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The Legend of the Miskito Indians: A Literary Translation Project

by Alyssa Friesen

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This project began in the spring of 2014 for the class of Intermediate Spanish Composition and Grammar. In class the object was to read this particular legend, but I decided to take that a step further and do a translation of it in order for me to better understand it. This is a literary translation, which is the most difficult type of translation which is why I used certain theories of translation to help get an accurate translation for the textbook *Introduction to Spanish Translation* by Jack Child. By applying these methods of translation, I was able to get an accurate, easy to read translation of a very old Nicaraguan legend. According to Maria Colombi, Jill Pellettieri, and Maria Rodriguez in their work *Palabra abierta*, this legend is important because it is the first reference of contact between the indigenous culture of Nicaragua and the exterior world.

Most people believe there are two types of translations. The first being “literal” which means a word-for-word translation. The second is “free” which means that a translation is merely inspired by the source language original with relatively little correspondence to the words involved. In reality there is a wide spectrum of different types of translation. The object of translation is to make the target language sound so natural, the people reading it do not know it is a translation.

All concepts of my theories of translation come from the book *Introduction to Spanish Translation* by Jack Child. One theory is a surface versus deep meaning translation. The deep meaning translation or meaning based translation, which is the theory I

used, involves changing the form of the message from one language (source language) to the appropriate form in a second language (target language) without changing the deeper meaning. The deeper meaning can be expressed in both languages and the translator's task is to find that link of meaning and the way in which to express it (16).

Another theory of translation is the beautiful-faithful theory of translation. This theory outlines four possible outcomes of a translation. The first is the beautiful and faithful outcome which is the idea translation. The second is beautiful but unfaithful, this is a compromise which favors the esthetic element over accuracy and may be justified in translating poetry and literature. The third is ugly but faithful, this is a compromise which favors accuracy over esthetics. The last is ugly and unfaithful, this is the worst of all possibilities, and a situation which hopefully occurs very rarely. My translation follows the first outcome because it has the correct esthetic element, but also contain the accuracy of the source language (26-27). I felt like it was important to translate this particular legend into English because no other English translations of the legend exist. The following pages contain the source language legend as well as my end translation.

Los cazadores invisibles: Una leyenda de los Indios miskitos de Nicaragua

Un sábado por la tarde, tres hermanos salieron del pueblo de Ulwas, junto al río Coco. Iban a cazar wari, el puerco salvaje de carne muy sabrosa. Después de caminar una hora por el monte, oyeron una voz. --Dar. Dar. Dar. --decía la voz.

Los hermanos se detuvieron. Miraron a su alrededor pero no vieron a nadie. Entonces oyeron de nuevo la voz. --Dar. Dar. Dar. La voz salía de un bejuco que colgaba de un árbol frente a ellos. El primer hermano agarró el bejuco. E instantáneamente desapareció. Entonces el segundo hermano agarró el bejuco. Y él también desapareció. El tercer hermano, lleno de miedo, gritó: --¿Qué les has hecho a mis hermanos?

--No les he hecho nada a tus hermanos --contestó la voz-- . Cuando ellos me suelten, los verás. Los dos primeros hermanos soltaron el bejuco. E instantáneamente se volvieron visibles.

--¿Quién eres? --preguntaron los hermanos, sorprendidos. --Soy el Dar --dijo la voz--. Si alguien me agarra, se vuelve invisible y ni los seres humanos ni los animales lo pueden ver.

Los hermanos se dieron cuenta inmediatamente de que el Dar les podía ser muy útil. --Podríamos acercarnos a los waris sin que nos vieran. --Luego podríamos matarlos fácilmente con nuestros palos. Cada uno de los hermanos quería un pedazo del Dar. Se lanzaron a coger el bejuco, pero el dar se alejó y desapareció. --Antes de apoderarse de mi poder, tienen que prometer que los usarán bien --dijo El Dar.

--Te prometeremos cualquier cosa --dijeron los hermanos. --Primero tienen que prometerme que nunca venderán la carne de wari. Solamente la regalarán. Luego, tienen que prometerme que nunca cazarán con escopetas. Tienen que cazar solamente con palos.

Los hermanos nunca habían vendido la carne de wari. Siempre se la habían dado a la gente. Nunca habían cazado con escopetas. Siempre habían cazado con palos. No lo sabían hacer de otra manera. --Lo prometemos --dijeron. Y el Dar permitió que cada uno se llevase un pedazo pequeño del bejuco mágico. Ese

día los hermanos cazaron muchísimos. Después de matar muchos waris colgaron sus pedazos del Dar en el árbol y regresaron a casa.

La gente de Ulwas recibió a los hermanos con mucho regocijo. Limpiaron los animales y los colgaron sobre el fuego. Pronto el delicioso aroma de la carne asada llegó a todas las casas de la aldea. Cuando la carne estuvo lista, los hermanos la cortaron en pedazos y la compartieron con todos. Nunca había comido tan bien la gente de Ulwas.

Más tarde, esa noche, los ancianos de la aldea les preguntaron a los hermanos cómo habían conseguido tantos waris. Los hermanos les contaron las promesas que habían hecho al Dar. --¡Qué buena suerte han tenido! --dijeron los ancianos--. Hemos oído hablar de ese bejuco. Es muy viejo y muy poderoso. Mientras cumplan sus promesas, nuestra aldea prosperará y nuestra gente los honrará.

Con la ayuda del Dar, los hermanos se convirtieron en cazadores famosos. Se contaban cuentos sobre ellos en todas las aldeas a lo largo del río Coco y hasta más allá. Un día, llegó a Ulwas un barco con dos extranjeros. Los extranjeros saludaron a los hermanos y les dieron regalos: telas de muchos colores y barriles de vino. --Hemos viajado por muchos días para conocer a estos cazadores famosos --dijeron.

Los hermanos los invitaron a comer con ellos. Después de la comida, los extranjeros les contaron a los hermanos que eran comerciantes. Habían venido a comprar carne de wari. --No podemos vender el wari --dijeron los hermanos, acordándose de su promesa al Dar--. Eso es lo que come nuestra gente.

Los comerciantes se rieron. --Nunca pensamos que cazadores tan famosos fueran tan tontos. Claro que la gente tiene que comer. Solamente queremos comprar lo que sobra. Los hermanos se sintieron tentados. Hablaron entre sí. --Quizás pudiéramos vender nada más un poco de carne --dijo el primer hermano.

--Pero el Dar lo sabrá --dijo el segundo hermano. Los hermanos se miraron nerviosamente. Entonces el tercer hermano dijo. --Hemos visto que los comerciantes son hombres muy hábiles. Su poder tiene que ser mayor que el poder del Dar. Los otros hermanos asintieron. No valdría la pena disgustar a los comerciantes. Así que

los hermanos comenzaron a vender la carne de wari.

Los comerciantes regresaron varias veces al pueblo de Ulwas. Cada vez traían más dinero para los cazadores. Cada vez se llevaban más wari. Pronto los hermanos empezaron a preocuparse al ver que no había suficiente wari para el pueblo. Los comerciantes se rieron de sus preocupaciones. –Es culpa de ustedes por cazar solamente con palos –dijeron. --Pero siempre hemos cazado con palos. --Ésa es la razón por la que no pueden alimentar a su pueblo. Tienen que cazar los waris más rápidamente. Necesitan escopetas.

Los hermanos conversaron entre sí. --Si compráramos escopetas, podríamos cazar más waris –dijo el primer hermano--. Podríamos vender a los comerciantes y alimentar al pueblo también. --Pero, ¿Qué nos pasará? –preguntó el segundo hermano. El tercer hermano se rió antes de contestar. –Nos convertiremos en hombres hábiles como los comerciantes. Así que los hermanos comenzaron a cazar con escopetas. Se olvidaron por completo de su promesa al Dar.

Poco a poco, sus corazones se alejaron de su gente. Mientras más carne cazaba, más vendían a los comerciantes. Se estaban acostumbrando a las cosas que podían comprar con el dinero que ganaban. Los ancianos del pueblo hablaron seriamente a los hermanos. --Necesitan darle de comer a la gente. Tienen hambre. Los hermanos respondieron, enojados. –¿Si quieren comer carne, nos pueden pagar por ella como hacen los comerciantes! Pero la gente no tenía dinero.

Comenzaron a esperar a los cazadores en las afueras del pueblo. Cuando los cazadores regresaban cargados de wari, la gente les pedía carne. --Los hombres listos no regalan lo que pueden vender –se dijeron los cazadores. Así que les daban a la gente la carne malograda que no se podía vender. La gente se enojó. --¿Ya no son ustedes nuestros hermanos? –les gritaron. Los cazadores se reían y seguían su camino. Hasta hicieron a un lado a los ancianos que trataban de razonar con ellos.

Así pasaron muchos meses. Un día, cuando los hermanos regresaron al pueblo, la gente no se reunió a su alrededor como de costumbre. Algunos se cubrieron los ojos y gritaron. Otros miraron

incrédulos a la extraña procesión de waris muertos que se movía lentamente por el aire. Sólo los ancianos entendieron qué era lo que pasaba. --El Dar ha vuelto invisibles a los cazadores --dijeron.

Era verdad. Los hermanos eran invisibles. Habían dejado sus pedazos de Dar en el árbol como de costumbre, pero habían permanecido invisibles. Algo no iba bien. Soltaron los animales que llevaban y corrieron hasta el árbol. --¿Qué nos has hecho? -- le preguntaron alarmados al Dar. Pero el Dar no les contestó. Los hermanos cayeron de rodillas y le rogaron al Dar que les ayudara. Pero el Dar sólo repitió su nombre una y otra vez. --Dar. Dar. Dar.

Entonces los hermanos se dieron cuenta de las cosas terribles que habían hecho y se sintieron muy avergonzados. Llorando, regresaron a su casa. En las afueras del pueblo los esperaban los ancianos. Los hermanos les rogaron que los perdonaran, pero los ancianos no los perdonaron. --Desde este momento, tienen que irse de Ulwas --dijeron--. Nunca más vivirán con nosotros. Los hermanos les rogaron a los ancianos que les dieran una última oportunidad. --¿Cómo podemos vivir lejos de nuestra gente? -- dijeron llorando. Pero los ancianos les dieron la espalda y se fueron.

Así que los cazadores invisibles dejaron su pueblo para siempre. Deambularon por las márgenes de río Coco y llegaron hasta las cataratas de Carizal. Mientras vagaban llamaban El Dar, rogándole que los volviera visibles de nuevo. Algunos de los miskitos de río Coco dicen que los cazadores todavía vagan después de todos estos años. Algunos dicen que los cazadores invisibles han pasado junto a ellos en el monte. Saben que es así, dicen, porque han oído voces que llaman: --Dar. Dar. Dar.

The invisible hunters: A legend of the Miskito Indians of Nicaragua

One Saturday afternoon, three brothers went to the town of Ulwas, together to the Coco River. They went hunting waris, wild pork that had very tasty meat. After walking for an hour in the woods, they heard a voice. "Give. Give. Give." said the voice

The brothers stopped. They looked around them, but they did not see anyone. Then they heard the voice again. "Give. Give. Give." The voice came from a vine hanging from a tree in front of them. The first brother grabbed the vine. And instantly he disappeared. Then the second brother grabbed the vine. And also disappeared. The third brother, full of fear, screamed.

"Have you done anything to my brothers?"

"I have not done anything to your brothers," replied the voice. "When they release me, you will see." Both of the first two brothers released the vine. And instantly they became visible. "Who are you?" asked the brothers, surprised. "I am the Giver," said the voice. "If someone grabs me they become invisible, and neither humans nor animals can see them."

The brothers realized immediately that the Giver could be very useful to them. "We could approach the waris without being seen." "After, we can kill them easily with clubs." Each one of the brothers wanted a piece of the Giver. They rushed to grab the vine, but the Giver drove away and disappeared. "Before seizing my power, you must promise me that you will use it for good" said the Giver.

"We will promise you anything," said the brothers. "First you have to promise me you will never sell the meat of the waris. Only give it away. Then you have to promise me that you will never hunt with shotguns. You must only hunt with clubs."

The brothers had never sold any meat. They always gave it to the people. They never hunted with shotguns, they only hunted with clubs. They did not know any other way. "We promise," they said. And the Giver allowed that each one could take a little piece of the magical vine. This day the brothers believed with all their heart they would not break their promises. After they had killed many

waris, they hung the pieces of the Giver in the tree and returned to the house.

The people of Ulwas received the brothers with joy. They cleaned the animals and then hung them over the fire. Quickly the delicious aroma of the meat went to all the houses of the village. When the meat was ready, the brothers cut it into pieces and shared it with all. Never did they have such good food.

Much later, that same night, the elders of the village asked the brothers questions on how they had got the waris. The brothers told about the promise they had made to the Giver. "What good luck you have!" said the elders. "We have heard of this vine. It is very old and very powerful. While you keep your promises, our village and our people will be honored."

With the help of the Giver, the brothers became famous hunters. They had stories about them in all the villages to the area of the Coco River and beyond. One day, a boat arrived to Ulwas with two foreigners. The foreigners greeted the brothers, and they gave them gifts of colorful fabrics and barrels of wine. "We have traveled many days to meet the famous hunters" they said.

The brothers invited them to eat with them. After they ate, the foreigners told the brothers that they were merchants. "We have come to buy the meat of the waris." "We cannot sell the waris" said the brothers, remembering their promises to the Giver. "This is the meat of our people."

The merchants laughed, "Never did we think that the famous hunters were so dumb. Clearly the people have to eat. Only we want to buy the leftovers." The brothers felt tempted. They talked between them. "Maybe we could sell some of our meat," said the first brother.

"But the Giver will know," said the second brother. The brothers looked nervous. Then the third brother said, "We have seen that the traders are highly skilled men. Their power has to be stronger than the power of the Giver." The other brothers nodded. "It is not worth upsetting the merchants." So the brother began selling the meat of the waris.

The merchants returned various times to the town of Ulwas.

Each time they brought more money for the hunters. Each time they got more waris. Soon the brothers began to see and worry that there was not sufficient wari meat for the village. The merchants laughed about their worries. "It is your fault because you only use clubs" they said. "But we always hunt with clubs."

"This is the reason that you cannot feed the town. You have to hunt the waris faster. You need a shot gun."

The brothers spoke between themselves. "If we use shotguns, we can kill more waris" said the first brother. "We can sell to the merchants and feed the village" "But what will happen to us?" asked the second merchant. The third brother laughed before he answered "we will become as skillful men as the merchants." Then the brothers began to kill with shotguns. They had forgotten all the promises they had made to the Giver.

Little by little their hearts went away from the people. While more meat was killed, more meat they sold to the merchants. They were accustomed to the things they could buy with the money. The elder of the town talked seriously with the brothers. "You need to give the food to the people. They are hungry." "If they want to eat the meat, they can pay the merchants for it." the brothers said. "But the people do not have money."

They began to wait for the hunters on the outskirts of town. When the hunters returned with waris, they asked them for meat. "Smart men do not give away what they can sell," said the hunters. They would only give them the spoiled meat that they could not sell. The people were angry. "Are you no longer our brothers?" they screamed. The hunters laughed and continued to walk. They even raised a hand to the elderly that tried to reason with them.

Many months passed. One day, when the brothers returned to the town, the people met as usual, but did not see what they normally saw. Some covered their eyes and screamed. Other watched the strange procession of dead waris as it moved very slowly by air. Only the elders understood what had happened. "The Giver has made them invisible hunters" they said.

It was true. The brothers were invisible. They had left their pieces hanging in the trees as usual, but they were permanently

invisible. Something was wrong. They put down the animals they were carrying and ran back to the tree. "What have you done to us?" they asked the Giver, alarmed. But the Giver did not answer. The brothers fell on their knees and begged the Giver to help them. But the Giver only repeated his name time and time again. "Give. Give. Give."

The brother realized the terrible things they had done and felt very ashamed. They cried and returned to their house. On the outskirts of the town, the elders awaited them. The brothers begged them to forgive them, but the elderlies did not spare them. "You must leave Ulwas," they said, "never can you live with us." The brothers begged the elders to give them a last chance. "How can we live so far from our people?" they cried. But the elders turned their backs and went.

So the hunters left their village forever. They roamed the banks of the river and came to the falls of Carizal. While roaming they called to the Giver, asking to be visible again. Some of the miskitos of the Coco River say that the hunters still wander after all these years. Some say that the invisible hunters have passed them on the mount. They know that is so, they say, because they heard voices calling. "Give. Give. Give."

Reflection

This translation was a project that I decided to complete because there was not an existing English translation over this particular legend that I could reference in my studies. After reading this translation, I thought it was an important work that should have the privilege of being read by speakers of multiple languages. This work has a powerful moral lesson that everyone could have the benefit of learning from. The work I did on this translation was rewarding and fulfilling. I receive a lot of joy by taking a beautiful work and transforming something that can be read by my fellow English speakers.

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