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Translation as Means or End As Imitation or Creation

The Process of Translation

Translation is concerned with moral and with factual truth. This truth can be effectively rendered only if it is grasped by the reader, and that is the purpose and the end of translation. Should it be grasped readily, or only after some effort? That is a problem of means and occasions. I begin this discussion by unifying my dual theory of semantic and communicative translation with three propositions (two correlations and a rider).

(a) The more important the language of a text, the more closely it should be translated. This is valid at every rank of the text; the text itself; the chapter; the paragraph; the sentence; the clause; the group (which may coagulate as an idiom, e.g. 'couldn't help laughing'); the collocation that lexically cuts across the group ('defuse a crisis', 'decisively defeat'); the word; the morpheme (e.g. 'pro-', 'pre-', 'nephro-', '-junct-', '-less' all *pace* M. A. K. Halliday, eminently translatable); the punctuation mark (e.g. that French colon). Other linguistic units such as proverbs, metaphors, proper names, institutional terms, familiar alternatives (*gatos* as Madrilenos, citizens of Madrid; *hrad* as the Czechoslovak presidency), eponyms ('Ceausescu' as 'tyrant') may be found at one or more of these ranks. Sometimes one word (like 'chaos'?) may be more important than the unit at any other rank of the text. If sound (alliteration) or phonaesthetic effect (rhythm) is of prime importance, that too has to be rendered, or at least compensated.

Conversely, (b) the less important the language of a text or any unit of text at any rank, the less closely that too need be translated, and therefore it may be replaced by the appropriate normal social language (for example: *Se algo puede dar un golpe mas fuerte que los que de Gorbachev, solo es el caos total.* 'Only total chaos could shake the Soviet Union as much as Gorbachev has done.'). Or again, the less important the nuances of meaning of the text, the more important the message to be communicated, the more

justification for (smoother) undertranslation, which simplifies or clarifies the place (*Stelle*) in the translation.

But (c), and this is the rider, the better written a unit of the text, the more closely it too should be translated, whatever its degree of importance, provided there is identity of purpose between author and translator, as well as a similar type of readership. If the details and nuances are clearly expressed, they should be translated closely, even though they could just as well be paraphrased. There seems no good reason not to reproduce the truth, even when the truth is not particularly important.

These many references require definitions and illustrations of the terms 'importance' and 'close'. 'Importance' superficially depends on the occasion of the translation and the client's criteria, but it may also be imposed on the translator by the values of the text.

'Importance' may be defined as language that denotes what is exceptionally valuable, significant, necessary or permanent.

Further, importance may be conferred on a text or a quotation by the status of whoever is responsible for it. I refer to such a text as authoritative; thus the phrase 'to be or not to be'; *sein oder nicht sein; être ou ne pas être; ser o no ser* (which limits its meaning), or the nouns in the phrase 'Water consists of hydrogen and oxygen', where 'consists of' is not important, since it may be replaced by 'is' (*es de*) or 'is composed of' (*se compone de*), or 'constitutes' (*constitue*) or 'comprises' (*consta de*) or 'is the equivalent of' (*es equivalente a*) etc., in descending order with negligible semantic loss. Similarly, in many contexts it is not important whether one translates *bien* or *buen* as 'good', 'fine', 'OK', 'excellent', *parfait* etc., provided that the message gets across. Note, too, that the important

factor in a text may not be restricted to words or other linguistic units, but may be tone (urgency), style (harsh), form (chaotic), metaphor (for its concision), or sound-effect (for emphasis), and they may be imposed by the occasion, e.g. by the requirements of clients or readers. Moreover, if the importance of a text lies merely in its means rather than its end, it is a decorative text, and the translator may change its meaning to suit the sound, as in Jiri * Levy's famous Morgenstern example: 'a weasel sat on an easel', 'a parrot swallowed a carrot', 'a cadger was chasing a badger', etc. The important element of a text is the invariant factor that has to be reproduced without compromise in an exercise that often entails many compromises.

Further, the term 'close' has to be defined. The closest translation is transference, where the source language (SL) word (*glasnost*) or idiom ('last but not least' in German) or collocation (*dolce vita*) or cultural (*tagliatelle*) or institutional (*Cortes*) term is already more or less rooted in the target language (TL), provided the term has not yet changed its meaning. The more

rooted it is, the more it modifies its pronunciation and its connotations in the direction of the TL, e.g. 'Berlin', 'machismo'. After that, close translation may be grammatical or lexical. Grammatical, first when a group or clause is reproduced ('after his arrival', *nach seiner Ankunft*); secondly, when it is rendered by its standard equivalent ('extremely important', *d'une importance extrême*), where the emphasis is changed, however; thirdly, when it is replaced by a more remote grammatical recasting ('which reaches the height of importance'). Lexical, beginning with word for word translation 'large garden', *grosser Garten*, although 'garden' may connote a less formal image in English than in other languages; secondly, an average one-to-one up to six-to-six translation from 'Friday' as *vendredi*, 'measles' as *rougeole*, 'soldier' as *militaire*, 'sailor' as *marin* or *matelot*, up to, say, *la matrone et la mal mariée* as 'the matron and the mismarried woman' may reach a degree of closeness varying from perfect equivalence through correspondence to adequacy (fruitless to define equivalence a common academic dead-end pursuitor to pronounce where equivalence ends and where correspondence, or adequacy, begins). One can, however, state that the longer the passage, the less close the translation may be, but that the dissimilarity between the generics 'bowl' and *bol* may be greater than that between this English 'bowl' and that French *bol*.

Further translation procedures, roughly in order of closeness, are:

- componential analysis ('murky' street as *rue sombre et sale*, *calle oscura y sucia*);
- modulation ('no mean city' as *ciudad soberbia*);

- descriptive equivalent (*escudilla* as 'hollow dish');
- functional equivalent ('knife' as *instrumento cortante*);
- cultural equivalent (*bachillerato* as 'GCE A-level', *paella* as 'stew') cultural equivalents are usually inaccurate but they are a shorthand, have emotional force, are useful for immediate effect on the receptor, e.g. in the theatre or cinema (dubbing or sub-titling), and they transport the readership uncritically into the TL culture;
- synonymy, say *difícil problema* for 'awkward-' or 'tricky problem' or *problème épineux*, which is pretty feeble, but all the Larousse (English to Spanish) gives, and which may, in the context, be all that is necessary;
- paraphrase, the loosest translation procedure, which simply irons out the difficulties in any passage by generalising: *por la razon de la sinrazon de un puyazo en el morrillo* ('owing to the injustice of a blow

to the back of a bull's neck' as 'why the picador has to do that to the bull's neck').

A general principle of closeness in translation is that normal or natural social usage must be rendered by its normal, equally frequent equivalent in any text; thus for 'cheers', *merci* or *au revoir* or *à la tienne*; in an authoritative text, both innovation or cliché should be reproduced (both to the same degree of deviation from normal usage in TL as in SL); but they should be replaced by normal usage, neat and unobtrusive, in any non-authoritative text. So if Mrs Thatcher proclaims 'The ship of State may founder', or James Joyce writes 'The figure was that of a broadshouldered deepchested strong-limbed frankeyed freely freckled brawnyhanded hero', the first statement has to be rendered by an equally banal phrase, while the second has to be translated virtually word for word, with some attempt to reproduce the alliteration. But if both sentences were the work of hacks, you might translate 'The Government may founder' and perhaps 'He was exceptionally attractive and well-built'.

The proposition 'The more important the language of a text, the more closely it should be translated', together with its corollary and its rider, is an attempt to narrow the gap between, on the one hand, translators and translation theorists who are instinctively and intuitively target text oriented *ciblistes*, as Ladmiral has called them, which I translate as 'targeteers' and on the other hand their 'adversaries' who like myself are instinctively and intuitively source text oriented (*sourciers* (Ladmiral) or 'sourcerers' (me)). In this or that context, targeteers lean towards ends, sourcerers towards means. Instinctively (a scrap example), a targeteer

translates 'Buck House' as 'Buckingham Palace', a sourcerer as 'Buck House, as Buckingham Palace is called by some trendies'. My proposition is a sliding scale which eliminates any dividing line between the two contrasted approaches. I have tried to show that this natural opposition pointed up by key-words such as Beauty versus Truth, Text versus Word, Message versus Meaning, Reader versus Writer, Social versus Personal, Gestalt versus Part, Global versus Particular, are far from irreconcilable, and may overlap or merge. Eugene Nida, the first linguist who took translation seriously and scientifically, pointed this out 35 years ago, and he is the dominant figure amongst the targeteers, who are likely to include most non-literary translators. The dominant sourcerer or literalist was Nabokov, then Benjamin and Stefan George; now perhaps it's Nida's critic Meschonnic. I can only say from my experience in classrooms that both factions can learn from each other, and bring their versions closer to each other's, although they will never be identical; hence the silliness of all fair copies, there are always alternatives leaning the one way or the other, hence communicative and semantic translation (see Appendix).

The Product of Translation

My emphasis up to now has been on the process of translating on how to translate the means. If I now discuss the product the end either as what we are aiming at or the value of what has been achieved, there are again two views. The first is relative: descriptive, historical, socio-cultural, it sees a translation as a product of its culture and its time, as a component of another the TL literature written to meet the requirements of new readers, which it studies. Crudely, it is a package for new customers. It is true that throughout history, and notably in the Roman and the Elizabethan periods, there is little to choose between the styles of many translations and their originals, in particular of poetry and comedy, where the translation is often an adaptation. There are, for instance, few correspondences between Ronsard's *Quand vous serez bien vieille, au soir, à la chandelle*, and Yeats's 'When you are old and grey and full of sleep'. Yeats's poem, which does not claim to be a translation, can be studied as a cultural product of its time (or, more profitably, independently). This attitude, which virtually ignores the source language text, hardly suits serious translations of serious originals, but it is appropriate for adaptations of comedies, ephemeral texts and blockbusters.

The second view of the product is critical and evaluative, and requires a continuous comparison of the translation with the original and a verification of correspondences, grammatical, lexical and often phonaesthetic. It is more concrete and detailed, often more pedantic and pedantic, than the first view, and shows up moral as well as stylistic and linguistic deficiencies. It covers all types of texts factual as well as imaginative and exposes a

translator's prejudices as well as ignorance. Thus two hundred years ago Tytler exposed Voltaire's preposterous version of Hamlet's 'To be or not to be' where there are no verbal correspondences, and Hamlet is translated into a sceptic and a free-thinker.

The Discussion of Translation

I want now to put forward a view about the discussion of translation. I see this as a continual interplay between generalisations and translation examples. I see no use in uninterrupted theorising, still less in resorting to mathematical models, geometry (diagrams) or algebra (alphabetic symbols), or conjuring up situations miscalled *Beispiele* (examples), unless they are supported by brief SL to TL translation quotations, real or invented, in or out of context. Sometimes a scrap example, if it is typical, is sufficient:

'henceforth' for *désormais* ('in the future'); 'thanks to' for *grâce à* ('owing to'); 'despite' for *malgré* ('in spite of'); 'alter' for *altérer* ('spoil'); 'dilapidation' for *effondrement* ('collapse'); 'now' for *or* ('furthermore') one has to beware of the slightly old-fashioned now 'literary' words often given in bilingual dictionaries ('sully', 'demur', 'helpmate'), the too personal words in non-literary texts ('strive', 'essay', 'attain'), all of which can also be faulted by the equal frequency translation principle. I feel uneasy if I write more than a dozen lines about translation without producing an example, partly to explain, illustrate and support my 'theory', partly to invite discussion reaction in favour or against, and in the hope of finding a *rapprochement*, a conciliation if not an agreement. I do not pretend that my views are ever other than personal (but they are not subjective) and I have no illusion that when I invoke moral or universal arguments that many of my readers will accept them. The misguided idea that translation is neutral and has nothing to do with human rights or human welfare dies as hard as the view that art or sport have nothing to do with politics. *Die Übersetzung ist menschlich, la traducción es humana*, translation is human that states an end; the means 'translation' and the end 'human' are philosophically 'synthetic', which cannot be perverted or diverted by an odd context or readership or special function.

The central element of translation discussion, whether theoretical or practical, is the typical, whether we discuss principles, examples, structures, occasions, readerships or texts. One can have too much of 'it all depends on what you mean by ...' or 'give me the context' or 'use decides everything' necessary as these are for non-typical cases. A tree is a tree is a tree in English, though in Spanish and French it may also and quite often be a shaft.

But just as translation, like language, appears to be a rule-governed activity (and you learn most from the rules, the typical), so, as in language, this is not always the case. Language develops mainly by breaking the rules, by innovations sometimes syntactically ('catch on', 'be on', 'be into'), more often lexically by giving words new senses ('crumbly', 'wrinkly', 'crinkly', 'golden oldy' all words for 'seniors', 'senior citizens'; note the cultural focus on age). So translation follows language, like a 'royal robe with ample folds', as Benjamin (1979) put it; where the original innovates, the translator is compelled to innovate; where the original uses culture specific language (*glasnost* again, as it breaks with a long cultural tradition), the translator is free to be creative. So rule is violated by play, by circumscribed creativity, by freedom within limits.

The Creative Element of Translation

Ironically, the ludic element cuts right across the balance, the correlation (the more the more; the less the less), the definition of translation method with which I began this piece. Where there is a concise symbol (the flesh as weakness), a weird metaphor (the rocking chair as old age), a deviant structure (the for me intended rebuff), a word that exposes a lexical gap (shin or fair play), the translator may have to improvise or import, both of which are creative acts. So the translator starts denting, distorting the target language, breaking Toury's translation (al) norms, inserting another culture.

The creative element in translation is circumscribed. It hovers when the standard translation procedures fail, when translation is 'impossible'. It is the last resource, but for a challenging text it is not infrequently called on. If it dominates a text as in Andrew Jenkins's translations in Fritz Paepcke's *Im Übersetzen Leben*, or in Pound, or in many pre-Romantic translations it becomes an adaptation, an idiosyncratic interpretation which can hardly be verified (or a bad translation). I think an at least approximate verification, where there are correspondences to be assessed through back-translation, is the scientific element in an appraisal of any translation.

It is not difficult to produce scrap examples of what I mean by creative translation, say in Patrick Creagh's brilliant translation of Claudio Magris's (1986) *Danubio: una vera passione* (a true passion) as 'a downright passion'; *diventando una pure sta straziata rettorica* (becoming a rhetoric, even though tortured) as 'turning into rhetoric, however lacerated that rhetoric might be'; *una mina*

d'odio (a mine of hatred) as 'a time-bomb of hatred'; *di neve* (of snow) as 'snow-fresh'; *notte assoluta* (absolute night) as 'night in its most absolute sense'; *la prosa del mondo* (the prose of the world) as 'the humdrum world' the fitness of these creative translations can be better appreciated in a larger context, but you can see they are a kind of deepening, an *approfondissement*, of literal translation, a for once justified attempt to go below the words to the author's thinking.

The argument for creative translation is the obverse of the argument for the strict impossibility of translation leaving aside the argument that any kind of translation decision, say translating *Gewalt*, *force*, *forza* as 'violence' rather than 'force' (German has only one word anyway) to stress brutality (which is a bottom line argument) could trivially be described as creative. Admittedly or minimally, there is no argument for impossibility in translating routine texts. In informative texts the creative element is limited to fusing the facts with an appropriately elegant and economical style, as often

in *The Guardian Weekly's* translations of *Le Monde* articles. In persuasive texts, creativity often lies in converting source language cultural components (forms of address, evaluative expressions, hypocorisms) neatly into their cultural equivalents, say toning-down Latin hyperbole *egregio*, *illuminatissimo*, *carissimo* to British English understatement ('dear').

However, it is in expressive texts poetry, stories, sagas, that are considered to be untranslatable by a succession of Romantic and post-Romantic literary people (from Humboldt through Croce and Ortega y Gasset to Graves and John Weightman), where words represent images and connotations rather than facts that creativity comes into play, and the play of words becomes creative. I list the most obvious occasions for the need for creativity:

1. Cultural words subjects or activities with connotations, that are specific to one community (*koa* for 'furniture').
2. Transcultural words with similar referents and different connotations the 'classical' examples are the staples: bread, rice, wine, etc.
3. Concept words with different emphases in different communities ('liberalism', 'liberty', 'obedience', 'bureaucracy').
4. Peculiar syntactic structures ('Seeing you is good', *Et lui de partir*).
5. Cultural metaphors, idioms, proverbs, puns, neologisms. They may have to be spelt out in the TL concision, force, nuances of meaning are lost or compensated.
6. Significant phonaesthetic effects ('bauble', 'pullulate').

7. Quality words with no one-to-one equivalent ('downright', 'grand', 'wonky').

This list is not exhaustive, and to a translator it is depressing, but useful. Yet we all know that, more or less anything that is said in one language can be said in another, and often has to be. All the above seven factors are a stumbling block only when their full meaning is functionally important, when it is a component of the actual message rather than a marginal nuance. When they are important, they have to be compensated by overtranslation, which adds further meaning (say, 'grand' translated as *grandiose* or *magnifique*). When they are not, a synonym (*maladroit* or *ungeschickt* for 'gauche'), or a generic term ('jellyfish' for *medusa*), or a recast nominal group (*à te voir* or *Dich zu sehen* for 'seeing you') may do, and the phonaesthetic effect has to be sacrificed (often, it is merely slightly rhetoricalthe ragged rascal)usually it is.

Whilst in principle the meaning of any word in any language is unique, owing to differences in frequency, usage, connotations and lexical gaps in

other languages in context, the great majority of non-cultural words have perfectly satisfactory equivalents in other languages. Their number depends mainly on the degree of contact present and past between the languages, and therefore the cultures, in question.

Creativity in translation starts where imitation stops. The imitative procedures defined 32 years ago by Vinay & Darbelnet (1965) as 'direct translation' are transference (*emprunt*), through-translation (*calque*), and literal translation. The other procedures, four of them defined as 'indirect translation' (but there are rather more than those four) are all in one sense or another creative. The wider and the more numerous the choices, the more (in quality and in quantity) creativity is required. Again, if the translator adopts larger units of translation; seeks dynamic equivalents (say substitutes TL culture for SL culture, 'bits and pieces' for *tapas*); unearths the sub-text, the hidden agenda, the *vouloir-dire*; is pre-eminently target-language oriented, s/he is less circumscribed, more creative and liberty in translation easily turns to licence. Creativity at its most intense is in translating poetry, where there are so many important additional factors: words as images, metre, rhythm, sounds. Inevitably a good translation of a poem is as much a modest introduction to as a recreation of the original. But again the most successful is the closest, the one that can convincingly transfer the most important components of the source into the target text. The most creative translated poem is one that is most compressed:

Foul yellow mist had filled the whole of space:
 Steeling my nerves to play a hero's part,
 I coaxed my weary soul with me to pace
 The backstreets shaken by each lumbering cart.
 (*The Seven Old Men*, Roy Campbell, 1952)

Un brouillard sale et jaune inondait tout l'espace
Je suivais, roidissant mes nerfs comme un héros
Et discutant avec mon âme déjà lasse,
Le faubourg secoué par les lourds tombereaux.
(*Les sept Vieillards*, Charles Baudelaire, 1857)

Conclusion

I have attempted to redefine my approach and evaluation of translation, and to show how creativity is called upon in a serious text when strict accuracy combined with economy apparently breaks down. In a shoddily written informative text a different kind of creativitythe ability to turn

bad into good writing is required. In a routine, say economic text, it would be flattering of the translator to refer to the use of the 'indirect' procedures as creative.

I have considered at times both ends and means. Addressing my title, I would say that both ends and means are always important, that the end never justifies inappropriate means (the writing), and that for a serious text its end and means often prescribe those of the translation (it being of greater value) which may require an unaccustomed humility from the translator.

Appendix to Chapter 1

Communicative and Semantic Translation

(The concepts of communicative and semantic translation represent my main contribution to general translation theory.)

1. In communicative as in semantic translation, provided that equivalent effect is secured, the literal word-for-word translation is not only the best, it is the only valid method of translation. There is no excuse for unnecessary 'synonyms' or elegant variations, let alone paraphrases, in any type of translation.
2. Both semantic and communicative translation comply with the usually accepted syntactic equivalents or correspondences for the two languages in question.
3. Communicative and semantic translation may well coincide in particular, where the text conveys a general rather than a culturally (temporally and spatially) bound message and where the matter is as important as the manner.

4. There is no one communicative or one semantic method of translating a text these are in fact widely overlapping bands of methods. A translation can be more, or less, semantic more, or less, communicative even a particular section or sentence can be treated more communicatively or less semantically.

5. The vast majority of texts require communicative rather than semantic translation. Most non-literary writing, journalism, informative articles and books, textbooks, reports, scientific and technological writing, non-personal correspondence, propaganda, publicity, public notices, standardised writing, popular fiction the run-of-the-mill texts which have to be translated today but were not translated and in most cases did not exist a hundred years ago comprise typical material suitable for

communicative translation. On the other hand, original expression (where the specific language of the speaker or writer is as important as the content), whether it is philosophical, religious, political, scientific, legal, technical or literary, needs to be translated semantically. A communicative translation may well be a useful introduction, a simplified version, to the semantic translation of such texts.

6. There is no reason why a basically semantic translation should not also be strongly communicative.

7. Meaning is complicated, many-levelled, a 'network of relations' as devious as the channels of thought in the brain. The more communication, the more generalisation; the more simplification, the less meaning. (I am writing against the increasing assumption that *all* translating is (nothing but) communicating, where the less effort expected of the reader, the better.)

TABLE 1.1 *Features of semantic and communicative translation*

<i>Semantic translation</i>	<i>Communicative translation</i>
1. Author-centred.	Reader-centred.
2. Pursues author's thought process Related to thought.	Pursues author's intention. Related to speech.
3. Concerned with author as individual.	Adapts and makes the thought and cultural content of original more accessible to reader.
4. Semantic- and syntactic-oriented. Length of sentences, position and integrity of clauses, word position, etc. preserved whenever possible.	Effect-oriented. Formal features or original sacrificed more readily.
5. Faithful, more literal.	Faithful, freer.
6. Informative.	Effective.
7. Usually more awkward, more detailed, more complex, but briefer.	Easy reading, more natural, smoother, simpler, clearer, more direct, more conventional, conforming to particular register of language, but longer.

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TABLE 1.1 (*cont.*)

<i>Semantic translation</i>	<i>Communicative translation</i>
8. Personal.	Social.
9. Source language biased.	Target language biased.
10. Over-translated: more concentrated and more specific than original.	Under-translated: use of 'hold-all' terms.
11. More powerful.	Less powerful.
12. Always inferior to the original because of loss of meaning.	May be better than original because of gain in force and clarity, despite loss in semantic content.
13. Out of time and local place 'eternal'.	Ephemeral and rooted in its context, 'existential'.
14. Wide and universal.	'Tailor-made' or targeted for one category of readership; does one job, fulfils one particular function.
15. Inaccuracy is always wrong.	A certain embroidering, a stylistic synonymy, a discreet modulation is condoned, provided the facts are straight and the reader is suitably impressed.
16. The translator has no right to improve or to correct.	The translator has the right to correct and improve the logic and style of the original, clarify ambiguities, jargons, normalise bizarre personal usage.
17. Mistakes in the original should (and must) be pointed out only in footnote.	The translator can correct mistakes of facts in original.
18. Target: a 'true' version, i.e. an exact statement.	Target: a 'happy' version, i.e. a successful act.

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TABLE 1.1 (*cont.*)

<i>Semantic translation</i>	<i>Communicative translation</i>
19. Unit of translating: tends to words, collocations and clauses.	Unit of translating: tends to sentences and paragraph
20. Applicable to all writings with original expressiveness.	Applicable to impersonal texts.
21. Basically the work of translating is an art.	Basically the work of translating is a craft.
22. Usually the work of one translator.	Sometimes the product of a translation team.
23. Conforms to the 'relativist' position of cultural relativity.	Conforms to the 'universalist' position, assuming that exact translation may be possible.
24. Meaning.	Message.

Related Notions

Equivalent effect principle (Koller, 1972), equivalent response principle (Rieu, 1953)

Dynamic equivalence/formal equivalence (Nida, 1964)

Effect-centred text translating (Reiss, 1968)

Cultural translation/linguistic translation (Catford, 1965)

Ethnographic translation/linguistic translation (Mounin, 1963)

Direct procedures/indirect procedures (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958)

Overt translation/covert translation (House, 1977)

Prospective translation/retrospective translation (Postgate, 1922)

Illusionistic translation (that the translation is the original)/anti-illusionistic translation (that the translation is a translation)

Exporting the TL reader/importing the SL author (Morgan, 1956)