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A METHODOLOGY FOR TRANSLATION

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AT FIRST THE different methods or procedures seem to be countless, but they can be condensed to just seven, each one corresponding to a higher degree of complexity. In practice, they may be used either on their own or combined with one or more of the others.

Direct and oblique translation

Generally speaking, translators can choose from two methods of translating, namely direct, or literal translation and oblique translation. In some translation tasks it may be possible to transpose the source language message element by element into the target language, because it is based on either (i) parallel categories, in which case we can speak of structural parallelism, or (ii) on parallel concepts, which are the result of metalinguistic parallelisms. But translators may also notice gaps, or “lacunae”, in the target language (TL) which must be filled by corresponding elements, so that the overall impression is the same for the two messages.

It may, however, also happen that, because of structural or metalinguistic differences, certain stylistic effects cannot be transposed into the TL without upsetting the syntactic order, or even the lexis. In this case it is understood that more complex methods have to be used which at first may look unusual but which nevertheless can permit translators a strict control over the reliability of their work: these procedures are called oblique translation methods. In the listing which follows, the first three procedures are direct and the others are oblique.

Procedure 1: Borrowing

To overcome a lacuna, usually a metalinguistic one (e.g. a new technical process, an unknown concept), borrowing is the simplest of all translation methods. It would not even merit discussion in this context if translators did not occasionally need to use it in order to create a stylistic effect. For instance, in order to introduce the flavour of the source language (SL) culture into a translation, foreign terms may be used, e.g. such Russian words as “roubles”, “datchas” and “aparatchik”, “dollars” and “party” from American English, Mexican Spanish food names “tequila” and “tortillas”, and so on. In a story with a typical English setting, an expression such as “the coroner spoke” is probably better translated into French by borrowing the English term “coroner”, rather than trying to find a more or less satisfying equivalent title from amongst the French magistrature, e.g.: “*Le coroner prit la parole*”.

Some well-established, mainly older borrowings are so widely used that they are no longer considered as such and have become a part of the respective TL lexicon. Some examples of French borrowings from other languages are “*alcool*”, “*redingote*”, “*paquebot*”, “*acajou*”, etc. In English such words as “menu”, “carburetor”, “hangar”, “chic” and expressions like “*déjà vu*”, “*enfant terrible*” and “*rendez-vous*” are no longer considered to be borrowings. Translators are particularly interested in the newer borrowings, even personal ones. It must be remembered that many borrowings enter a language through translation, just like semantic borrowings or faux amis, whose pitfalls translators must carefully avoid.

The decision to borrow a SL word or expression for introducing an element of local colour is a matter of style and consequently of the message.

Procedure 2: Calque

A calque is a special kind of borrowing whereby a language borrows an expression form of another, but then translates literally each of its elements. The result is either

- i a lexical calque, as in the first example, below, i.e. a calque which respects the syntactic structure of the TL, whilst introducing a new mode of expression; or
- ii a structural calque, as in the second example, below, which introduces a new construction into the language, e.g.:

English-French calque

Compliments of the Season!

Science-fiction

Compliments de la saison!

Science-fiction

As with borrowings, there are many fixed calques which, after a period of time, become an integral part of the language. These too, like borrowings, may have undergone a semantic change, turning them into faux amis. Translators are more interested in new calques which can serve to fill a lacuna, without having to use an

actual borrowing (cf. “*économiquement faible*”, a French calque taken from the German language). In such cases it may be preferable to create a new lexical form using Greek or Latin roots or use conversion (cf. “*l’hypostase*”; Bally 1944:257 ff.). This would avoid awkward calques, such as:

<i>French calque</i>	<i>English source</i>
thérapie occupationnelle	occupational therapy
Banque pour le Commerce et le Développement	Bank for Commerce and Development
les quatre Grands	the four great powers
le Premier Français	The French Premier
Le mariage est une association à cinquante—cinquante.	Matrimony is a fifty—fifty association.
<i>(Les Nouvelles Littéraires, October 1955)</i>	
l’homme dans la rue	the man in the street
<i>(Revue des Deux Mondes, May 1955)</i>	[instead of “l’homme de la rue” or “le Français moyen”]
compagnon de route	fellow-traveller
<i>(Le Monde, March 1956)</i>	
La plupart des grandes décisions sur le Proche-Orient ont été prises à un moment où Sir Winston Churchill affectait de considérer comme “vide” la “chaise” de la France sur la scène internationale.	Most major decisions regarding the Near-East were taken when Churchill pretended that the chair occupied by France on the international scene was empty. [instead of: “la place” or “le fauteuil”]
<i>(Le Monde, March 1956)</i>	

Procedure 3: Literal translation

Literal, or word for word, translation is the direct transfer of a SL text into a grammatically and idiomatically appropriate TL text in which the translators’ task is limited to observing the adherence to the linguistic servitudes of the TL.

I left my spectacles on the table downstairs.	J’ai laissé mes lunettes sur la table en bas.
Where are you?	Où êtes-vous?
This train arrives at Union Station at ten.	Ce train arrive à la gare Centrale à 10 heures.

In principle, a literal translation is a unique solution which is reversible and complete in itself. It is most common when translating between two languages of the same family (e.g. between French and Italian), and even more so when they also share the same culture. If literal translations arise between French and English, it is because common metalinguistic concepts also reveal physical coexistence, i.e.

periods of bilingualism, with the conscious or unconscious imitation which attaches to a certain intellectual or political prestige, and such like. They can also be justified by a certain convergence of thought and sometimes of structure, which are certainly present among the European languages (cf. the creation of the definite article, the concepts of culture and civilization), and which have motivated interesting research in General Semantics.

In the preceding methods, translation does not involve any special stylistic procedures. If this were always the case then our present study would lack justification and translation would lack an intellectual challenge since it would be reduced to an unambiguous transfer from SL to TL. The exploration of the possibility of translating scientific texts by machine, as proposed by the many research groups in universities and industry in all major countries, is largely based on the existence of parallel passages in SL and TL texts, corresponding to parallel thought processes which, as would be expected, are particularly frequent in the documentation required in science and technology. The suitability of such texts for automatic translation was recognised as early as 1955 by Locke and Booth. (For current assessments of the scope of applications of machine translation see Hutchins and Somers 1992, Sager 1994.)

If, after trying the first three procedures, translators regard a literal translation unacceptable, they must turn to the methods of oblique translation. By unacceptable we mean that the message, when translated literally

- i gives another meaning, or
- ii has no meaning, or
- iii is structurally impossible, or
- iv does not have a corresponding expression within the metalinguistic experience of the TL, or
- v has a corresponding expression, but not within the same register.

To clarify these ideas, consider the following examples:

He looked at the map	Il regarda la carte.
He looked the picture of health.	Il paraissait l'image de la santé.
	Il avait l'air en pleine forme.

While we can translate the first sentence literally, this is impossible for the second, unless we wish to do so for an expressive reason (e.g. in order to characterise an Englishman who does not speak very good conversational French). The first example pair is less specific, since “*carte*” is less specific than “map”. But this in no way renders the demonstration invalid.

If translators offer something similar to the second example, above, e.g.: “*Il se portait comme un charme*”, this indicates that they have aimed at an equivalence of the two messages, something their “neutral” position outside both the TL and the SL enables them to do. Equivalence of messages ultimately relies upon an identity of situations, and it is this alone that allows us to state that the TL may retain certain characteristics of reality that are unknown to the SL.

If there were conceptual dictionaries with bilingual signifiers, translators would

only need to look up the appropriate translation under the entry corresponding to the situation identified by the SL message. But such dictionaries do not exist and therefore translators start off with words or units of translation, to which they apply particular procedures with the intention of conveying the desired message. Since the positioning of a word within an utterance has an effect on its meaning, it may well arise that the solution results in a grouping of words that is so far from the original starting point that no dictionary could give it. Given the infinite number of combinations of signifier s alone, it is understandable that dictionaries cannot provide translators with ready-made solutions to all their problems. Only translators can be aware of the totality of the message, which determines their decisions. In the final analysis, it is the message alone, a reflection of the situation, that allows us to judge whether two texts are adequate alternatives.

Procedure 4: Transposition

The method called transposition involves replacing one word class with another without changing the meaning of the message. Beside being a special translation procedure, transposition can also be applied within a language. For example: “*Il a annoncé qu’il reviendrait*”, can be re-expressed by transposing a subordinate verb with a noun, thus: “*Il a annoncé son retour*”. In contrast to the first expression, which we call the base expression, we refer to the second one as the transposed expression. In translation there are two distinct types of transposition: (i) obligatory transposition, and (ii) optional transposition.

The following example has to be translated literally (procedure 3), but must also be transposed (procedure 4):

Dès son lever...	As soon as he gets/got up...
As soon as he gets up...	Dès son lever...
	Dès qu’il se lève...

In this example, the English allows no choice between the two forms, the base form being the only one possible. Inversely, however, when translating back into French, we have the choice between applying a *caique* or a transposition, because French permits either construction.

In contrast, the two following phrases can both be transposed:

Après qu’il sera revenu...	After he comes back...
Après son retour...	After his return...

From a stylistic point of view, the base and the transposed expression do not necessarily have the same value. Translators must, therefore, choose to carry out a transposition if the translation thus obtained fits better into the utterance, or allows a particular nuance of style to be retained. Indeed, the transposed form is generally more literary in character.

A special and frequently used case of transposition is that of interchange.

Procedure 5: Modulation

Modulation is a variation of the form of the message, obtained by a change in the point of view. This change can be justified when, although a literal, or even transposed, translation results in a grammatically correct utterance, it is considered unsuitable, unidiomatic or awkward in the TL.

As with transposition, we distinguish between free or optional modulations and those that are fixed or obligatory. A classical example of an obligatory modulation is the phrase, “The time when...”, which must be translated as “*Le moment où...*”. The type of modulation which turns a negative SL expression into a positive TL expression is more often than not optional, even though this is closely linked with the structure of each language, e.g.:

It is not difficult to show...

Il est facile de démontrer...

The difference between fixed and free modulation is one of degree. In the case of fixed modulation, translators with a good knowledge of both languages freely use this method, as they will be aware of the frequency of use, the overall acceptance, and the confirmation provided by a dictionary or grammar of the preferred expression.

Cases of free modulation are single instances not yet fixed and sanctioned by usage, so that the procedure must be carried out anew each time. This, however, is not what qualifies it as optional; when carried out as it should be, the resulting translation should correspond perfectly to the situation indicated by the SL. To illustrate this point, it can be said that the result of a free modulation should lead to a solution that makes the reader exclaim, “Yes, that’s exactly what you would say”. Free modulation thus tends towards a unique solution, a solution which rests upon an habitual train of thought and which is necessary rather than optional. It is therefore evident that between fixed modulation and free modulation there is but a difference of degree, and that as soon as a free modulation is used often enough, or is felt to offer the only solution (this usually results from the study of bilingual texts, from discussions at a bilingual conference, or from a famous translation which claims recognition due to its literary merit), it may become fixed. However, a free modulation does not actually become fixed until it is referred to in dictionaries and grammars and is regularly taught. A passage not using such a modulation would then be considered inaccurate and rejected. In his M.A. thesis, G.Panneton, from whom we have borrowed the term modulation, correctly anticipated the results of a systematic application of transposition and modulation:

La transposition correspondrait en traduction à une équation du premier degré, la modulation à une équation du second degré, chacune transformant l’équation en identité, toutes deux effectuant la résolution appropriée.

(Panneton 1946)

Procedure 6: Equivalence

We have repeatedly stressed that one and the same situation can be rendered by two texts using completely different stylistic and structural methods. In such cases we are dealing with the method which produces equivalent texts. The classical example of equivalence is given by the reaction of an amateur who accidentally hits his finger with a hammer: if he were French his cry of pain would be transcribed as “Aïe!”, but if he were English this would be interpreted as “Ouch!”. Another striking case of equivalences are the many onomatopoeia of animal sounds, e.g.:

cocorico	cock-a-doodle-do
miaou	miaow
hi-han	heehaw

These simple examples illustrate a particular feature of equivalences: more often than not they are of a syntagmatic nature, and affect the whole of the message. As a result, most equivalences are fixed, and belong to a phraseological repertoire of idioms, clichés, proverbs, nominal or adjectival phrases, etc. In general, proverbs are perfect examples of equivalences, e.g.:

Il pleut à seaux/des cordes. Like a bull in a china shop.	It is raining cats and dogs. Comme un chien dans un jeu de quilles.
Too many cooks spoil the broth.	Deux patrons font chavirer la barque.

The method of creating equivalences is also frequently applied to idioms. For example, “To talk through one’s hat” and “as like as two peas” cannot be translated by means of a calque. Yet this is exactly what happens amongst members of so-called bilingual populations, who have permanent contact with two languages but never become fully acquainted with either. It happens, nevertheless, that some of these calques actually become accepted by the other language, especially if they relate to a new field which is likely to become established in the country of the TL. For example, in Canadian French the idiom “to talk through one’s hat” has acquired the equivalent “*parler à travers son chapeau*”. But the responsibility of introducing such calques into a perfectly organised language should not fall upon the shoulders of translators: only writers can take such liberties, and they alone should take credit or blame for success or failure. In translation it is advisable to use traditional forms of expression, because the accusation of using Gallicisms, Anglicisms, Germanisms, Hispanisms, etc. will always be present when a translator attempts to introduce a new calque.

Procedure 7: Adaptation

With this seventh method we reach the extreme limit of translation: it is used in those cases where the type of situation being referred to by the SL message is unknown in the TL

culture. In such cases translators have to create a new situation that can be considered as being equivalent. Adaptation can, therefore, be described as a special kind of equivalence, a situational equivalence. Let us take the example of an English father who would think nothing of kissing his daughter on the mouth, something which is normal in that culture but which would not be acceptable in a literal rendering into French. Translating, “He kissed his daughter on the mouth” by “*Il embrassa sa fille sur la bouche*”, would introduce into the TL an element which is not present in the SL, where the situation may be that of a loving father returning home and greeting his daughter after a long journey. The French rendering would be a special kind of over translation. A more appropriate translation would be, “*Il serra tendrement sa fille dans ses bras*”, unless, of course, the translator wishes to achieve a cheap effect. Adaptations are particularly frequent in the translation of book and film titles e.g.:

Trois hommes et un couffin	Three men and a baby. [film]
Le grand Meaulnes	The Wanderer. [book title]

The method of adaptation is well known amongst simultaneous interpreters: there is the story of an interpreter who, having adapted “cricket” into “Tour de France” in a context referring to a particularly popular sport, was put on the spot when the French delegate then thanked the speaker for having referred to such a typically French sport. The interpreter then had to reverse the adaptation and speak of cricket to his English client.

The refusal to make an adaptation is invariably detected within a translation because it affects not only the syntactic structure, but also the development of ideas and how they are represented within the paragraph. Even though translators may produce a perfectly correct text without adaptation, the absence of adaptation may still be noticeable by an indefinable tone, something that does not sound quite right. This is unfortunately the impression given only too often by texts published by international organizations, whose members, either through ignorance or because of a mistaken insistence on literalness, demand translations which are largely based on *caïques*. The result may then turn out to be pure gibberish which has no name in any language, but which René Etiemble quite rightly referred to as “*sabir atlantique*”, which is only partly rendered by the equivalent “Mid-Atlantic jargon”. Translations cannot be produced simply by creating structural or metalinguistic *caïques*. All the great literary translations were carried out with the implicit knowledge of the methods described in this chapter, as Gide’s preface to his translation of *Hamlet* clearly shows. One cannot help wondering, however, if the reason the Americans refused to take the League of Nations seriously was not because many of their documents were unmodulated and unadapted renderings of original French texts, just as the “*sabir atlantique*” has its roots in ill-digested translations of Anglo-American originals. Here, we touch upon an extremely serious problem, which, unfortunately, lack of space prevents us from discussing further, that of intellectual, cultural, and linguistic changes, which over time can be effected by important documents, school textbooks, journals, film dialogues, etc., written by translators who are either unable to or who dare not venture into the world of oblique translations. At a time when excessive centralization and lack of respect for cultural differences are driving international organizations into adopting working languages *sui generis* for writing documents

which are then hastily translated by overworked and unappreciated translators, there is good reason to be concerned about the prospect that four fifths of the world will have to live on nothing but translations, their intellect being starved by a diet of linguistic pap.

Application of the seven methods

These seven methods are applied to different degrees at the three planes of expression, i.e. lexis, syntactic structure, and message, For example, borrowing may occur at the lexical level—“*bulldozer*”, “*réaliser*”, and “*stopover*” are French lexical

Table 1 Summary of the seven translation procedures
(Methods in increasing order of difficulty)

	<i>Lexis</i>	<i>Structures</i>	<i>Message</i>
1 Borrowing	F: <i>Bulldozer</i> E: Fuselage	<i>science-fiction</i> à la mode	<i>Five o’Clock Tea</i> Bon voyage
2 Calque	F: <i>économiquement faible</i> E: Normal School (C.E.)	<i>Lutetia Palace</i> Governor General	<i>Compliments de la Saison</i> Take it or leave it
3 Literal	F: <i>encre</i> ↕ E ink	<i>Le livre est sur la table.</i> The book is on the table.	<i>Quelle heure est-il?</i> What time is it?
4 Transposition	F: <i>Expéditeur</i> ↕ E: From	<i>Depuis la revalorisation du bois</i> As timber becomes more valuable	<i>Défense de fumer</i> No smoking
5 Modulation	F: <i>Peu profond</i> ↕ E: Shallow	<i>Donnez un peu de votre sang</i> Give a pint of your blood	<i>Complet</i> No vacancies
6 Equivalence	F: (Mil.) ↕ <i>la soupe</i> E, UK: (Mil.) Tea E, US: chow	<i>Comme un chien dans un jeu de quilles</i> Like a bull in a china shop	<i>Château de cartes</i> Hollow triumph
7 Adaptation	F: <i>Cyclisme</i> ↕ E, UK: Cricket US: Baseball	<i>En un clin d’œil</i> Before you could say Jack Robinson.	<i>Bon appétit!</i> US. Hi!

borrowings from English; borrowing also occurs at the level of the message, e.g. “O.K.” and “*Five o’clock*”. This range of possibilities is illustrated in Table 1, where each procedure is exemplified for each plane of expression.

It is obvious that several of these methods can be used within the same sentence, and that some translations come under a whole complex of methods so that it is difficult to distinguish them; e.g., the translation of “paper weight” by “presse-papiers” is both a fixed transposition and a fixed modulation. Similarly, the translation of PRIVATE (written on a door) by DÉFENSE D’ENTRER is at the same time a transposition, a modulation, and an equivalence. It is a transposition because the adjective “private” is transformed into a nominal expression; a modulation because a statement is converted into a warning (cf. Wet paint: Prenez garde à la peinture, though “peinture fraîche” seems to be gaining ground in French-speaking countries); and finally, it is an equivalence since it is the situation that has been translated, rather than the actual grammatical structure.