

TEXT ANALYSIS AND TRANSLATION METHODOLOGY

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When we speak of text analysis we tend to think of two general approaches: the literary approach and the linguistic approach. However, when we talk of text analysis and the translator, we find that we need a different method or *modus operandi*. While borrowing from both aforementioned approaches, other factors have to be considered that make it necessary to include concepts associated with fields of study such as semiotics, cultural and social anthropology, communications, philosophy, etc. In this paper today, I wish to outline a theoretical approach to text analysis for translation which offers a framework from which to teach both theoretical and practical translation in class¹. This approach owes its greatest debt to work being done within systemic functional linguistics and discourse analysis or text linguistics.

As I have written elsewhere on this topic, I shall limit myself here to the statement that as translation clearly deals with language in use and in a specific context, approaches to language which take the text as the object of enquiry are an obvious choice for providing the linguistic framework from which to work².

Neither shall we enter into the polemical topics of whether translation is an art or a science³, whether translation is really feasible at all⁴ or whether it

¹ For further details on the theory behind this approach, see Hatim, I and Mason, I. *Discourse and the Translator* Nueva York: Longman 1990.

² «Proposals for a textlinguistic approach to translation training» Actas del 1er, 2 y 3er simposios de traducción Vol. I (forthcoming).

³ Lauren Leighton in the introduction to his translation of Kornei Chukovsky's *A High Art* refers to Chukovsky as «the author of this first major study in world literature of the art of translation». Leighton Lauren G. *The Art of Translation* Knoxville: University of Tennessee 1984 p. ix.

See also Radice W. & Reynolds B. *The Translator's Art. Essays in Honour of Betty Radice*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1987.

is possible to teach translation. Our approach presupposes that translation is possible and that some method and guidelines can be given to teach translation. We agree with Jean Delisle when he states the following:

There will always be translators who have the ability to transpose messages from one language to another without consciously referring to a set of principles. Today, however, the ever increasing demand for professional translators cannot be met by the few individuals who are able to dispense with systematic training. There are also translators whose work is unsatisfactory because they have not devoted any thought to the problems of translation, and others who are convinced that language rather than meaning must be translated.(...) In most cases, intuitive knowledge of the rules of translation is not enough.(...) Teaching requires the systematization of empirical knowledge because, before a phenomenon can be explained, it must be broken down into its constituent parts⁵.

Our aim is therefore to formulate a framework from which to work with the purpose of systematizing empirical knowledge with a view to pinpointing likely problematic items, considering solutions so that conscious choices are made. The primary concerns within our translation methodology include a detailed analysis of the source language text, and keeping in mind the purpose of that text and the purpose of the translation and the target language text, its subsequent reformulation in the target language.

Another basic concept behind our theory is that translation is not merely a transfer of linguistic structures from the source language to the target language, but should involve the effective encoding of meaning —both semantic and pragmatic— from one culture to another. Danica Seleskovitch, in her foreword to Jean Delisle's publication *Translation: an Interpretive Approach*, goes a step further when she states the following:

The object of translation is meaning, taken in its full sense, which is much broader than semanticists and linguists have so far acknowledged. As the translators and interpreters associated with the Ecole Supérieure d'Interprètes et de Traducteurs de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, Université de Paris III, push their studies further, it becomes increasingly apparent that meaning is in fact the object of language and the focus of communication⁶.

Levy, J. *The Art of Translation*. Prague 1963. etc.

Wolfram Wilss clearly considers translation a science. Vid. Wilss, Wolfram *The Science of Translation* Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag 1982.

See also Nida, E. *Toward a Science of Translating* Leiden: E. J. Brill 1964.

⁴ Ortega y Gasset among others maintained that translation was an impossible undertaking. Ortega y Gasset, J. «Miseria y esplendor de la traducción» en *Obras Completas Tomo V (1933-41)* Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1970, pp. 431-452.

⁵ Jean Delisle *Translation: An Interpretive Approach*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa 1988 p. 31. This is an English translation of part one of *L'analyse du discours comme méthode de traduction: théorie et pratique*. Ottawa: Université de Ottawa 1980.

⁶ *Ibid.* pp. vii-viii.

While some might find this statement of semantics being the core of language controversial, no-one will deny that while thorough knowledge of languages and their workings is essential to the translator if he or she is to interpret the source language text and translate it adequately, knowledge of linguistic codes is not sufficient in itself to guarantee an efficient translator. So-called bilinguals are not necessarily good translators. The translation process involves innumerable cognitive complements relating to varied fields such as semiotics, anthropology and so on, that together with the linguistic elements create a meaning in the translator's mind which he then reformulates in the target language.

Today, we are going to discuss the analysis of texts for translation and consider some of the elements that come into play and that can help to pinpoint problematic points that the translator is likely to come across. At the same time we must also keep in mind how the text will be reformulated in the target language with a view to retaining as much as possible the intention and effectiveness of the original. Our approach to text analysis is holistic and based on a top-down approach to discourse, where we take advantage of shared knowledge, discourse types and functions and then work down to discourse techniques, cohesive devices and basic units. Similar texts are always chosen in English and Spanish for analysis and translation and discussion on comparative discourse organisation on a macro and micro level is encouraged and has proved to be a productive area within the classroom. Experience shows that an effective way of approaching a text is to first consider the source and the expectations that source automatically arouses in the reader. If we know the source of a text, we can predict certain elements related to linguistic, textual and content items from our knowledge of the world and from our knowledge of similar texts. Comprehension and communication in all situations depend to a certain extent on this kind of prediction or inferencing. To illustrate this point, we can consider the expectations aroused by the following sources of texts—an instruction manual, a recipe, a short story written for children of eight, a legal text, an article from an extreme right wing newspaper or a formal letter. At this point, we can also consider whether the target language will require a particular style or form. The content or meaning obviously should remain the same, but in some cases form is part of content and meaning, and failure to conform to the standard will affect the meaning. Jokes and humorous situations often depend on the violation of just such norms to produce comic effect.

Next, we should proceed to read the text and consider whether our expectations have been confirmed. At this point we should also consider whether the text contains any particular idiolect—including jargon, literary language, etc., or dialect—which may be geographical, social, temporal, non-standard—and whether this will be important when translating. In some texts we may find juxtaposition of differing dialects or idiolects,

sometimes accidental due to quotations or references and sometimes deliberately done to create an effect, and this should be taken into account when the translation is done. Here, we can mention literary texts like *Pygmalion* or *Changing Places*. Non-literary texts will include newspaper articles when we have quotations within a text, advertisements, etc. At this first reading, and still within Halliday's theory of register, we can identify the field, mode and tenor of the text or of possible subtexts such as dialogue within narration. Here, we consider the type of text, the purpose for which it was written —to be read carefully or quickly, or, as in the case of this paper, to be read aloud, and finally, the tenor which may range from the extremely informal including slang, colloquial language, through neutral and progressively through to the extremely formal language of written documents. If we consider here for example formulaic texts like letters which require standardised forms, and consider in particular a formal letter of complaint, we can appreciate that one language may require a more formal approach while another may prefer a more direct approach. An extremely formal letter in English can be used to convey rudeness. Another relevant aspect related to language and tenor is the case of texts written for children to read themselves in informal language or easy English where phrasal verbs may abound and which cause a certain amount of difficulty for translation into Spanish as the Spanish text needs to read naturally and be appropriate for children too. This type of exercise is useful as Spanish students realise that the «easy» English of a native English speaker is certainly not necessarily easy for the Spanish speaker. Equally, it is relevant to teach our students that Latinate vocabulary in English is not associated generally with informal or colloquial texts but to more formal language and would therefore be inappropriate for use in a story written for young children.

Another factor to take into account is the type of text — whether it is descriptive or narrative and here we must refer to concepts originally developed within psychology and epistemology and included within text linguistics or discourse analysis, such as schema and frames. In the case of instructive or argumentative texts we can speak of scripts and plans⁷. Different types of text will also produce different macro discourse structures and as research indicates that differing cultures often use differing discourse strategies⁸, these are also questions to be considered when translating.

⁷ De Beaugrande, R. and Dressler, W. *Introduction to Text Linguistics* Londres: Longman 1981 p. 90-91.

⁸ See Canale, M. et al «Evaluation of minority student writing in first and second languages» and Fine, J. «The place of discourse in second language study» in Fine, J. Ed. *Second Language Discourse: A Textbook of Current Research*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation 1988.

Also O'Connor, U. «Argumentative patterns in students' essays: cross cultural differences» in Connor & Kaplan (Eds.) *Writing Across Languages: Analysis of L2 Text* Addison-Wesley Publishing Co. 1987.

The next step is the identification of problematic semiotic items — these may be cultural, linguistic or textual. Often these items are bound in the source language text and unless carefully considered will produce a different meaning in the target language text. Examples of cultural elements will include historical and literary figures and events, proper nouns or references to everyday occurrences which may mean or imply nothing, something slightly different or even opposite meaning if translated thoughtlessly from one language to another. A classic example here is Sir Francis Drake who is a hero for one culture and a pirate for another. Similarly a literary reference may be lost if translated. Obviously references to texts that are products common to both Spanish and British civilisations such as the Bible or Latin and Greek mythology etc. will not necessarily require further consideration, and a decision to include extra information within the text, a footnote, not explain the reference or to omit it altogether will depend on the author's intention on including the reference, the type of text and the purpose of the translation. Within linguistic items, we can include lexical items that may be problematic for reasons of polysemy, homophony, connotation etc. or phrasal items such as idiomatic expressions, proverbs and so on. We would also include here figurative language and items traditionally associated more with literary analyses such as metaphor, simile, alliteration, personification, irony, understatement and hyperbole which must also be identified as such by the translator so that both semantic and pragmatic meaning can then be adequately translated.

Textual elements include formulaic expressions which require communicative translation, «communicative» in the sense defined by Peter Newmark⁹. Examples here would include expressions in English such as «Once upon a time... and they lived happily ever after», «Dear Madam», «Going, going, gone!», «Cheers», similarly, notices and warnings including road signs, etc. These items situate the reader or listener of the source language text and need to be translated effectively into the target language text.

Finally, we turn to text structure and text organisation. How is the text organised in the source language? How will it be organised in the target language? Do discourse structures necessarily transfer well? How does a well balanced sentence in one language become one in another? Elements to take into account here include the four divisions of reference, ellipsis and substitution, conjunctions and lexical cohesion, presented originally by Halliday and Hasan in *Cohesion in English*¹⁰ and further developed in later

Also Clyne, M. «Cultural differences in academic texts» *Journal of Pragmatics*. Vol. II NO. 2 April 1987 pp. 211-247. and «Discourse structures and discourse expectations: implications for Anglo-Germanic academic communication in English» in Smith, L. (Ed.) *Discourse Across Cultures: Strategies in World Englishes* Prentice-Hall International 1987.

⁹ Newmark, Peter *A Textbook of Translation* Exeter: Prentice Hall International 1988. p. 45.

¹⁰ Halliday M.A.K. & Hasan R. *Cohesion in English* London: Longman 1976.

publications. Work done with students reveals that lack of recognition of the cohesive function of these elements often produces peculiar texts in Spanish. Cohesion in Spanish is not attained necessarily in the same way. Admittedly, sometimes cohesive devices do coincide, but not always and very often the strangeness of translated texts is due to effects produced at this suprasentential or textual level. Work with students has also shown that lack of detection of the adversative conjunction «yet», which students frequently confuse with the adverbial «yet», in an argumentative text can result in a translation where the meaning and purpose is completely different from or contrary to the original source language text.

Translation has been limited for far too long within university curricula to pedagogical translation which is basically a remnant of teaching based on the grammar translation method. Here, fragments of texts, usually literary, are given to students for translation and few, if any, guidelines are offered. Often these texts contain extremely complex linguistic structures and are marked by the author's idiolect. They are not the most appropriate types of text for translation as translation is a complicated process which cannot be simplified and, therefore, effective teaching of translation often requires the use of material which is not linguistically complicated. Furthermore, as one translation is of little relevance to another, there is little or no reinforcement of knowledge from one text to another. The aim behind this type of exercise is to test the student's comprehension of a complex source text and then test the grammatical correctness of the target language text. This type of exercise is now referred to as «transcoding» rather than translation as it is evident that far more is involved in translation than a simple transfer of linguistic codes. For this reason, while borrowing heavily from linguistic research and in particular from discourse analysis, in translation studies we must also be open to other areas of research and part of the attraction of this field of studies lies in the need for such eclecticism. Text analysis of the type described today is an essential part of translation theory and practice and no doubt with time and with research being done in other areas including those mentioned previously and more recent areas such as computational linguistics and automatic translation, more elements will have to be introduced.

To summarise, if we analyse and translate similar types of texts in both English and Spanish with a view to pinpointing problematic points, discussing solutions and making conscious decisions and at the same time encourage the comparison of possibly differing textual discourse patterns and organisation, the student will appreciate being provided with a method which is in itself productive. This type of framework also offers the teacher and students a common metalanguage so that discussion in class is possible in more concrete terms and translation assessment can be carried out more effectively as we are allowed some sort of vision of the process and work that lies behind a translation. Peter Newmark compares the translation activity to an iceberg:

«The tip is the translation —what is visible, what is written on the page— the iceberg, the activity, is all the work you do, often ten times as much again, much of which you do not even use»¹¹.

The methodology for text analysis and translation presented here today is an attempt to systematize and describe the translation process which lies beneath the final translated text or the «tip of the iceberg».

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 12.

