua en otra, en el qual se requiere fidelidad, prudencia y sagacidad y tener igual noticia de ambas lenguas y lo que en ellas se dize por alusiones y términos metafóricos mirar lo que en estotra lengua le puede corresponder”

The first entry of Autoridades can also be understood as interlinguistic recoding, while the second is clearly symbolic recoding:

(A)

1. “el que interprétâ, explica ù declara alguna cosa o idioma”

2. “se llama en sentido analógico, lo que explica ù dá a conocer la voluntad ù otros afectos del ánimo”

The latter definition remains practically unchanged to the present day, as we shall see.

The senses since 1734

Let us now observe the changes from the mid-eighteenth century to the end of the twentieth century. The year of the edition appears between parentheses before each definition. We disregard changes that only affect accents.

The verb senses

interpretar

The first entry of the different editions understands the verb as intralinguistic recoding:

(1780, 1783, 1791, 1843, 1884) 1. “explicar, ó explanar alguna cosa y el sentido de ella”

(1803, 1817, 1822, 1832, 1837, 1852, 1869) 1. “explicar o declarar el sentido de alguna cosa”

(1899, 1914) 1. “explicar ó declarar el sentido de una cosa”

(1950, 1989) 1. “explicar el sentido de una cosa, y principalmente el de textos faltos de claridad”

The second entry (or sense) covers interlinguistic recoding in general:

(1780, 1783, 1791, 1843, 1884) 2. “lo mismo que volver en otro idioma ó traducir, en orden al sentido de lo que se dice, ó está escrito en idioma distinto”


(1817, 1822, 1832, 1837, 1852) 2. “traducir de una lengua en otra”

(1989 labels it as obsolete (sic!) from 1900 onwards, 1992) 2. “traducir de una lengua a otra, sobre todo cuando se hace oralmente”

The third, fourth, fifth, sixth and partly seventh entries of the different editions entail the symbolic recoding possibilities:

(1780, 1783, 1791, 1843, 1884) 3. “dar otro sentido ó entender de otro modo lo que se dice; ó el ánimo con que se dice, ó se hace algo”


(1817, 1822, 1832, 1837, 1869, 1914) 3. “entender, ó tomar en buena, ó mala parte alguna acción, ó palabra”

(1927, 1950) 3. “tomar en buena o mala parte una acción o palabra”


(1803, 1817, 1822, 1832, 1837, 1852, 1869) 4. “atribuir una acción á algun fin, ó causa particular”

(1899, 1914) 4. “atribuir una acción á un fin, ó causa particular”


(1927, 1950) 5. “comprender y expresar bien o mal el asunto o materia de que se trata”

(1925, 1936, 1939, 1947, 1956, 1970) 5. “comprender y expresar bien o mal el asunto o materia de que se trata. Dícese especialmente de los actores o de los artistas en general”

(1899, 1914, 1950) 5. “comprender y representar un actor su papel bien ó mal”

(1950) 6. “representar una obra de teatro o ejecutar una composición musical”


(1989) 5. “ejecutar un artista una obra”
(1992) 4. “representar una obra teatral, cinematográfica, etc.”


The seventh and eighth entries of the different editions refer to the creation field:

(1984, 1992) 7. “concebir, ordenar o expresar de un modo personal la realidad”

(1989) 8. “concebir, ordenar o expresar de un modo personal el asunto o materia de que se trata”

The noun senses

interpretación

The first sense of the 1780, 1783, 1791, 1843 and 1884 editions can be understood as intralinguistic recoding or as mancy:

(1780, 1783, 1791, 1843 1884) 1. “declaración, ó explicación de alguna cosa obscura y de difícil inteligencia”

(1803, 1817, 1822, 1832, 1837, 1852, 1869) 1. “la acción y efecto de interpretar”


The second and third entries of the different editions deal fully with legilectic values that can understood as intralinguistic or as symbolic (“the spirit of the law”) recoding values:

(1899). 2. [interpretación] auténtica’ For. “la que de la ley hace el mismo legislador”


(1817, 1822, 1832, 1837) 2. “secretaría en que se traducen al castellano los documentos y papeles escritos en otras lenguas”

(1852, 1869 1899 and 1914 give it in third place) 2. ‘[Interpretación] de lenguas’ “Secretaría en que se traducen al castellano los documentos y papeles legales escritos en otra lengua”

(1950) 3. ‘[Interpretación] de lenguas’ “Secretaría en que se traducen al castellano documentos escritos en otras lenguas y que han de hacer fe ante los tribunales o autoridades”

The agent noun senses

intérprete

The first entry of the 1780, 1783, 1791, 1843 and 1884 editions can be understood as intralinguistic recoding or interlinguistic recoding:

(1780, 1783, 1791, 1843, 1884) 1. “el que interpreta, explica ó declara alguna cosa, ó idioma”

(1803, 1817, 1822, 1832, 1837, 1852, 1869) 1. “el que interpreta”


The second and third entries of the different editions refer to symbolic recoding:

(1780, 1783, 1791, 1843, 1884) 2. met. “lo que explica, ó da á conocer la voluntad, ú otros afectos del ánimo”


(1927, 1950) 3. “cosa que sirve para dar a conocer los afectos y movimientos del alma”

In these two groups, the second entries correspond to interlinguistic recoding:


(1992) 2. “persona que explica á otras, en idioma que entienden, lo dicho en otra que les es desconocida”
The fourth and legilectic entry is also to be understood as interlinguistic communication:


3.2. Historical values in English

The diachronic analysis of the English values will make use of the data given in a dictionary based upon chronologically sequenced citations: the Oxford English Dictionary.

The verb senses

To interpret

1. “to expound the meaning of (something abstruse or mysterious),” “to render (words, writings, an author, etc.) clear or explicit”; “to elucidate,” “to explain.” Formerly also “to translate” (now only contextually, as included in the general sense)

This entry includes symbolic recoding, intralinguistic recoding and –partly– also interlinguistic recoding, with aspects of maney. It is the second oldest and first found in the late Middle English translation that Wyclif undertakes of the Bible:

1382, Wyclif, ‘Daniel’ v, 16 I herde of thee, that thou mayst intérprete derke thingis, and vnbynde bounden thingis (Vulgate: … ego audien de te, quod possis obscura interpretari, et ligata dissolvere …)

b. “to make out the meaning of,” “to explain to oneself”

A rather recent semasiological addition, this symbolic recoding is first found in the late Modern English period:

1795, Cowper, ‘Pairing Time Anc.’ 6 The child who knows no better than to interpret by the letter A story of cock and bull.

c. In recent use: “to bring out the meaning of (a dramatic or musical composition, a landscape, etc.),” “to render”

The second latest of all additions, this symbolic recoding, is first found in the late Modern English, late nineteenth century:

1880, ‘Athenaeum’ 25th December 876/1 The two female characters (…) were interpreted with striking success.
“to obtain information esp. from a photograph used, esp. of aerial photographs taken for military purposes”

A mid-twentieth century incorporation of symbolic recoding is:

1950, A. Lee, ‘Soviet Air Force’ vii, 154 Photographs developed in mobile front-line vans, were interpreted and the main points signalled (...) to army and corps headquarters.

2. “to give a particular explanation of,” “to expound or take in a specified manner,” “to construe (motives, actions, etc.) favourably or adversely”

The chronologically oldest entry, again due to Wyclif:

1380, Wyclif, ‘Sermons’ (in ‘Selected Works’ I, 206) As princes of prestis and Phariseis joined wi them, wolen interprete Goddis lawe aff hem shal it be taken.

b. “to render,” “to explain,” “to translate by a specified term”

Another specific technolectic usage and, for the first time, a legilect. The other two are: an intercultural substitution (Verstegan in 1605, establishes the ‘equivalence’ of the Germanic goddess Frigga and the Latin Venus) and a botanical example (in 1690, Temple says that—generally speaking—Latin mala is equivalent to apples in English):

1530-1531, ‘Act 22 of Henry VIII’ c. 13 No person ... being a common Baker, Brewer ... shall be interpreted or expounded handicrafts men.

3. “to make an explanation,” “to give an exposition,” spec. “to act as interpreter or dragoman.” Formerly also in general sense “to translate”

As seen in our previous synchronic analysis, the core sense and semantic field of interlinguistic recoding we are interested in, does not appear foremost. Two are the main entries:

1382, Wyclif, ‘1Cor.’ xii, 30 Wber alle spoken with langages? wber alle interpreten [gloss or expounen]? (Vulgate: numquid omnes linguas loquentur? numquid omnes interpretantur?)

1588, Parke’s translation of Mendoza’s ‘Hist. China’ 285 Every one wil construe and interpret thereon at his pleasure.

4. obs. “to signify,” “to mean”

A symbolic recoding value that is not extant:

1614, Selden ‘Titles Hon.’ 107 Sophi by all likelihood was given him with regard to his reformed profession, as the word interprets.
The noun senses

Interpretation

1. “The action of interpreting or explaining,” “explanation,” “exposition”

   Again the first entry of this intralinguistic or symbolic recoding value is found in Wyclif:
   
   1382, Wyclif, ‘2Pet’ I, 20 *Ech prophete of scripture is not maad bi propre interpretacioun* 
   (Vulgate: … *omnis prophetia Scripturae propria interpretatione non sit*)

   b. “The faculty or power of interpreting”

   This mantic *charisma*, this Pauline gift of God, now understood as obsolete.
   
   1526, Tindale, ‘1Cor’ xii, 10 *To won is geven the vitraunce off wisdom … To another the interpretacion of tonges* (Vulgate: … *alii genera linguarum, alii interpretatio sermonum.*

2. “an explanation give,” “a way of interpreting or explaining,” “a comment” (obsolete), “a commentary” (obsolete)

   1390, Gower, ‘Confessio Amantis’ I, 145 *Of … straunge interpretations, Problemes and demaundes eke His wisdome was to finde and seke*

   b. ‘a construction put upon actions, purposes, etc.’

   1387, Trevisa’s translation of Higden’s ‘Polychronicon’ (Rolls) vii, 153 *Ge angt for to soften De opininouns of fonde men wiD better interpretacioun.*

   c. “the representation of a part in drama, or the rendering of a musical composition, according to one’s conception of the author’s idea”

   As with the corresponding verbal senses, the first entry of this symbolic recoding value is found in the 1880 Christmas number of ‘Athenæum’:

   1880, ‘Athenæum’ 25th December 876/1 *The part of Cassandra … is capable of more various interpretation than that of her rival.*

3. “the way in which a thing ought to be interpreted,” “proper explanation” and, hence “signification,” “meaning”

   A late Medieval symbolic recoding value:

   ca. 1440, ‘Secreta Secret., Gov. Lordsh.’ 106 *Bytokenyng or enterpretysoun of wordes ys so as De espirt of word, and De endytynge ys De body, and De writyngys ys De clethyng of wordys and spekyngye.*
4. “the action of translating,” “a translation or rendering of a book, a word, etc.”

These interlinguistic recoding values referred to written material are considered obsolete, the last entry being dated 1646. As usual, the first entry is due to Wyclif:

1382, Wyclif, ‘Prologue to Joshua’ If the oold oonliche interpretacioun plese to hem

**The agent noun senses**

*interpreter*

1. “one who interprets or explains,” obs. “an official or professional expounder of laws, texts, mysteries, etc.,” “a commentator”

The first entry can be understood as intralinguistic or symbolic recoding. The immediate sense rejects, as obsolete, one of the most common values in Spanish even today and is first found in the wake of the Wycliffite movement:

ca. 1400, ‘Apology Lollards’ 32 God sethe bi Ysaye ... Din interpretors han brokyn De lawe agenis Me.

b. “one who interprets a particular thing, or interprets something in a particular way,” “one who explains or puts a construction upon the meaning or purposes of a person.” Also *transf.* of things.

Purely symbolic recoding entries:

1531, Elyot, ‘Gov.: Proheme’ I ... beseche your hyghnes to dayne to be ... defendour of this little warke agayne the assaults of malignant interpretours.

c. Formerly a frequent title of books explaining the meaning of technical terms or unusual words:

On the other hand, this obsolete value refers to intralinguistic recoding of technolectic written material:

1607, Cowell (title) *The Interpreter ... or booke containing the Signification of Words.*

2. “one who translates languages,” obs. “a translator of books or writings”

Once more interlinguistic, mainly written, recoding values:

ca. 1400, tra. ‘Secreta Secret. Gov. Lordsh.’ 48 Iohan Dat translatyd bis book ... ful wys, & heel interpretour of langages

b. “one who translates the communication of persons speaking different languages”; *spec.* “one whose office it is to do so orally in the presence of the persons,” “a dragoman”
Almost at the end we come to the sense we are primarily interested in: chronologically the first of them all and again due to the Wycliffite translation of Paul’s ‘First Letter to the Corinthians’:

1382, Wyclif, ‘1Cor’ xiv, 28 *If ther be not an interpretour, be he stille in the chirche* (Vulgate: *Sì autem non fuerit interpres, taceat in Ecclesia …*) specifically as an oral intermediary between heterolinguistic parties:

1535, Coverdale, ‘Gen’ xlii, 23 *They knew not that Ioseph vnderstode it, for he spake vnto them by an interpreter.* (Vulgate: *Nesciebant autem quod intelligeret Ioseph: eo quod per interpretem loqueretur ad eos*) and also specifically as an intralinguistic or interlinguistic intermediary in legal affairs:

1752, Louthian, ‘Form of Process’ (second edition) 212 *In cases where the Prisoner and Witnesses do not understand the British Language, Interpreters must be procured and sworn as follows …*

3. “one who makes known the will of another”; “a title of Mercury the messenger of the gods”

The third entry corresponds both to symbolic communication and to mancy. In the latter we find the Homeric (and Socratic) *hermeneus* who must repeat *expressis verbis* and minutely, to the ultimate prosodic and rhetoric values, the message he (Hermes) or she (Iris) has been commended with. But is is also the intralinguistic medieval messenger who benefits (*jadme albriciâst*) and suffers (remember the popular Spanish saying imbedded in the ‘Quixote’: *mensajero eres amigo, no mereces culpa non*) the effect of the news he has been charged to utter.

1490, Caxton, ‘Eneydos’ xvi, 61 *Iupiter … called to hym Mercurius, whiche ys interpretour of the goddess.*

4. *Rheto.* “an explanation of one expression by another,” SYNONMY.

This intralinguistic recoding value is also considered obsolete:

1589, Puttenham ‘Eng. Poesie’ iii, xix (Arb.) 223 *The Greekes call it Sinonimia … the Latines … called it by a name of equent for (said they) many words of one nature and sence, one of them doth expound another. And therefore they called this figure the interpreter.*

4. **Summary**

In our review of the present and historical values of the lexemes that derive from the Latin root [interpret-] in the main Western European languages we have seen that the
core value of interlinguistic oral mediation is only predominant as a technolect, for the specialist and professional and that neither the historical nor the present-day references award it any predominance. We have also established three main semantic fields for [interpret-]: CREATION, RECODING (subclassified as INTRALINGUISTIC, INTERLINGUISTIC and SYMBOLIC) and MANCY (or divination). These fields are historically found in Latin and also in the synchronic and diachronic values of the Western European languages of our study.

(Paper received December 2005)

REFERENCES


Dr. Juan José Calvo is tenured lecturer at the University of Valencia since 1992. He has taught History of the English Language and Translation subjects. His publications and main areas of academic interest are centered on translation studies, English diachronic linguistics and language contact.

NOTES

1 It is worth noting that the Spanish language (albeit seldom if ever used) retains nahuatlato for “oral interpreter” as a result of contact with the Mexican Nahuatl speaking culture, yet it has not done the same with any oral communication term related to the other great pre-Columbine empire, that of the Quechua speaking, Peruvian Incas, nor for that matter with the Tagalog speaking peoples of the Philippines.

2 This does not deter public bodies from plodding along their well-known paths: the long and winding roads of pompous administrative lingo. The midday news on the Spanish TVE1 informs, on the fourth of December 2005, that the Barcelona hospitals make use not of interpreters but of mediadoras interculturales (“female intercultural mediators”) in the maternity wards to facilitate communication with the foreign mothers.

3 The first Spanish group lists those found in Sáinz de Robles (1967) and Espasa-Calpe (1989). The first of the English groupings are those found in Regel’s International Thesaurus (1960); while the fourth refers those included in (2000). New Oxford Thesaurus of English. As for the other languages, the Italian synonyms are taken from Roselli (1989), the French from Manquin & Duttoit (coord.) and the German ones from Müller (ed.) (1972).

4 In his Pro A. Cluentio Oratio xxxvi, 101 oegistas domestica quasque forensis in medium proferabatur, numerarius interpreps pacis et concordiae non probatur.

5 Ab urbe condita xxi, 1, 12 adiuvans se pacis eius interpretem fore pollicitur.

6 The iii, 358-360 full citation reads: His uatum aggregior dictis, ac talia quaeve: Triongens, interpres diuum. qui numina Phachi Qui tripped, Clarri aurae, qae sidera sentis. Other ‘Æneid’ [interpret-] loci include the following: iii, 473 Quem Phachi interpres multo compluriam honos, iv, 378-380 Interpreps diuum fort birida inuia per auris, sicco is superis labor est, ea circa quietos sollicitat, neque te tene neque dicta refello, iv, 608 tuque barum interpres curarum et consilia Ino and x, 175 Terris ille hominum diuunmque interpres Asias.

7 This reference, albeit with partly different spelling, can be found at http://www.th-augsburg.de/~harsch/Chronologia/Lspost04/Donatus/don_inch.html (consulted 31-10-05). Cicero’s Pro Cluentio citation can also be found at http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/cicero/cluentio.shtml; Virgil’s at the splendid http://www.intratext.com (all consulted 31-10-05).

8 Richard Verstegan was born Richard Rowlands, but his ideology led him to adopt the surname of his Teutonic grandfather.