

CONTEXTUAL MISMATCHES IN THE TRANSLATION INTO SPANISH OF ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S THE SUN ALSO RISES

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INTRODUCTION

When one approaches the translation¹ of a novel of one of the best American writers in the 20th century –and Ernest Hemingway undoubtedly belongs in this category: and feels that the original strength and genius have almost completely vanished, there is a subsequent wish to articulate the causes of the failure. For it is certainly a failure that, amongst Spanish readers, the American novelist has not reached by any manner of means the levels of popularity that he has amongst those who read his work in the original.

I have analysed Joaquín Adsuar's translation into Spanish of *The Sun Also Rises*² –*Fiesta*– from the perspective of Sperber and Wilson's theory of relevance. My analysis revolves around the concept of *context*; I take Sperber and Wilson's definition of context as a starting point and show that it is comprehensive enough to explain the deficiencies of a translation and that, consequently, cognitive linguistics can provide certain guidelines from which professional translators might benefit.

CONTEXT AND TRANSLATION

The context is an essential element of all pragmatic approaches to human communication. In their work *Relevance. Communication and Cognition*, Sperber and Wilson explain what their idea of the context is:

A context is a psychological construct, a subset of the hearer's assumptions about the world. It is these assumptions, of course, rather than the actual state of the world, that affect the interpretation of an utterance. A context in this sense is not limited to information about the immediate physical environment or the immediately preceding utterances: expectations about the future, scientific hypotheses or religious beliefs,

1 Although there are four different translations into Spanish of *The Sun Also Rises*, I will analyse just the translation by Joaquín Adsuar, which is the most recent one; it was published by Bruguera in 1983 and Planeta has published four editions since (see Laprade [1991] 147-48, 155-57).

2 Hereafter cited as *SAR*.

anecdotal memories, general cultural assumptions, beliefs about the mental state of the speaker, may all play a role in interpretation (1986: 15-16; emphasis added)

The context we are talking about here is, therefore, something that is in the mind of both the speaker and the hearer. For our analysis, we must bear in mind that assumptions about what has been previously said or what comes before or after in a text –the so called *co-text*– are also part of the context.

Unless speaker and hearer share a certain number of assumptions, communication will be jeopardized; and the fewer assumptions speaker and hearer share, the more likely misunderstandings are to arise. As Sperber and Wilson put it:

A speaker who intends an utterance to be interpreted in a particular way must also expect the hearer to be able to supply a context which allows that interpretation to be recovered. **A mismatch between the context envisaged by the speaker and the one actually used by the hearer may result in a misunderstanding** (1986: 16; emphasis added)

All this can be applied to the reading of the novel by a speaker of English, but the process of translation is more complex. In the first case we have to consider two contexts; in the case of a translation we have to talk about four different contexts, namely: 1) the set of assumptions envisaged by the writer, 2) the set of assumptions that the translator –as reader of the novel– brings to bear, 3) the set of assumptions envisaged by the translator as writer of a new text in the target language, 4) the set of assumptions that the reader of the text in the target language brings to bear. Thus the original text has to go through two filters before it gets to the reader in the target language. As a consequence, the risk of contextual mismatches –present in every act of communication– is particularly high in the case of translations. In order to articulate the deficiencies in translation in terms of contextual mismatches, I have grouped the latter into four different categories:

1. Contextual mismatches in the knowledge of the external field of reference.
2. Contextual mismatches in linguistic competence that result in misunderstanding of the language of the original.
3. Contextual mismatches in education, sensitivity, etc., that result in lack of appreciation of the communicative clues associated with the style.
4. Co-textual mismatches.

The dividing line between categories is not at all clear; in fact, very often the mistranslation can be attributed –as we shall see– to more than one of the four types of mismatch I have distinguished.

The case of *SAR* is a very interesting one. What we have in the novel is an American writer talking about places in Spain and aspects of the Spanish culture that he knows far better than the Spanish translator himself. As a result, when the translator tries to facilitate things to the reader by explaining things that are unexplained in the original, he very often makes mistakes. In principle Spanish readers are more knowledgeable about bullfighting, the Sanfermines, Pamplona, San Sebastian, etc. than most prospective readers of the novel; as a consequence, they will –again, in principle– bring more assumptions to bear and, therefore, they need even less information than what Hemingway included in *SAR*. Paradoxically, they have more information in the translation than in

the original and quite a lot of this information is misleading and does not reflect the reality Hemingway is describing.

COMMUNICATIVE CLUES AND THE PRESERVATION OF STYLISTIC FEATURES IN TRANSLATION

Since we are dealing with a literary work, we must also consider how the style has to be taken into account in the translation and to what extent the style is part of the message the writer wants to convey. It is obvious that when rendering a text into another language stylistic features can only be preserved up to a certain point because, very often, they rely on the specific characteristics of the language in which the text was originally written. However, in many other cases certain stylistic elements could very easily be maintained in the translation.

As early as 1922 –four years before the publication of the novel that would make him be regarded as one of the greatest writers of the time– Ernest Hemingway started to define the principles that would guide his literary production throughout his life and that would model his unmistakable writing technique:

He was determined to begin afresh with brand-new standards of truth and simplicity. “All you have to do is write one true sentence,” he told himself. “Write the truest sentence that you know.” It must be above all a “true simple declarative sentence” without scrollwork or ornamental language of any sort. It must deal with something he knew from personal experience (Baker 1969: 84)

The quotation contains in essence the foundation stones of Hemingway’s writing: truth and simplicity. The writer has to write about things that he has experienced and he has to tell them in the simplest way possible. Both characteristics are present in *SAR* and in all his works. *SAR* is based on the personal experiences of the novelist during the years 1924 and 1925, and all the characters in the novel correspond to friends of Hemingway’s and people he knew. Interestingly enough, the external field of reference³ –Paris, Pamplona, Burguete, San Sebastian, the Sanfermines, etc.– he used for his fiction, is very precisely described in the novel, which is not the case in the translation. As regards simplicity, the avoidance of adornment in the lexis, in the syntactic structures, etc., which is very remarkable in the novel, is not reflected in the translation. It is worth noting that the characteristic vividness of *SAR*’s dialogues very much depends on the use of very short sentences that become lengthy in the Spanish version.

In a sense Hemingway’s writing principles can be considered universal because a true, simple sentence can be written in any language. Therefore, this is not a question of feasibility but rather a question of whether sticking to the original style would add to the correct interpretation of the text or not.

In his work *Translation and Relevance*, Ernst August Gutt states that stylistic properties play an important role in the process of interpretation because they provide what he calls *communicative clues*:

3 I have taken the concepts of *external field of reference* and *internal field of reference* from Harshaw (1984).

[O]ne might well argue that the point of preserving stylistic properties [in translation] lies [sic] not in their intrinsic value, but rather in the fact that they provide clues that guide the audience to the interpretation intended by the communicator. We shall refer to such clues as *communicative clues* (1991: 127)

The writer envisages a context that will enable the reader to appreciate these communicative clues; by the same token, if the reader's education, sensitivity, etc. are not up to the standard envisaged by the writer, there will be a contextual mismatch that will result in lack of appreciation of the communicative clues, which in turn will prevent the interpretation intended by the writer.

CONTEXTUAL MISMATCHES IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE EXTERNAL FIELD OF REFERENCE

In the two instances I bring here to illustrate this point (there are several more, related to the cities of Pamplona and San Sebastian and to different aspects of the fiesta), apart from lack of knowledge of the external field of reference on the part of the translator, there is a certain misunderstanding of the text and a consequent interference of wrong ideas about the external field of reference; the translator seems to rely more on his wrong assumptions about the external field of reference than on the actual meaning of the language. The knowledge of the reality the writer is talking about would have undoubtedly helped the translator interpret the original in the right sense but a thorough knowledge of the language alone would have certainly led, as well, to a translation faithful to the external field of reference. Obviously, when Hemingway wrote *SAR* in the 1920s he did not envisage for his readership an acquaintance with the city of Pamplona or the fiesta of San Fermin, just a sound knowledge of the English language.

There is a very important passage in the novel in which Brett and Jake get out from the frenzy of the fiesta in the centre of town and walk to the walls that surrounded the old city; not all the walls that Hemingway could see during the 1920s are still standing, but the place where the characters go in this passage remains as it was then. The interpretation the translator makes of the original does not agree with the external field of reference that, in the case of *SAR*, is described very precisely. The context envisaged by Hemingway is made up of pure assumptions about the literal meaning of the terms he uses for his description; his accurate description does not presuppose a previous knowledge of Pamplona. Instead of rendering exactly what the original says, the translator goes further with his interpretation and envisages a context consistent with the one he has brought to bear when reading the original (his own experience of other walled cities). He might have thought that his own version would be more easily understood by his readership than Hemingway's:

The street was dark and wet, and we walked along it to the fortifications at the edge of town (152)

In this case the grammar is not ambiguous: it is clear that they walked down a street and ended up at the walls that are at the edge of town. Therefore, it must have been the translator's own experience of other walled cities, along with misunderstanding of the original, which made him figure out a walk *beside* the walls, not *towards* the walls:

La calle estaba oscura y húmeda. Caminamos junto a las murallas, casi en el límite de la ciudad (213)

Something similar happens with what they see from the place on the walls where they are sitting:

Up on the top of the mountain we saw the lights of the fort (152)

The equivalent of *fort* in Spanish is *fuerte*. In fact Hemingway is referring to the *Fuerte de San Cristobal*, which is a military fort on top of the *Monte San Cristobal*, opposite Pamplona. For Hemingway a fort is just a fort but the translator might have thought that the American writer did not know very well the difference between a castle and a fort:

En su cumbre [la de la montaña] vimos las luces del castillo (214)

In this case it is probable that the context the translator brings to bear is his experience of a number of castles on top of mountains, which are so typical of Spain; also the assumption that a foreigner might have mistaken a castle for a fort. The interesting thing is that, in other places in the novel, when Jake sees a castle –and these castles are, as always, identifiable– he calls it a castle: “and off on the left was a hill with an old castle” (78), “[o]ff on the right, almost closing the harbour, was a green hill with a castle” (198).

The following passage describes a *montón* –a heap of people, something that sometimes happens in the *encierro* –the running of the bulls in Pamplona; the *montón* is formed in the *callejón* –the narrow passage that links the outside of the bullring with the inside– when the bulls are getting into the ring:

‘There were these bulls coming in,’ Mike said. ‘Just ahead of them was the crowd, and some chap tripped and brought the whole lot of them down.’

‘And the bulls all came in right over them,’ Bill said (166)

Since the *callejón* is not mentioned, the only indication that what is being described happened in the *callejón* and not in the bullring is the use of the progressive form of the verb: the bulls *were coming in*, through the *callejón* because there is no other possibility. The contextual assumptions that the translator brings to bear –a very vague idea of the *encierro*– interfere with the literal meaning of the utterance; in the case of readers with no other contextual assumptions than the knowledge of the language, a literal interpretation of the utterance would have been more faithful to the reality. A *montón* cannot happen in the bullring because, once the people running in front of the bulls get in there, they run to the sides of the ring; therefore, if a runner stumbles and falls, it is very unlikely that other runners fall onto him. But in the *callejón*, if somebody falls, people have to jump over them and, since the passage is very narrow and it is packed with people, normally a *montón* is formed. Let us compare now Adsuar’s translation with the original:

-Entraron aquellos malditos toros –explicó Mike–, y delante de ellos la gente, en tropel. Uno de los mozos tropezó, cayó y los demás tropezaron y cayeron sobre él.

-Y los toros se lanzaron sobre ellos –añadió Bill (232)

The use of the simple past (“entraron”), instead of a verbal form with progressive aspect, conveys the idea that the bulls are already in the bullring when the runner falls down, which, as I have explained, is not the case. Also, Adsuar translates “the bulls all came in right over them” as “los toros se lanzaron sobre ellos”, which –again– is neither what the original says nor what normally happens in real life (when there is a *montón* bulls do not stop but continue running and pass over the people who are lying on the floor of the *callejón*).

CONTEXTUAL MISMATCHES IN LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE

In the previous section we have seen that misunderstanding of the text combines with vague ideas about the external field of reference and produces mistranslations. In some other cases it is clear that the error is just the result of not having understood the language of the original. The table below contains a few representative examples:

I'm not interested in bullfighters. That's an abnormal ⁴ life (12)	No me interesan los toreros. Su vida es normal (18)
I'm going to England. I'm going to visit friends. Ever visit friends that didn't want you? Oh, they'll have to take me, all right (43)	Voy a ir a Inglaterra. Voy a ir a ver a unos amigos. Incluso algunos que no te aprecian, ¿no es así? Sí, sé que me recibirán (61)
What do you suppose he said to his mistresses when he wouldn't marry them? (45)	¿Qué crees que le diría a su amante cuando decidió que quería casarse con ella? (63)
You know he's extraordinary about buying champagne. It means any amount to him (49)	Sabes, es un tipo extraordinario a la hora de comprar champaña. Quiero decir en grandes cantidades (69)
'I'd tell her, too,' said the count. 'I'm not joking you. Joke people and you make enemies. That's what I always say.' 'You're right,' Brett said. 'You're terribly right. I always joke people and I haven't a friend in the world. Except Jake here.' 'You don't joke him.' 'That's it.' (51)	...excepto Jake, aquí presente – No se burle de él. –Eso es (72)
We walked down the Boulevard (61)	Comimos por el bulevar (86)
It was cool and dusky (89)	Hacía fresco y había mucho polvo (124)
I thumbed my nose (95)	Arrugué la nariz (133)

4 Emphasis added in all the cases on the table.

‘Take a worm can.’ ‘No, I don’t want one. If they won’t take a fly I’ll just flick it around. ’ (99)	...Si no pican con mosca me quedaré dando una vuelta por ahí (138)
...and all these coves ⁵ were busy taking off their medals, and I had mine in my pocket (113)	Aquellos vanidosos no hacían más que hablar de sus medallas, y yo llevaba las mías en el bolsillo (157-58)
They were all standing outside the chapel where San Fermin and the dignataries had passed in (129)	Todos estaban frente a la capilla por donde habían pasado San Fermín y las autoridades (180)
and the dwarfs moving with their whacking bladders through the crowd (129)	y los cabezudos que iban de un lado para otro moviendo sus cabezotas entre la multitud (181)
They had hung a wreath of garlics around her [Brett’s] neck (129)	Llevaban ristras de ajos alrededor del cuello (181)
He blew it up, his cheeks puffing ahead of the wine-skin, and stood on the bota holding on to a chair (130)	Infló sus carrillos y sopló hasta llenar la bota, que puso sobre una silla, y se sentó encima (182)
I’m not one of you literary chaps (147)	Yo no soy uno de tus amigos literatos (207)
Is that San Fermin’s [the chapel]? [173]	¿Es ése San Fermín? (241)
Behind us the concrete stands filled solidly [with people] (176)	Detrás, como una solida masa de cemento, se extendían las gradas (245)
...his hand on his hip, his cape on his arm, and the bull watching his back going away (181)	...con las manos en la cadera, la montera bajo el brazo y el toro observándolo mientras se alejaba (252)
...and the bull, the red sword hilt tight between his shoulders, his head going down and his legs settling (182)	El toro, con la espada clavada hasta tal punto que sólo la roja empuñadura sobresalía entre sus lomos, agachaba la cabeza y se mantenía firme sobre sus piernas rígidas (254)

Certain mistranslations could be attributed to simple slips of the translator; in other cases we can see, very clearly, that the translator has just not understood the original. Since they are self-explanatory, I will not go into their analysis. I just want to say that the knowledge and experience of the language provide the most basic assumptions that writer and reader have to share in order to communicate successfully; the translator’s sound knowledge of the language of the original text must not be taken from granted. The writer will always envisage an interpretation of the text that is

5 “A man; a fellow” (Wentworth & Flexner 125).

based on a common knowledge of the language: the semantic value of terms and expressions, of verbal tenses, of syntactic structures, etc. When the linguistic competence the reader brings to bear is not up to the competence the writer had envisaged, misunderstandings are likely to happen.

CONTEXTUAL MISMATCHES THAT PREVENT THE APPRECIATION OF COMMUNICATIVE CLUES

Joaquín Adsuar's eagerness for clarity betrays Ernest Hemingway's style. The simplicity of the original disappears because the translator multiplies the lexical items used to refer to the same reality and constantly enlarges the text in order to make explicit the implicatures⁶ he sees behind the original text. As a consequence, the communicative clues related to the simplicity of Hemingway's style are lost. Talking precisely about a passage of *SAR*⁷, Terrence Doody points out the kind of communicative clues that result from the characteristic style of the American novelist:

With its insistent observation, simplicity, and repetitions this paragraph, which opens Chapter XVI of *The Sun Also Rises*, is a quintessential example of Hemingway's style, which we have honored because it has worked so well to recover for us (in Merleau-Ponty's phrase) "a naive contact with the world." (1998: 103)

This *naive contact with the world* is absent in the Spanish rendering of the novel, where the contact becomes much more complicated and full of explanations. Moreover, the repetitions Doody mentions as an essential part of Hemingway's style, are deliberately avoided in the translation into Spanish.

Hemingway's modernist way of writing relies mostly on the inferential abilities of the reader; the more inferential the process of interpreting the text, the more active a role the reader plays and, consequently, the more vivid the fictional image the reader develops in his mind. Explaining things that are implicit in the original goes against the very essence of the stylistic principles of any literary writer. The explanation of terms and expressions is only justifiable insofar as the contextual effects intended for the original could not be, otherwise, inferentially reached with the translation. So long as there is a possibility of rendering the original into a text with similar implicatures, there is no need to explain elements that are unexplained in the original. Moreover, the communicative clues associated with the simplicity of the style are lost. What follows are some instances that illustrate this point.

Hemingway uses just two different verbs –*ask* and *say*– all through the dialogue; the translator uses thirteen (32-36 in the original and 46-51 in the translation):

asked Krum	me preguntó Krum
said Krum	dijo Krum
Woolsey asked	le preguntó Woolsey

6 The interpretation of an utterance has to take into account both the analytic implications, **explicatures**, and the contextual assumptions, **implicatures**, that the speaker intends to convey. Sometimes translators transform implicatures of the original text into explicatures in the translation by making contextual assumptions explicit.

7 "In the morning it was raining. A fog had come over the mountains from the sea. You could not see the tops of the mountains. The plateau was dull and gloomy, and the shapes of the trees and the houses were changed. I walked out beyond the town to look at the weather. The bad weather was coming over the mountains from the sea" (141).

said Krum	dijo Krum
Woolsey said	se lamentó Woolsey
said Krum	exclamó Krum
I said	les dije
Krum said	me respondió Krum
he said	protestó
	insistí
he said	me saludó
I asked	le pregunté
I said	le dije
I said	le expliqué
Cohn said	insistió Cohn
I said	le corté
I said	le respondí
I said	le dije
I said	
I said	le ordené
I said	lo apacigué
Cohn said	asintió Cohn

In order to transmit an impression of darkness in the passage (152-54 in the original and 213-16 in the translation) Hemingway uses two plain, simple, straightforward adjectives: *dark* and *black*. Instead, Adsuar changes the grammatical category –some adjectives become nouns or a periphrasis with a verb– and, apart from *oscuro* and *negro*, he uses *tenebroso* and the verb *ver*:

the street was <i>dark</i>	la calle estaba oscura
black	
it was <i>dark</i>	la oscuridad reinaba
dark	tenebrosos
dark	apenas se veían
black	negro
dark	negros
it was <i>dark</i>	la oscuridad reinaba

Within the same passage, the word *bitch* –whose repetition is essential to keep the strength of the original– has three different equivalents in the Spanish version:

bitch	mala mujer
bitch	puta
bitch	fulana

Another example (180 in the original and 250 in the translation):

loved	le gustaba
loved	quería
loved	amaba

As regards the explanation of things that are unexplained in the original, we have already seen some examples. Nevertheless, I want to include some other remarkable instances where, graphically, we will be able to see how succinct the original text is as compared to the translation.

On the third column I have included an alternative translation of my own that I consider more faithful to the style of the original:

It [the dam] was built to provide a head of water for driving logs (99)	...la presa, cuyo objeto era contener y regular el agua con el fin de que tuviera fuerza suficiente para arrastrar los troncos durante la época de la tala (139)	Fue construida para darle al agua la fuerza necesaria para transportar troncos
They don't know what he means. Any foreigner can flatter him (143)	No tienen idea de cómo es ni de lo que significa para la fiesta. Cualquier extranjero puede hacer con sus alabanzas que se convierta en un vanidoso (201)	No saben lo que vale. Cualquier extranjero puede adularle
...I felt a little uncomfortable about all this shoeshining (144)	...no sentía gran entusiasmo por el humor de Bill y su capricho de hacer limpiar los zapatos de Mike a todos los limpiabotas de Pamplona (202)	Me sentí un poco incómodo con el asunto éste de los limpiabotas

CO-TEXTUAL MISMATCHES

Finally, I want to look at what I consider the most significant mistranslation due to a co-textual mismatch. One of the keys to the interpretation of *SAR* is the fact that Jake Barnes –the narrator– is sexually impotent as a consequence of a war injury, which determines the peculiar kind of love/friendship relationship between he and Brett that is depicted in the novel. His sexual desire is intact but the emasculation he has suffered makes him incapable of performing sexual intercourse.

Jake's impotency is indirectly mentioned several times during the novel. Only an attentive reader realizes what is going on after a few clues have been given. But, obviously, all those clues scattered throughout the text are part of the co-textual assumptions the writer envisaged; in fact, it is a sort of progressive unveiling that eventually explains why Jake and Brett behave with each other in the way they do. The reader can then understand things in retrospect.

The first reference that appears in the novel is so general –Jake just admits that he is *sick*– that nobody could have noticed the sort of sickness he is talking about unless other hints appeared in the text:

She [a prostitute] looked up to be kissed. She touched me with one hand and I put her hand away.

‘Never mind.’

‘What’s the matter? You sick?’
 ‘Yes.’
 ‘Everybody’s sick. I’m sick, too.’ (16)

The previous paragraph poses no problem to the translator; even if he had not noticed –and he actually did not notice it, as I will show–what kind of sickness Jake is referring to, the translation preserves the ambiguity of the original:

Alzó la cara para ser besada. Me tocó con la mano y yo se la aparté.
 -No hace falta...
 -¿Qué le pasa? ¿Está enfermo?
 -Sí.
 -Todo el mundo lo está. Yo también (23)

However, the following dialogue between Jake and Brett is unintelligible in the translation because the translator did not take into account the co-text and, obviously, he did not understand what they are talking about:

‘And there’s not a damn thing we could do,’ I said.
 ‘I don’t know,’ she said. ‘I don’t want to go through that hell again.’
 ‘We’d better keep away from each other.’
 ‘But, darling, I have to see you. It isn’t all **that** you know.’
 ‘No, but **it** always gets to be.’
 ‘That’s my fault. Don’t we pay for all the things we do, though?’ (24-25; emphasis added)

With the light shed by the consideration of Jake’s wound, the dialogue makes perfect sense. We just have to substitute the two pronouns in bold –‘that’ and ‘it’– by the word *sex*. But the translator has not understood this and, consequently, his interpretation of the original leaves no room for Jake’s impotency:

–Y no podemos hacer nada -dije.
 –No lo sé -dudó-. No quiero volver a pasar ese mismo infierno de nuevo.
 –Lo mejor que podemos hacer es mantenernos alejados el uno del otro.
 –Pero yo tengo que verte, cariño. Tú no lo sabes todo.
 –No, pero todo resulta como digo yo.
 –Es culpa mía. ¿No pagamos siempre por todo lo que hemos hecho? (35)

When Brett says “tú no lo sabes todo”, what is she referring to? And when Jake replies “todo resulta como digo yo”, what is *todo*?, what is what he says (“digo yo”)? The co-textual mismatch is patent. In this dialogue the translator has not envisaged as a co-textual assumption the fact that Jake

is sexually impotent, most probably because he had not noticed it after having read the novel or, perhaps, because he had not realized that that is precisely what they are referring to here.

I propose the following alternative to the translation of this dialogue:

- Y no hay ni una puñetera cosa que podamos hacer, -dije.
- No lo sé, -dijo-. No quiero volver a pasar por ese infierno.
- Mejor que nos mantengamos alejados el uno del otro.
- Pero tengo que verte, cariño. No es sólo **eso**.
- No, pero siempre **lo** acaba siendo.
- Es culpa mía. ¿No acabamos pagando por todo lo que hacemos?

If we consider now that “eso” and “lo” are referring to sexual relationships, everything becomes clear; even the “infierno” Brett mentions.

CONCLUSIONS

Since translation is an act of communication between two different linguistic communities, a theory of communication should, in principle, be sound enough to describe and analyse translation in the same way that it is valid to explain the success or failure of other types of communication. We have seen that the concept of *context* as described by Sperber and Wilson in their work *Relevance. Communication & Cognition* accounts –in terms of contextual mismatches– for the different types of deficiencies we appreciate in the rendering of a literary work into another language.

The taxonomy of mismatches that I have outlined here can be applied, in the first place, to the reading of the original. The translation has a higher risk of mismatches –between the context originally envisaged by the writer and the context brought to bear by the reader of the translation– because, in between these two contexts, there are two other contexts: the context of the translator as a reader and the context he envisages as a writer.

Underlying certain deficiencies in translation is very often the translator’s concern for clarity. In order to produce a version that is clear enough for the reader, the translator works at the level of explicatures making explicit the implicatures he has inferred. Apart from stylistic considerations, by so doing the translator alters the initial context that the writer envisaged and produces a text for whose interpretation less contextual assumptions are necessary. The problem is that, quite often, there are mismatches between the context envisaged by the writer and the context brought to bear by the translator as reader. The result is that the implicatures he infers and makes explicit are not such implicatures and, therefore, there is no correspondence between the original and the translation.

What the translator should do if he wants to play it safe is work at the level of explicatures; that is to say, not make implicatures explicit but render the original text into a target language text with similar analytic implications –explicatures– and from which the same implicatures as in the original could be derived. The only exception should be those cultural elements that most of the readers in the target language would be likely to ignore and that would make the text unintelligible.

It is worth noting, though, that sometimes certain things that appear in the original text were equally incomprehensible for the readership for which the novel was intended in the first place.

Literary translators should try to identify, first of all, the context originally envisaged by the writer: assumptions about the external field of reference, about the purpose of communicative clues related to the style, about the purely linguistic interpretation of the text, about the cotext. This is a difficult task that demands far more than a profound knowledge of two languages. It requires the sensitivity of a writer. Good translation, like good writing, has never been an easy task.

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