

A GIBRALTAR IN THE MAKING: INTERVIEW WITH DR. JENNIFER BALLANTINE PERERA

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Dr. Jennifer Ballantine Perera is the director of the Gibraltar Garrison Library and of the Institute for Gibraltar and Mediterranean Studies (University of Gibraltar). She is the current editor of the *Gibraltar Heritage Journal*, a specialised journal on Gibraltar history and anthropology, and the founder director of Calpe Press, a publishing house dedicated to promoting Gibraltar writings.

Dr. Ballantine holds a PhD in Postcolonial Studies from the University of Kent, and from 2003-2006 was the Research Associate on the project *Gibraltar Community and Identity*, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. With Professor Andrew Canessa, from the University of Essex, she is the recipient of a major award from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), for their project *Bordering on Britishness: An Oral History of Gibraltar in the 20th Century*, which started in September 2013.

On 14-16 November 2016 Dr. Ballantine visited the University of Vigo to collaborate on our research project (FFI2014-53930-P) *Variation in English Worldwide* (ViEW; view0.webs.uvigo.es), particularly on the compilation of the Gibraltarian component of the *International Corpus of English* (ICE; ice-corpora.net/ice), which we have been appointed to compile. Through our work we have come to realize that it is not until you know Gibraltar from the inside that you start to understand and appreciate the complexity and richness and the Gibraltarian people and their identity. To know more about the history, culture, identity and language of Gibraltar, we asked Dr. Ballantine to answer a few questions for us, which she kindly accepted.

E.S.: *Dr Ballantine, thank you for coming to the University of Vigo and for your seminar on the sociolinguistic and cultural aspects of Gibraltar in the 21st century. You are the director of the Gibraltar Garrison Library, one of the oldest cultural institutions in Gibraltar. What is its history?*

J.B.: In 2011 I took over the running of the Garrison Library. It is one of the oldest cultural institution in some respects, but in others it was a private library and club for officers of the garrison only. So culturally it has its own, I'd say, historical backdrop, a very specific one at that. The Garrison Library was established in 1793 for the officers of the garrison of Gibraltar on the back



of the Great Siege of Gibraltar, which took place between 1779 and 1783, and during that time one of the young officers, then Captain Drinkwater, lamented the fact that his officers had no reading materials to hand. They read all the books, and since nothing was getting in under siege conditions they had no fresh material to read. After the Siege heset about establishing a library through private subscription amongst the officer class. At the end of every month all these officers would pay a certain amount of money towards the Garrison Library for the acquisition of books and so the library was set up; not as an MOD [Ministry of Defense] establishment, not as a Gibraltar cultural establishment, but as a private library, a private concern for an officer class. I think this is very interesting because the fact that the library was sustained as a private concern, as a private subscription library, between 1793 and 2011 is just in itself... the mind boggles. How did they do it? How did they manage to keep the library? You've seen the huge magnificent library, how did they manage to keep that going? The library had restricted access, only men, only officers were permitted to be members, so women were not allowed in, but neither were any other soldiers, non-commissioned officers nor squaddies, you know, soldiers with no rank were not permitted. So it was a very elitist institution.

E.S.: *From 2011 onwards, it changed radically. Is it now a public library?*

J.B.: It's not a public library, we're a reference library. We are working our way towards recognition as Gibraltar's National Library. In that respect the aim is to institutionally turn the library around so that we can enjoy and make use of the wonderful collection, and make it a library that everybody can enjoy rather than an institution that the community will continually perceive of as elitist and restricted. So is about access for us at the moment, making sure the access is there.

E.S.: *The Gibraltar Garrison Library today is much more than a collection of books. I understand you organize cultural events and exhibitions on various aspects of Gibraltarian culture.*

J.B.: Yes, the organisation of cultural events and exhibitions are part of our Outreach Program and part of dispelling this impression that we are a place where access is restricted. So, since 2011 I've been actively trying to bring people into the library. Exhibitions and cultural events are a good way to do that. Since we opened we've had a number of exhibitions. I'll just mention two. The first was in 2012, just months after I took over. We have an archive of a fox hunt. The British in Gibraltar established the fox hunt which you know is very traditionally a British endeavour, a British sport, a blood sport at that. This was a fox hunt that in 1906 had royal patronage, in that the King of England, Edward VII, became a royal patron of the Calpe Hunt, and Alfonso XIII, the king of Spain, became joint royal patron of the hunt. This tells you something about how Gibraltar is very good at setting up networks of reciprocity to some extent. So, one of the first exhibitions that I curated



was on the archive that we hold on the Royal Calpe Hunt, the fox hunt. It was really good; I brought together members of Larios family in Gibraltar: Pablo Larios, Marqués de Marzales, a Gibraltarian, born in Gibraltar from a Spanish father but who then was naturalized and also became Gibraltarian. Pablo Larios was the Master of the hunt for over forty years. I contacted some of the Larios family and they came over to Gibraltar for the exhibition, and I thought that was really quite amazing. We had a saddle, a coat, a hunting coat of Lady Harrington, who was a joint Master with Pablo Larios in 1935, and we had the minute books and beautiful photographs of the hunt going back to the 19th century. That was an important exhibition for us. I think it just opened our doors up to a lot of people.

Last year we had two exhibitions; the most important one was an exhibition on the First World War. Every year we're commemorating a year of the First World War and in March 2015 we exhibited our collection of newsprint and journals. Some were produced especially during the First World War and they offered a blow-by-blow account of the events as they unfolded. One thing I hadn't realised when looking at these was that they're very graphic. These were photographs of men and soldiers that had been blown up, horses blown to bits and you sort of think that this sort of graphic reportage only takes place now in the 21st century and that we somehow are desensitised, but it was happening at the time as well. We went back a hundred years to March 1915, the second year of the war, and through all the newsprint and the journals that we have we just focused on that month [March] with the battles that were taking place, with the lists of the dead, of those that had fallen. The library also holds the Army Lists for the Officers of British Army; we placed on display all the Army Lists for that period, with hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of officers and hundreds of hundreds who just died senselessly during the war. So the Army Lists, I feel, were the most significant items of exhibitions.

In terms of cultural events we have poetry recitals; we are also part of the organising team of the Gibraltar Literary Festival, which is an international festival. It is a wonderful cultural event in our calendar. With more of an academic backdrop, we hold a symposium every year, an international conference looking at some very pertinent issues and topical ones that reflect the times that we are experiencing now, that impact on Gibraltar, and we look at both local and global contexts for all these issues. So outreach I think is quite wide in that respect. I must add, that the Garrison Library has in recent years been used for a House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee sitting in 2014 and for meetings of Overseas Territories representatives.

E.S.: *As linguists we are interested in the digitalization of the newspaper Gibraltar Chronicle, since it will provide us with valuable diachronic linguistic data. Can you tell us about the newspaper itself and the digitalization project?*

J.B.: *The Gibraltar Chronicle was established in 1801 and it is linked to the Garrison Library. The Garrison Library moved to its new premises, which is*



a wonderful Georgian building, in 1800. In 1801 the printing press came to Gibraltar and it came to Gibraltar through the Garrison Library, and it [the Library Committee] set up the *Gibraltar Chronicle*. Initially it was set up to provide news for its readership, a military readership who would have spoken English, read English, and understood English, whereas the local population wouldn't have necessarily spoken English. So the circulation of the *Gibraltar Chronicle* from its inception is for a very close set initially. Therefore the *Gibraltar Chronicle* first came out in May 1801 and was born from the Garrison Library and continued to be managed by the Garrison Library up until the 1980s; then the Garrison Library and the *Gibraltar Chronicle* became two separate entities, although still very connected. The *Gibraltar Chronicle* became more of a commercial entity, and at that stage, less of a garrison organ and more of a local newspaper. The interesting thing about this is that the *Gibraltar Chronicle* is the second oldest newspaper in English to have been continuously in print, therefore is an important newspaper in terms of the history of print culture.

E.S.: *And its digitalization will make it available for everyone.*

J.B.: Yes. We're looking at the model along the same lines as *The London Times*. They have a really excellent digitized product that they offer online, also to academic institutions. We've been working for the last few years with the National Archives at Kew, so we are following the same procedure as in the British Library and as in the National Archives at Kew, and we are hoping to use the same machinery, the same scanners. We have funding for this; for example, the Kusuma Trust in Gibraltar has funded our consultation process.

E.S.: *Jennifer, you are also the editor of the Gibraltar Heritage Journal. What kind of publications does it include?*

J.B.: The *Gibraltar Heritage Journal* is very eclectic in some ways in that you'll have historical essays, or you'll have reminiscences, or even just some notes and queries of some historical curiosity. As a publication it is a mixed bag with an assortment of articles. At the same time, they all point towards Gibraltar's historical past and Gibraltar's heritage.

E.S.: *In September 2015 the University of Gibraltar was opened. Is it a private institution? What are the requirements for entrance? Is it interested in having international students? Maybe from Spain as well?*

J.B.: It's a public institution. As universities are public in the United Kingdom, and in Spain as well, except that you also have private universities. As a public institution and as a European institution, of course European students, students from other parts of the EU, are able to attend the University of Gibraltar. That would include Spain as it would Portugal as it would the United Kingdom.

E.S.: *We were wondering as linguists whether it is possible that in the future having a University in Gibraltar will change the linguistic landscape, since some Gibralt-*



tarians won't have to leave Gibraltar to go to the UK to study their university degrees. What's your view on this?

J.B.: Not in the immediate future, for two reasons. Maybe I'm just speculating about these questions, but it is very culturally ingrained, I have to say, on the one hand, and it is expected, that Gibraltar students will, if they have a place in a university in the UK, study abroad. This is seen as part of their education, part of their seeing a world outside of Gibraltar which in itself is also part of an education. Almost like a rite of passage, though perhaps I'm romanticizing this a bit. This is why I don't think that students will necessarily attend the Gibraltar University. I think students will continue to go to the United Kingdom. The second reason why I believe this is the case is because the University of Gibraltar is set up to reflect a very specific Gibraltar orientated perspective or at least to deliver on subjects that are quite specific to Gibraltar's geographical and historical backdrop. Therefore, we are not going to be offering courses necessarily on American Literature, or medicine, etc. because there is no specificity and there is no reason why Gibraltar would be offering these courses where we have no specialism at the moment. The courses that are being designed and developed, certainly in the post graduate institutes, the Institute for Gibraltar and Mediterranean Studies and the Institute for Life and Earth Sciences, are focusing on the very things that Gibraltar has expertise in. Therefore, the course content that will be developed will have that specificity and expertise behind it; it will be looking at Gibraltar, its location, the Strait of Gibraltar, the question of migrations, the question of language, which is of great interest to you, the question of how the crossroads of cultures and of languages that we find ourselves in impacts on questions of identity and linguistic nuances. These are the sort of subjects. The same with archeology, with natural history, with Gorham's Cave: we have now a UNESCO World Heritage Site that looks at Neanderthals. And Gibraltar is, I'm sure I'll get this wrong and Clive [Professor Clive Finlayson, Director of the Gibraltar Museum, of the new World Heritage Site and also Director of the Institute for Life and Earth Sciences at the University of Gibraltar] will then be annoyed at me if I do, but I think that Gibraltar has now been recognised, as being the last stronghold for Neanderthals in Europe. So again there's a lot going-on in very important key subjects and those are the subjects that our university will focus on. Therefore, there'll be many students in Gibraltar who will be studying something else [some other subject] and will in any case have to go to the United Kingdom to seek those subjects.

E.S.: *You've just mentioned the Research Institute for Gibraltar and Mediterranean Studies, which you're director of. What are the activities in this and in the other research institute at the University of Gibraltar?*

J.B.: The Institute for Gibraltar and Mediterranean Studies is a post-graduate institute and therefore we do not run any courses, but we do have a post-graduate community and PhDs that come under this institute. We are a humanities-



based institute looking at questions of literature, history, archeology, ethnographic studies, social anthropology, language. Language in Gibraltar is very important because of all the nuances and because of this thing called Yanito that almost becomes a national language without even being a language in its own right. So as a post-graduate institute it is important in that we do focus on a lot of the subjects that refer to Gibraltar, modern-day Gibraltar.

E.S.: *Ten years ago Prime Minister Peter Caruana said that “our identity is distinct separate and unique. As a community the only way in which we can be accurately described is therefore as Gibraltarians.” And my question is, is Gibraltarianness an issue that people discuss at home or among friends?*

J.B.: I don't know. I don't know if people discuss this at home or with friends, but I do know that there has been a concentrated emphasis on discussing identity. I was away from Gibraltar for a period of years, and from when I left in 1994 to when I came back in 2007, in that period of time this question of identity had somehow erupted in a way that I hadn't heard before, certainly not when I left initially. I suspect that the tercentenary commemoration of the taking of Gibraltar in 2004 would have focused everybody's minds towards the fact that it was three hundred years since Gibraltar was taken from Spain, and this must mean something; at that time a number of publications were produced which aimed to look at the question of Gibraltar. I think that also the question of identity is also important politically, which is why Sir Peter Caruana mentioned this. He mentioned this as well because in the 1960s when the Franco government sought to have Gibraltar decolonised in Spain's favor through the United Nations, the foreign secretary of the time for the Spanish government produced something called the *Red Book* in which all the efforts were to disqualify the Gibraltar people as a people in their own right with an identity. This attempt to suggest that Gibraltar had no people with any unique identity, any sense of identity, hit very hard, because it somehow disqualified a whole people to have a right to a homeland, saying that Gibraltarians were a made up people of migrants -which I have to say, yes, but not made up. People come and go and that's the ebb and flow of life. So identity has been a very strong question because Gibraltarians have had to prove it all the time, to be able to say “but we *are* a people, but we *are* Gibraltarians.” Gibraltar is our homeland and this where Sir Peter Caruana is coming from. In 2004, the tercentenary of the taking of Gibraltar really concentrated all efforts towards thinking about this very carefully and try to understand and to digest identity a bit further.

E.S.: *In 1967 you had a referendum and 99% of the Gibraltarian people chose to remain under British sovereignty. There is a commemoration next year, is that so?*

J.B.: Yes, next year 2017 we commemorate 50 years from the 1967 referendum. There was another referendum in 2002 in Gibraltar. This was at the time when you had a PP government here with Aznar, and Tony Blair suggested a resolution. This is an ongoing issue, the question of Gibraltar and Spain,



and the territorial integrity question, and the contested sovereignty. So that's ongoing. I think it needs to be parked in some way and understood, but I know that in 2002 the suggestion of joined sovereignty came to rise and there was another referendum at the time. And again 99.9% of the population said that they could not go down the road of joint sovereignty. Then Spain rejected it anyway because they did not want joint sovereignty, because it was a question of 100% sovereignty or joint sovereignty as an interim position before full sovereignty. So it wasn't a situation that could really happen.

E.S.: *Focusing now on linguistic issues, according to the sociolinguistic literature there are several generations of speakers in Gibraltar. The second generation, which is our age, from 40 to 59, is supposed to use mainly Yanito and Spanish but also English depending on the situation and the context. Do you think we can generalise this fact according to age or are there other factors that also contribute to the use of one language or another?*

J.B.: I am a second generation speaker according to them. I think that social class and educational background has a certain amount of influence in this question. I know that I never spoke Spanish. I spoke it very, very badly when I was a teenager, and I didn't really speak it well until well into my twenties and even thirties. So I'd only speak English. Then, when I went to secondary school, I realised that there was a whole group of other girls who could speak English and Spanish, and could also speak English and Spanish at the same time, and I couldn't. But I wasn't the only one who couldn't: all those who were in my class at the convent had that same problematic. So, you can't generalise to say that the second generation would have Spanish and English and Yanito. I think that there are more variables over here.

E.S.: *Galicia, like other linguistic communities in Spain, is bilingual. In the past the situation was diglossic, Spanish being the language of prestige, Galician being the language of rural areas to be used only at home. Younger generations now don't feel that way because Galician is empowered from the regional government. Does this diglossic situation exist in Gibraltar today? Are there different perceptions of English and Spanish in terms of prestige?*

J.B.: Maybe not so much today but the theory goes that Gibraltarians learnt Spanish from a working class, Spanish, say, laborers who come across the border to work every day in Gibraltar, working in households perhaps as cleaning ladies. So, the suggestion is that Gibraltarians learnt Spanish from a class that was already a very working class, perhaps a semiliterate class, and therefore the language in itself was of a certain type and not as sophisticated had Gibraltarians been in contact with a more professional class. That is the theory, that Gibraltarians learnt Spanish in this way, and that accounts for, to a great extent, the almost incompleteness of the Spanish that we have learnt. There is also another reality that education in Gibraltar was, up until the Second World War, in Spanish mostly and in the hands of the church to ensure that catechism was being taught. There were newspapers other than



the *Gibraltar Chronicle*, for example, *El Calpense*, *El Anunciador*, all Gibraltarian papers written in Spanish produced for a local readership, which gives you some idea how widespread Spanish was. In terms of any writings produced in Gibraltar before and maybe just after the Second World War, they were all in Spanish. Two fully fledged novels which are the earliest as far as I can tell. Both were published in the mid to late 1920s, both in Spanish and good Spanish at that. A number of poetry collections as well in Spanish, a play in Spanish. So [spoken and written] Spanish couldn't have been that bad. I've read them, they are good, the Spanish is very correct. So I don't know how these theories stand except that I know the Spanish was good post Second World War.

Then, after the Second World War, everything changes. The civilian population gets evacuated to the United Kingdom so that Gibraltar can function as a fully fledged fortress just in case of an attack. The British authorities in charge of the whole evacuation process suddenly realise that they have hundreds of children who they can't educate because they can't speak English. They have classrooms full of children who they can't educate because they mostly only speak Spanish and some English, but not sufficient, and they feel like they've let these children down. Because of a colonial mission to educate, to transfer this language, to be able to make, you know, transform them into good colonial subjects and they failed in their mission. That's when they set about figuring out how to resolve this problem, and that's when a formalised state education system in Gibraltar is established. On the back of the Second World War and when this children return, there is already the start of a formalised state education in place in Gibraltar, in English. And many other things in placestart setting Gibraltar down the route of the killer English phenomenon [laughs], English as a killer language.

E.S.: *Is Spanish disappearing? Why?*

J.B.: Yes, it is, with generation Y, in terms of the global generational terminology - in sociolinguistic terms it would be a third and fourth generation. I think a fourth generation is mostly monolingual, even though they may suggest they are bilingual because they do have some code switching and may speak a form of Yanito, which in itself is not a stable form of communication. It changes depending on the occasion, on the subject, on who you are talking to really. The suggestion that this generation Y, the fourth generation, is bilingual may be true in a very limited way, but I doubt it very much. I think that English is becoming the main language for this generation, and code switching is probably very difficult; only certain terms enter their register but not every term that perhaps an older generation would be able to use.

E.S.: *You mentioned that there were some debates or small-scale attempts to keep Spanish, to give some support to it.*

J.B.: Yes, I think that. I'm not so sure how established this is yet in the education system, but there is some discussion about Spanish being given within the



national curriculum a more prominent position. This is just a debate that I've heard, but I can't speak on any official capacity because I don't really know. This is really about equipping our students with languages, languages which would be of use to them within a professional capacity, as students, etc. So it could be Spanish and it could equally be French, it could equally be German. I'm not sure how far this initiative has gone but I know that there has been some discussion in this area.

E.S.: *Thank you, Jennifer, for your time and your insights on Gibraltar. We would not be able to carry out the compilation of the corpus without your invaluable help, and without your cooperation we would not be able to appreciate the identitarian, social, historical and cultural dimensions of Gibraltar English.*

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