The Translation Room, Makuma, Ecuador

The room has no windows, a ventilator sucks the moisture out. It is noisy but this way it remains cool and the computers are safer. The concrete walls have not been painted over, but posters and pictures have been put up. One wall shows maps of Ancient Israel and diagrams of the Jerusalem temple. The other wall has pictures of previous Bible translators at home in the US with their families. In the middle of the room, a computer with two screens showing the same text in Shuar. Norma and Domingo sit in front of each screen, and behind them sits Rogelio. They are talking, repeating the same Shuar word with different intonations to decipher whether it should be spelt with one or two "t"s. Norma opens a new window in the computer to look for other occurrences of the same word in previously translated text. She types the beginning of the word in a field, clicks a button, and a list of words appears. Some of them are marked as approved, while others have a question mark next to them. Looking at the list, they find another occurrence of the Shuar word that matched the Spanish word they are trying to translate. They talk some more and decide to keep it for now, until a further revision (see Cova 2015).

How does "the digital" feature in this scene of Bible translation in the Ecuadorian Amazon? If we take digital to mean "computers", it is clear both that "the digital" is central to the scene and that is almost peripheral to it. The computer holds center stage, and the whole translation work takes place in this specific room, in this specific building, only in

order to keep the computer safe from humidity, heat, bugs and theft. Yet the computer is not the real centre of attention: the Bible is. What Norma, Domingo, Rogelio care about is to ensure the continuity between the Shuar text they are elaborating and the Spanish and English Bibles and commentaries they have at their disposal. To do so, they must also ensure the continuity between oral and written Shuar. Shuar orthography is still a matter of debate, yet the Shuar Bible should be usable for preaching. In that sense, the computer matters to the translators insofar as it can bring the entire past history of Shuar Bible translation to help them produce a coherent and readable text. The computer also matters insofar as it is able to compress the text already written and transmit it to Bible translators in the US, editors in Switzerland, and a printing press in China.

But it might be preferable to take "digital" in its wider sense, as a discrete signal. As such the digital stands in opposition to a continuous signal, "the analogue". Although both the digital and the analogue are amenable to computation, they may also continue to exist without it. Moreover, both the analogue and the digital can be converted into each other. The computer then becomes only one instance of the digital, alongside the many Bibles, dictionaries and Bible commentaries that surround it. In fact, the computer matters to the translators because of its ability to arrange and re-arrange digital information of the same sort as the Bible: letters. Reciprocally, the translators matter to the computer because of their ability to produce one type of digital information (Shuar Bible) alongside another (Spanish Bible) through the conversion of these digital signals into analogue ones and back. The translators read aloud from a Spanish Bible or from a draft Shuar translation, repeat the sentences to each other, try different modulations, until they settle for one or two possible forms, at which point they type it into the computer. Or again: one reads a sentence from the screen, another repeats it with a different intonation, searching for the orthography. Seen through the prism of the digital/analogue dichotomy, Shuar Bible translation can be descrcibed as two sets of "objects", some digital and others analogue, and as continuous and interrupted movements across them.

This opposition of sets of discrete objets and continuous processes is itself an instance of the relation between the discrete and the continuous. Each process can be described as itself a discrete object ("reading out loud", "typing"), and each discrete object can be seen as a form of continuity (if only the process of continuing to be what that object is). From a digital point of view, the discrete and the continuous are opposed to each other like the 0 to the 1. From an analogue point of view, the concrete and the continuous are

aspects of each other. Anthropological works concerned with "ontology" have emphasized similar invaginations of continuity and discontinuity. Latour's modes of existence (2013) describe continuities that encompass discrete objects, which themselves are in the mode of persisting in their being. Descola's four discrete ontologies (2013) describe possible ways of perceiving (and producing) continuities and discontinuities among "physicalities" and "interiorities". Viveiros de Castro's controlled equivocation (2009) seeks to produce discrete worlds and bodies out of the continuity of language. They recall previous anthropological efforts to relate discrete objects or myths as parts of a continuum or ensemble (Levi-Strauss 1964-71 and Leroi-Gourhan 1971-1973). I suggest that digitality enjoins anthropology to encompass the familiar trope of identity and difference within the play of the discrete and the continuous. Digitality would be emphasizing the discrete over the continuous (much like Descola's totemist ontology), whereas analogism would instead work with continua (much like Descola's analogist ontologies). Analogue and digital worlds, nested within each other. Rooms without windows, a ventilator sucking the moisture out.

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