

THE PROCESS AND FEELING OF TRANSLATION

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It is well known that some people have the skill to translate whereas others find it difficult and complicated. Sandor Harvey, Ian Higgins and Louise Haywood explore these concepts in the introductory chapter of their book "Thinking Spanish Translation". For these authors the idea that a translator is born with the talent to perform his or her job is very possible. They cite the following ideas that support their point of view: "It is often said that skill in translation cannot be learned and, especially, cannot be taught. Underlying this attitude is the assumption that certain people are born with the gift of being good translators or interpreters, whereas others simply do not have the knack; in other words, skill in translation is an inborn talent: either you've got it or you haven't." (1995 :5).

We can understand these ideas if we consider the different talents someone may have in various fields of knowledge. But does it mean that if we are born with this talent we do not need to study and perfect techniques and better ways of performing it? Not necessarily, as these authors continue presenting their ideas referring to the predisposition of doing well in certain subjects they add: "There is no reason why things should be otherwise for translation; some are 'naturally' good at it, others find it difficult, some enjoy translation, others do not." (1995 :5).

With this idea we can comprehend this assumption a lot better as we find out that the enjoyment in performing this activity is an essential part of the process. Donald Frame continues arguing the same point of view in his article "Pleasures and Problems of Translation" in the book "The Craft of Translation". For him, the pleasure of translation is very important, especially for those who translate literary works. This is what he says referring to his work as a literary translator: "I find it very pleasant to see how much of a favorite author you can bring across into your own language. As has been said, it offers some of the joy of original creation without much of the travail." (1989 :70). Another translator, who agrees with this argument is Karin von Schweder-Schreiner. She is the first winner of the International Award, given by the ministry of culture of Brazil. These are some of the ideas she presented in her speech reproduced by the HUMBOLDT magazine on the occasion of the international book fair held in Frankfurt in 1994: "We are happy when we know the stages of the books, when we know what colors, what smells, and what other sensual perceptions are related to them. We work our brains out, we consult books, we make phone calls, we write letters, we send faxes. We suffer and curse, others and ourselves, and we would like to send this passion to hell. But no matter what, we keep going because this work fascinates us." (1995 :74).

Mona Baker, in her book "In Other Words" deals with the aspect of motivation and she also affirms that a translator must have empirical and theoretical basis to perform a good job. If we try to give our profession a respectable place as a science, and we do, it is necessary to include two aspects in our preparation: *vocational training and academic training*.

In vocational training we can include all those activities designed to provide us with practical skills. A course on typing could be an example of this kind of preparation. At the end of a course like this, one will be able to perform accurately a certain task, but one will not have a theoretical background to follow. On the other hand, we encounter academic training. Although in translation we tend to minimize theoretical aspects, and praise practice as the only way to reach excellence, theory is relevant. The theoretical component of translation enables us to perform a more conscious job, to reflect about the way we work and why we do it. It shows us the different trends so that we can choose and improve our performance. We cannot assert that theory is the solution to all the inconveniences that emerge when we work, but we can establish a set of rules, approaches and documents that will effectively complement practice.

Theory and practice are combined consciously or unconsciously while performing the steps that will lead us to the final text of a translation. The problem is to know which one is most suitable in each case. John Dryden, in his essay *On Translation*, affirms that there are only three stages in the elaboration of a text in

which it is necessary to include empirical and theoretical knowledge. These stages are: *Metaphrase*, *Paraphrase* and *Imitation*.

The first phase, *Metaphrase*, implies the use of our empirical background to "turn an author word by word, and line by line, from one language into another"; since no further analysis is needed here. (1992 :17).

The *Paraphrase* involves a more structured knowledge not only of the text, but about the author, who is the center of the work in this part of the process. We must keep in mind his style, age, intention and points of view to accomplish a good second paper. However, the mechanical translation is left behind and our task is to look for sense rather than equivalence between languages. The translation then "is admitted to be amplified, but not altered."

Dryden warns us about *imitation*, the final step in translation since we can "lose" our name of translators wanting to be writers. We cannot overpass the boundaries of our work. Neither by improving or giving a free version of a text, nor by creating a text which resembles the original without meeting the features of it. The subtle line between faithful imitation and word for word translation must be respected by taking the two precedent steps to imitation as a guide.

Other authors consider that there are more than three stages in the process of translation. For instance, Newmark takes into consideration less "instinctive" steps. As he states, "My description of

translating procedure is operational. It begins with choosing a method of approach. Secondly, when we are translating, we translate with four levels more or less consciously in mind". (1995 :19)

These four levels concern aspects like grammar, context and intention. Although many authors have made use of these features, Newmark gives them a new dimension by organizing and describing them. He also shows them as a whole in which every step is a consequence and a complement of the others. Let us briefly explain the nature of these levels:

a. The Textual Level. Your lexical knowledge and your management of grammatical structures will be tested in this part of the translation. This could be the easiest stage since we *only* have to look for equivalents in the target language. However, there will be some occasions when a word does not exist, or the tenses have different implications of time and meaning in both languages. In this part, the translator has to accomplish several tasks, and has to get used to "divide" his or her mind to achieve a useful document.

b. The Referential Level. After looking for a grammatical and lexical equivalence for the text it is time to look for an equivalence related to time, space, readers, field of knowledge and use of the text. It is necessary to analyze the real facts that appear in the text. In this part of the process the translator must realize that the final

text should be a compromise with reality. All trace of ambiguity, abstraction and obscurity has to disappear from the text. To achieve this "transparency" the translator can find a support on the textual level. At this point of the translation one is able to discern which synonyms, prepositions or phrases are suitable according to the topic, the potential readers and the items mentioned above. There are obviously some cases (literary texts) in which the translator limits his or her work to the reproduction of the main idea and the interpretation of it is left to the reader. The outstanding characteristic of this level must always be the conservation of the message and the function of the text without neglecting the particularities and distinctions of both languages.

c. The Cohesive Level. It deals with two important parts of a text: its *general structure* or *lay out*, and its *mood*. The first includes the logic relations in a text - introduction, continuation, conclusion - , punctuation, coherence among sentences, register, and sequence in time. The mood is the summary of the intention, language, style and feelings of the author reflected in the text. The translator has to differentiate between a positive or neutral tone, the intention in the use of adjectives and other elements that constitute an *invisible* but relevant part of any text. In some cases, the ability to deal with the subjective part of a text makes the difference between a misleading translation and a good one.

d. Level of Naturalness. This final level has a different focusing point. We have talked a great deal about the original text, its intention, its author, and so on. Now what is important is the way the final text is going to look like in the target language. A translator has to bear in mind that the text must be easy, even fun to read. Its language should be free of archaisms, include idioms and expressions (whenever possible) to enhance the main ideas. In the same way it must be avoided the over use of neologisms or words from other languages if their meaning is not clearly understood throughout context. All these considerations will surely vary, but naturalness must be present in every text as an indicator of knowledge and skill.

These steps are not the only ones or the most appropriate. The translator is the one who has to decide which direction is the best in each case.

Taking into consideration the demand for translation, and the conditions in which we work, one would say that the best way to learn about the process of translation is to translate every single text we are asked to. In this wide range of information (provided by our generous family and friends) one might work with booklets, dialogues, official documents or brochures. This exercise is helpful with regard to vocabulary, timing and management of structures. But what happens when our client does not belong to our social surrounding and we know nothing about the topic we are dealing with? It will be time for us to do our best, make use of all our theoretical basis and

demonstrate that we are not only good workers, but also good professionals. The new generations of translators must be aware of this if they want to give translation the status that it deserves. Constant reading and research must not be neglected. Talking about motivation, we can cite Descartes, who said: "Not showing enthusiasm is a sign of mediocrity."

With the fast advance of science and technology, translators have a brilliant future and a responsibility to help our country follow these avenues of development. The tools are given. Our abilities can be either inborn or learned. The important thing is to take advantage of them and make them become useful to us and to society.

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