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Decolonizing the Dreaming: Reframing “Translation” as “Retelling”

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Abstract

This article explores the exercise of translating an oral Dreamtime story from English to Spanish, without the use of transcription. “The Tale of Gwonowah and Wattarang”, is from the audio CD *Platypus Dreaming*, recorded and published by an Indigenous Australian, Wurundjeri elder Murrundindi. The translation and analysis have been undertaken with his permission. The motivation behind the exercise was a desire to find out how one could retell Murrundindi’s Dreamtime stories to the next (multicultural) generation of Australians in an ethical way, respecting his stated desire to educate all Victorian children about his people’s oral storytelling traditions. Foundational concepts are: “translation as retelling” and “translation as relationship”, in the context of post- or neo-colonial Australia. The case study includes an analysis of relevant extratextual, paratextual and textual elements of the task.

1. Introduction

This paper aims to begin a discussion about what might constitute “best practice” in the sourcing, translation and dissemination of oral Indigenous tales in twenty-first-century Australia. It focuses on a case study of crosscultural collaboration in translating Wurundjeri elder Murrundindi’s audio recording of the Dreamtime story “The Tale of Gwonowah and Wattarang” (*Platypus Dreaming*), from English into Spanish. Although there is much that could be said about the current state of relations between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians, it is not within the scope of the present study to explore this. Acknowledging that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been the traditional owners and custodians of Australia for tens of thousands of years, and British settlers colonized Australia from the year 1788 (my British ancestors arrived in the early 1900s), this study aims to explore the possibility of translating oral stories without the use of transcription, this tool having purportedly been used throughout the centuries for the personal gain of literate researchers (Do Rozario; McConnell) and for “colonising the minds” of First Nations peoples (Ngugi). The terms that will be used to refer to twenty-first-century Australia in this paper are “postcolonial”, in the sense of Young’s definition: “in the aftermath of the colonial” (13) and “neo-colonial”: “value[ing] economic growth over indigenous rights”.

Previous research into orality and translation in post- or neo-colonial settings has included analyses of strategies used to represent “hybridity” when translating “postcolonial texts”. The latter refers to autobiographical or other works of self-expression written by colonized peoples *in colonizer languages*, in Africa (Bandia), Egypt and Morocco (Ettobi), and India (Manfredi), to give some examples. The aforementioned “hybridity” of these texts refers to patterns of writing that bear significant resemblance to oral storytelling, and the use of vocabulary from a third language: the writer’s native or ancestral tongue. These postcolonial translation scholars recommend that hybrid features of “orality in writing” and the use of local terms be carried over into translated versions of these works, to avoid smoothing over the writers’ distinctive expressions of a hybrid identity. However, little research has been done on the process of translating oral Indigenous stories *without transcription*, where the maintenance of an oral format is requested by the story’s custodian(s) for reasons of cultural continuity.

“The Tale of Gwonowah and Wattarang” was selected for this study due to its significance in my childhood. I grew up close to the Healesville region where the story takes place, and was introduced to Wurundjeri stories by Murrundindi at the age of nine, as part of his work in schools. Murrundindi was the first Aboriginal person I had ever met, and he generously shared stories from his culture with us, along with hundreds of children across Victoria, to promote crosscultural understanding and reconciliation. Not feeling greatly connected to my ancestral roots in England, the opportunity for me to be included in hearing stories about local places and animals from an elder of the Yarra Valley contributed to a greater sense of belonging, and a greater feeling of connection to the people and the land where I lived. To date, no other research about this tale has been carried out. The reason for selecting Spanish as the target language is that my husband is Peruvian, and I wanted to explore the way in which my family and other migrant or mixed families might tell these Indigenous Australian stories to our bilingual and bicultural children. As an academic study, the aim was to develop a model for translating orality *orally*, departing from historical patterns in which story “collectors” transcribed oral tales and converted them into text, often for personal gain. The project draws on literature from anthropology, Aboriginal Studies and Translation Studies, and reveals a need for further research in the areas of “translation as retelling” and “translation as relationship”.

2. Methodology and literature review

The qualitative data in this study focuses on an interview and subsequent conversations with storyteller Murrundindi, regarding what he would consider to be an appropriate and respectful way to translate his recordings, and seeking his permission to do so. These conversations were considered alongside a review of existing literature about oral cultures, crosscultural research and collaboration, audio books, postcolonial translation, and post-European-settlement history of the Wurundjeri people. The strategies and recommendations from Murrundindi and academic literature were then applied to the process of translating “The Tale of Gwonowah and Wattarang” into verbal Spanish, detailed as a reflective account of events in Section 3. First of all, it was necessary to consider past interactions between literate and oral peoples, to learn from history and seek out a way forward that would contribute to a mutually empowering collaboration between storyteller and translator.

2.1 “Literates” in an oral world

Walter Ong, in his book *Orality and Literacy* (1-2), differentiates between “primary orality”, a culture that has never known writing, and “secondary orality” in “literate” cultures: oral expressions that depend on writing for their production and dissemination, such as television and radio. Ong asserts that it is impossible to imagine what a primary oral culture is like without having experienced it (12), and that knowledge of writing permanently alters the way a person thinks, interacts and conceptualizes words and ideas (12-14).

As researchers of oral communication have historically been literate before stepping into oral-communication-based communities, many of the attempts to describe the oral paradigm scientifically have relied on terms associated with writing, such as “oral text”, “oral literature”, and “pre-literate” (13). Ong likens this phenomenon to describing a horse anachronistically as a “car without wheels” (ibid.) and recommends the avoidance of such labels, preferring such descriptions as “verbal performance” (14), which will be used in this case study.

Two contrasting approaches to literate research in New Mexico American Indian communities are detailed in missionary Taylor McConnell’s essay, “Oral Cultures and Literate Research”. McConnell recognizes that a fundamental difference between the worldviews of nineteenth-century anthropologists and the locals was the concept of “documentation”. Whereas the Western researchers documented stories, songs and other cultural forms for fear

that they would be “lost”, members of the Tlingit people felt that once culture needed to be “recorded”, it was now confirmed *dead* (350). While writing externalizes knowledge, oral stories internalize it. Oral stories were used by the Pueblo communities of New Mexico to pass on knowledge and wisdom (349, 353). However, the power of this information lay in its restriction (341-2), and when anthropologists wrote down the Pueblo people’s stories and rituals, and disseminated this information back home without their consent, it was as if the anthropologists had destroyed the stories’ power (ibid.). McConnell contrasts this example with that of Frank Waters, a twentieth-century anthropologist in the same region, who submitted all of his research papers and stories to Taos Pueblo elders to verify the accuracy and representation of what he had written (347-8). Many Taos Pueblo people later chose to use these stories as a resource to teach their children about their identity (348); a testament to Waters’ respectful relationship with the community. This practice of submitting all research to the custodians of knowledge would be essential in building a relationship of mutual respect with Murrundindi.

2.2 A meeting of oral and literate worlds in post-invasion Australia

In the Australian context, Indigenous people have also been telling stories for millennia, to pass on local knowledge and identity to each successive generation. But when British colonizers and settlers later arrived to Australia’s shores, they had a dilemma. Which stories would they tell their children? They found that the stories from Britain were not useful for their children in the formation of an Australian identity, as children could not relate what they read to the reality that surrounded them.

Rebecca-Anne Do Rozario in her article, “Australia’s Fairy Tales Illustrated in Print”, documents the quest of non-Indigenous Australians to find and develop “Australian” children’s stories and fairy tales. After several attempts to create an “Australian” equivalent to European fairy tales during the early and mid-nineteenth century, a woman called Katie Parker decided to collect and write down Indigenous Australian stories. She considered that these stories would be more “genuine” than invented “Australian fairy tales”, as they were “the product of hundreds of years of story-telling” (Wall 5) in the Australian landscape.

Do Rozario notes that the Aboriginal storytellers who collaborated with Parker were keen to have their stories written down, but differences in communication between the two cultures (oral versus literate) complicated the relationship between them. As the storytellers did not write, Parker had the responsibility of representing their “voice” in writing, and also of describing her own perceptions of the cultures mentioned in the introductions to each story. Clare Bradford in “Centres and Edges” explains that when (white) collectors are given the responsibility of representing “pure Aboriginality” and the said Aborigines are “assumed not to be able to speak for themselves”, this constitutes an “appropriating move” (104). Furthermore, these newly-written stories were then sent to Britain, labelled as being “Australian” narratives, whites claiming Aboriginal stories as their own (103). In my collaboration with Murrundindi to translate “The Tale of Gwonowah and Wattarang”, I would need to avoid all practices of “appropriation”, given that this has historically been a key pattern of practices associated with colonization (Wallerstein 13-4).

2.3 “Orality” translated into writing in a (now presumed) literate world

Michèle Grossman, in her thesis *Entangled Subjects*, writes specifically about the crosscultural collaboration evidenced in Indigenous life-writing from the 1970s, where a white editor or researcher would write down and edit life stories told orally by an Indigenous person (into a tape recorder). In a sense, these editors were acting as “intersemiotic” translators (Jakobson 114), “translating” verbal stories into the language of writing. Grossman recognizes that this process was used by anthropologists and ethnographers in the previous century, collecting oral

“native” knowledge and stories for research purposes and converting the “raw material” of “talk” into the “cooked” form of written “text” (Grossman 111). Written stories were not immune from ideological intervention on the part of editors and publishers as speech was *translated* into the language of written Standard Australian English for a wider audience.

When it came to the later context of the Indigenous life-writer and white editor, Grossman notes that both parties still often had their own agenda: the life-writers to express themselves and the editors to undertake research (161). However, she asks this question: in a post-invasion society where Indigenous Australians have repeatedly been treated according to a “deficit and dependency” paradigm (4), “do the practices of these editors serve to increase Aboriginal visibility and agency?” (161). She urges non-Indigenous people firstly to take a non-essentialist view on Indigenous authors’ preferences regarding the use of “talk” versus the use of “text”, and to honour these differences (12). Secondly, she highlights the importance of examining *who has the control* over publications that represent Aboriginal peoples, and “whose subjectivities and agency they affirm” (199). These two recommendations would form the core of my approach when seeking to collaborate with Murrundindi in the retelling of his tale in Spanish.

2.4 The Wurundjeri context and Murrundindi’s mission

Murrundindi’s people, the Wurundjeri, experienced many challenges to their agency and self-determination since Melbourne was claimed for Britain by Governor Bourke in 1835. After mass decimation of Kulin Nation peoples by shooting, poisoning and disease, the remaining Wurundjeri were gathered up along with other survivors at Coranderrk Station in Healesville in 1863. They were not allowed to speak their own languages or tell their stories, instead being forced to speak in English and learn European ways of life (Gardiner 23-4). Much of their language (Woiwurrung) and many of their stories were lost (Murrundindi, personal communication, 25 September 2015; van Toorn 333).

However, Murrundindi, the Ngurungaeta (head man) of the Wurundjeri people, *was* taught a number of oral Wurundjeri stories by his mother and grandmother, verbally translated into English with some traditional Woiwurrung terms woven into the tales (Murrundindi, personal communication, 25 September 2015). While many of his generation were trying to downplay their Aboriginality in the face of “assimilation” policies (van Toorn), Murrundindi took it upon himself to keep his culture and the oral tradition alive through cultural presentations in primary schools and at the Healesville Sanctuary (*Murrundindi Dreaming*). In 1999, he came to my school, Wandin Yallock Primary School, and announced a special competition. We were to design a front cover for his new audio CD of Wurundjeri Dreamtime stories, *Platypus Dreaming*, and the winner would have their design on the cover when the CD was released. He explained that he did not write the stories down, rather recording them on an audio CD, because his people told these stories verbally. They were to be listened to and learnt by heart – not read. When I approached him for an interview in 2015, Murrundindi further explained to me that his mission was to reach every child in the state of Victoria with his stories, to teach them about his culture’s value of oral storytelling.

Desiring to tell these stories to my own future (bilingual English-Spanish) children as part of passing on my educational heritage, it occurred to me that there would be a number of recently arrived migrant children in Victoria that would not yet have learnt English, but who would still love to hear Murrundindi’s stories. I asked myself how an oral story could be “translated”, having only ever worked with written text. My first thought was to transcribe the story in English, translate this text into Spanish, and then record my reading of the translation onto audio. However, as it was Murrundindi’s story, this was not my decision to make. Asking permission to translate, and seeking his guidance on how to go about this, would need to be the first step toward retelling “The Tale of Gwonowah and Wattarang” in Spanish. What follows

is a reflective account of the process from beginning to end. As a proficient “literate”, it would have been “the norm” for me to analyse the translation process in a hierarchical manner. However, in the interest of learning to tell stories, I will relate the process of translating Murrundindi’s tale as episodes, in the order that they happened.

3. Translating “The Tale of Gwonowah and Wattarang”

3.1 Stage 1: Request to translate

As soon as I became inspired to take on the task of translating an Aboriginal audio story that did not come with a book, I realized that I was entering an unknown world about which I had very little knowledge. If I had learnt anything from my studies in Aboriginal Education as an undergraduate student, it was i) to build relationships with people from a position of humility, rather than making assumptions, and ii) to honour cultural gatekeepers through asking permission, always giving something in return.

As custodian of the story and as the Ngurungaeta (head man) of his people, Murrundindi had the authority to determine how his people’s stories and knowledge were used, to control and restrict their dissemination and to receive full rights and recognition for this cultural and intellectual property (cf. Langford; Lydon). If I wanted to translate a Wurundjeri story from *Platypus Dreaming*, I would need to begin by building a relationship with Murrundindi, honouring him as a cultural gatekeeper through permission-seeking, and considering how I could reciprocate this sharing of culture.

Acutely aware that my ancestors came from the same country that colonized Victoria and shattered the Wurundjeri’s way of life, I felt an enormous debt to Murrundindi. If colonization had created unequal power relationships with colonizers claiming Indigenous land and stories as their own, then our relationship would have to be one of equal agency, of the *mutual* and *voluntary* sharing of stories and resources.

After a number of attempts to contact Murrundindi, I was ecstatic to receive a return call one morning.¹ I shared with Murrundindi that I had been a student at Wandin Yallock Primary School when he produced the CD *Platypus Dreaming*, and was now hoping to translate one of the tales into Spanish as part of a research project. I was hoping to gain an understanding of the story’s origin and Murrundindi’s main purpose in recording the CD, as well as ask his permission to translate “The Tale of Gwonowah and Wattarang”.

Murrundindi explained that he learnt the story from his mother and grandmother, in English. He had obtained permission from his mother to record the stories in audio format, as she had previously been their custodian as a Wurundjeri elder. Murrundindi’s purpose in recording the CD was primarily educative and secondly expressive – for all pre-school and primary school students in Victoria to hear and enjoy the audio stories, learning his people’s way of telling them orally from generation to generation.

Owing to this mission, Murrundindi was adamant that the stories remain oral and not be transcribed in any way. He agreed that the most appropriate translation strategy would be to learn the stories by heart and then retell them in Spanish without transcription in either language. This method of oral/aural learning would challenge my reliance on being able to refer to written text as a memory aid, also pushing the boundaries of my understanding of “translation”, which usually refers to the written mode of communication (Munday 8).

The second condition was that no money was to be made from the translation, as for too long, Aboriginal stories have been collected or “stolen” from their custodians and sold for profit, exploiting differing cultural notions of “authorship” and “copyright” (as mentioned in Section 2: cf. Do Rozario; Lydon). At this point, I imagined that I would simply record the retelling for my own use, perhaps telling the story in person to my own children in the future.

¹ See Appendix 1 for a paraphrased version of the interview, which took place on 25 September 2015.

3.2 Stage 2: Reforming my concept of translation

Now that I had permission to translate the tale, I needed to justify this transfer as being an act of “translation”, as it did not involve writing. I found two theoretical precedents for this – Pimentel’s concept of translation as “retelling” (9) and Spivak’s explanation of the Hindi term for translation, *anuvad*, meaning “speaking after” (247). Munday (8) points out that there are overlaps between “translation” and “interpreting”, with “interpreting” usually being the spoken expression and “translation” the written one. However, in this case, the oral story would be “consumed” (Polsky and Takemoto) in its entirety before being retold in a different space, time and language. For this reason, I have used the terms “translation” and “interlingual retelling” in this study, with “interlingual” referring to the transfer between languages (Jakobson 114).

Having justified “translation as retelling”, I then turned to the notion of “translation as relationship”. Since discovering relationship as being a key in Aboriginal education and cultural affairs, I had more recently noticed that “translation as relationship” is also a concept in Translation Studies. Since the “cultural turn” of the (inter)discipline in the 1980s and 90s, there had been a greater focus on the *actors* in the translation process, especially by Christiane Nord. In her “functionality plus loyalty” principle, she highlights the role of “loyalty” in the interpersonal relationships and negotiation of the translation process as being equally, if not more important than the previously-held notion of a target *text*’s “faithfulness” to a source *text*. The loyalty principle was offered as an addition to the functionally-oriented *Skopos* theory (Reiss and Vermeer), which focuses on producing translations that are “fit for purpose”. In *Skopos* theory, the purpose of a translation is specified in a “translation commission” (234) and is the overriding factor to be considered when making textual decisions in translation.

In my translation of “The Tale of Gwonowah and Wattarang”, I was both the “commissioner” (with Murrundindi’s consent) and “translator”, and the “translation commission” was negotiated with the Murrundindi as the “source-culture sender”. The “target text receivers” were similar to those of *Platypus Dreaming*, still being primary students in Victoria, except that these would be Spanish-speaking students who would likely hear the story either in a live retelling or on an audio recording, from a Spanish-speaking narrator rather than from Murrundindi himself.

The function and purpose would remain the same: to teach children in Victoria about Wurundjeri culture and oral storytelling. I would tell the story with the same characters and the same events in order to explain how the platypus was created according to Wurundjeri culture. I would also use the same Woiwurrung terms as Murrundindi to make the Spanish-speaking audience equally familiar with them, accompanied by the terms’ Spanish counterparts to ensure understanding, as Murrundindi had done in English. But to remain loyal to Murrundindi and the conditions of the negotiated translation commission, I would make sure that my translation gave him full acknowledgement for the story and that no financial gain was involved.

Having established this theoretical framework for translating orality *orally*, I read some research articles about oral storytelling and proceeded to listen to the audio performance over and over again, considering the way in which I would approach the retelling.

3.3 Stage 3: Listening to the “source performance”

As an audio file, “The Tale of Gwonowah and Wattarang” might be better described as a “source performance” rather than a “source text”. The story, described by Murrundindi as a “Dreamtime story”, follows the journey of Gwonowah, the little black swan, down the Yarra River. There, she is kidnapped by Old Nargoo, the ugly water rat, who tries to force her to marry him. However, Gwonowah outsmarts Old Nargoo and escapes back up the mountain to the Badger Creek, where she lays two eggs, resulting in two little babies that resemble what

we now know as the platypus. As an explanation of how the platypus was created, it is an example of an “etiological story” (Beardsley 526).

Woiwurrung terms are used for animal character names and selected features in the landscape, as enduring evidence that this story, too, is the product of an “interlingual retelling” from the previous Woiwurrung version. This recording expresses a “hybridity” between Indigenous (Woiwurrung) and colonial (English) languages and storytelling conventions, which I would need to carry over into the Spanish version to maintain its distinctiveness.

Beardsley describes some typical features of oral cultures and oral storytelling that are relevant here. He explains that in this tradition generally, oral pieces are *performed* as a new composition each time, varying according to the needs of the audience (522). I had observed this in Murrundindi’s storytelling in schools and at Healesville Sanctuary. Shorter and longer versions of “The Tale of Gwonowah and Wattarang” maintained the same characters and ending (the creation of the platypus), but the descriptions and events varied in the amount of detail given, depending on how long the story needed to be. Beardsley indicates that rather than there being a fixed “type” (“original”) and additional “transformation” (“variants”) of oral stories, there can be many retellings and interpretations of the main point of the story (526). Every version of this story that I heard from Murrundindi explained the platypus as the product of a water rat and a swan, but only the longer version on *Platypus Dreaming* emphasized Gwonowah’s father’s warning not to swim around the big bend in the river, which could be interpreted as an additional warning to children not to disobey their parents.

In *Siting Translation*, Niranjana observes that it is only in logocentric (writing-based) cultures that the “standardization” and “memorization” of stories made possible by writing is so highly prized. Strate describes this act of recording or writing down stories as “freezing” them, and thus “binding time”, as previously live events can be stored for later use, and an official version “canonized” (240). However, Murrundindi asserts that the act of recording *Platypus Dreaming* was solely for the purpose of reaching a greater number of children with understanding and enjoyment of his culture and oral traditions (Murrundindi, personal communication, 25 September 2015). As a result, the need for the story to be preserved through *continuing the tradition* of intergenerational *retelling* (in any language) would be more important for achieving Murrundindi’s desired “function” (*Skopos*) for the story than would obsessing over strict adherence to written-text notions of linguistic “equivalence” and “fidelity” for each and every phrase. This was a comforting realization as I set about learning to tell a ten-minute story from memory for the very first time.

3.4 Stage 4: Internalizing the story and making decisions for the transfer to Spanish

Compared to translating written words on a page, learning a complete story by heart, remembering it and retelling it in recorded form in my second language was a challenge. I listened over and over, writing down key words that I didn’t know how to say in Spanish so that I could look them up at the end. I ended up with a list of words in English, such as “reeds”, “webbed feet”, “flat bill”, “flutter” and “paddle around”, next to their Spanish translations. As concepts that exist in most cultures, these terms already had “natural equivalents” (Pym 7), making this step relatively straightforward. I also noted Woiwurrung terms (including character names) and place names, to consider how I would express these in the Spanish version. My need to record and visualize key terms and phrases in writing supported the truth of Walter Ong’s assertion that literacy alters a person’s thought processes forever – my aural memory had suffered greatly in the process of becoming proficient in “literacy”.

The translation strategies used for the Woiwurrung terms may be of interest to translators in the readership (although not essential to the main focus of crosscultural collaboration), so I will present these here with a short commentary.

3.4.1 Multilingualism

To maintain the hybrid feature of “multilingualism” (Ettobi 235; Platt et al. 183) in this tale, I have used the same Woiwurrung terms present in Murrundindi’s recording. These include greetings and some key nouns (animate and inanimate), presented in the table below:

Table 1: Woiwurrung terms in Murrundindi’s version and in the Spanish retelling

	Definite article	Woiwurrung	English	Spanish (with back translations for phrases)
Greetings		Wominjeka	Welcome	Bienvenido/a(s)
		Neganga kundewa	Come and listen	Vengan y escuchen (come and listen)
		Twiginin	Until the next time	Hasta la próxima (until the next time)
Nouns (inanimate)	el (m)	gunnugilli	sky	el cielo (m)
Nouns (animate)	la (f)	yeta	water	el agua ² (f)
	la (f)	bullum bullum	butterfly	la mariposa (f)
	el (m)	wattarang	platypus	el ornitorrinco (m)
	el (m)	gwonowah	swan	el cisne (m)
	la (f)	nargoo	water rat	la rata de agua (f)
	los (m.pl.)	gooligah	water spirits	los espíritus del agua (m.pl.) (the spirits of the water)

I have needed to add gendered articles to the Woiwurrung words to follow Spanish grammatical conventions, and have used the same article genders as the equivalent terms in Spanish. In the recordings (Murrundindi’s and also mine), every Woiwurrung word is said without any additional vocal emphasis, followed immediately by the English / Spanish, for example, “Entró a la yeta, al agua” [She jumped into the yeta, the water]. In written text, this lack of verbal emphasis would suggest the use of roman typeface rather than italics for these terms, normalizing the foreign terms’ presence.

3.4.2 Character names

Regarding names for animals, the Woiwurrung is used in the source text as the character’s name in the story: “*Gwonowah* [swan], the little black swan”, “Old *Nargoo* [water rat], the ugly water rat” and so on. Interestingly, the character names in this Dreamtime story follow the English fairy tale pattern of “two adjectives followed by the animal name”, for example “**three little pigs**”, “**big bad wolf**” etc., here “**little black swan**” and “**ugly water rat**”. This suggests “interference” between the fairy tale and Dreamtime story genres (Bandia 132). The norm when translating fairy tales from English into Spanish is to combine two of these words into one (for example “tres **cerditos**” [three **little-pigs**] and “lobo **feroz**” [**ferocious** wolf]), so I used the diminutive “-cillo” on the end of Gwonowah’s name, (which can denote both “little” and “dear”), and combined “old” and “ugly” into “vejete”, meaning “old codger” for the water rat.

3.4.3 Geographic references

The place names in the tale (Healesville Sanctuary, Badger Creek, Yarra River, Melbourne, Watts River and Marysville) not only situate the native Australian animals in the story, but also

² “Agua” is a feminine noun in Spanish, but takes the masculine article “el” because it begins with a stressed vowel.

express the Wurundjeri people’s custodianship of the area and their right to tell the Dreaming stories of this region. As the target audience is a Spanish-speaking or bilingual child who lives near or visits the places mentioned, no additional explanation regarding places mentioned would be required. The choice, however, lay in either keeping the English terms for “creek” and “river”, or translating these into Spanish, with “Arroyo Badger” [Badger Creek] and “Río Yarra” [Yarra River]. I have chosen to translate these terms into Spanish to provide additional cohesion through the repetition of the terms “creek” and “river” when used generically in the story.

Table 2: Geographical references in Murrundindi’s version and in the Spanish retelling

English	Spanish	Back translation into English
Badger Creek	Arroyo Badger	Badger Creek
Healesville	Healesville	Healesville
Yarra River	Río Yarra	Yarra River
Melbourne	Melbourne	Melbourne
Watts River	Río Watts	Watts River
Marysville	Marysville	Marysville

3.5 Stage 5: Recording, checking and publishing

After establishing key terms for the Spanish version, I recorded the entire story a number of times as a voice memo on my iPhone, listening back to check the story details and my use of grammar. Before and after the recorded performance in English, Murrundindi had addressed an audience of “boys and girls, mums and dads” and introduced it as a Dreamtime story, placing the recording within the genre of “narrative performance” (Beardsley 524-5). I needed to adapt these peritexts³ (Genette) to reflect the change in the person telling the story, mentioning in the foreword where I learnt the story and who gave me permission to retell it (Murrundindi). The afterword in the recording involved listeners in a guessing game about which animal the “wattarang” was in the story, revealing the answer: “the platypus”. I kept this part of the afterword as well as the explanation relating to Murrundindi’s purpose in making the CD, namely, teaching children about oral tradition and stories being “passed down from generation to generation”.

Needing some form of visual support, I had the bilingual list of key terms, and the adjusted foreword and afterword in front of me while I recorded. To copy the nature soundtrack in the source recording, I recorded my performance outdoors with the sounds of birds and wind in the background, although clapping sticks were not used. I tried to imitate Murrundindi’s soothing and calm intonation, placing emphasis on character names and enunciating each word clearly. The even intonation and slow pace differentiated the tale from “audio books”, which are professional, dramatic readings of print books with distinct voices for characters (cf. Haag; Irwin; Kozloff).

Murrundindi’s recorded performance in English avoided the use of Australian jargon, such as “tucker”, but employed informal devices typical of speech, such as contractions (“gonna get you”). As contractions do not exist in Spanish, I compensated with another marker of informality used widely in the spoken register of Latin American Spanish, which is the use of the diminutive form: for example, “water” (“aguita” [little water]) and “babies” (“bebitos” [little babies]). I did, however, avoid Peru-specific oral markers such as the addition of the suffix “-pe” to an informally spoken “sí” [yes] and “no” [no]. If being used for general distribution in the Spanish-speaking world, the use of internationally understood “standardized” vocabulary would enable the story to then be retold in localized Spanish variants, in live retellings between friends or family members.

³ See Appendix 2 for a transcription, translation and back translation of the foreword and afterword.

I edited the best take of the Spanish retelling using Audacity, removing hesitations, repetitions, and re-recording obvious grammatical slips. I then published this as a free YouTube video with an image of the CD cover as the background. I set the privacy to “private” and shared the link with Murrundindi, and when he had listened to it and given permission, I changed the privacy settings to public and shared the link with family in Peru for their feedback. My husband’s cousin enjoyed the story and kindly found the exact places in minutes and seconds where I had made unintentional grammatical mistakes in Spanish, so that I could re-record these parts and edit them back in to the file. The final version of the story is available on YouTube, which seemed to be an appropriate platform for the story, being both free of charge for users, and giving opportunity for feedback, updates and ongoing interaction.⁴ This bears greater resemblance to a live performance when compared with print books, which do not provide these dialogic features.

3.6 Stage 6: Publication of the research paper

The final stage of my collaboration with Murrundindi was to write about the process. Smith and Ward assert that in the context of post- or neo-colonial Australia, collaboration is the antithesis to power relations (5-6), and that the objective should be a “shared future [...] built on the needs and agendas of both Indigenous peoples and the people who study them” (5). My “needs and agendas” in desiring to publish a research paper about the interlingual retelling process were i) to broaden the concept of “translation” to be more inclusive of orality as cultural practice, and thus invite readers to join me in reversing (colonial) patterns of compulsively converting oral stories into text for non-Indigenous profit, and ii) to provide an example of crosscultural collaboration where both parties benefit and have equal agency to achieve their purposes. Through my access to academic writing and the Spanish language, I have been able to extend Murrundindi’s call for keeping oral storytelling alive. Through Murrundindi’s agency as a Wurundjeri elder, he has used his cultural authority to offer stories, perspectives, advice, and permission to enable me to undertake research in this area and further explore my identity as a third-generation British-Australian.

To avoid repeating the mistakes of researchers in the past, I submitted all of my writing to Murrundindi for his feedback and approval before submission, and made sure to acknowledge all of his contributions in full. I look forward to being able to reciprocate the sharing of stories and cultures when I chat again with Murrundindi in the near future, and value the opportunity to continue to listen and learn from the wisdom of this inspiring elder.

4. Results and recommendations for practice

Through this process of crosscultural collaboration, I have come to realise that *my story* is the base of my identity. While I do not have my own ancestral-land stories, I do have ancestor stories: stories of migration, stories of starting life again in a new land, and stories of settler life in Melbourne, Gippsland and the Yarra Valley. While I now know that I do not need to look for Aboriginal stories in order to have an identity in this beautiful land, Murrundindi kindly entered my story and those of many children in Victoria, reaching out a hand of friendship and reconciliation through storytelling, and opening the door to a shared future of understanding between migrants and the Wurundjeri. I hope to return the favour by spreading his message further in my languages of Spanish and academic writing.

When it comes to the question of how this study can benefit translation practice, here are some things to consider:

⁴ The Spanish performance of the tale, “El Cuento de Gwonowah y Wattarang, historia aborigen australiana” can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SGmzv5sN0X0>

A transparent agenda: Question the motivation for “collecting” an Indigenous story. Is there a personal connection to the storyteller or story?

Respecting custodianship: Ask how Indigenous agency will benefit from the translation into writing or another language. Any use of culture by outsiders must, firstly, be approved, and secondly, control, rights and royalties must stay with the custodians.

Respecting publication guidelines: Seek permission and guidance in terms of process, product and publication, and respect these conditions.

Translating oral stories orally: If a story is to remain oral, one strategy is to listen to the story repeatedly from live or audio retellings and practise until all episodes of the story can be remembered. The characters, key events and moral are the most important elements to retain, depending on the type of story and its function.

Avoiding non-Indigenous profit: Consider publishing for free or for shared rights and profit. Asking the storyteller their preferred arrangement regarding publishing and royalties is the best way to ensure an appropriate solution.

Checking and approval: Submit all material for checking and approval prior to publication. This must include any later changes to the content. All Indigenous contributions should receive full and accurate acknowledgement.

Continuing the relationship: Reconciliation begins with a connection characterized by equal agency and mutual respect. Beyond this, listening deeply and valuing each other for who each one is over one’s *economic potential* is a step towards deeper healing as a nation (cf. Al Jazeera America).

Getting involved: Find out about what local Indigenous elders are doing and how their “voice” (whether “talk” or “text”) could be extended through translation to significant groups of new arrivals who are starting to build a new story and identity in Australia.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to develop a model for sourcing and translating oral Indigenous stories ethically. Through an interview, literature review and a process of listening and learning, I have been able to share a Spanish retelling of “The Tale of Gwonowah and Wattarang” as a free video on YouTube. Central concerns to this endeavour included mutual benefit, control of knowledge, respecting guidelines, and learning another way of knowing and communicating through a type of apprenticeship.

Furthermore, the notion of translation as “retelling” opens up an area of Translation Studies that seems to have been neglected, namely that of translation in purely oral traditions, without transcription. It challenges the field to look outside Western epistemology to acknowledge and include other ways of knowing, doing and being. Additional work is still needed to explore models for the translation of non-literacy-based modes of performance. It is time to decolonize the assumption that translation necessarily constitutes “putting into writing”, and explore the possibilities for “translation as retelling” and “translation as relationship”.

Appendix 1. Interview with Murrundindi (paraphrased and summarized)

Rosanne: Hi Murrundindi.

Murrundindi: How can I help you?

Rosanne: I am studying translation and would like to write an essay about the ethics of translating an oral story from your CD into Spanish.

Murrundindi: Ok. What do you want to know?

Rosanne: Where did you learn the story of Gwonowah and Wattarang and in which language?

Murrundindi: I learnt it from my grandmother, in English. It would be hard to tell it in Language because our language was taken from us. There are no more speakers living.

Rosanne: What was the main purpose of producing the CD?

Murrundindi: I want all kinder and primary school children to hear it and learn how we told our stories orally.

Rosanne: Would it be ok for someone to translate the story into another language, like Spanish?

Murrundindi: I guess that would be alright, as long as they weren't making money off it. People have been making money off Aboriginal peoples' culture and that has to stop.

Rosanne: What would be the most appropriate way for someone to translate the story?

Murrundindi: Learn the story by heart, then tell it in the other language. Don't write it down. These stories are not written stories, they are oral stories.

Rosanne: Would it be ok for me to write an essay about translating the story and publish it in an academic journal, if I didn't make any money from it?

Murrundindi: That should be ok. Mention Murrundindi, that it's my story and that I've given you permission, otherwise people will get their backs up. And I'll want to read it first. Good luck.

Rosanne: Thank you very much.

Appendix 2. The foreword and afterword in English and Spanish

Below I have transcribed and translated the foreword and afterword within the specific context of the commission being “to tell the story orally to my own (future) children”.

	Woiwurrung/English	Woiwurrung/Spanish	Backtranslation into Woiwurrung/English
Foreword	<p>Wominjeka, neganga kundewa Murrundindi. <i>Wominjeka</i> means “welcome”. <i>Neganga kundewa</i> means “come and listen, to Murrundindi”. <i>Murrundindi</i> means “home in the mountain”. My mother, senior elder of the Wurundjeri tribe, she gave me that name.</p> <p>This story, is about Gwonowah, the little black swan...</p>	<p>Wominjeka, neganga kundewa. <i>Wominjeka</i> significa “bienvenido(s)(as)”. <i>Neganga kundewa</i> significa “vengan y escuchen”.</p> <p>Esta historia es del pueblo Wurundjeri, del valle Yarra en Victoria. Yo lo aprendí de Murrundindi, el jefe de su pueblo. Él me ha dado permiso para contárselo, para que sepan cómo su pueblo contaba las historias orales.</p> <p>Esta historia es acerca de Gwonowah, el cisnecillo negro...</p>	<p>Wominjeka, neganga kundewa. <i>Wominjeka</i> means “welcome (masc. plural/fem. plural)”. <i>Neganga kundewa</i> means “come and listen”.</p> <p>This story is from the Wurundjeri people, from the Yarra Valley in Victoria. I learnt it from Murrundindi, the head of his people. He has given me permission to tell it to you, so that you may know how his people told oral stories.</p> <p>This story is about Gwonowah, the little black swan...</p>
Afterword	<p>That story was passed down through generation to generation boys and girls, mums and dads and brothers and sisters, but what sort of little animals do you think they were? Have a guess. Yes, that’s right. They were... the platypus. That’s the Dreamtime story how the platypus was created. It was taught to me by my mother. It’s been passed down through generation to generation. We do not say “goodbye”. We say <i>twiginin</i>: “until the next time”.</p>	<p>Esa historia ha sido transmitida de generación en generación, mis niños/as. ¿Pero qué clase de animal crees que fueron ellos? Adivina... Sí, es cierto. Fueron ellos los ornitorrincos. Esa es la historia de soñar de cómo el ornitorrinco fue creado. Me la enseñó Murrundindi que lo aprendió de su mamá. Ha sido transmitida de generación en generación. Los Wurundjeris no dicen “adiós”. Más bien, dicen <i>twiginin</i>: “hasta la próxima”. Entonces, yo también les diré “hasta la próxima”.</p>	<p>This story has been passed down from generation to generation, my children. But what sort of animal do you believe they were? Guess... Yes, that’s right. They were the platypus. That is the Dreamtime story about how the platypus was created. Murrundindi taught it to me, and he learnt it from his mother. It has been passed down from generation to generation. Wurundjeri people do not say “goodbye”. Instead, they say <i>twiginin</i>: “until the next time”. And so I will also say to you “see you next time”.</p>

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