Translation and Community-Building for Transnational Learning in Cuba and Russia

Anne Macpherson – History
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European imperialism divided the Caribbean by language
The Association of Caribbean Historians as a Long-Term Transnational/Intercultural Learning Project

- Founded in late 1960s
- ACH’s symbol since 1977: “birdman” Taino zemi of mahogany
- expresses ACH’s “commitment to the region and to the process of ongoing historical inquiry”
The ACH’s Annual Conference embodies goal of integrated pan-Caribbean historical practice

• Deep commitment to overcoming divisions of European imperialism
• Annual conference has rotated location since early 1970s. Allows Caribbean scholars to see the whole region. Most recent conferences:

2016 Havana, Cuba, Centro de Estudios Martianos (S)
2015 Nassau, College of the Bahamas (E)
2014 Martinique, Université des Antilles et de la Guyane (F)
2013 Belize, National Institute for Culture and History (E/S)
2012 Curacao, National Archives and University of Curacao (D)
2011 Puerto Rico, Universidad de Puerto Rico (S)
2010 Barbados, University of the West Indies, Cavehill (E)
2009 Guadeloupe, Université des Antilles et de la Guyane (F)
2008 Suriname, Anton de Kom University (D)
2007 Jamaica, University of the West Indies, Mona (E)
Simultaneous Translation at Annual Conference

• Historical research, teaching, and knowledge in and about the Caribbean affected by political and linguistic divisions that obscure commonalities

• ACH conferences with simultaneous translation foster integrated Caribbean historical practice to battle such divisive imperial legacies, build common historical body of knowledge
Layers of Translation

1. thematic multi-lingual panels
2. papers pre-circulated with English, French, and Spanish abstracts; expected to read papers in advance
3. team of professional translators hired
4. community building: one panel at a time, presenters speak “abnormally” slowly for translators
5. audience members get audio equipment so they can listen to the relevant translator
6. Q&A simultaneously translated and very high level
Other elements of ACH multi-linguality

• socializing and networking/free afternoon/fête/field trip
• prize committee language skills
• recent commitment to making website and bulletin multilingual

http://www.associationofcaribbeanhistorians.org/translationproject.htm

• Overall result: increased awareness of pan-Caribbean history, of colleagues’ research projects, increased possibilities for collaboration and comparative/regional research and teaching
Problems and Challenges

- Institutional incentives continue to emphasize collaboration within language categories: grants and scholarships, universities, publishing outlets
- A small % of ACH members are themselves truly bilingual or trilingual, so socializing tends to fall along linguistic lines (except the dancing!)
- Puerto Ricans (S/E), Canadians (E/F), and Dutch and Dutch Caribbean people (D/E) among the most bilingual groups
- U.S., British Caribbean, and French Caribbean people the most monolingual
- Political and financial obstacles to attendance: Cuba, Haiti, Suriname/Guyana/Guyane
The ACH 2016 field trip to Valle de Viñales
- translation and learning outside the classroom/conference!
Making cigars in Spanish and French!
What ACH members learned on the Field Trip

- how state-run tours function in Cuba
- what guides are trained to tell tourists about
- fragility of infrastructure
- no photos inside cigar factories
- tobacco farmers hide part of their crop from the state to sell more than legally allowed to non-state buyers like tourists
- cultural sensitivity around portrayals of extinct indigenous people could be improved
- our guide trusted us enough by the end of the day to be very frank about her and her generation’s frustrations with the slow pace and small extent of current reforms