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On the Trail of the First Interpreters in Early British Colonial Trinidad: An Exploration of Relevant Historical Aspects

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Abstract. With practitioners becoming increasingly of interest to translation historians, this study explores the presence of translators and interpreters in the sociocultural milieu of early British-ruled Trinidad. As an erstwhile Spanish colony with a significant Francophone influence, early 1800s Trinidad was a multilingual entity. The selected case studies track the presence of translators and interpreters at two key contemporary events: the Capitulation of 1797, which established British rule over the island, and the famous 1806 London-based torture trial of the island's first British governor, Sir Thomas Picton. Adopting a postcolonial lens, the information presented is based on the examination of relevant early nineteenth-century sources. Noting the understudied nature of this geographical area and historical era, the insights outlined in this exploratory study aim to provide a useful starting point for further discussions of the ideological context surrounding translators and interpreters in multilingual colonial Trinidad.
Keywords: Trinidad, interpreting, history of interpreting, the Capitulation, Thomas Picton.

Pirmųjų vertėjų žodžiu pėdsakais Britanijos imperijos ankstyvojo kolonijinio laikotarpio Trinidade: istorinė prieiga

Santrauka. Pastaruoju metu vertimo istorijos tyrėjai vis labiau domisi vertimo praktikais, todėl šiame straipsnyje tiriama, kokią vietą vertėjai (raštu ir žodžiu) užėmė Britanijos imperijos ankstyvojo kolonijinio laikotarpio Trinidado visuomenėje ir kultūroje. XVIII–XIX amžių sankirtos Trinidadas, kaip didelę prancūzų kalbos įtaką patyrusi buvusi ispanų kolonija, buvo daugiakalbė teritorija. Analizei pasirinkti du atvejai, liudijantys vertėjų raštu ir žodžiu dalyvavimą dviejuose svarbiuose to meto įvykiuose: 1) 1797 m. kapituliacijoje, įtvirtinusioje Britanijos imperijos valdymą saloje, ir 2) garsiojoje pirmojo Britanijos imperijos skirto Trinidado gubernatoriaus sero Thomas'o Picton'o byloje, nagrinėtoje Londono teisme 1806 m., kurioje gubernatorius buvo teisiamas už kankinimą. Straipsnyje nagrinėjami atitinkami XIX amžiaus pradžios šaltiniai vertinami iš pokolonijinės perspektyvos. Šios geografinės teritorijos ir minimo istorinio laikotarpio tyrimų trūksta, todėl tikimasi, kad straipsnyje pateikiamo žvalgomojo tyrimo įžvalgos paskatins išsamesnį daugiakalbiame kolonijiniame Trinidade veikusių vertėjų ideologinio konteksto aptarimą.
Pagrindiniai žodžiai: Trinidadas, vertimas žodžiu, vertimo žodžiu istorija, kapituliacija, Thomas Picton.

Introduction and Scope

With the relatively recent launch of important initiatives like the History and Translation Network,[1] specialist publication series such as the Routledge Research on Translation and Interpreting History,[2] and dedicated journals such as *Chronotopos: A Journal of Translation History*,[3] it is evident that the growing interest within Translation Studies on historical aspects of translation and interpreting shows no signs of abating. Recent historically-based studies have charted translation in specific ideological and geographical milieux (e.g. Veisbergs 2020; Rundle, Lange, Monticelli 2022). In addition, conscious of the general tenets of Translator Studies (Chesterman 2009), others have heeded prominent scholar Anthony Pym's call to place practitioners at the core of translation history (Pym 1998/2014: ix–x). In reflecting on the nineteenth-century context, examples also include Michaela Wolf's studies of imperial Habsburg translators (e.g. Wolf 2015), as well as several of the numerous historical portraits of translators and interpreters featured in Anna Aslanyan's well-researched and informative popular work (Aslanyan 2021).

Though the examples featured above are primarily from Europe, it is also noteworthy to observe growing interest in historically-centred interpreter studies from elsewhere in the globe, such as within the Chinese context (e.g. Zhang 2023) and also in Africa (Getta 2019). Additionally, with perhaps greater geographical relevance for the purposes of this contribution, there are also some studies of early translators and interpreters in the Americas, especially in the first centuries immediately after initial contact with Europeans (e.g. Alonso-Araguás 2016; González Núñez 2020; Cunill 2023). Indeed, the latter study is part of Lucía Ruiz Rosendo and Jesús Baigorri-Jalón's path-breaking edited collection on the intercontinental history of interpreters (2023), which also examines the trajectories of practitioners in contexts as varied as Oceania, the Ottoman Empire, and elsewhere.

However, despite this clear and growing body of research, historically-focused studies on translators and interpreters in the Anglophone Caribbean still appear to be somewhat elusive. Accordingly, bearing in mind that the observation that translation and interpreting take place in "contexts that are saturated with various ideologies, cultures, and stands" (Tatolytė 2022: 113), this foundational contribution has as its focus the portrayal of early interpreters in British colonial Trinidad through the prism of the relevant historical and sociocultural milieu.

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1 https://historyandtranslation.net/

2 https://www.routledge.com/Routledge-Research-on-Translation-and-Interpreting-History/book-series/RRTIH

3 https://chronotopos.eu/

The inspiration for the present study occurred as part of a natural progression of the author's wide-ranging project on translation, interpreting, and multilingualism in the modern-day republic of Trinidad & Tobago. This has included analyses of governmental initiatives to promote proficiency in Spanish through the country's official Spanish as the First Foreign Language (SAFFL) policy (Hoyte-West 2021); an overview of aspects relating to the nation's provision of translator and interpreter training options (Hoyte-West 2022a); as well as a comparative analysis of language policies for Spanish and Creole languages in both Trinidad & Tobago and Jamaica (Hoyte-West 2022b).

In seeking to explore historical aspects relating to interpreters in the Trinidadian context during the first days of British colonial rule in the early 19th century, two case studies were selected for analysis. Using relevant sources, they both relate to seminal events in early Trinidadian history: the Capitulation of 1797, which brought British rule to the island (albeit with the continuation of Spanish laws), and the 1806 London-based torture trial of the British governor of the island, Sir Thomas Picton. Yet, as indicated by the title of this article, this study is a work in progress. Accordingly, it should be emphasised at the outset that it does not pretend to offer an exhaustive analysis of the selected subject matter. Rather, given the constraints occasioned by the digital resources available to the author, it aims to provide a preliminary overview. Echoing André Lefevere's and Susan Bassnett's assertion that "translations are never produced … [or] … received in a vacuum" (Lefevere, Bassnett 1998: 3), the act and practice of interpreting is rather situated within a given social context (Inghilleri 2003). For the purposes of this article, presentation and analysis of the necessary historical and/or social milieu is key as a means for discussing translational activity through a postcolonial lens (e.g. Simon 2000: 12; Cronin 2000: 47). Distinguished by its hybridity (Bhabha 1994), colonialism and its legacy means that the unique linguistic and sociocultural context of the Caribbean has been marked by power imbalances—for example, between dominant and minority languages, and between the coloniser and the colonised. Therefore, it is relevant here to mention the interlinkage of translation (and by extension, translators and interpreters) with these power dynamics (see e.g. Tymoczko, Gentzler 2002; Harmon 2020), as well as—given that the temporal scope of this study predates the professionalisation of interpreting—issues relating to translator/interpreter visibility (e.g. Venuti 1995/2017; Paloposki 2016).

The current study, therefore, is designed as a preliminary contextual practice analysis of interpreters in early British Trinidad, centring on the qualitative analysis of relevant documentation from the period. From a postcolonial perspective, these two key events represent points of departure for obtaining foundational interpreter-related information about the specific situation there. This will be done through presentation

of the context and background to each case study, before focusing specifically on the ideological aspects relating to interpreting—for example, in terms of practitioner identification and involvement, the languages used and the quality of the interpretation provided—as well as also aiming to uncover details about the histories, backgrounds, and status of the interpreters themselves. As such, given the general paucity of attention that has been paid to translation and interpreting history in the Trinidadian context, it intends to represent a first step and an impetus for subsequent deeper research on the topic.

The Trinidadian Context

At its closest point, the island of Trinidad is less than fifteen kilometres from the South American mainland. Europeans first became aware of it in 1498, when Christopher Columbus named it after the Holy Trinity and claimed it for Spain. For the vast majority of the three centuries of Spanish rule, it was mostly neglected, underpopulated, and overlooked. This changed somewhat in the late eighteenth century, when a royal decree of 1783 (*Real Cedula de Población*) permitted Catholic non-Spanish subjects to settle in the colony. This brought many French plantation owners and their slaves, bringing their languages and cultures, but the growing population could not stave off the threat of conquest by the British. In 1797, British forces swiftly and successfully overpowered the Spanish forces, annexing the island to the British crown. As such, with its capital city remaining at Port of Spain, Trinidad became a British colony albeit with profound Spanish and Francophone influences (Watts, Brereton, Robinson 2023).[4]

Amidst its complex demographic and sociopolitical situation, British Trinidad was a linguistic mix in the early 1800s. Though English was of course the language of the island's new rulers, Spanish, as the language of its former colonial masters, continued as the dominant language of the colony's official administration and the legal system, as well as for many private citizens.[5] French retained significant influence as the main language of the immigrant planters. These European languages were also joined by the

4 With the emancipation of the slaves taking place in the British colonies from the mid-1830s, indentured labourers from India were brought over starting in the 1840s, further enriching Trinidad's ethnic, cultural, and linguistic mix. At the end of the nineteenth century, the colony was amalgamated with the much smaller one of Tobago; as Trinidad & Tobago, the nation received its independence from the United Kingdom in 1962, attaining republic status in 1976. English is the country's only official language (Watts, Brereton, Robinson 2023).

5 According to the descriptive sociohistorical writings by the Reverend William H. Gamble, a Baptist missionary stationed in Trinidad in the mid-nineteenth century, English only became "exclusively adopted" as the colony's official language in 1823 (Gamble 1866: 17), over a quarter of a century since the island's conquest by the British.

vestiges of African languages and—similarly to other instances of colonial language contact in the Caribbean (see Hewitt-Bradshaw 2014: 161)—this multilingualism favoured the development of an enduring creolised vernacular or *patois* known as Trinidadian French Creole. As its name suggests, the lexicon of this creole was primarily based on French and was widely spoken at that time throughout the island (see e.g. Ferreira 1997, etc.).[6]

At the same time, it is also important to note that as a focal point of military activity, the whole of the Caribbean was a hotly contested area with various European powers vying for influence (Gasper, Geggus 1997). Many of the smaller islands changed hands frequently; the Napoleonic Wars were raging; and ongoing revolutionary tensions in Saint-Domingue/Haiti would eventually lead to it becoming the first black-ruled independent nation in the Western Hemisphere. As evidenced by the fact the many of the case studies featured in Ruiz Rosendo and Baigorri-Jalón's (2023) volume centre on the multilingual colonial context, constant contact between peoples from different backgrounds, cultures, and languages meant that interpreting was often a necessity.

Before delving into the presentation of the case studies, in quoting the old dictum *verba volant, scripta manent*, the impermanency of spoken words as compared to their written counterparts is thus an important consideration of this exploratory study. This aspect is further emphasised by the comments of Baigorri-Jalón and Ruiz Rosendo that "records of interpreted events are generally ephemeral" (2023: 5). This is demonstrated by Georges Bastin's (2006) acknowledgement of the at-times difficult reality of conducting translation-focussed historical research in the Latin American context; this observation can also be applied to the unique setting of early British Trinidad in the initial years after Spanish rule. Indeed, in proposing some possible research avenues for the history of interpretation, Baigorri-Jalón (2006) elucidates some potential resources, approaches, and challenges. With regard to particular historical situations or the history of interpreting in a given geographical locale, he writes that useful sources can include relevant chronicles and archives. Yet, as Baigorri-Jalón (2006) and Ruiz Rosendo

[6] In his observations, William Gamble notes that French Creole was "the language spoken most widely" (Gamble 1866: 39) in mid-nineteenth century Trinidad. However, as Jo-Anne S. Ferreira underlines, English (and by extension, an English-based Creole) eventually predominated as the result of successive educational policies and sociocultural changes which promoted an overwhelming language shift (Ferreira 1997: 3-6). Though having no official status, Trinidad English Creole remains extremely prevalent right up until the present day (see e.g. Ferreira 1997; Mühleisen 2013; Hoyte-West 2022b; etc.). On the other hand, though a deep decline in intergenerational transmission over many decades has led to just a handful of speakers nowadays, Trinidadian French Creole remains "moribund but not dead" (Ferreira 2015: 111).

(Baigorri-Jalón, Rosendo 2023: 5) highlight, difficulties can arise in accessing and consulting the necessary information, which may be scarce, incomplete, or fragmentary in nature. Indeed, these occurrences have certainly been the case with the current study; nonetheless, through the presented analysis, it is intended to offer some exploratory observations on interpreters in the early nineteenth-century Trinidadian context.

Case Study I—The Capitulation (1797)

As noted in the preceding section, the last years of the eighteenth century saw increased military activity in the Caribbean and power struggles between the major European colonial powers. Though a long-standing colony of Spain, Trinidad was extremely badly defended, and the British were keen to annex it. The last Spanish governor of the colony (1783–1797) was José María Chacón, and the inadequate naval defence of the island was under the responsibility of Admiral Sebastián de Apodaca (Real Academia de la Historia 2023). In February 1797, under the command of Sir Ralph Abercrombie,[7] the British forces took the island extremely easily; in the aftermath, both Apodaca and Chacón were subsequently recalled to Spain in disgrace (Böttcher 2007: 168).

In terms of the main resource utilised here, the principal early account of the Capitulation comes from Edward Lanzer Joseph's pioneering *History of Trinidad* (Joseph 1838). Written by a prominent Anglo-Jewish writer and journalist who was also the author of the first Trinidadian novel, this is the first extant history of the island. Though, as eminent Trinidadian historian Bridget Brereton highlights, Joseph's history suffers from notable methodological and historiographical limitations (Brereton 1995: 38), the timing of its composition meant that Joseph was able to gain access not only to eyewitnesses but also to many early historical sources which, owing to the vicissitudes of time and other circumstances, are now no longer available.[8] From Joseph's work, it is unclear if any of these original sources made any specific references to interpreting.

After the skirmishes between British and Spanish forces, the Capitulation took place on Saturday 18 February 1797, when "a long conference took place between Ab-

[7] His surname also appears in other documents as 'Abercromby.'

[8] As outlined in Brereton's (1995) comparative study, Joseph's (1838) work was the earliest of the three major nineteenth-century histories of Trinidad. The other two were written much later on in the century: these were Pierre-Gustave-Louis Borde's two-volume French-language work *Histoire de l'île de la Trinidad sous le gouvernement espagnol*, which was published in Paris in 1876 and 1883, and Lionel Mordaunt Fraser's *History of Trinidad*, of which two volumes were published in Port of Spain in the 1890s. Accordingly, as Brereton underlines, Joseph's history utilised "some important archival sources which had disappeared by the time Borde and Fraser wrote their books" (Brereton 1995: 38).

ercrombie, Harvey, Chacon,[9] and Apodaca: this conference was carried on in English, Apodaca using Don Meany as his interpreter. It ended in the surrender of the island to his Majesty's arms" (Joseph 1838: 195).

Aside from this brief statement, no further information about interpreting is provided in Joseph's account of the Capitulation. This could be viewed in two ways; firstly, as a possible reflection of contemporary perspectives in a multilingual society—i.e., that interpreting was considered commonplace and thus of minor importance; or secondly, given that Joseph was not a trained historian, he may simply not have viewed information relating to interpreting as being key to his narrative. Hence, no details are given as to the precise length of the meeting or to the modality of interpretation used (e.g. consecutive, chuchotage, etc.), or to the quality of the interpreter's work. It is not clear from Joseph's text if there were more participants present than just the four officials (plus the interpreter). In terms of language regime, English is stated to have been the main language used and thus Chacón must seemingly have been comfortable using it, with the services of the interpreter ostensibly required for the Spanish admiral.

The interpreter at these proceedings, Don Diego Meany, is described elsewhere in Joseph's volume as the "aide-de-camp" (*ibid.*: 181) to the Spanish governor Chacón at that time. Noting that Joseph's *History of Trinidad* was written over four decades after the Capitulation, a footnote appended by the author on the same page adds that "this gentleman is a Spanish creole of Irish family. He is now, at a very advanced age, the Police magistrate of Port of Spain" (*ibid.*: 181).

Indeed, the importance of Diego Meany's contribution and assistance to Joseph's history is acknowledged in the Preface to the volume, where Joseph thanks the interpreter (here with his first name translated into English as 'James')[10] as follows: "Although last, not least appreciated was the information supplied, and the documents lent by James Meany, Esq.—the latter consisted of the Trial of his patron, Don Josef

[9] To give their full titles and roles as presented in the documents reproduced in Joseph (1838: 197): "his Excellency Sir Ralph Abercrombie, K. B., Commander-in-Chief of his Britannic Majesty's Land Forces, Henry Harvey, Esquire, Rear-Admiral of the Red, and Commander-in-Chief of his Britannic Majesty's Ships and Vessels of War, and his Excellency Don Josef Maria Chacon, Knight of the Order of Calatrava, Brigadier of the Royal Navy, Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Island of Trinidad and its Dependencies, Inspector-General of the Troops of its Garrison, &c. &c."

[10] In historical times, Christian names were often easily translated between languages as they were linked to a common saint (The Economist 2022); in this regard, this explains Meany's (and Joseph's) seemingly interchangeable usage of both Diego and James (and also Jacques, which features later in this article). In modern, more standardised times, the translation of personal names can typically pose issues for people seeking to use appellations in non-state or minority languages (for more information, please see Azhniuk, Azhniuk (2014), as well as the postscript to a recent article by Pym (2023: 21–22)).

Maria Chacon, and Admiral Apodaca—a collection of old Proclamations, official papers, and private correspondence of Chacon; together with a Diary kept by Mr Meany during an interesting period of the History of Trinidad" (*ibid.*: Preface).

Further evidence of Joseph's gratitude is supplied in the footnote to page 179, which details some of the civil unrest leading up to the British conquest of the colony. Here, the historian notes that some of the information regarding the events came "from the relation of several old inhabitants, living and dead, specially from Don Diego Meany, the secretary of the governor. This gentleman has kindly furnished me with his diary kept during the affair of the above, and that of the Capitulation of the island" (*ibid.*: 179).

Aside from this information, available digital resources reveal little about James Meany, though as will be illustrated later on, he does feature as one of the interpreters in the Trinidad-based portions preceding Picton's 1806 trial in London. His name also appears in a publication written by an anonymous Trinidad-based author (Anonymous 1807). Written in the form of a 207-page letter to the Duke of Portland,[11] the author is strongly against Picton and in favour of the introduction of British laws in the colony. Notably, given the letter's frequently ill-tempered portrayals of many of the varied inhabitants of Trinidad at that time, Meany is included in the following description relating to signatories of an 1805 Address which petitioned George III to introduce the British legal system to the island:

> Of the very few Spaniards remaining in the Island there are not more than twenty who are of much respectability or influence. Among those there are some of the highest officers of the ancient Spanish government; and it is material to state, that, of these, the Address contains the following names: […] JAMES MEANY, Secretary to the Spanish government. (*ibid.*: 151–152)

As such, it appears from this observation that Meany was a man held in high esteem who pursued a successful administrative career under both Spanish and British administration. Additionally, in terms of personal attributes, he also seems to have been well-disposed enough to help Joseph in the compilation of his *History of Trinidad* through offering relevant support. Though the sources are of course incomplete, it may be ascertained that Meany's interpreting work seems primarily to have arisen from his expertise both as an administrator and his proficiency as an educated bilingual speaker of (at least) two of the main languages which were important in Trinidad at that time. As acknowledged in Joseph's text, it could be argued that Meany's collection of administrative and other documents illustrates his influential professional status in the island's

[11] William Cavendish-Bentinck, 3rd Duke of Portland, was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom between 1807 and 1809 (Burns 2015).

society. Yet for the purposes of this research project, following Jan Delisle's highlighting of ego documents such as memoirs and journals as important tools in translator studies (Delisle 2022: 6), it is Meany's diary (if still extant) that could serve as a valuable resource in establishing ideological perspectives on the interpreter's role and interpreting practice in the very specific colonial context of the Capitulation.

Case Study II—The Picton Trial (1806)

Born in Wales in 1758, Sir Thomas Picton was the British governor of Trinidad from 1797 until 1803. Indeed, his despotic cruelty and harsh rule meant he acquired the sobriquet of the "Tyrant of Trinidad" (Amgueddfa Cymru 2023.). Among several other criminal charges, the one that led to the famous trial was Picton's order for the judicial torture of Louisa Calderon, an adolescent mulatto girl accused of theft. This was against English law, but Picton argued that torture was permissible under the Spanish laws then current in Trinidad.[12] After much ado the trial went to London, where Picton was found guilty but never sentenced; the verdict was subsequently reversed at a later date, and Picton was later to die on the battlefield at Waterloo in 1815 (*ibid.*). Indeed, debates and discussions on Picton's contentious legacy still continue, especially amid recent controversy regarding the presence of his portrait in the National Museum in Cardiff (e.g. see Tingle 2021), as well as in the broader Trinidad & Tobago context (Sorias 2022). The case of Louisa Calderon has also been the subject of academic interest, with a chapter of Kit Candlin's monograph focusing primarily on the Trinidadian context to the trial (Candlin 2012), and James Epstein's analyses also include the events of the trial itself (Epstein 2007, 2012). It also features in a chapter of Trinidadian Nobel laureate Sir V.S. Naipaul's work *The Loss of El Dorado: A Colonial History* (Naipaul 1969/2010).

In exploring the roles of translators and interpreters in the Picton torture trial, the initial sources utilised here will be two shorthand renderings of the trial, which took place in London in early 1806. Both appear to have been published by commercial publishers for the general interest of the public. The first, entitled *The Trial of Governor T. Picton. For Inflicting the Torture on Louisa Calderon, a Free Mulatto, and One of His Britannic Majesty's Subjects, in the Island of Trinidad, Tried Before Lord Chief Justice*

[12] In addition to featuring prominently in publications relating to the Louisa Calderon trial itself, the complexities and confusing nature of Trinidad's legal system post-Capitulation and its implications have been discussed extensively elsewhere. These range from economic-related disagreements between planters and the merchants (see Böttcher 2007) to discussions of Trinidad as a model for a new imperial constitutional framework (see Benton, Ford 2018). A contemporary (and pro-British law) view of the confusion is provided in Anonymous (1807); ultimately, Spanish laws were not to be repealed until 1838 (Böttcher 2007: 44).

Ellenborough and a Special Jury, and Found Guilty (Dewick, Clarke 1806) is the more voluminous, running to 126 pages and providing a detailed overview of the proceedings. This is supplemented by the second, with the similarly baroque title of *Inhuman torture!! Fairburn's edition of the trial of Thomas Picton, late Governor of Trinidad and Colonel of the 54th Regiment of Foot, for torturing Louisa Calderon in the island of Trinidad in the month of December, 1801, by suspending her by a rope tying her to her wrist, and a sharp spike the only resting-place for her foot, which was tried at the Court of King's-Bench, Westminster on Monday, Feb. 24, 1806 before Lord Ellenborough & a special jury* (Fairburn 1806). Much shorter in nature, with only 20 pages, this text is more similar to a pamphlet and offers a summary of the major happenings.

Interpreters are referred to frequently in these two initial source texts. According to the first, Louisa Calderon, the witness for the prosecution, "was attended by two interpreters, the one for the Spanish language, the other for the Creole corruptions, or variations from that language" (Dewick, Clarke 1806: 13); the Fairburn edition observes that "she spoke English but very indifferently, and was examined through the medium of a Spanish interpreter" (Fairburn 1806: 8). However, information about the specific languages spoken by the witnesses and interpreted by the interpreters (e.g. Spanish, Creole, and potentially others) appears not to have been recorded.

Indeed, in the course of questioning a witness (Michael Gourville) on sentencing procedures in criminal cases in Trinidad, the apparent inconsistencies in the translated responses led the famous barrister William Garrow (for the prosecution) to state that "you appear to have selected the interpreter for his unfitness" (Dewick, Clarke 1806: 74). Subsequently, "the interpreter not being able to make the witness comprehend the interrogation, and his lordship not thinking him competent to the duty, another was sent for" (*ibid*.). Subsequently, Lord Ellenborough states that "the interpreter and the witness must be both wrong" (*ibid*.: 75). And during the same testimony, it was noted that "Mr Gourville not being able to comprehend the interpreter, Colonel De Chabilier tendered his services in that office, which were accepted with thanks by his Lordship" (*ibid*.: 79–80).

This episode is also commented on in a contemporary publication authored by Lieutenant Colonel Edward Alured Draper, one of Picton's diehard supporters. Though there is little mention of translation or interpreting in that particular document, it observes the following with regard to Gourville's evidence:

> Why did not Mr. Gourville state this on his examination? The reason is evident, and must have been observed by any person who was by, and saw the most dissatisfactory and distressing way in which the evidence of the witnesses was delivered: interpreters were employed who neither understand the languages nor seemed to me to possess common sense. (Draper 1806: 138–139)

Draper also highlights Gourville's cry—emulated by Garrow to great effect—of "Jamais ! Jamais !" (*ibid*: 139), which of course is in French ("Never! Never!"), rather than in Spanish.

Interpreters are also mentioned at other key points—for example, during the examination of the old Spanish laws: "An interpreter, having taken the original, the title of the Curea Philippica was read in the following form" (Dewick, Clarke 1806: 88). Yet, aside from the aforementioned Colonel De Chabilier, the only translator and interpreter to be named is Don Pedro Vargas, who, as the trial documents state, was a qualified advocate who had been in Trinidad since 1803 and had extensive professional experience in the Spanish colonies (*ibid*.: 98). For example, in response to the question from Picton's counsel enquiring if he was "employed […] to take the depositions of different persons against General Picton," Vargas states in his testimony that he was "employed as an interpreter to translate them" (*ibid*.: 102). For clarification, Garrow asks "you translated the evidence of the witnesses who spoke Spanish?" (*ibid*.: 103), to which Vargas replies in the affirmative "yes I did" (*ibid*.). This is also confirmed in the Fairburn edition, which observes that Vargas "had been employed […] as an interpreter and translator of part of the evidence to be employed in this prosecution" (Fairburn 1806: 18). An interpreter is also mentioned when the Spanish legal codes are examined for any instances when torture might be permitted. On reaching folio 962, no. 16: "In notorious crimes, and most secretly transacted, against the most iniquitous men and of bad morals, if the judges order the torment, should witnesses be not quite sufficient" (Dewick, Clarke 1806: 91–92)—there is a note that the "[Interpreter stopped. He afterwards proceeded]" (*ibid*.: 92).

Yet before coming to London, preliminary legal proceedings against Picton also took place in Trinidad during the latter part of 1804 and into 1805. These, as well as documentation relating to Picton's 1806 London trial, the motion for a new trial, and the subsequent 1808 retrial are contained in the volume compiled by Thomas Jones Howell which brings together the state trials and proceedings for major crimes (Howell 1822).[13] Indeed, as earlier, the London-based portions of the proceedings relating to Picton also do not name the interpreters, save for a brief mention in the 1808 retrial: "[It appeared rather difficult to make the witness understand the questions, and an interpreter (Mr. Newman) was called]" (*ibid*.: 814).

In general, at the London trial it appears to be standard practice for the interpreters not to be identified. In this regard, the challenges of researching this era seem similar to those faced by Aslanyan when seeking to find out more about the Italian interpreters

[13] The Trinidad-based documentation is also contained in Sir Thomas Picton's own publication relating to the incident (see Picton 1806).

utilised during the famous adultery trial of Queen Caroline, wife of George IV, in 1820 (Aslanyan 2021: 96). However, it is notable that the Trinidadian portions do highlight the name and signatures of the interpreters, with a notable figure being James Meany, the former aide-de-camp to Governor Chacón who also interpreted at the Capitulation. By way of example, the following excerpt from 22 November 1804 states that:

> James Meany government interpreter being called, was duly sworn, and examined as follows: Question by the Court. – Look at the exhibit marked A, now shown to you; did you make a faithful translation of the notice contained in it? – Answer. I did, and the names Diego Meany and Jacques Meany are of my hand-writing. (Howell 1822: 235)

This is followed by the printed letters "JAMES MEANY," which denote the interpreter's signature, before continuing "The said James Meany was afterwards appointed and sworn as interpreter of the court" (*ibid.*: 235). As such, his name (as JAMES MEANY, Interpreter) also appears after the signed testimony (or marked, in the case of illiteracy) of several others who were called to give evidence, such as Francisco de Castro (*ibid.*: 273), Maria Ignacia Espinesa (*ibid.*: 323), Jean Baptisto Vallot (*ibid.*: 283), the Reverend Father Josef Maria Angeles (*ibid.*: 273), Maria Calderon (*ibid.*: 313), Pedro Ruiz (*ibid.*: 285), Francisco Farfan (*ibid.*: 303), Francisco Tebles (*ibid.*: 322), and Pedro Josef Reyes Bravo (*ibid.*: 270).

Apart from Meany, several other interpreters were also named during the Trinidadian stage of the proceedings. These included Juan Bermudes (e.g. see *ibid.*: 332), Carlos A. Tellineau (e.g. see *ibid.*: 334, 365, 366) and Juan Bernardes (e.g. see *ibid.*: 336). Interestingly, Juan Bermudes was also called to testify about the fateful robbery which led to Louisa Calderon's torture, responding to the question "Are you an escrivano and interpreter?"[14] with the answer "Interpreter only" (*ibid.*: 276) and noting that though he took depositions "in rough," he was "then acting as interpreter" (*ibid.*: 277) when visiting the house where the incident had taken place.

Following the first London trial of Picton and the motion for a new trial, the Trinidad-based portion of the documentation shows that James Meany reappears in 1807 as "Diego Meany (Jun Interpreter)" (*ibid.*: 629); elsewhere, Meany is also listed

[14] In modern Spanish, *escribano* simply means a legal clerk or—in Latin America—a notary (Collins Spanish-English Dictionary 2023). In the early nineteenth-century Trinidadian context, a contemporary definition given by the anonymous author of the letter to the Duke of Portland states that "an Escribano was a writer of law-proceedings, and a Notary-public. His attestation, to all decrees and instruments of writing, was indispensably necessary to render them valid; and his office was a place of public record. Three of these Scriveners were assigned in common to the tribunals" (Anonymous 1807: 8). However, it is clear that the author does not think highly of their capabilities, describing them elsewhere in the same document as "ignorant pettifoggers" (*ibid.*: 16).

as a "Junr Interpreter by Royal Appointment" (*ibid*.: 658). In addition, a "Lewis Nihell" appears as a "(Public Interpreter)" (*ibid*.: 629). Given the shared surname, this Lewis Nihell may possibly be a relation of the Hon. John Nihell, described in the texts as a "chief judge, chief magistrate and auditor of this island" (*ibid*.: 600) and as a resident of Trinidad for over two decades who held the role of Alcalde. Like Meany, John Nihell was of Irish descent (Blackman 2019: 3), and when under examination during the motion of the new trial, John Nihell stated that "I think I perfectly understand the Spanish language" (Howell 1822: 601) when asked about his relevant linguistic capabilities. During the later stages, a further interpreter "in the Spanish language" is named as Henry Coryat (*ibid*: 595–596); this may be the same Henry Coryat who is listed as a slave-owner in the late 1820s and was involved in a legal case relating to that matter (for more information, see Fergus 2007).

As outlined above, the Trinidad- and London-based portions of the Picton proceedings reveal interesting and divergent information about the interpreters involved. In the Trinidad-based portion, the names are recorded and from the extant information it appears that these interpreters (such as James Meany) also held other administrative posts in the still Spanish-speaking government apparatus. In London, however, analysis of the documents does not provide details of the names of interpreters; however, some limited information about the languages used is given. Particularly noteworthy, both from a historical and postcolonial standpoint, is the provision that is made for a Creole interpreter. In using the term "corruptions" (Dewick, Clarke 1806: 13), it could be argued that this illustrates a "colonial sense of cultural superiority" (Sindoni 2010: 222) regarding the use of Creole as a low-status vernacular. Yet interestingly, from an ideological perspective the fact that special provision was made for a Creole interpreter during the trial also provides contemporary acknowledgement of its separate nature from the European language that it was supposedly linked to—i.e., through demonstrating the fact that it was so different that mutual intelligibility was not assured.[15] In addition, general questions arise of who provided and funded the interpreting for Creole and other languages, thus demonstrating that further research on the provision of court interpretation in Britain and its colonies in such contexts is surely merited.

The London-based documentation also uncovers contemporary viewpoints on the quality of interpreting provided, including when it appeared insufficient or incorrect or when an emotional response was observed (e.g. when it was noted that the interpreter paused). Though it may be regarded as straying into the realms of conjecture,

[15] For more details on the postcolonial context regarding Creole languages in Trinidad and the wider Anglophone Caribbean, see e.g. Ferreira 1997, 2015; Moustaira 2023: 99–101, etc. No country in the English-speaking Caribbean has recognised any Creole language as an official language.

there may have been myriad reasons for these quality issues in the interpreting, such as the specialised legal terminology that was involved, the high status of the case and the ensuing degree of public interest, the harrowing nature of the subject matter (it is to be remembered that it was a torture trial), as well as potential differences in the accent and lexis of French and Spanish as spoken in Trinidad compared with European versions. However, given that these observations were few and far between, it appears that interpreting provision was generally satisfactory. Unfortunately, the analysed documentation does not reveal those extra insights—e.g. regarding educational and linguistic training received, the specific language combinations, professional status and development etc.—which might have provided a fuller picture of those early interpreters.

Concluding Remarks and Pointers for Future Research

The present article has sought to provide an overview of the presence of interpreters at two key moments in the early history of British colonial Trinidad—the Capitulation and the Picton Trial. As stated at the outset, this is a work-in-progress, but nonetheless relevant historical resources from the era have been located and presented to sketch a preliminary portrait of the multilingual practitioners active during those two events. In transcending the scant data and records available, it has become possible to identify who some of those early interpreters were, and also to uncover limited information about them, although further research will indeed be necessary to outline their biographies with greater certainty. What is clear from the historical records, though, is that interpreters played important roles at these two events, although at times (especially in London) their names have not been recorded. This was accompanied by the surprising presence of a Creole interpreter, an event notable in the contemporary context and even more interesting when considered from a postcolonial perspective, given that no modern-day Anglophone Caribbean nation has recognised or accorded official status to any Creole language. This aspect clearly deserves further attention, especially within the scope of uncovering more about the historical and ideological underpinnings to court interpreting in Britain and its vast colonial empire.

In addition, the absence of relevant primary data quickly became apparent during the research process. To reiterate Delisle's (2022: 6) statement, ego documents and the like can be invaluable when approaching Translator Studies from a historical perspective. Therefore, to compensate for this lack of the interpreters' own voices, the case studies illustrated in this article have been heavily reliant on the words and testimony of others; it remains to be seen whether other documentation written by the interpreters themselves—especially items such as James Meany's diaries mentioned in the Preface to Joseph's *History of Trinidad*—still exists and is accessible. Thus, in order

to ascertain the relevant availability of potentially useful sources, physical presence in the relevant archives would be both desirable and necessary: "there is no comparison between visiting archives in person and consulting them in digital format" (Baigorri-Jalón, Ruiz Rosendo 2023: 6).

Observations from the sources presented also note that these early interpreters seemed to exercise their professional activities as linguists alongside work and/or training in other areas, typically related to the law and administration of the colony. With scant contemporary opportunities for formal interpreter training at the time, it appears that the relevant linguistic and professional skills may have been acquired through family background and the day-to-day reality of life in a cosmopolitan yet ideologically-charged society where multilingualism was prevalent; further archival research is of course needed. However, as observed by certain instances where some of the interpreters faced apparent difficulties at the trial of Sir Thomas Picton, there may have been times when their linguistic and other skills did not meet the necessary threshold, though this is of course challenging to prove given the fleeting nature of the spoken word.

In focussing on potential future research options, a possible expansion of the topic could include the analysis of relevant newspapers. Here, the aim would be to explore the presence and visibility of interpreters in contemporary print media from that era. Additionally, it is hoped that further archival resources can be located—either in the country or elsewhere—which could shed greater light on interpreting and interpreters in early British colonial Trinidad, as well as with regard to any ideological aspects of their daily professional practice. As such, in offering a foundation for deeper research on the history of translators and interpreters in the Trinidadian context, the current key aims are to flesh out the stories behind these first interpreters and to discover more about the historical, sociocultural, linguistic, and ideological context in which they lived and worked. In doing so, it is intended to continue to contribute more to this evolving topic, thereby expanding knowledge not solely about translation and interpreting history in Trinidad & Tobago, but also across the Anglophone Caribbean as a whole.

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