

Journey to the Centre of Text,
Discourse Awareness in
Translation

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Journey to the Centre of the Text, Discourse Awareness in Translations

My interest in this paper is not to lay stress on theoretical or practical innovations concerning translation studies; I simply wish to highlight the difficulties that learner-translators have in their attempts to produce adequate English discourse. I will investigate the complex relationship between translation and language-in-text, a kind of dialectic tension which –to borrow from George Steiner– might be described as "Word against Text". (In Steiner's *"After Babel"* it is: "Word against Object")¹.

Now, insofar as all translation begins as an exercise in reading, and if the comparison is allowed, we have to admit that many times we read a text in the same way as we travel through the country or visit a distant town. To read is to go for a walk, and to translate is to take a trip to a foreign country. Indeed, some translations are like going on a journey for the first time. We reach the place, we admire the scenery and notice the differences. We follow the text as we might follow a tour guide, accepting the already established programme. From time to time, we stop before the semantic content of a monument (sentence) and we take a photograph of it. In the end, by means of the text and use of language we are able to complete the linguistic and literary journey to the world of translation. This is what probably Jules Verne's translators had in mind when trying to understand the density of the text and the many layers of meaning in *"A Journey to the Centre of the Earth"* (1874), because they knew most of his books were "veritable minefields of connotations and denotations, ambiguities and metaphors, poetic effects and scientific arguments. If traditionally translation has been either literary or technical, in Verne's case it really has to be both at the same time". (Butcher, 1994)²

Discourse and text

It seems appropriate at this stage to clarify the concept of discourse analysis which is a fairly recent one. It means the analysis of connected speech and writing "above the sentence " and their relationship to the contexts and cultural influences in which they are used. Two main approaches have developed : a) discourse analysis itself focusses on the structure of naturally occurring spoken language, as found in: conversations, interviews, commentaries and speeches; and b) text analysis which focusses on the structure of written language as found in : paragraphs,

1- In G. Steiner 's "After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation".1975.OUP.,chapter 3 makes reference to the "word against object".

2- J.Verne's romantic and fantastic adventure: "La Voyage au Centre de la Terre" which he wrote in 1864 , and which formed part of the science-fiction series "Voyages Extraordinaires", was followed by anonymous translations in 1872 (Griffith and Farran edition, London),1874 (New York and Boston), and several others in 1876,1925 and 1961, for all of which no translator was acknowledged. Then, in 1965 Robert Baldick's translation was written for Penguin and reprinted by Dent in 1970. In 1994, W. Butcher's paper for Babel: "Journey to the Centre of the Text. On translating Verne ", gives an account of some of the pitfalls involved in translating "La Voyage au Centre de la Terre".

essays, summaries, research papers etc. But, this distinction is not clear-cut; some scholars talk about "spoken and written discourse", others about "text linguistics": a term which governs the structure of all forms of text. So, with the development of the latter and the gradual emergence of translation studies as an independent discipline in its own right (no longer relegated to a subsection of Comparative Literature or Applied Linguistics), there has been an increasing awareness of the text, not as a chain of separate sentences, and, these themselves a string of grammatical and lexical items, but as a complex, multi-dimensional structure consisting of more than the mere sum of its parts. In other words, a gestalt, whereby an analysis of its parts cannot provide an understanding of the whole. This view (holistic), focusses on the whole in order to reach the parts; that is to say, individual items, such as words and sentences, are decided by their relevance in the larger context of text, situation and culture.³ Thus, textual analysis, which is an essential preliminary to translation, should proceed from the "top down", from the macro to the micro level, from text to sign.. "Particulars are not to be examined till the whole has been surveyed", said Dr. Samuel Johnson in the 18th. century in his preface to Shakespeare. And, much later, in 1995, Professor Eugene Nida stressed the fact that we must emphasize the role of discourse analysis, context and sociolinguistics. "Because the context tells us more about meaning than the term itself. If you say: "the man was running", you know the kind of running only because of man in the context. If I say: "his nose is running", that's a very different kind of context and run means another thing. Then, if you take a poem and dissect all its parts, for example, it's no longer really a meaningful communication. In order to help people, we must communicate to them the structure of the poem and its purpose. What was the poet really saying? What is the message of the poem? If a poem is worth translating, it ought to have some kind of message!" Prof. Nida went on to say that, until very recently, translators were pulling texts apart and that they had missed the point because what they really want to know is how the parts fit together and how they can put them back together again.

All this search for larger linguistic units and structures has been pursued by scholars whose aim is to see language as a dynamic, social, interactive phenomenon –whether between speaker and listener (as in the case of the interpreter), or writer and reader (for example, the translator). Taking all this into account we can conclude that, if we are going to teach students to translate, we are not going to ask them to do so intuitively, thereby producing stilted translations, but, rather they will be taught the realities of discourse of the language under consideration. To this effect, the learner-translator will realize that translation is a discourse-ori-

3- Gestalt psychology - gestalt theory: a movement in experimental Psychology, originated just prior to World War 1, in which behaviour is studied as undivided wholes or "gestalts. Since the 1950's researchers, pioneered by the German Friedrich Perls, have assumed that separation of mind and body is artificial and that the human organism instead responds holistically to life events. The theory emphasizes awareness and the accurate perception of oneself, of one's needs and of the world. Gestalt style is another term for global learning: a cognitive style in which the learner tries to remember things (a text) as a whole. He starts with a general survey of the text and goes from general to specific (Extensive Reading exercises - Deductive form of reasoning) When the learner remembers something by separating it into parts, it is called analytic style or part learning (Intensive Reading ex. - Inductive form of reasoning)

ented (not a sentence or even word-oriented) process, which must be approached from a text-oriented perspective.

For that purpose, it is necessary at this point, to look at the translation process so as to make it clear that it is not merely a linguistic operation but a cognitive activity (any mental process which students make use of in language-learning such as: inferencing, generalization, deductive reasoning, monitoring and memorizing) that brings together two language levels –content and form– within a communicative framework, in a given situation and as part of a broader sociocultural background. The pedagogical significance of such a method is the emphasis it places on the need for numerous and various receptive language activities before rushing the learners into premature production of translation. If a translation method is well-structured, it will achieve its aim, that is to say, training prospective translators by consolidating the source language and increasing the target language proficiency.

Nonetheless, the main objection to translation as a technique in language learning is based on the assumption that it leads the learners to suppose that there is a direct equivalent between SL and TL items, instead of considering the whole discourse to achieve meaning. This may be true to a certain extent, but it can be argued that if translation teaching is undertaken within a clear discourse framework, the problems of finding the exact equivalent can be controlled. In addition, Peter Newmark, in "A Textbook of Translation", 1988, mentions the not-so-preferable approach by means of which "you start translating sentence by sentence, for say the first paragraph or chapter, to get the feel and the feeling tone of the text, and then you deliberately sit back, review the position, and read the rest of the SL text". He said that if you do so, you will have to trust your intuition especially, and that the danger of this method is "that it may leave you with too much revision to do on the early part, and is therefore time-wasting."

All in all, the point here is that the student should be led to understand, analyze and transmit the same communicative message in the target language as that conveyed by the original. As Mary Snell-Hornby stresses:

"Given the initial command of foreign language, translation presents an ideal opportunity, not merely to learn the technique of translating itself, but, overall, to perfect knowledge about and active mastery of that language, and to investigate interlingual relationships between the two languages concerned, whereby the text functions as an empirical basis".

Processing discourse information for translation

In order to demonstrate the validity and practicality of the above views, the teacher will take into account a number of factors: students'needs, their linguistic background (if their English is poor,standard etc.), the nature of their problems with languages, and so on. He will introduce controlled and guided exercises (also known as discrete-point or closed exercises) such as: matching words or phrases,

true-false statements, gap-filling, word combinations to form compound nouns, multiple choice etc., and then gradually move towards open-ended activities, which allow more freedom such as: paraphrasing, reading and listening comprehension, pair and group work, summary writing etc. In this way the student will move from the known to the unknown, using what has been learnt as parameters for practising the new language. In other words, familiarization will be the key word.

It is sometimes argued that translators start from the meaning, but many writers believe that this is an entirely misleading proposition. "Translators do not start from meanings, but from the signs or forms of the text which they have to read and interpret" (M. Ballard, 1996), such as: repetitions, examples, cause and effect arguments, comparison and contrast... The translator goes beyond the meaning of the text to look in detail at just how the message is being conveyed. It is not enough to just translate, one needs to have an understanding of what one does: of the relationship between 2 signs within a context. An excellent strategy that the teacher can use here, during the first stage of the training is to present would-be translators with: headlines, puns, wordplay, some figures of speech and idiomatic expressions etc., so as to make them aware of how meanings can be construed and misconstrued. And again, the main objective will not be to translate the individual words, because they will miss the point, but rather the play on words, the implications of the comparisons, the omissions of words in the case of headlines and so on and so forth. Indeed, a one-month course on the translation and mistranslation of the examples given ought to be an essential component of any such syllabus.

Another strategy that can be developed to process discourse in order to translate it afterwards, could take the form of the following text: (You will read it first, and you will notice that it is typical of occupational English or EST –English for Science and Technology– discourse). Be ready to say what type of manual this is.

Clock / Radio. Manual

A clock-radio is a type of alarm clock that can be set to turn on a radio in order to wake someone up.

For safe and efficient operation:

1- Do not take the unit apart and do not insert pins or any metal with sharp edges inside the cabinet.

2- You should not drop the clock-radio or subject it to strong shocks. Doing so could result in damage.

3- If water should enter the cabinet, electrical shock or a malfunction may result. Use in an area where there is low humidity and little dust.

4- Do not use the unit in areas where extremes in temperature occur or where it may be exposed to direct sunlight.

5- Keep the unit away from heating appliances and electric sources that could cause static on the radio such as fluorescent lamps and motors.

6- Remember that you should use a clean soft cloth moistened with plain lukewarm water for cleaning the cabinet.

Other instructions follow on how to set time and the alarm, on the radio operation, on the power supply etc.

We define instructions as discourse that tells someone to do (or not to do, as in 1, 2, 4) something. It provides readers with two quite different kinds of information: a) direct instructions, which are characterized by the use of the imperative form of the verbs, particularly in concise, technical texts as this one, which can also be understood by the lay reader. What sentences in the list are direct instructions? Numbers 1, 3 second sentence, 4, 5. Besides, this discourse is usually in the form of a numbered vertical list: 1, 6, that is most often headed by a statement or introduction indicating the goal or purpose of the set of instructions. What sentence is the introduction? –The first one. b) indirect instructions: are identified by the use of modal verbs, the passive mood and, most frequently, a combination of the two. Which ones in the list? – Numbers 2 first sentence and, 6.

And, we still have additional information or discourse that "assists" readers by referring to extra cautions, warnings or descriptions connected with the clock-radio, if necessary.⁴

As can be seen, the example given illustrates all the possibilities in the same text. This list can also be the basis for useful student exercises such as collecting information to form tables and then matching words in the two columns, or, exercises using passives or modals, before they are required to use the discourse information productively: before they undertake the task of translating. For example, they can be told to:

1- Find specific verbs or phrasal verbs in the list, organize them in a column and, finally, make sentences using the imperative form

take... apart

insert...

drop...

use...

expose...

keep... away from...

2- Join all the sentences of the first list (1, 6) with connectives, to form a coherent paragraph. This exercise can take the form of oral or written work. In this way, learners are made aware of different patterns in instructive discourse. Now they are ready to translate. Let's try it together: Radio-despertador. Manual de instrucciones.

El radio-despertador es un tipo (clase) de reloj despertador que se pone en hora (se ajusta) para que encienda una radio y (así poder) despertar a una persona. Introducción.

Para una segura y eficiente operación:

1- No desarmar la unidad y no insertar (inserte) alfileres o cualquier objeto

4- In a functional model of translation as this one, sentences in the imperative mood may perform a variety of different functions: ordering, giving instructions, suggesting, inviting, requesting etc. This approach to linguistics is concerned with language as an instrument of social interaction.

de metal con bordes filosos (puntado), dentro del aparato.

2- No deje caer el radio-despertador y no lo someta a fuertes sacudidas. El hacerlo puede resultar en daños.

3- Si entra agua en el aparato puede causar un choque eléctrico o que el aparato no funcione correctamente. Use en zonas (un área) de poca (baja) humedad y poco polvo.

4- No usar la unidad en áreas de temperaturas extremas (donde ocurran extremos en temperatura), o donde pueda ser expuesta a luz solar directa. (directamente expuesta a luz solar).

5- Mantener la unidad lejos de aparatos calentadores y de fuentes eléctricas que pudieran causar estática en la radio tales como lámparas fluorescentes y motores.

6- Recuerde que debe utilizar un trapo limpio y suave humedecido con agua (pura, sin mezclar) tibia para limpiar el aparato.

So, once a level of proficiency is established in language analysis, the learner-translator will then be in a position to begin translating per se. McEldowney (1982), identified a seven-point process of mental operations, i.e. what takes place in the learner's mind from his reception of the original discourse –decoding– (descodificación), to the production of this discourse into the TL - encoding (codificación). The translator should begin his text analysis by reading and gradually - 1. Identifying - 2. Distinguishing - 3. Classifying - 4. Ordering - 5. Synthesizing - 6. Inferring - 7. Translating.⁵

The text I've chosen to illustrate this type of analysis is the first paragraph of the article "Come in, mars", from *Newsweek*, August 1996. I chose it because it is short, manageable and a complete text in itself, without technical terms and, so, it can be understood by the lay reader. The title "Come in, Mars", can be immediately taken up as part of the conversational style that will prevail throughout the whole article: in this case, the Red Planet Mars is characterized as a guest who is invited in and asked to remain in our planet Earth. We soon find out that its meteorite, found in the Antarctica, was studied for 2 years by a team of scientists who are now ready to prove that life might have existed at some point on Mars (not only the Earth).

"Since human beings first looked into the face of the universe and saw only infinite night, we have wondered who was out there. Not what – that was clear enough. Stars, maybe rocks like the one under our feet. But did anything laugh and cry, have children, build monuments? Was anything looking back wondering the same things about us? Those questions remain unanswered, but last week a team of scientists announced that after two years of staring into a 1.9-kilogram meteorite from our neighbor planet Mars, they had found indications of life. The microscop-

5- Kenneth Burke (Meta, 1986), based his theory of discourse on a pentad. In order to understand the source text and be able to translate it afterwards, he examined 5 principal aspects: translation is an act on the part of the translator (agent), who sees the text as a discourse, as a whole, and not words and sentences, and, who uses the means available in the target language (agency), e.g. imagery, rhetorical devices etc., in a specific scene or context (involving the target culture, social circumstances, period, literary conventions and so on) in which the work was written, and, for a specific purpose (the nature of the translation: legal, technical, literary...)

ic organisms they say they found, never experienced life the way we do. But if they're right, then more than 3 billion years ago they lived – fed, reproduced, died. And the simple fact of their existence radically improves the odds that we are not alone in the universe." (Adam Rogers)

1- Identifying: the text in terms of literary genres: poem, essay, play...or discourse types: narrative, descriptive, expository...It's an expository paragraph. This mental operation may also involve a skimming exercise as words or phrases are picked while reading and while the eye moves rapidly over some body of material:

Mars – universe – stars – questions unanswered – alone in the universe...Or scanning beneath the surface to find the topic of a sentence, paragraph, chapter: Who is outside waiting to come in? – Anything about life on Mars?

2- Distinguishing: one piece of relevant information from another, for instance: same and different, cause or effect etc.: You may start thinking about other possibilities of life in the universe: UFO's (flying saucers) and extraterrestrial creatures that people think might exist on other planets apart from Mars – or discoveries of primitive tribes in Brazil, Africa...

3- Classifying; relevant pieces of information into suitable groups having to do with: Astronomy (the scientific study of the stars), Biology (the scientific study of living things) and why not Astrology or Anthropology?...

4- Ordering; of relevant information according to suitable criteria , as in sequence of occurrence, from general to specific, in a descending size and so on. You think about the Universe and then move on to – the solar system – sun – planets – stars – galaxies – meteorites

5- Synthesizing: relevant information from different sources into a composite whole: the rest of the article mentions the origins of the Universe – NASA scientists and their discoveries since 1960 – The astronauts and their landing on the moon – The space race...

6- Inferring: beyond relevant information that was collected: as establishing a non-stated conclusion or applying general principles to a specific case: The writer is suggesting that maybe we are not alone in the universe or, that there are definitely traces of primitive life in outer space...

7- Translating: after reading the text a second or third time, we proceed down from the macro-structure to the level of lexical cohesion and we include the relationship between the title and the main body of the text.

So now, let's translate the paragraph:

Desde que los seres humanos observamos por primera vez el rostro del universo y sólo vimos una noche infinita, nos preguntamos si habría alguien más allá (fuera de la Tierra). No algo – eso estaba (suficientemente) claro: había estrellas y quizás rocas como la que estaba debajo de nuestros pies. Pero, ¿habría algo que riese y llorase, tuviese hijos, construyese monumentos? ¿Había algo (alguien) que mirase hacia acá, preguntándose las mismas cosas sobre nosotros? Todas esas preguntas siguen sin respuesta, pero la semana pasada un grupo de científicos anunció que, después de observar atentamente (analizar) durante dos años un meteorito de 1,9 kilogramos proveniente de nuestro vecino planeta Marte, había encon-

trado indicios de vida. Los microorganismos que dicen haber descubierto nunca llegaron a vivir como nosotros. Pero si están en lo cierto, (si es cierto lo que dicen), entonces, hace más de 3 billones (3.000 millones) de años tuvieron vida – se alimentaron, se reprodujeron y murieron. Y, el simple hecho de su existencia aumenta radicalmente las posibilidades de que no estemos solos en el universo.

The translation procedure using discourse analysis I have just mentioned, is proposed as a flexible tool enabling the learner to deal with confidence with all 6 meaningful tasks before attempting to begin translating. This prior analysis and effective discourse comprehension will make it possible for him to clarify in his own mind the purpose, scene and means used by the author in the source text. Once he is able to handle the tasks of skimming, finding and organizing the material clearly, that is to say, once he has developed an awareness about the way English and Spanish use individual structures to communicate, he will then be in a position to undertake the final Task of Translating.

Referencias para seguir la lectura del trabajo

1- G. Steiner: *"After Babel.Aspects of Language and Translation"*, 1975. Ch.3, "Word against Object".

2- Translation: exercise in reading. To read: to go for a walk. To translate: to take a trip to a foreign country.

"La Voyage au Centre de la Terre", Jules Verne, 1864.

"A Journey to the Centre of the Earth", Anonymous translation, 1874.

3- Discourse analysis: connected speech and writing "above the sentence" and their relationship to the contexts and cultural influences in which they are used.

a) Discourse: spoken language (conversations, interviews...)

b) Text analysis: written language (paragraphs, essays...) . Text linguistics.

The Text: complex, multi-dimensional structure, consisting of more than the mere sum of its parts. A gestalt. Holistic view: the "whole".

Textual analysis: essential preliminary to translation.

4- Dr. Samuel Johnson (18th.c.) – Prof. Eugene Nida (1995)

5- Language: a dynamic, social, interactive phenomenon.

Translation: discourse-oriented – text-oriented.

linguistic operation - cognitive activity - communicative framework -

given situation - sociocultural background.

6- Peter Newmark, *A Textbook of Translation*, 1988.

7- Mary Snell-Hornby, *The text functions as an empirical basis*, 1988.

8- Processing discourse information for translation:

Controlled and guided exercises: true/false statements, gap filling, multiple choice... Open-ended activities: paraphrasing, reading and listening comprehension...

The translator starts with the signs or forms of the text: repetitions, examples, cause and effect arguments... He goes beyond the meaning and is interested in how the message is being conveyed.

Strategies: headlines, puns, wordplay, some figures of speech...

Clock / Radio. Manual

A clock-radio is a type of alarm clock that can be set to turn on a radio in order to wake someone up.

For safe and efficient operation:

a- Do not take the unit apart and do not insert pins or any metal with sharp edges inside the cabinet.

b- You should not drop the clock-radio or subject it to strong shocks. Doing so could result in damage.

c- If water should enter the cabinet, electrical shock or a malfunction may result. Use in an area where there is low humidity and little dust.

d- Do not use the unit in areas where extremes in temperature occur or where it may be exposed to direct sunlight.

e- Keep the unit away from heating appliances and electric sources that could cause static on the radio such as fluorescent lamps and motors.

f- Remember that you should use a clean soft cloth moistened with plain lukewarm water for cleaning the cabinet.

Direct instructions: imperative. Indirect instructions: modal verbs, passive mood...

Exercises:

1- Find specific verbs or phrasal verbs in the list, organize them in a column and finally, make sentences using the imperative form:

take... apart

insert...

drop...

use...

expose...

keep...away from...

2- Join all the sentences of the first list (1 - 6) with connectives, to form a coherent paragraph.

10- McEldowney (1982): Seven-point process of mental operations from decoding (decodificación) to encoding (codificación): Identifying - Distinguishing - Classifying - Ordering - Synthesizing - Inferring - Translating.

Come in, Mars (Newsweek, August 1996)

"Since human beings first looked into the face of the universe and saw only infinite night, we have wondered who was out there. Not what - that was clear enough. Stars, maybe rocks like the one under our feet. But did anything laugh and cry, have children, build monuments? Was anything looking back wondering the

cry, have children, build monuments? Was anything looking back wondering the same things about us? Those questions remain unanswered, but last week a team of scientists announced that after two years of staring into a 1.9-kilogram meteorite from our neighbor planet Mars, they had found indications of life. The microscopic organisms they say they found, never experienced life the way we do. But if they're right, then more than 3 billion years ago they lived – fed, reproduced, died. And the simple fact of their existence radically improves the odds that we are not alone in the universe." (Adam Rogers)

1- Identifying: literary genres: poem, essay play...Discourse types: narrative, descriptive, expository... This is

2- Skimming exercise: Mars - universe - stars - questions unanswered - alone in the universe... Scanning: Who is outside waiting to come in? Anything about life on Mars? ... different - cause or effect etc. UFO's- extraterrestrial creatures-Discoveries of primitive tribes in Brazil, Africa...

3- Classifying: Astronomy - Biology...

4- Ordering: from general to specific; in a descending size...

Universe - solar system - sun - planets - stars - galaxies - meteorites...

5- Synthesizing: Origins of the Universe - NASA scientists - Astronauts and landing on the moon - Space Race...

6- Inferring: establishing a non-stated conclusion, applying general principles to a specific case: Maybe we are not alone in the universe?

7 Translating: from the macro-structure to the level of lexical cohesion...

So now let's translate!!

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