

# Linguistic Variety in the Translations into Spanish of E. M. Forster's *A Passage To India*<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The last novel E. M. Forster published during his lifetime, *A Passage to India*, appeared in 1924. It was first translated into Spanish thirty years later (1955) and has been retranslated into this language twice (1981 and 2004). The three translations not only appeared at different moments in time, but were also carried out by different translators (J. R. Wilcock, J. L. López Muñoz and J. G. Vázquez) from different Spanish-speaking countries (Argentina, Spain and Colombia) and published by different publishing houses (Argentinian Sur, Spanish Alianza and Folio). This paper analyses the linguistic variety of the three translations, focusing on two linguistic features that can be affected by geographical variation within the Spanish language, vocabulary and second person pronouns. Such features reflect the history of the publishing industry in the Spanish-speaking countries in general and in the publishing history of *A Passage to India* in Spanish in particular in a number of ways.

**Keywords:** E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India*, Spanish, English, literary translation, translation studies

## Introduction

The last novel British author E. M. Forster (1879–1970) published during his lifetime, *A Passage to India*, appeared in 1924. The book was soon translated into several European languages, but it was not translated into Spanish until 1955, more than thirty years later. No records of any other Forster's novels

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being translated into Spanish before that date have been found (the first translation of *Where Angels Fear to Tread* also appeared in 1955), although some of his articles and short stories already had.

The first translation into Spanish of *A Passage to India* was released by an Argentinian publishing house created in 1933 by the writer and intellectual Victoria Ocampo (1890–1979), the founder of the homonymous literary journal *Sur*. The translation was entitled *El paso a la India* and released as a paperback edition; the cover was plain orange, with the title and the author's name at the top and the publisher's logotype at the bottom: the simple look of many books published by *Sur*. The translator was Juan Rodolfo Wilcock (1919–1978), an Argentinian writer of English and Italian origins. In Argentina, Wilcock published six volumes of poems as well as a play co-authored with Ocampo's sister Silvina (González 2007, 10), and worked extensively as a translator, translating into Spanish authors such as Graham Greene, Franz Kafka, Christopher Marlowe, or Jack Kerouac. At the end of the 1950s, he moved to Italy, where he spent the rest of his life. He wrote all his subsequent works in Italian and translated into Italian authors such as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, William Shakespeare, Gustave Flaubert, or Jorge Luis Borges (Bourdeilh 2013, 37–38).

The first European translation of *A Passage to India* into Spanish was published in Spain in 1981 by the publishing house Alianza, founded fifteen years earlier by a group of Spanish intellectuals including José Ortega Spottorno, son of the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset (Alianza). It was another paperback edition, with a plain black cover, white lettering and a book jacket featuring an elephant figurine. The title was *Un viaje a la India*, but four years later, when David Lean's adaptation of *A Passage to India* was released, this second translation was reissued with the movie's title, *Pasaje a la India*. The author of this version was José Luis López Muñoz (born 1934), a Spanish translator who held a BSc in Medicine, a BA in Spanish Language and Literature, and a PhD in Philosophy. López Muñoz had already translated works by authors such as Henry James, Jane Austen, John Dos Passos, William Faulkner, or Robert Louis Stevenson, as well as Forster's *The Longest Journey* and *The Life to Come and Other Stories* (later on, in 2005, he would also translate *A Room with a View*). By the time he translated *A Passage to India* he had already been awarded the Spanish National Translation Award and he would be awarded the Spanish National Award for a Career in Translation in 2000 (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte).

The third and last translation appeared in 2004. It was printed by the Spanish publishing house Folio and distributed at an affordable price by the Spanish daily newspaper *ABC*. It was part of a collection of travel books that included forty-one various titles by such authors as William Faulkner, Joseph Conrad, André Gide, Umberto Eco, Mark Twain, and Doris Lessing. The books were distributed between April and June 2004 according to a predetermined schedule; Forster's *A Passage to India*, released on June 27<sup>th</sup>, happened to be the last title of the collection (*ABC* webpage). This was a hard-cover edition, with a light blue cover featuring a photograph of a fisherman against the view of the Taj Mahal credited to Frans Lemmens. The author of this translation, entitled *Pasaje a la India*, was Colombian writer Juan Gabriel Vásquez (1973), who, after obtaining a degree in Law, moved to Europe, where he stayed for sixteen years before returning to Colombia. So far Vásquez has published seven novels and a collection of short stories, as well as two non-fiction books and many newspaper articles; he has also received several literary awards. He has translated several other books, including titles by John Dos Passos, John Hershey, and Victor Hugo.

### **The translation industry in Spain and Latin America**

During the first thirty years of the twentieth century, the Latin American publishing market was controlled by non-Spanish European publishing houses. Several causes contributed to this situation, one of them being the late industrialization of the Spanish publishing industry, which only took place in the second half of the nineteenth century (the industrialization of the Latin American publishing industry took place even later). Exporting books to Latin America was also quite expensive and the process took a long time. The economic situation in Latin America and the Spanish publishers' lack of awareness of Latin American literary preferences did not help, either (Larraz 2010, 15–19).

Nonetheless, during the 1920s the Spanish publishing industry started to grow and, by the 1930s, Spain was the country exporting most books to Latin America. However, World War I spurred the development of the emerging Latin American publishing industry and many Latin American publishing houses were born during the late 1920s and the early 1930s. The Spanish Civil War, on the other hand, meant a temporary setback for the Spanish publishing industry. The development of the Latin American publishing industry was

further fostered by the improvement in the economic and cultural circumstances. During the 1930s, the number of publishing houses increased, national publishing associations were created, Argentina, Mexico, and Chile started to export their books, and Buenos Aires became the publishing, literary, and translation centre of the Spanish-speaking world. This meant that, for the first time in history, the reception of foreign literature in the Spanish-speaking world was based on Latin American (mostly Argentinian) criteria (Larraz 2010, 22–86).

The Spanish publishers could not compete against the Argentinian ones, whose books were cheaper and of better quality. Latin American publishing houses did not have to deal with censorship, they had access to better and cheaper paper and it was easier for them to send their books to other Spanish-speaking countries; Spanish publishing houses were unable to secure translation rights for many international bestsellers and, when they did, they were often restricted to the Spanish territory. After the war, the Spanish publishers started to wonder how to re-enter the Latin American market and the Spanish government started to implement protectionist measures to hinder the import of Latin American books. As a result, as of 1944 the Spanish publishing houses started to recover and in 1946 the Spanish government enacted a law to protect the national publishing industry that was key to such recovery (the export to Latin America doubled between 1949 and 1951). From that point on, Latin American publishing houses started to encounter difficulties; by 1950, 40 percent of Argentinian publishing houses which had been in business five years earlier closed and between 1953 and 1955 Argentinian exports fell from 60 to 30 percent (Larraz 2010, 89–189).

Nowadays, a great part of the foreign books read in translation in Latin America are translated for Spanish publishing houses (Zaro Vera 2013a, 53). Therefore, if we apply Pierre Bourdieu's (1930–2002) sociological model and his concept of field, where such fields grow out of the network of relations among the agents within the field and the competition to preserve or modify the forces applied to their positions, we could say that the Latin American subfield of literary translation has lost its autonomy when compared to its golden age (between 1936 and 1950, approximately), since it is now dependent on the economic power of big Spanish publishing companies. However, it should also be pointed out that the autonomy of the literary field (to which the literary translation subfield belongs) is always relative, since it depends on the economic and political fields (Bourdieu 1997, 213).

On the other hand, the linguistic variety employed to translate a source text into Spanish often plays a role within the publishing relationships between Spain and Latin America. Spanish is the official language of Spain, eighteen Latin American countries and the African Republic of Equatorial Guinea, as well as one of the official languages of the U. S. territory of Puerto Rico. The Spanish spoken in each of these countries has its own lexical, phonetic, and morphosyntactic features, but the term “American Spanish” is frequently employed to refer to the Spanish language spoken in Latin American countries as opposed to the one spoken in Spain (Sánchez Lobato 1994, 553). Most Argentinian translators working during the period when Argentina was the publishing centre of the Spanish-speaking world employed a variety of Spanish that was easy to understand for most readers (Zaro Vera 2013b, 78), whereas Spanish translators have traditionally employed the European variety of the Spanish language.

Editing alleged Latin American features out of Argentinian translations before publishing them in Spain was a common practice during the late 1960s, 70s and 80s (Zaro Vera 2013b, 77). This could be a sign of Spanish readers' reservations about American Spanish when employed to translate foreign works, a sign of what María Pía López, then Director of the Argentinian Museum of Books and Languages, called the longstanding claim that Spain should define what standard Spanish is (Frieria 2011). Let's remember that the Argentinian Academy of Letters did not commend the use of the personal pronoun *vos* (which is extensively employed in Latin America) until the 1980s, since it was considered incorrect (Ramírez Gelbes 2011, 566), or that even today there are several dictionaries devoted to American Spanish words and expressions but none specializing in European Spanish ones. The dictionary published by the Royal Spanish Language Academy (*DRAE*) identifies both European and American Spanish words as such, but there is an apparent lack of proportion among the number of words classified as typical of European Spanish and the number of words marked as typical of the Spanish spoken in other regions (RAE 2014).

Nowadays, most of the books translated in Spain are rendered into European Spanish and no attention is paid to the fact that they are not only distributed in Spain but also in other Spanish-speaking countries, a situation that has given rise to criticism from Latin American readers, translators and critics (Zaro Vera 2013b, 76). In fact, according to the Argentinian writer and translator Carlos Gamerro, Latin American readers frequently discuss

the “ugliness” of translations made in Spain. Gamero also says that Spanish translators think they speak Spanish and other Spanish-speakers speak a dialect, while Latin American translators are more aware of the diversity of the Spanish-speaking community and therefore try to avoid local or dialect features (Zaro Vera 2013b, 76-77). This kind of translation, which does not seek to make its place of enunciation clear, is the most frequent one (Fólica and Villalba 2012, 260) of the two general kinds of translation that Patricia Willson identifies as working in Argentina (2004, 187).

### **A Passage to India in Spanish**

According to Paola Mancosu (2013, 5), the first translation of Forster’s *A Passage to India* was very well received by the critics. Right after it was published, Uruguayan poet Mario Benedetti (1920–2009) wrote an article about Forster where he commended the translation, except for the title (1955, 186–193), and the Argentinian journal *Davar* featured a review thanking Wilcock for making *A Passage to India* accessible to Spanish-speaking readers. Another review by Argentinian critic Jaime Rest was published a year later in *Sur*. However, no records of this translation being reissued have been found and twenty years later Argentinian writer and translator Luis Enrique Revol wrote that Forster’s books had been a failure in Argentina, *A Passage to India* having only achieved a mild success (1974, 133).

According to the Spanish ISBN and National Library databases, this translation was never published in Spain, as opposed to other translations originally published by Wilcock in Argentina. In 1979, Spanish writer, critic and translator Marta Pessarrodona said that the distribution of this first translation within Spain had been “non-existent” (1979, 53), although her words should probably not be taken literally, since my own copy of this translation was acquired at a Spanish second-hand bookstore. The translation is also mentioned several times in the Spanish press of the time: Juan Tebar cited it in an article in 1973 (1976, 50–51) (however, he did not name the translator) and the anonymous author of another article published in 1970 recalled having read it. He even named the translator, although he called him “Roberto” instead of “Rodolfo” (M. 1970, 53). In any case, it seems safe to assume that if this translation was ever exported to Spain, its distribution must have been very limited.

The possibility that this first translation was barely known by Spanish readers is reinforced by the reviews that appeared in the Spanish press after the second translation was released in 1981. Two years earlier, in the article she wrote on the occasion of the centenary of Forster's birth, Pessarrodona had already praised the fact that *A Passage to India* was "finally" to be published in Spain (1979, 53). The year the second translation was released, at least other three reviewers welcomed the long-awaited publication: Alberto Díaz Rueda (1981, 21), Julio M. de la Rosa (1981, 3), and Robert Saladrigas (1981, 31). As Pessarrodona did before them, both Díaz Rueda and De la Rosa used the word "finally" to describe the translation of *A Passage to India* into Spanish, and Saladrigas spoke of an "unfortunate delay". A year later, Domingo Pérez Minik expressed a similar point of view in the literary journal *Ínsula* (1982, 17-18). This translation has been reissued several times by Alianza and other Spanish publishing houses, and it was last printed by Alianza in 2010 as part of its 13/20 collection. It is the most frequently found in Spanish bookstores as well as in public and university libraries, and it is the only one offered in the online catalogues of Latin American bookstores we have consulted. However, both the first and the second translation can be found in some Latin American libraries, although the second translation is the most frequent one.

The distribution of the third and last translation also seems to have been fairly limited. This translation was intended to be sold together with a Spanish newspaper on a particular date and, according to the copyright page, could not be sold separately, which means that it was only available in Spain and for an extremely short period of time. Therefore, it cannot be found in regular bookstores, although some copies are available in second hand bookstores and public libraries.

## Analysis

We will now proceed to an analysis of the linguistic variety of the three translations. Due to space restrictions, this analysis will focus on two linguistic features, vocabulary and second person pronouns, both of which can be affected by geographical variation within the Spanish language.

Spanish speakers from different countries (and even from different regions within the same country) sometimes use different words and expressions. The dictionary published by the Royal Spanish Language Academy (*DRAE*)

defines *americanismo* (“Americanism”) as a word, an expression or a phonetic, grammatical or semantic feature that is characteristic of the Spanish spoken in some Latin American country. The dictionary does not offer an equivalent term for those features that are characteristic of the Spanish spoken in Spain, but they obviously exist. Local or dialect features are more frequently employed when translating certain kinds of texts, such as texts rich in informal dialogues and slang, which is not the case of *A Passage to India*, but even so both European and American Spanish words and expressions can be found in its translations into Spanish.

For instance, in the first translation we find words such as *arveja*, *curtiembre*, *desprolijo*, *develar*, *galpón*, *kerosene*, *lapicera*, *largavistas*, *malvón*, *parado*, *pedregullo*, or *sacudón*, which are classified as characteristic of the Spanish spoken in one or more Latin American countries by the *DRAE*. More specifically, *arveja*, *curtiembre*, *develar*, *kerosene*, *parado* and *sacudón* are considered to be typical of Latin America in general and *desprolijo*, *galpón*, *lapicera*, *largavistas*, *malvón* and *pedregullo* are considered to be typical of Argentina (among other Latin American countries). Other dictionaries classify as Americanisms several other words employed in this translation: *anteojos*, *baldazo*, *boleto*, *chivo emisario*, *confianzudo*, *jején*, *llamado*, *unto* (dictionary of Americanisms published by the Association of Spanish Language Academies (ASALE)); *afligente*, *manteca* (Morínigo’s dictionary of American Spanish); *estadía*, *suncho* (Sopena’s visual dictionary of Americanisms); and *chinche* (Haensch and Werner’s dictionary of *argentinismos*). This last dictionary also points out that the words *fósforo* and *cancha* (both used in the first translation) are employed differently in Argentina and in Spain. The number of Americanisms that can be found in the third translation is considerably lower. The words *aro*, *planeación*, *remezón*, *remada* and *salón [de clases]* are classified as such by the *DRAE*, although none of them is considered to be typical for Colombia. The dictionary of Americanisms published by the ASALE includes *llamado* and Morínigo’s dictionary of American Spanish includes *rol*. The *DRAE* records most of the words classified as Americanisms by the other dictionaries, but does not identify them as such.

None of these words are employed in the second translation, at least not with the same meaning. Since there is no dictionary devoted to words and expressions specifically employed in European Spanish and the number of those marked as such in the *DRAE* is comparatively low, it is more difficult to pinpoint European Spanish words than American Spanish ones. Still,



some words used in the second translation have been classified as characteristic of the Spanish spoken in Spain by authors such as Jose G. Moreno de Alba, Carlos Arrizabalaga Lizarraga, Raúl Ávila, or Juan M. Lope Blanch, for instance, *billete*, *cacahuete*, *conducir*, *doncella*, *faro*, *girar*, *guisante* (Moreno de Alba 2003, 388), *autobús*, *calcetines*, *cerilla* (Arrizabalaga Lizarraga 2012), *calle* (Ávila 2004, 10), and *nata* (Lope Blanch 2003, 160), or by the *DRAE* itself (for instance, *comisaría*, *magistrado* or *patata*). However, more than half of these words are also employed in the first translation and all but two (*nata* and *comisaría*) are used in the third one.

Second person pronouns are also employed differently in different Spanish-speaking communities. There are three second person singular pronouns in Spanish: *tú*, *vos* and *usted*. The most formal second person singular pronoun is *usted* both in Spain and Latin America; *tú* is the only informal second person singular pronoun in Spain, where the second translator comes from; and both *tú* and *vos* act as informal second person singular pronouns in Latin America, depending on the country and even on the region (RAE–ASALE 2005, 659–672). According to the *Diccionario panhispánico de dudas*, *vos* is fully accepted by all social classes in Argentina, where the first translator comes from, whereas *tú* and *vos* coexist in Colombia's capital city, where the third translator comes from, although *tú* is considered to be the educated form (RAE–ASALE 2005, 673–674) and characters from this city always use *tú* (besides *usted*) in the translator's original works (he even points this out in his novel *The Informers* (2004)). On the other hand, there are two second person plural pronouns: *vosotros* and *ustedes*. In most of Spain, *vosotros* implies familiarity and *ustedes* implies formality, while in Latin America and some southern Spanish regions *ustedes* acts both as formal and informal second person plural pronoun (RAE–ASALE 2005, 659–677). Since the three translations of *A Passage to India* into Spanish were carried out by translators from different countries, we could expect to find different second person pronouns in each of them: *vos* or *usted* and *ustedes* in the first one; *tú* or *usted* and *vosotros* or *ustedes* in the second one; and *tú* or *vos* or *usted* and *ustedes* in the third one. However, this is not always the case.

In the first translation, *tú* and not *vos* is employed as informal second person singular pronoun. On the other hand, *ustedes* is consistently used throughout this translation regardless of familiarity, that is, a character who addresses two other characters as *tú* when speaking to them one-to-one will address them as *ustedes* when speaking to them at the same time: for instance, Ronny

addresses Adela and his mother as *tú* when he speaks to them separately but as *ustedes* when he speaks to both of them. There is only an exception: one of the characters, Mrs. Moore, addresses her son Ronny and Adela as *vosotros* even though up to that point she has been addressing them and everybody else as *ustedes*. In the second translation, *tú* and *usted* are used as second person singular pronouns and *vosotros* and *ustedes* as plural ones, depending on the level of formality. The same pronouns are employed in the third translation.

Both the vocabulary and the second person pronouns employed in the three translations can be partly explained by the variety of Spanish spoken in their translators' countries. For instance, the first translator, who was Argentinian, used almost exclusively the only second person plural pronoun employed in Latin America, *ustedes*, as well as several Americanisms. The second translator, who was Spanish, used the informal second person pronouns typically employed in Spain, *tú* and *vosotros*, along with some words deemed to be characteristic of European Spanish by some authors. The third translator, who was Colombian, employed the educated informal second person singular pronoun used in his native Bogotá, *tú*.

Other decisions regarding vocabulary and second person pronoun choices could be attributed to extralinguistic reasons. For instance, the first translator probably opted against the informal second person singular pronoun *vos*, even though it is the most frequently employed in Argentina and he himself used it in his letters, because it was not as widely accepted in the 1950s as it is nowadays and most translators did not use it at the time (Zaro Vera 2013a, 57). In fact, Argentinian translators were still asked to avoid *vos* in their translations even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Colodrón Denis 2007, 114). It is also possible that the third translator (whose original works feature almost exclusively *ustedes* as second person plural pronoun and several Americanisms he could have employed in his translation of *A Passage to India* but did not) employed a second person pronoun which is never used in Latin America (*vosotros*) as well as fewer Americanisms than the first translator and most of the words considered to be characteristic of European Spanish used by the second one because the third translation was commissioned by a Spanish newspaper and intended to be distributed only in Spain. In addition to this, the third translator was living in Spain at the time and he would have been familiar with European Spanish vocabulary. In fact, his original works feature some of the words we early identified as characteristic of European

Spanish. This would not explain why the first translator also employed many of these words, whereas the second one did not use any of the Americanisms employed by the other two, although it could be hypothesized that Latin American speakers are more familiar with European Spanish vocabulary than vice versa.

## Conclusions

E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* was not available in Spanish until thirty years after it had been first released, but it has since been translated three different times at different points in time by translators from three different Spanish-speaking countries, and the linguistic features analysed in this paper reflect this publishing history in a number of ways.

The first translation, released by an Argentinian publisher and carried out by an Argentinian translator, features almost exclusively the only second person plural pronoun employed in Latin America as well as a greater number of so-called Americanisms, although it also includes several words considered to be typical of European Spanish by some authors, and it opts against the most frequent informal second person singular pronoun in Argentina. This could be a reflection of the literary usages of the time, since this pronoun was deemed to be incorrect by the Argentinian Academy of Letters until the 1980s and even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Argentinian translators were still asked not to use it, which in turn reflects the difference between original literary works and translations when it comes to their linguistic variety. The second translation, released by a Spanish publisher and prepared by a Spanish translator, features the informal second person pronouns typically employed in Spain and none of the Americanisms used in the other two translations. The third translation, commissioned by a Spanish newspaper and carried out by a Colombian translator, is somewhat hybrid in that it includes a number of so-called Americanisms but also features most of the words considered to be characteristic of European Spanish used by the second translator and a second person pronoun used only in Spain.

The publishing history of the three translations is also reflected in their distribution within the Spanish speaking world. The first translation was published in Argentina when the golden age of its publishing industry was coming to an end, which explains why it was scarcely exported to Spain, if at all.

This translation was not reissued in Argentina, either, which points out that Forster's works were not very successful when first published in Spanish, as Revol reported twenty years later, which could in turn explain why this translation was not republished by any Spanish publisher as many Argentinian translations were. Nowadays the second translation is the only one available in regular Spanish and Latin American bookstores, whereas the first one can only be found in second-hand bookstores and Latin American libraries, a situation which seems to illustrate the full recovery of the Spanish publishing industry and to support the idea that most translated books sold in Latin America are translated in Spain (the third translation is a special case since it was originally intended to be sold together with and only with a Spanish newspaper).

We can come to the conclusion that the three existing translations of Forster's *A Passage to India* into Spanish mirror the power relations at work within different areas. For instance, the second translation being the only one commercially available both in Spain and in Latin America illustrates the power relations currently in play within the Spanish-speaking publishing world. The first translation not featuring the second person singular pronoun *vos* exemplifies the power relations at work within the Spanish language, at least when employed in translation and at the time this translation was published. The different use the three translations make of vocabulary and second person pronouns is a reflection of the existing power relations within the subfield of literary translation.

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