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COMPOSITIVE LOAN TRANSLATION: FROM *LLETRAFERIT* TO *LETRAHERIDO* 'SOMEONE WHO LOVES LITERATURE'[1]

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Abstract

The word *letraherido* ('who feels an extreme passion for literature') is a compound that Castilian has copied from the Catalan *lletraferit* ('learned, read'). The Catalan word is documented from the 16th century (with an illustrious antecedent in the dialect of the Perigord, of which Montaigne left notice), and the Castilian one started to be used in the middle of the 20th century by Catalan authors such as Jaime Gil de Biedma, Juan Goytisolo, Enrique Badosa, etc., which slightly modified its meaning. Today it has spread in the cultured language throughout Spain (not at least until now in Latin America).

Keywords

loan translation, loanword, Catalan, Castilian

UN CALCO COMPOSITIVO: DE *LLETRAFERIT* A *LETRAHERIDO*

Resumen

La palabra *letraherido* ('que siente una pasión extremada por la literatura') es un compuesto que el castellano ha calcado del catalán *lletraferit* ('instruido, leído'). La voz catalana (con un antecedente ilustre en el dialecto del Perigord, del que dejó noticia Montaigne) se documenta desde el siglo XVII, y la

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castellana la ponen en circulación a mediados del siglo XX autores de Cataluña como Jaime Gil de Biedma, Juan Goytisolo, Enrique Badosa, etc., modificando ligeramente su sentido. Hoy se ha extendido en la lengua culta por toda España (no, al menos todavía, por Hispanoamérica).

Palabras clave

calco, préstamo, catalán, castellano

1. Introduction

The dictionary of the Real Academia Española has collected for the first time in its last edition (2014) the word *letraherido* 'someone who loves literature'. The DLE informs us that this adjective, used only in Spain (i.e., apparently not in Spanish America), comes from the Catalan *lletraferit* and means "someone who feels an extreme passion for literature".

The word has a most illustrious antecedent nothing less than in the *Essais* by Montaigne. In chapter xxv of book I, "Du pédantisme":

> Mon vulgaire Périgourdin appelle plaisamment *Lettreferits* ces savanteaux, comme si vous disiez lettre-férus, auxquels les lettres ont donné un coup de marteau, comme on dit.

Which his excellent modern translator Javier Yagüe Bosch has read like this:

> En mi dialecto del Périgord llaman a estos sabihondos con mucha gracia *lettreferits*, como si dijéramos *letraheridos*: o sea, aquellos a los que las letras han asestado un martillazo, es un decir[2] (Montaigne 2014: 303).

The information included in the passage by Montaigne is completely isolated both chronologically and geographically from Spain, and, of course, despite such an illustrious

[2] "In my dialect of the Perigord they call these savants rather amusingly *lettreferits*, as if we said *letraheridos*: that is, those whom the letters have struck with a hammer, it is a saying".

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precedent, the French language has not retained the adjective, "lettre-féru", which the father of the genre of essays formed to translate and explain the *lettreferit* of his Perigordian dialect.

2. *Lletraferit* in the Catalan lexicographical repertoires

What do Catalan lexicographical repertoires tell us about *lletraferit*? The *Diccionari català-valencià-balear* by Alcover & Moll defines it as "instruït, que ha llegit molt" 'someone instructed, who has read a lot', locates the word in Majorcan and Minorcan dialects, gives as Castilian equivalent *letrado* 'learned' and it cites two texts which include the word. The first of them is by Tomàs Aguiló ("lletraferit no 'u és gayre" 'He is not very learned'), is taken from the *Poesías en mallorquín* (Palma 1883) integrated in his *Obras en prosa y verso* and I have been able to accurately date it when locating its original publication: in the Majorcan journal *L'Ignorància* on October 4, 1879, p. 2. The second ("ja sabia qu'alguns lletraferits se riurian d'ella" 'I already knew that some learned people would laugh at her') belongs to an article of the same journal, in the issue of December 25, 1880, p. 1.

The authors of the DCVB — one Majorcan, the other Minorcan — use the adjective with the value of 'instructed' at some point: "Encara existeix la forma *milió* en el parlar de la pagesía de gran part de Catalunya i les Balears; la gent lletraferida l'ha substituïda per la castellana *milló*, però en el llenguatge literari s'ha restaurat la llegítima forma *milió*» (s. v. milió)".[3]

Joan Coromines, *Diccionari etimològic i complementari de la llengua catalana* (DECLC), tells us that he recalls finding the word "en escriptors floralescs i més en els de "L'Avenç"" 'in writers who participate in the Floral Games and more in those who wrote in the journal *L'Avenç''*, and added that "ja devia estar en ús en el s. XVI, no sols en terres occitanes" 'it must have already been used in the sixteenth century, not only in Occitan

[3] "There still exists the form *milió* 'million' used by the peasantry of Catalonia and the Balearic Islands; learned people have replaced it with the Castilian *milló*, but in literary language the legitimate *milió* form has been restored" (s.v. *milió*)".

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territoires', in proof of which he furnishes the text by Montaigne. It is a word, he says, of popular use, at least in the Balearic Islands, and among the dictionaries that gather the word — according to him — there is one that gives an earlier date to the testimonies offered by the DCVB: it is the *Diccionari mallorquí-castellà* by Pere Antoni Figuera (Palma, 1840), although the Castilian equivalence offered for the word seems to Coromines, rightly, "estrafalària" 'bizarre': "Lletraferid, da. *adj*. Astut, traidor, viu. [Castellano:] *Matrero*" 'Lletraferid, da. *adj*. cunning, traitor, clever. [Spanish:] *Matrero*'.

The information provided by another nineteenth-century dictionary, the *Nuevo diccionario mallorquín-castellano-latín* by Juan José Amengual (Palma, 1878), is interesting — and earlier also, although not much, than the oldest text provided by Alcover and Moll. In volume II we read:

> LLETRAFERID, DA. adj. joc. Lo que es culto sin tener la sal de la discresión [*sic*]. *Bobiculto*, *ta*. adj. ESSER MOLT LLETRAFERID. fr. *Ser muy leído*.[4]

Coromines was right when he presumed that the word would have been used long ago. Indeed, a piece of information hitherto completely unknown by Catalan lexicography is that the word is used by Francesc Vicent Garcia, the famous Rector of Vallfogona (1583-1623). This begins the "romans" 'poem' "A una senyora molt hermosa, que, galanteiantla un Cavaller, se feu Religiosa" 'to a very beautiful lady, who, being courted by a chevalier, became a nun', included in *La armonia del Parnàs*:

> A Vos, la Lletra ferida,
> Io lo ferit de aquell Art,
> A qui de fletxas mantenen
> Aqueixos Ulls soberans.[5]

In this novel the portrait of a beautiful lady who has entered into religion has been drawn (below the poet says: "Perdonau, que no sabia / Que lo Mon hajau deixat"

[4] LLETRAFERID, DA. adj. joc. What is educated without having the salt of discretion. *Bobiculto*, *ta*. adj. ESSER MOLT LLETRAFERID. fr. *'Being very learned person'*.
[5] "To you, Lletra ferida, / I, the wounded of that Art, whose arrows maintain / those sovereign eyes".

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'forgive me, I did not know / that she had left the world'), and it is to be presumably after reading pious books. Hence, I understand, she is called «Lletra ferida»: she is a very "educated" lady, and we could even say, in line with the jocular tone of the poem, a bit of a "wiseacre". Josep Joan Piquer i Jover (1971: 130) supposes that the addressee of these verses would be a nun of the monastery of Vallbona, where there would be «no poques monges "lletraferides", és a dir, cultes y afeccionades a llegir i a escriure» 'quite a few nuns; that is, educated and fond of reading and writing'.

It is important to emphasize that the Catalan word had or could have a very different meaning from what has today, at least in Castilian. See these texts, the first Majorcan (1885), the second Minorcan (1918) and the third Valencian (1934):

> Contan qu'aquest jove
> ha estudiat llatí;
> qu' és sortit
> tan hàbil,
> tan lletraferit...[6] (Penya 1885: 18)

> A un lletreferit, que solia escriure cartes per encárreg (un memorialista, como diríem avuy), s'hi presentá un pagès... (Camps i Mercadal 1918: 23)[7]

> Heus ací, Regina d'esta festa de galanies, com la trinitat Pàtria, Fe i Amor que ací ens congrega ha estat cantada per tots, els que foren i els que som; des del més lletraferit fins al més illetrat; des de l'home d'intel·ligència a l'home de cor; des de l'erudit al llaurador[8] (Sánchez Gozalbo 1934: 273).

[6] "They say that this young man / has studied Latin; / who has left / so skilful / so *lletraferit*".
[7] "To a *lletreferit* man, who used to write letters to order (a scribe, as we would say today), a peasant came...".
[8] "Here, Queen of this gala, as the trinity Homeland, Faith and Love that here congregates us has been sung by all, what they were and what we are; from the *lletraferit* to the most illiterate; from the man of intelligence to the man of the heart; from the scholar to the farmer".

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3. *Letraherido* in Spanish literature

In the second half of the twentieth century the Catalan *lletraferit* gave rise to the compositive loan translation *letraherido*, in the language of authors who, having been born in Catalonia or living there, wrote in Castilian.

I have found the oldest examples in several letters by Jaime Gil de Biedma of 1956 (see Jaume 2010). In a letter to Carlos Barral written from Manila on January 20th, he says: "Te escribo desde la oficina, mientras en torno cantan el vals de los ventiladores. Realmente no es éste clima para letraheridos: mi cabeza pierde filo y mi caligrafía lleva camino de convertirse en algo infantil".[9] This letter was included by Gil de Biedma — with the mere modification of omitting a paragraph — in the first part, hitherto unpublished, of his voluntarily posthumous *Retrato del artista en 1956* (1991).

The word reappears in two other letters written to Gabriel Ferrater: "He conocido incluso algunos letraheridos. Es curioso el *renversement* que la situación del letraherido de aquí representa respecto a la del europeo" (Manila, 2 de febrero de 1956) 'I have even known some letraheridos. It is curious the *renversement* that the situation of the *letraherido* here represents with respect to that of the European' (Manila, February 2nd, 1956); and "de acuerdo en lo de la impersonalidad de los letraheridos" 'I agree about the impersonality of the letraheridos' (Manila, February 29th of the same year). Note that this text implies that Gabriel Ferrater would also use the wod in his letter).

Finally, the word appears twice in other passages of another letter to Gabriel Ferrater of August 8th, written in Nava de la Asunción:

> Hay que reconocer que, al lado del apetito rabelesiano de los letraheridos dieciochescos, época en que un Jovellanos emprendía para sus amigos de la Chancillería la traducción del *Essai sur le commerce* o del *Ami des hommes* con la misma ausencia de pereza con que hoy se adjunta un recorte de periódico, nuestro *zest* epistolar es por cierto modesto. [...]

[9] "I write to you from the office, while the fans waltz around. It is not really this climate for letraheridos: my head loses its edge and my handwriting is on the way to becoming childish".

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> Oigo música, leo bastante, escribo [...], trabajo en mi estudio sobre *Cántico*. En fin, que por fin llevo una vida de letraherido integral, sin nostalgias ni deseos de placer. [10]

There is a frankly curious detail. If Gil de Biedma used the word *letraherido* in these letters to his friends from Barcelona, it was from the assurance that they knew it and also used it. But when he included the letter to Ferrater — that of August 8th, 1956 — in the *Diario de un artista seriamente enfermo* (1974), which later will become known as the third part of the *Retrato*, he decided to eliminate the two mentions of *letraherido*, probably because he thought that by then readers, at least non-Catalans, it would be puzzled by it. Thus, in that *Diario* — as it will be in the third section of the posthumous *Retrato* — what was read was instead of "el apetito rabelesiano de los letraheridos dieciochescos" (which is what, as we have seen, the private letter says), "el apetito rabelesiano de aquella época" 'the Rabelaisan appetite of that time'; and instead of "por fin llevo una vida de letraherido integral" 'at last I lead a life of a complete *letraherido*', "por fin llevo una vida de escritor integral" 'at last I lead a life of a complete writer' (Gil de Biedma 1974: 67-68).

On the other hand, when he was closer to the end of his life, the author included — as we have already said — the letter to Barral of January 20th of the same year in his *Retrato* (in the section he occupies in it the first place) and he kept "letraheridos". This can be explained probably because this word would be better known by all readers at that time (we have already said that the *Retrato* appeared not long after the death of the poet in 1990).

Next we return to the chronology and the texts of Catalan writers in Castilian. The following example that I find is from Juan Goytisolo in *Problemas de la novela* (1959):

[10] I must admit that, next to the Rabelesian appetite of the eighteenth century letraheridos, when Jovellanos the translation of *Essai sur le commerce* or the *Ami des hommes* undertook for his friends of the Chancellery with the same absence of laziness with which today a newspaper clipping is attached, our epistolary *zest* is modest by the way [...] I listen to music, I read a lot, I write, [...] I work on my study of *Cántico*. Anyway, finally I'm living a life of a complete *letraherido*, without nostalgia or desire for pleasure.

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> Psicológica, explicativa y, como tal, esencialmente burguesa, sus personajes [de la novela francesa] son letraheridos y cultos (Goytisolo 1959: 48).[11]

Tomás Salvador published an article entitled "Lletraferits" in *La Vanguardia* on March 24th, 1962 (p. 11), in which he thinks about the Catalan word and he finds it missing in Castilian (although he adventures "letraheridos").

In 1963 the bilingual edition of *La pell de brau* by Salvador Espriu was published, in translation, by another Goytisolo, José Agustín. In the eighteenth poem he evokes a dinner with writers friends: [12]

> Sota la branca del penjat,
> lletraferits, a Sepharad,
> paràvem taula de sopar.[13]

And Goytisolo (1963: 52-53) translates these verses into Spanish like this:

> Bajo la rama del ahorcado,
> letraheridos, en Sepharad,
> poníamos mesa para la cena.

In 1964, one of the chapters of *Razones para el lector*, by Enrique Badosa (1964: 77 f), is called "En torno de los letraheridos" 'Around the *letraheridos*'. Two years later, Juan Marsé (1978: 351) writes the word with a hyphen: «Intelectual de izquierdas y letra-herido, había derivado sin ganas hacia la publicidad editorial» 'Left-wing intellectual and letra-herido, he had not desires for editorial publicity' in *Últimas tardes con Teresa*. Next, the Valencian Joan Fuster speaks of «la nobleza media, letraherida y acomodada» 'the middle nobility, letraherida and wealthy" of Gandía (*La Vanguardia*, 23 August 1969, p. 8). On the other hand, in the same year, 1969, José María Valverde

[11] "Psychological, explanatory and, as such, essentially bourgeois, its characters [of the French novel] are letraheridos and learned".
[12] See, about this dinner, Castellet (1988: 86-88).
[13] Under the hangman's branch, / *Lletraferits*, in Sepharad, / We set the table for dinner.

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leaves the word in Catalan in a letter-poem to Narcís Comadira, "por y para sus *Papers privats*":

> Querido Comadira: *Papers privats* me trae
> lo mejor de mi tiempo catalán, mi paréntesis
> de hermosa libertad, en que hablé con vosotros
> (con los *Lletra-ferits*, inefable pandilla)
> de poeta a poetas...[14]

4. Conclusion

I think I am not mistaken if I say that this example shows a clear evolution of the word, not only applied to the 'well-read', 'literate', 'someone who has read a lot' but to the 'passionate about literature'. If the *Diccionari general de la llengua catalana* by Pompeu Fabra and other repertories that follow it define lletraferit as "amant de conrear les lletres" 'lover of cultivating literature' (but does he need to cultivate it?), the most recent *Diccionari descriptiu de la llengua catalana* of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans prefers to make it equivalent to "amant de la literatura" 'lover of literature'. And the dictionary of the Spanish Academy has emphasized this meaning in its recent definition of *letraherido*, as we have seen: «que siente una pasión extremada por la literatura» 'someone who feels an extreme passion for literature'. It has ended by imposing a more passionate and romantic view of *herir* 'to hurt'. If, in Montaigne's text, this verb meant rather "golpear" 'to hit' (remember: "... comme si vous disiez lettre-férus, auxquels les lettres ont donné un coup de marteau"), now we see in *letraherido* the joyful victim of a Cupid of literature that would have selected him as the destiny of his arrows. The French language does not have an equivalent adjective, but the expression "être féru de littérature" is frequent.

[14] Dear Comadira: *Papers privats* brings me / The best of my Catalan time, my parenthesis / Of beautiful freedom, in which I spoke with you / (With the Lletra-ferits, ineffable gang) / From poet to poets ...

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The *Diccionario del español actual* directed by Manuel Seco includes in *letraherido*, which is defined as an "aficionado a las letras y a la lectura" 'a lover of letters and reading', the "regional" and "literary" marks. The latter is consistent with the documentation that the article shows: precisely the texts by Marsé and Badosa — both of the 60's — to which we have referred above.

Today the Castilian word, which remains "literaria" in the sense that it occurs on the lips or in the pen of educated persons, has been extended to authors from all origins. We have been able to document it in texts by Francisco Umbral, Rosa Montero, Luis Antonio de Villena, Francisco Rico, Miguel Sánchez-Ostiz, Andrés Trapiello, Manuel Longares, Juan Cruz, Ignacio Echevarría, Manuel Rodríguez Rivero, Santos Sanz Villanueva, Sergio del Molino, José Luis Melero, etc. At least one manifestation of literary history studies has been made, since in 2008 it appeared in the title of a book that is the result of a Spanish-French Integrated Action (or research project): *La mujer de letras o la letraherida. Discursos y representaciones sobre la mujer escritora en el siglo XIX*, CSIC, 2008.

Letraherido has also been used by Jorge Edwards and Roberto Bolaño, both Chileans and both closely linked to Spain. But, undoubtedly, it is a word so suggestive and transparent that it could spread throughout America: the Academy's Corpus of 21st Century Spanish includes two texts from the Peruvian newspaper *El Comercio*, both of 2008.

And it is obvious, in short, we insist, that the word has moved far away much from the value initially assigned by Catalan dictionaries. The passage by the critic Ángel Basanta is a good example of the extreme that his meaning has reached: "Pronto fue [Umbral] un letraherido, enfermo de literatura, poseído por la pasión de escribir como enfermedad y locura sin otro remedio que la escritura misma" '[Umbral] was soon a letraherido, sick of literature, possessed by the passion of writing as illness and madness with no other remedy than the writing itself (*Abc Literario*, 4 de octubre de 1996, p. 9).[15]

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