

LITERARY TRANSLATION FROM SPANISH INTO ENGLISH: THE TRANSLATION OF CULTURE-SPECIFIC TERMS

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Very little has so far been written on translating Spanish into English, and even less on the specific problems encountered in the translation of Spanish prose fiction. To take the point further, so far as this author knows, nothing is written on the practical problems caused by culture-specific terms. One of the major reasons being, of course, the extremely sensitive and subjective nature of any enquiry into this area. It is a veritable minefield for academic research and, as the author is aware, "fools rush in where angels fear to tread". This fool is not only rushing in but probably putting her foot in. Having said this, it should be pointed out that until theorists deign to come to some agreement on the subject, it still has to be taught in the classroom. With this in mind the following article presents some of the most common culture-specific problems encountered in translating Spanish into English.

Since Lado's seminal work on lexis and culture (1957)¹, very little has been done to analyse the lexico-cultural contrasts across linguistic barriers. When a situational feature, functionally relevant for the SL text, is completely absent from the culture of which the TL is part, "cultural untranslatibility" is said to take place (Catford 1965)². A SL text is the product of the culture of a SL community. Because of the similarities between Eng. and Sp. culture and literary trends in the twentieth century, a piece may often pose no cultural problems. However, there are many others where history, geography, local customs and character, etc., are integral parts of the text. The most common examples cited are the 40 different words for snow in Inuit, and the 5,714 words for 'camel' in Arabic. In Sp. one need only cite words like *verja*, *patio*, *romería*, *chorizo*, *Gobierno Civil*, *provincia*, etc., to illustrate that even on a lexical level, and in cultures as close as Eng. and Sp., cultural obscurity in translation can be a problem. Taken to the text level the problem becomes far more complicated.

(1) Lado (1967).

(2) Catford, pg. 94.

How can translation theories and studies help, if not to *solve* this problem, then at least to *surmount* it? Bassnett-McGuire (1980) agrees with Neubert's view (1967) that Shakespeare's sonnet "*Shall I compare Thee to a Summer's day*" cannot be semantically translated into a language where summers are unpleasant³. She goes on to say,

"To attempt to impose the value system of the SL culture unto the TL culture is dangerous ground, and the translator should not be tempted by the school that pretends to determine the original *intentions* of the author on the basis of a self-contained text.

The translator cannot be the author of the SL text, but as the the author of the TL text has a clear moral responsibility to the TL readers.⁴"

Three criticisms of Bassnett-McGuire's approach are put forward in the following paragraphs to further sensitise potential translators to the problems created by "cultural untranslatability".

Firstly, translation is a primary form of communicating SL culture to TL readers, and, according to Newmark, of aiding international understanding⁵. The communication of SL values is therefore hardly an *imposition*, but rather a valuable addition. For example, Santoyo has written a brief overview of the importance of translation for Western European culture and civilization, an overview which in every respect bears out Louis Kelly's statement that "Western Europe owes its civilization to translators"⁶.

Secondly, attempting to change the comparison evident in the sonnet to a more acceptable TL image is exactly what Bassnett-McGuire criticises ie. determining the original intentions behind the author's message, and then changing the vehicle through which they are conveyed. This is perhaps understandable where two cultures are so far apart as to make the image completely incomprehensible. However, with developments in education, communications and technology, the only conceivable situation where this would apply would be reading Shakespeare to Aborigines, Eskimos or Amazon Indians who have little or no knowledge of a world outside their own. It is highly unlikely that a translation would be used in this situation.

Finally, the reader is increasingly being taken for an uneducated, incurious idiot by the exponents of this view. It is to be assumed that the reader knows the work at hand to be a translation. If so, the inclusion of certain alien, culture-specific terms, properly translated (and if not, with explanations or footnotes) is unlikely to cause a brainstorm or fit of anger. Bassnett-McGuire's solution sounds suspiciously like the Indian proverb which compares translation to previously

(3) Neubert (1969).

(4) Bassnet-McGuire, pg. 33.

(5) Newmark. Lecture at the University of León, 10th June, 1989.

(6) Louis Kelly. Introduction pg. 1.

chewed food. In the interests of transmitting culture, and furthering international understanding, translators must *avoid* attempting to pureé the more difficult pieces of the SL text in order to make consumption easier. If we do not attempt to deal intelligently with the problems posed by culture-specific concepts we are heading towards what Newmark has called "the consumerization of translation"⁷.

Difficult, culture-specific concepts encountered in Sp. prose are outlined below. Various translations which credit the reader with a little more intelligence are given, and their rationale explained.

GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES AND IMPLICATIONS

Within any language, certain geographical locations often become identified with an event, a drink, a dish, etc. "It was decided at Number 10 today..." may mean far more than is linguistically explicit. Examples in Sp. include:

"Durante treinta años o más, había tenido una fonda en Cabezardos, en *tierra manchega*..." (Cela, *Sansón García - Fotógrafo Ambulante*).

To the Sp. mind, *tierra manchega* evokes the barren plain where Cervantes set *Don Quixote* and all that this implies. Yet, although Cela could simply have used 'en La Mancha', it is not certain whether he intended to invoke the extra connotations this phrase carries or not. It is therefore advisable not to attempt to divine the author's original intention and to simply translate the geographical term, accompanied by a footnote outlining the possible connotations, eg.

"For thirty years or more, he had run an inn at Cabezardos, in the region of La Mancha".

In other cases, like well-known geographical features, the TL reader may not have the knowledge of the SL reader to orient him, eg.

"Hasta que al deán le pareció que habían bajado tanto que el lecho del *Tajo* estaba sobre ellos" (Borges, *El Brujo Postergado*): "... until the dean thought they had gone down so far that the bed of *the river Tajo* must be above them." - Note the explicitation 'river'. This can also be used in cases like: 'The town of _____', 'The city of _____', etc., if the translator feels the TL text requires this.

Within this section, there is also a linguistic problem, in that Sp. allows the adjectivalisation of almost all place names. In Eng. this is mainly confined to designations of origin, eg. a person can be a Corkonian, a Liverpudlian, etc., but a 'Liverpudlian summer evening' sounds strange in a way that 'claras tardes de otoño mogueireño' does not. We tend to deal with this problem thus: 'The bright Autumn evenings of Moguer'.

(7) See 5, Newmark.

TERMS OF ENDEARMENT

Besides using the diminutive suffixes to convey affection, in Sp. terms of endearment are used much more extensively and frequently than in Eng.. Many are local in their application and, although for the most part would be understood, would not be used in other regions. *Repollo* = *Cabbage* is used in parts of Andalucía, as is *Reina Mora* = *Moorish Queen*. Two more are to be found in the following conversation:

- “- Llevas el vinagre?
- Sí, Paulina.
- ¿Y el bicarbonato?
- Sí, Paulina.
- ¿Y los puntilleros nuevos?
- Sí, *cordera*.
- ¿Y las tazas?
- Sí, *paloma*.” (García Pavón, *Paulina y Gumersindo*)

The lexical equivalents are ‘lamb’ and ‘dove’ and the possibilities are (1) to use collocational equivalents - ie. words used in a similar context in Eng., eg. “Yes, dear” “Yes, dearest” or “Yes, my dear.” (2) Alternatively, the translator may decide that this is boring and that the translation loses a dimension, in which case he may favour the culturally closer translation of “Yes, my lamb” and “Yes, my dove.”

PROPER NAMES AND NICKNAMES

It is widely accepted by translation theorists nowadays that proper names should not be translated. As Adams puts it rather flippantly, “Paris cannot be London or New York, it must be Paris; our hero must be Pierre, not Peter; he must drink an apéritif, not a cocktail; smoke Gauloises, not Kents, and walk down rue du Bac, not Back Street. On the other hand, when he is introduced to a lady, he’ll sound silly if he says, ‘I am enchanted, Madame’.”⁸

In Fairy-tales, folk-tales and children’s literature proper names are translated on the grounds that children and fairies are the same the world over. Thus *Snow White* becomes *Blancanieves* and *Cinderella* becomes *Cenicienta*, etc.

Problems arise, however, with proper names in fiction, which often have deliberate connotations through sound and meaning. Cela’s short stories often contain characters with very long, high-sounding names which amuse the SL reader because of their multiple witty and humorous associations, and also because they often contrast with the humble state of the character in question, eg. *Sansón García Cerceda y Expósito* and his father *Don Híbrido Expósito y*

(8) Bassnet-McGuire, pg. 119.

Machado Cosculuella (Sansón García-Fotógrafo Ambulante). It is possible, according to Newmark, to translate the proper name into the TL, and then to naturalise it back into a new SL proper name. Newmark gives an example of this method when he translates Dickens' character *Wackford Squeers* into German: "... 'whack' becomes 'prügeln' becomes 'Proogle', and possibly 'Squeers' (squint?, queer?) could become 'schielen' and the name in a Ger. version might be translated as 'Proogle Squeers' or 'Proogle Sheel'". This method has the double advantage of conveying the humorous associations while at the same time allowing the character a certain English air maintained by the Eng. spelling of the name. The possibilities in the case of Sansón García's father are really up to the translator's imagination. How about *Mr. Hybridus Expósitus y Machado Jellibus* or something equally silly. It is advisable to try to convey the humour without translating it into a completely Eng.-sounding name.

Nicknames could be treated similarly. In "*Los de Abajo*", Luis Cervantes is usually addressed as '*curro*', or referred to as '*el curro*' = dude, tenderfoot or even greenhorn. Margarito Arranda is known as '*el Güero*', a Mexican-Sp. designation for a blond person, so: '*Blondie*'. Other minor characters are called '*Cordoniz*', '*Meco*', '*Manteca*', '*el Telecote*'. In only one case does the author Azuela explain the reasoning behind the nickname. '*La Pintada*', the camp follower, who is addicted to gaudy, showy clothes, unfaithful men and uses rouge and cosmetics in profusion; it literally means '*The painted woman*'. In Mungía Jr.'s translation, however, she is '*War Paint*', which in this reader immediately conjures up images of a Wild West show (Azuela's very own Annie Oakly!).

The problem with translating proper names and nicknames is exactly this: the TL reader places them linguistically, and often semantically, in an alien environment. In cases like the above it is probably safer, and more boring, to leave the names intact and include an explanation in a footnote or glossary. This allows the character to preserve his lexical and Hispanic identity.

OTHER CULTURE-SPECIFIC TERMS

Halen Lane, a literary translator, outlined some of the problems inherent in translating culture-specific concepts at a 1986 symposium on the problems of translation¹⁰. In translating Carmen Martín Gaité's *El Cuarto de Atrás*, she wrote to the author, asking for information about the "... juegos infantiles de la novela, para que yo pudiera encontrar para un juego de Carmen en Salamanca, el nombre de otro similar con el cual yo me divertí en mis años de niña en el Mid-West, U.S.A."

(9) Newmark (1981), pg. 71.

(10) Lane, Helen "*Problemas de la Traducción Literaria*". Lecture given at the Instituto de España, London 1986 (Private Tape).

She points out, however, that this was also a game known to her husband, who grew up in a different part of the U.S.A. Since the game in question is an important part of the message, severe problems may arise when readers from other areas in the U.S.A. do not share a knowledge of the game. A potential solution would be to leave the SL term and explain the game in a footnote. Alternatively, overtranslation may be the answer, i.e. unobtrusive insertion of the mechanics of the game, where this is a necessary part of the message to be conveyed.

In other cases, the game in question is not of vital significance to the text, eg.: "Y estaban cómodamente sentados en torno a la mesa merendando o jugando a la brisca como en su propia casa" (Cela, *La Romería*). On analysing the text, it can be seen that it is the action of playing cards, and not the particular game, which is needed to convey the message - that some families had brought the comforts of their own homes, such as tables and chairs, with them. Therefore they were able to sit comfortably, eating and playing cards. There is a second culture-specific concept in this quotation which is difficult to translate. *Merendar* is usually an early evening snack or meal. However, in this case it also carries connotations of eating 'al fresco'. In Eng. this would usually be rendered as *picnic*. Yet the translator must be aware that *picnic* in Eng. carries a different range of connotations not present in the Sp. *merendar*, and vice versa. It is perhaps better, then, to translate *merendar* with the 'neutral' term *eating*, eg. "and they were sitting comfortably around the table, *eating* or *playing cards* as if they were at home."

Another difficulty evident in this story is ironic implication, using culture-specific terms. Cela's biting humour is manifest when the hen-pecked husband is referred to as '*El cabeza de familia*' = '*the head of the family*'. However, we are left in no doubt as to who wears the trousers - in this case the wife and the mother-in-law. The example which follows illustrates this, but great care must be taken when translating the regional dishes, since they are an integral part of this humour:

"Tomaron de primer plato *Fabada Asturiana*; al cabeza de familia, en verano le gustaban mucho las ensaladas y los *gaspachos* y, en general, los platos en crudo."

While the contents of the *Fabada* are not stated (they would be familiar to SL readers) they are important as they contrast humourously with the *gaspachos* that the character likes. To complete the contrast, some description must be added to both of these so that the ironic implication will be grasped by the TL reader. A possibility is semiexplanation, eg.

"They had a heavy (Asturian?) stew as a starter. In Summer, the head of the family really liked salads, light (Andalusian?) saladsoups, and crudités in general."

This is also the solution favoured by Rutherford in his masterly translation of Alas's *La Regenta*.

"For example, the *cocido* and the *olla podrida* that the noble city is digesting at the beginning of the novel could not be left untranslated, uniquely Spanish dishes though they are, because their precise nature is important and needs to be conveyed: much starch and animal fat combining to produce unhealthy somnolence."¹¹

Rutherford's solution is to describe two of the basic ingredients of the dishes to convey the starch and the grease, yet retains a sense of foreignness: thus,

"Vetusta... was digesting its boiled bacon and chick-pea stew"

A greater difficulty arises if the author pokes fun at, blasphemes or abuses a cultural value. The sense of shock is difficult - and in some cases, one must admit, impossible - to translate unless the TL culture shares this value, for example: "Triste país éste, donde para divertirse, se hacen corridas de toros o luchas de fieras y se cantan la jota, que es la brutalidad cuajada en canción." (Baroja, *¡Triste País!*). Although linguistic translatability exists here, it is almost impossible to achieve equivalent effect on the TL audience. Baroja heaps scorn upon dearly-held national customs, which to some are almost sacred. "A sad country this, where to enjoy ourselves we have bullfights or wild animal fights, or we sing the jota*, - brutality personified in song." *Jota* will have to be footnoted and explained as a very popular dance form and the singing which accompanies it. Once this is explained, the reader will perceive that the tone is highly critical. Combine this with the fact that the majority of educated Eng. speaking readers are aware of a devotion to the bullfighting tradition in Spain, and the result is a culturally aware reader, who is able to think for himself and comprehend Baroja's scornful tone. The translator can do no more, since to overtranslate-to translate the effect it has on an SL reader is to make "assumptions about the author's intentions." (Bassnet-McGuire; 1980).

In difficult texts such as these the translator must be guided by the tone (Baroja's scorn, Cela's irony, etc.), the function of the text, and its overall context.

IDIOMS AND ASSOCIATIONS

Idioms can be defined as phrases or word groups whose meaning cannot be elicited from the separate meaning of each word of which they are formed. Hence idioms can never be translated word for word - and since they can be either colloquial or slang, it is often difficult to find a TL equivalent with the same

(11) Rutherford's translation of Clarín's *La Regenta*.

(12) Rutherford contribution to the Aedean Congress in León, Dec. 1989.

degree of informality. Translators are meant to work in their language of habitual use, and this often has the effect of dating a translation. That is, what appeared colloquial and 'slangy' twenty years ago, now sounds archaic. For example, the exclamation *¡Pero con una!*, which nowadays we would translate as something like - *What the hell!*, Mungia Jr.'s translation gives as - *God 'struth!*

As we can see, the translation of idioms takes us a stage further in considering the whole question of 'meaning' in translation. It illustrates the argument that translation involves far more than the replacement of grammatical and lexical items of one language by those of another. A knowledge and understanding of the particular cultural context of a language is necessary. The following examples, taken from Sp. literature, illustrate this point further.

Firstly we deal with idioms whose literal translation would leave the reader extremely confused, the correct interpretation depending on the translator keeping up to date with colloquialisms in the SL.

In translating the following examples the use of standard TL equivalents is advised, insofar as they are acceptable. If the colloquialism is an important aspect of the message, a corresponding Eng. colloquialism will have to be used. Failing all else, footnotes and/or explanation will have to fill in the gap. Some idioms are not so colloquial and are consequently easier to translate, eg: "Pronto prefirió filosofar a medias palabras." (Quiroga, *El Techo*) = *incoherently* could do in this case. Also, "Mientras no supo, a ciencia cierta..." (Azuela, *Los de Abajo*) = "While he didn't know for certain.", and finally "Y como Demetrio creía, a ojo cerrado, en la..." (Azuela, *ibid*) = "And since Demetrio believed *implicitly* in..."

Many other idioms can be formed with an infinitive+adj., or infinitive+noun, as the following examples indicate: "Se prohíbe la embriaguez y el armar bronca con los paisanos" = either (1) "Drunkenness and *causing trouble* with the locals is forbidden" or, to retain the colloquialism, (2) "Drunkenness and *raising hell* with the locals..." "Y aquella negativa colmó el cantaró" = "And that refusal *was the last straw*" (García Pavón, *El Ciego*).

Exclamations and expletives will be included here under the umbrella term *idiom* since:

- (i) they resist word-for-word translation;
- (ii) they are often colloquial or slang terms; and
- (iii) they require an in-depth knowledge of the SL popular culture for their translation.

Two of the most common exclamations in colloquial Sp. speech are *¡hombre!* and *¡mujer!* Both imply a certain familiarity with the addressee. The first is often used as an exclamation of familiar surprise. Many examples can be found in J.R. Jiménez's *Platero y Yo*, especially when Platero's master uses it when talking to the donkey, conveying concern and familiarity, eg. "Pero, ¡hombre! ¿Qué te pasa?" = "Hey, boy, what's wrong with you?". In most other cases, depending on context it can usually be translated by an Eng. exclamation such as 'Hey!' 'Well!' or 'My, my!' etc.

The second exclamation ¡*Mujer!* is used a little differently, and yet again, any attempt at translation must depend on context. Take for example the beseeching or wheedling tone of the following: “El cabeza de familia adoptó un aire suplicante. - Pero, *mujer*, Encarna, déjeme dormir, que estoy muy cansado.” = “.....but *please*, Encarna *dear(est)*, let me sleep, I’m so tired.” (Cela, *La Romería*). Although he is talking to his wife (also *mujer* in Sp.), to translate this exclamation as ‘wife’ in Eng. would sound clumsy and would not convey the full, wheedling tone of the original.

Expletives are often quite difficult to translate, since they are usually highly culture-specific. The shock value of the blasphemous expressions in Sp. can only be rendered pragmatically into Eng. by substituting expressions with sexual overtones, to reproduce a comparable shock effect. For example, one could make a case for rendering “¡Me cago en la Hostia!” = “Fucking Hell!”. Other common Sp. expletives usually cast aspersions on a person’s parentage. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that in many cases these slurs are implied by association. eg. in one of J. Fernández Santos short stories the following exchange occurs:

“-¡... tu madre!”

“¡la tuya!”

In the first phrase the implication is usually ‘me cago en ...’ or something in that vein. To translate it literally would be extreme in Eng. These cases must be dealt with on an equivalent-effect basis.

“Why you b*****!”

“The same to you!”

COLLOQUIAL SPEECH

Colloquial speech poses special problems for the translator. For the purposes of this paper, it is defined as socially conditioned speech whose ‘register’ (Catford 1965, Newmark 1981) is illustrative of a particular class, age, region, educational or cultural background. The actual list of determiners is much more extensive and grows yearly, according to the socio-linguists.

The socially conditioned nature of language is particularly important in literature, where the author uses language sometimes remote from standard educated language to achieve a particular effect. In the following examples different registers are used to distinguish class, region and level of education. Newmark advises that the translator no more imitate class or regional dialect (unless they are his own) than antiquate his writing to translate a classic - it sounds too artificial: “... one false note will find him out.” (Newmark 1981)¹³ In Goytisolo’s short story *La Guardia*, the difference between the new, young, university-educated officer and his older subordinates is conveyed by their respective use of language. The former’s Sp. is, at all times, standard educated

(13) Newmark, pg. 121.

speech, and he uses the informal *Tu* form of address to them. This social distinction is further emphasized by their uneducated speech and use of the formal *Vd.* to address him. "Mi sargento.... ¿Me podía *hacé* *usté* un favor?No es *na* ... Decirle al ordenanza suyo que traiga luego el diario."

(The underlined words are colloquial forms of *hacer*, *usted* and *nada*.) Angel Flores' (1960)¹⁴ translation manages to convey the respectful *Vd.* form in parts. However, he makes no attempt to compensate for the coarse uneducated speech, translating it into perfectly correct, grammatical Eng. Thus the piece becomes. "Sargeant, would you mind doing me a favour? (...) Nothing much. Tell your orderly to bring me a newspaper."

Even keeping on the safe side, it is possible to drop a few G's in the interests of coarsening the speech slightly, for contrast purposes eg. *doin'* and *nothin'*. In Eng. as well as Sp., speech forms are often contracted and endings swallowed. It should be possible therefore to translate, not into grammatically perfect Eng. - as Flores does above - but into Eng. which like the SL text, from a phonetic point of view reads incorrectly. The degree to which a translator can do this depends on two things (1) his own imagination; and (2) the degree to which these deliberate 'incorrections' will be understood by and acceptable to the TL reader.

Logic suggests that the latter would constrain the former. Experience shows, however, that the opposite is more likely to be true. Thus: "Sage, would'ya mind doin' me a favour?... Nothin' much. ...Would'ya tell your orderly to bring me a newspaper?"

Again, the guiding light must be *context*. In the context of this story, the speech distinctions are important. If both parties speak grammatically correct Eng. then this is lost.

In the following examples (p.12), Luis Cervantes, the young intellectual who joined the bandits, is being addressed by Camilla, an illiterate country-girl, whose speech is far removed from standard Sp. In *Los de Abajo*, Azuela phonetically transcribes this regional speech. It is interesting to note the changing 'fashions' of translation in the three examples contrasted. This comparison is not an attempt to criticise any one method. It is merely intended to illustrate the changes, and more importantly, the possibilities. In 1989, the translator of the third example would find it difficult to assume that having the girl speak correct Eng. (except for critters), as Mungia Jr. does in his translation, is being faithful to the text.

Yet it is interesting to note that almost thirty years separate the two texts - a period in which the application of translation studies to the process of translation has made a large difference.

Los de Abajo has never been an easy novel to translate. Azuela's language is colloquial, usually spoken by murderers, thieves, farmers and others from the less learned realms of Mexican society. It admirably reflects the revolutionary scene; the high levels of illiteracy and poverty, and the breakdown of law and order. If

(14) Angel Flores' 1960 translation, pg. 101.

it is possible to take the 'mistakes' and substitute some that are often made when speaking colloquial Eng., then this may go some way to conveying these points.

ORIGINAL: "Oiga ¿Quién *lo insiño* a curar? ... ¿Y *pa que jirvió la agua?* ... ¿Y los trapos, *pa que los coció?* ... ¡Mire, mire cuanta curiosidad *pa todo!* ... ¿Y eso que se echó en los manos? ... ¡Pior! ... ¿Aguardiente de veras? ... ¡Ande, *pos si yo creiba* que el aguardiente no más *pal cólico* era *güeno!* ¡Ah! De *moo* es que *usté* iba a ser *dotor* ... ¡Ja, ja, ja! ... ¡*Mi'* que cuentos! ... ¡*Qesque* animales en la agua sin *jervir!* ... ¡*Fuch!* ... ¡*Pos* cuando ni yo miro nada!"

TRANSLATION I (Mungia Jr., 1960): "Say, who taught you to cure people? Why did you go and boil the water? And why did you cook the rags? (OMISSION: 1 line) And what was that you put on your hands? (OMISSION) A doctor. Ha, Ha. That's enough to make a person laugh. And why didn't you use cold water instead of that? Just listen to those stories. They say there are *critters* in the water if it isn't boiled. (OMISSION: Exclamation) And I Can't see any kind of *critters*."

TRANSLATION II (Robe, 1979): "Tell me, who *leagned you* how to cure people? Why did you boil that water? Why did you boil the rags? Look, look how careful you are about everything! And what did you put on your hands? Really? ... and why did you pour on alcohol? (OMISSION: Exclamation) And I just knew alcohol was good to rub on when you had a bellyache, but ... Oh, I see *so you was* going to be a doctor huh? Ha, ha, that's a good one. Why don't you mix it with cold water. Oh, stop fooling me, the idea! Little animals alive in the water unless you boil it! Ugh! Well, *I can't see nothing* in it myself."

TRANSLATION III (Joyce, 1986): "Say, who *learned you* how to cure? ... *An' what' ya* boil that water for? ... *An' the rags, what' ya* boil *'em* for? ... Well, well, aren't you *bein'* careful! ... *An' what'd ya* just throw on *yer* hands? ... *Whaat?* ... Real alcohol? ... come off it! ... Sure, I was *thinkin'* *t'was* only good for a bellyache. Oh! I see, you *was goin'* to be a doctor. Ha, ha, ha! That's a good one! ... Why *didn't ya* use cold water with that? ... What a load *o'* rubbish! There'd be *critters* in the water if *ya* didn't boil it! Ugh! ... Why,

METAPHORS AND PUNS

A metaphor is defined as: "A transference of meaning, a substitution of one thing for another which it only resembles" and "It describes an entity, event or quality more comprehensibly and precisely, and in a more complex way than is possible by using literary language," according to Newmark¹⁵. Like idioms, the sense is rarely preserved in the TL by a literal rendering. Problems are mainly

(15) Newmark, chapter 7.

caused by the multi-dimensionality of lexis, syntax and connotation of both metaphors and puns. Due to parallels in literary and language development of both Eng. and Sp., metaphors have become a very common part of our communicative expression. Many of them have become stock-phrases or words; hence they are commonly accepted and usually easily translatable. Stock-metaphors are included in what Snell-Hornby refers to as "transparent style"¹⁶. Newly coined or original metaphors, on the other hand, often appear shocking or imprecise since they establish points of similarity between one object and another, without implicitly stating what the resemblances are. These are written in what Snell-Hornby calls "opaque style...", words which are not elucidated by the context... on the contrary, they are often used so unconventionally that the reader has to be familiar with all the semantic implications of the lexeme concerned before he can appreciate its impact on the text."¹⁷

Because of the difficulties involved, translators have often shied away from this challenge, rendering difficult, 'opaque' SL metaphors into the 'transparent style' of the TL. Whether it be concern for the reader or laziness on the translator's part, the result is often a TL text in banal, stylized language with a consequent loss of depth and subtlety of the original. It is possible that no metaphor is universal; however, it is also possible that in some language groups at a similar stage of development, there will be some basic, universal metaphors and connotations. For example, in the majority of Western European languages calling someone an *animal* is synonymous with barbaric violent or disgusting behaviour. (Quite unjustly, in my opinion.)

Francescato (1970) says that universals, such as 'head' (chief, main, master, etc.), are cognitive, rather than linguistic, and that the possibility of translating them depends more on cultural overlap than on any linguistic similarities¹⁸: "Al *cabeza de la familia* lo despertó su señora. -¡Arriba Carlitos! vamos a misa. -Pero ¿Qué hora es? -Son las siete menos veinte. El *cabeza de familia* adoptó un aire suplicante." (Cela, *La Romería*)

The father is constantly referred to for ironic purposes as the *head of the family*. This metaphor is important, as both the extract and the story show; it is not he, but his wife and mother-in-law who rule the roost. Since there is cultural overlap here, it translates well as "The *head of the family* was woken by his wife. 'Get up, Carlitos we're going to mass!' But what time is it? 'Twenty to seven.' *The head of the family ...*"

Direct translation is often the best way of rendering metaphor if the image used has a comparable frequency and currency in both SL and TL cultures. Another thing the translator must keep in mind is that many stock metaphors sound quite clichéd, and are often an indication of dull, unimaginative prose. The translator has a duty to the TL reader to translate bad prose in a way that it will be recognizable as such.

(16) Snell-Hornby, (1983) pg. 109-111.

(17) *ibid.*

(18) as quoted in Newmark pg. 88.

Sp. and Eng. often overlap in physical description, and certainly in the metaphors of desolation and suffering we find in Delibes' *En Una Noche Así*: "Porque lo peor no es el estar solo, ni el *hiriente frío* de la Nochebuena, ni el terminar de salir de la cárcel, sino el encontrarse uno a los treinta años con el hombro izquierdo *molido por la reuma*, el *hígado trastornado*, la boca sin una pieza y hecho *una dolorosa y total porquería*."

The four metaphors underlined are illustrative of the vividness and strength of Delibes' powers of description. Suffering and desolation is conveyed by the unconventional use of *moler* = *to grind down* with a body part, *trastornado* = *ruined, upset, messed-up* with liver, and *porquería* = *filthy, vile, revolting mess* to describe what he has become while he has been in prison. A suggested translation is: "The worst of it is not being alone; its not the biting cold of Christmas Eve, or even just getting out of prison. It's finding yourself at thirty years of age, your left shoulder *eaten away by rheumatism, a diseased liver*, not a tooth in your head, just an *aching, revolting mess*." Note the translation of the stock metaphor *frío hiriente* for its equivalent stock metaphor *biting cold*, although the possibility *wounding cold* is also present.

Original metaphors are less likely to have as many cultural connotations. It is better, therefore, to translate them as far as possible without detracting from their originality, eg.: "Por el campo cubierto por el *blanco sudario* de la nieve, etc. ..., Claudito hechó a andar..." (Cela, *Claudito, El Espantapájaros*).

Here we see Cela mocking florid landscape descriptions (note ironic use of 'etc.'). The adj. used with *white* to describe snow is derived from the Sp. for 'shroud'. The translation should try to convey this thus: "Through the *shroud-white* snow-covered countryside, etc". The more original the metaphor the easier its translation, since the shock value it achieves is the same for both SL and TL readers.

Some of the most original Sp. metaphors must surely be found in De la Serna's *Greguerías*, which he defines as "-humorismo+metáfora = greguería" (Andrian 1969)¹⁹.

"Lo que obsesiona a la mujer moderna es lograr que su pulsera llegue a ser su cinturón." = "The modern woman is obsessed by the desire that her bracelet should become her belt." And also

"Las sombras que ponen las nubes en el panorama, son como esponjas grises que absorban el pensamiento del paisaje" = "The shadows thrown by clouds over the panorama are like grey sponges which absorb the landscape's thoughts."

Animal metaphors are a separate problem. Why, asks Leech (1966), is *you son of a bitch* or *you swine* abusive, when *you son of a kangaroo* or *you polar bear* is not?²⁰ Cases of animal metonymy (ie. one-word metaphors) are not always literally translatable, although there is apparently a one-for-one equivalent in Eng.

(19) Andrian (1967) pg. 67.

(20) Newmark, pg. 85.

and Sp. Each culture seems to attribute different characteristics to the same animals. Hence, *hens* are prostitutes in Fr., broody and motherly in Eng., and cowardly in Sp. eg.:

"Un bendito... y un valiente. Valiente, gallina. Pues *Gallina* le llamaban en el pueblo por su timidez." (Clarín, *El Sustituto*).

The juxtaposition of *valiente* and *gallina* leaves us in no doubt that, although he is known as 'hen' in the village for his timidity, the TL equivalent we are seeking is really 'chicken', eg.:

"A simpleton... and brave. A brave... chicken. For everyone in town called him *Chicken* because of his timidity."

Other ways of translating metaphor include translation by simile, simile+sense, or simply by sense. In practice, it can be observed that translation of a SL metaphor for a TL metaphor works, if

- (i) there is sufficient cultural overlap, and
- (ii) the SL metaphor is stock, original or creative.

Translation for sense is usually a last resort: to ensure that it is understood by the reader. It can sometimes render the translation banal and shallow, and can also suggest a lack of confidence in the power and clarity of the original TL metaphor.

Puns are an area where linguistic and cultural translatability are often united, and this ensures that puns are possibly the most difficult area of translation. As Santoyo puts it (1986) "la traducción del *cómo* puede ser de mucho mayor importancia que la del *qué*." And again in his corollary to Larson's dictate (or should one say diktat) that "Everything that can be said in one language, can be said in another" to which he adds "... UNLESS THE FORM IS AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT OF THE MESSAGE" (original emphasis)²¹.

A word may have many different senses which form the basis of the pun. eg. the following, slightly risqué Sp. pun:

"¿Tú qué tocas?

- ¡Hombre, lo que se presenta!"

The pun is on the verb *tocar* which has the separate senses of to feel, touch or play and the connotations touch up, finger, grope, etc. It is literally "What do you touch/play? "Well, whatever is available!"

Another linguistic difficulty arises from the *se* morph. Foster says: "It is no exaggeration to label 'se' as one of the most ubiquitous morphs in the Sp. language, so multiple and varied are the forms in which 'se' appears." (1970)²². The following joke relies on the similarity between the 'quasi'- reflexive and true reflexive forms: "¿Vd., lo ve bien que los curas se casen? -¡Hombre, si se quieren!" "Do you think priests should marry (sense of each other)? Well, if they love each other!" As we can clearly see, the pun does *not* translate. In less humorous cases, difficulties can also arise when the pun or, indeed, polysemy is an integral part of the message to be conveyed.

(21) Santoyo. Paper presented at the University of Granada's Congress.

(22) Foster (1970).

Thus, in Octavio Paz' *El Ramo Azul*, the assailant tells the protagonist: "Es un capricho de mi novia. Quiere un ramito de ojos azules." The pun is on *ojo* = eye, which figuratively means the heart of a flower. A suggested translation is, "...she wants a posy of Blue Eyes". The horror of the situation is that the attacker is taking her request quite literally. This connection of flowers and eyes is central to the story. Before the attack the protagonist looks into the night and says: "La noche es un jardín de ojos" = "The night is a garden of flowers." The importance of the pun could possibly be conveyed by the translation of "*Ojos azules*" as "*Blue Eyes*" since the capitalization will hopefully conjure up the image of flowers. Thus, we can maintain

- (i) the flower-eye connection, and
- (ii) the readers realization of the full horror of the attacker's madness, when he attempts to gouge out the protagonist's eyes.

In the following excerpt we see another example of how various translators deal with puns.

"Y ¿te acuerdas de cuando aquel señorito se cayó con pantalón blanco y todo, en la sartén de la churrera? -También me acuerdo. ¡Qué voces pegaba el condenado! ¡En seguida se echaba de ver que esto de estar frito debe de dar mucha rabia!" (Cela, *La Romería*).

A young man had fallen into the 'churreras' hot oil. The speaker puns on *estar frito* = *to be fried* but in colloquial Sp. = *to be completely drunk*. Botherson translates a pun, the pun with "You could see straight away that being on hot coals must make you pretty mad!."

Whether the solutions outlined above fall into translation, transposition, etc. is a question for the theorists. The question of where translation ends and other activities begin is open to interpretation. The fact is that the student and the translator are faced with cases of cultural obscurity in texts quite frequently with little or no guidance on how to proceed. The major aim of translation should be to push back the boundaries of "translatability". There is hope in Santoyo's 1986 paper, given at the *Primeras Jornadas Europeas de la Traducción e Interpretación*: "Los límites de la traducción no son fronteras físicas infranqueables. Porque la intraducibilidad no es una noción de absoluto, sino exclusivamente de grado, nacida quizá por oposición a la idea de "traducibilidad". (...) La noción de intraducibilidad deriva de las dificultades prácticas y aporías del proceso de traducción"²³.

More and more translations which were previously considered "impossible" are appearing. Helen Lane has translated Roa Bastos' *Yo, el Supremo*. Rick Francis is at present translating Julian Rios' *Larva*: the results may not technically be called translation, but they do constitute some of the most dynamic trends in translation. For example:

(23) Santoyo (ibid.).

Selections from *Larva. Babel de una noche de San Juan*, Julián Ríos, (Edicions del Mall, tercera edición, 1984). Translations by Rick Francis. (From private correspondence with the translator)

Pasen,² y santas pascuas. Pasen,³ uno a uno, y sin propasarse. --p. 139

Pass on, we're at an impass. Into the passing lane, one-on-one, and no more than three seconds apiece.

... y roulade de sternerá² con guarnición (with the usual trimmings!) y escalopes de vega (para vegetarianos!) y calderones con mucha salsa. El plato del día, para chuparse el dedo:³ un faux filet pentagruelique de cinq livres doré sur tranches grasses.⁴ A devorar todos los libros sagrados... --p. 131

... and spensirloin steak (donne to perfection), sterner-fried shrimp (with the usual trimmings!), joysters on the half shelley; becketts of clams, and wilde rice. Today's special, finger-lickin' good: un faux filet pentagruelique de cinq livres doré sur tranches grasses. Butter up the better books...

(Ahora treboleando por su cuenta y riesgo el Burlador trebolandista o trebolandero o trebolandés errante?¹ Para entrevolver² aún mejor sus enredoblados entresijos macanudos?³ En definitiva, carajol, a qué trifolio aludían? Aludían y eludían, lúdicamente. Probablemente a un trébol compuesto de varios tréboles. El treboludo trébol de los tréboles! Triada.⁴ Terno eterno.⁵ Término sin término...⁶)

2. Trevo a trevo, trevoador...
Trevoltaretista! Trevolapuquista!
Trevociferados! Trevolúvel! Pare de trevocabulizar, con esos equivocaburlarios y trebolenguas entrebolbucientes. --pps. 100-101

(Now the Joker cloveering about at his own risk, clovertiginously roaming, a wild clover cloverdoing it? Return and retwist, the better to rhetorque his fabulously fraught¹, his flighteningly flawed free-for-fall? To what trifolio do you alude? Aluding and eluding, ludifictitiously. Probably a trefoil composed of nevarious trefouils, all clover-hitched together. triaddled brain. Eternal threnody, sans remedy. Terminall allness with no end in site...)

1. Flabulussy wrought? Rot!
Not just flightful, but really threeling too! A three-for-all, a three-wring circus!

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