

## GUIDE TO THE LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE TRANSLATION OF J.B. SAY'S WORKS: THE CREATION OF A VOCABULARY IN POLITICAL ECONOMY IN SPANISH

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The figure of J.B. Say is extremely important in the framework of the diffusion of political economy at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in continental Europe. Say became the most praised economist in his epoch in France, but besides, he has been widely acknowledged for his role in the diffusion and popularisation of the ideas of Adam Smith, especially in Southern Europe. The pedagogical aim of his writings was a key feature in his success as an economist. One of his main concerns in this regard, was the creation of a specific language for the new science of political economy, as he deemed language an essential trait of a sound science. He was consequently extremely careful in the use of language, searching to define precisely the terms he was employing conscious of the need of an accurate terminology for the rising field of knowledge of political economy. Spanish translators of Say's works also put attention to this concern for language, and it can be said that these translations largely contributed to the creation of the economic language in Spanish. This reader's guide focuses on the Spanish translation of J.B. Say's *Épitomé des principes fondamentaux de l'économie politique*, a small dictionary added in the second edition of his *Traité d'économie politique*, whose terms were adopted in Spain as the language of political economy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### 2. THE AUTHOR: JEAN-BAPTISTE SAY

J.B. Say is one of the most famous economists in history. He is remembered essentially for what has been named Say's Law, an essential pillar of classical economy. In its simplest proposition Say's Law stands that "supply creates its own demand", which however has many different meanings and has been the source for uncountable debates. Jean Baptiste was born in Lyon in 1767, in a family of protestant origins devoted to the silk business. While he was training to become a merchant, he became increasingly interested in political economy and wrote articles for some newspapers too. In 1803 he published his most renowned work, *Traité d'économie politique*. Confronted to Napoleon, he was forbidden to publish, turning into an entrepreneur in cotton business. After Bonaparte's fall, he could then diffuse his writings, In 1815 he edited the *Catéchisme*

d'économie politique and in 1828-1829 the *Cours complet d'économie politique pratique*. In these years he became an extremely famous economist in France and abroad. He died in Paris in 1832.

Say was one of the most prominent economists in the so called classical school, the most important school of economic thought in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many economists consider that this school was founded by Adam Smith's works, and reached its maturity at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the contributions of Malthus and Ricardo. The classical school is behind the ideas of economic liberalism, which apply both to individuals (everyone should be free to take his own economic decisions according to his interests) and policies (the government should guarantee the exercise of freedom, and reduce its intervention in the economy).

Say became the great diffuser of Adam Smith's ideas in France. His first big work, *Principes d'Economie politique* turned into a bestseller, it being the object for several editions in Say's life, and also of many translations and adaptations. His second famous work, the *Catéchisme d'Economie Politique* also reached success in France and abroad. It was thanks to these two writings that Say was read across Europe, and was preached as the disseminator of political economy in some European countries, especially Southern.

Say ranks among the most quoted classical economists, and also French economists of all times. There are hundreds of volumes devoted to his work as economist. You can get more information on Say in any handbook of the history of economic thought, and also in general digest on economics, for instance, the Palgrave Dictionary on Economics, in general sources such as the British Encyclopaedia, and of course, in the internet.

### 3. THE TRANSLATIONS OF J.B. SAY IN SPAIN

The penetration of J.B. Say in Spain was undoubtedly much larger than the diffusion of Adam Smith. This was however the consequence of several circumstances happening which fostered the spread of Say's works, whereas hampered Smith's: First, Say's books were not prohibited by the Inquisition, which was the case of Adam Smith. However, it seems that this was not the main reason for his success in Spain as compared to Smith's (Smith's works had been introduced indirectly – through a translation of Condorcet –, and directly in a translation in 1794): The didactical approach of Say should have played a crucial role in his widespread diffusion.

The works by Say became immediately popular among Spanish cultured elites, as it is witnessed by the numerous translations into Spanish of his works, which arrived generally without major delay. In fact, Say was the most translated foreign economist into Spanish in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The *Traité d'économie politique*, whose addendum is the work that we will address in this guide, was the subject for four different translations, from corresponding original editions. The original first edition of 1803 started being published in Spanish a year later. It was reedited in Mexico in 1814. The second edition (1814) was translated in 1816, immediately after the wartime unrest; reedited in 1817. The fourth edition of 1819 was edited in Spanish in 1821, reedited with some additions in 1836, and the fifth edition of 1826 was translated into Spanish a bit later, in 1838. The only editions which did not circulate in Spanish were the third (1817), and a posthumous edition of 1841. There are other translations from Say's works into Spanish; but there is also a crucial exception, the *Cours complet d'économie politique*, probably his most completed work. More details on the translations into Spanish of Say's works can be seen in the paper uploaded in the EET Project Portal by Prof. J.M. Menudo.

#### 4. THE SOURCE TEXT: THE ÉPITOME TO THE TRAITÉ D'ÉCONOMIE POLITIQUE

In his second edition of the *Traité* (1814), Say included a small dictionary of economic terms in order for the readers to have a clear-cut idea on the concepts he had been dealing with in his book, the *Épitomé des principes fondamentaux de l'économie politique*. Apparently it had great success among readers. Say continued including his Epitome in successive editions, sometimes introducing changes in it, in order to sharp the meaning of the terms there included. This Epitome was essential in building a precise vocabulary for a field of knowledge that was slowly being created across Europe, and whose history was at that time still short. The *Épitomé*, therefore, turned into Say's active tool in his concern for terminology. The *Epítome de los principios fundamentales de la economía política* (1816), as it is known in Spanish in the translation of the second edition of the *Traité*, is therefore a compendium of the economic vocabulary used in the *Traité*, which aims at supplying readers with an ordered terminology of economic science, allowing quick searches or more comprehensive ones using the readers' guide which Say placed at the beginning of the *Epítome* (see the *Epítome* on the EET Project database, source online of the 1816 edition, pages VI-XVI).

Say modified considerably the *Epítome* in subsequent editions, this showing an intense process of re-elaboration of the economic vocabulary. You can get more details on this issue in the paper uploaded in the EET Project Portal by Prof. De Hoyos.

#### 5. THE NEW TERMINOLOGY IN POLITICAL ECONOMY

Analysing the Spanish translation of the *Épitomé*, it is possible to verify an outstanding presence of linguistic reasoning in Say's opinions on the language of economics, which leads him to give a particular coherence to his terminological contributions. At the same time, it is also remarkable the perception of Spanish translators of Say's sensitiveness towards language.

Indeed, as it has been said, Say has a perception of his work as a diffuser of the new economic science. He was not alone in this task: Condillac, an economist close to Say, stated in 1776 that every science demanded a particular language, because every science has its own ideas. Say followed this trend, and in the introduction to the *Épitomé*, he uttered: "If all science is not but a well made language, who possesses the language possesses the science". It was therefore his aim to replace an approximate semantics of the economic science with a properly defined terminology that Say made the effort of formalising his field of research by the publication of the *Épitomé* and the extension of the vocabulary to all his works. This effort was immediately grasped by the translators: "The nomenclature of economic terms suffice it to prove that Say overcame the others, taking the first step in order to rise the economy to the rank of science with the creation of its technical language, and with the generalization of principles so narrowly connected" (pp. IV-V). Therefore, the translators record not only Say's creation of a new language, but also the notional interrelation of his nomenclature. This is one of the key elements to explain why say was so widely diffused.

There are some crucial expressions in Say's translation into Spanish, which have rested as economic vocabulary since then until now. Here we will present some of the most interesting cases:

##### 5.1. ENTREPRISE/ENTREPRENEUR – EMPRESA/EMPRESARIO

This is one of the key terms in Say's work. For a Spaniard at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was not the evident translation of *empresa/empresario* firmly established today. For *entrepreneur*, the Spanish language at that time could suggest *maestro, oficial, director, fabricante, industrioso, hombre de negocios...*



And for *entreprise*: *industria*, *comercio*, *negocio*... In Spanish dictionaries until well into the 19th century the term was not stabilized. It is only from the *Nuevo diccionario francés-español* by Antonio de Capmany (1805, reedited 1817) that the modern equivalent *empresario* starts being used. It is therefore interesting that in the Spanish *Epítome* of 1816 the translators adopted *empresario* instead of voices such as *maestro* or *oficial*. There is a first terminological “setting” which opens the door to the linguistic stabilization of Say’s key term.

### 5.2. ADJECTIVE FOR AN ACTIVITY: COMERCIAL/MERCANTIL

These two words have different connotations today. *Comercial* may be considered as the standard reference to the process of exchange of goods, with quite a neutral image. *Mercantil* tends to be perceived, albeit intuitively, as an usage more restricted, partly as a consequence of its morphological relation to terms as *mercar*, *mercancía*, *mercadería* or *mercader*, a morphological series somehow old, and partly as a consequence of its integration in pluri-verbal forms, as *derecho mercantil* or *registro mercantil*, limited to diastratic precise uses. In the *Epítome* of 1816 translators preferred *mercantile*, whereas in the translation of 1821, the translator used *comercial*, both of them from the same voice *industrie commerciale*. The preference of the second translator seems to be more in consonance with the history of the Spanish language, advancing solutions that will stabilize later. The first translators followed a classical Hispanic tradition. Probably the second translator, feeling the pressure of French on the one side, and conscious of the progressive outdatedness of the series *mercar-mercado-mercancía-mercantil*, chose the option, more risky, of *comercial*.

### 5.3. EMPRUNT/PRÊT – PRÉSTAMO/EMPRÉSTITO

The original terms *emprunt* and *prêt*, and all their associated morphological series, entailed a linguistic challenge for the translators, who arrived to force the Spanish language to say words that did not belong to its tradition and did not have any further success. According to documentation, *préstamo* and *empréstito* were used as synonyms of the activity of “lending”. However, the translators of the *Epítome* doubted when translating the terms *emprunt* and *prêt*. In the Spanish versions of 1816 and 1821, the chain of equivalents was: *prêt* – *préstamo*; *prêteur* – *prestamista*; *emprunteur* – *toma a préstamo*; *emprunt* – *empréstito*. However, there was a problem with *emprunt* and *emprunteur*, which were not easily translated into Spanish. In fact, in some other places translators avoid the term *emprunteur*, using instead paraphrases, which allows thinking that the terminology in this field was not very settled and was at odds with the Spanish tradition. In this case, probably the translators, despite their efforts to homogenize in the direction *prêt-préstamo* and *emprunt-empréstito* forced the Spanish langue in order to adapt it to a morphology to resemble French. In this case, it can be said that the terminological debate fed with decisions that were later turned down.