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Dilemmas and Conceptual Frameworks in Translation
Studies: Past and Present

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ABSTRACT

Ever since the unrecorded origin of translation, the latter became a powerful tool for bridging linguistic and cultural gaps and a major vehicle for the spread of knowledge and civilization. Starting from a recognition of this huge debt, the present graduation paper attempts to provide a general overview of major forces that operated in the surge of this human activity as well as to more specifically probe into some of the major recurring issues that punctuate its development both as a craft and as a theoretical discipline.

Key words: Translation, historical perspective, translation studies, translation dilemmas, translation typologies.

RESUMEN

Ya desde el indocumentado nacimiento de la traducción, esta se convirtió en una poderosa herramienta que estrechaba distancias culturales y lingüísticas además de un poderoso vehículo para la expansión del conocimiento y la civilización. Comenzando con el reconocimiento de esta gran aportación, este trabajo de fin de grado pretende mostrar una perspectiva general de las fuerzas más relevantes que influenciaron el nacimiento de esta actividad humana así como sacar a colación algunos de los aspectos más recurrentes que han jalonado su desarrollo como disciplina teórica al igual que como arte.

Palabras clave: Traducción, perspectiva histórica, estudios de la traducción, dilemas de la traducción, tipologías de la traducción.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the dawn of civilization, translation has been consubstantial with human communication. While translation theorists resort to many different approaches in order to explain what the act of translation is, the most common understanding of this term makes reference to translation as bilingual rendering, an activity which has existed for more than five thousand years as it has been proven by numerous archeological discoveries.

In this graduation paper, I will attempt in the first place to explore some factors that may account for the reasons why the human race needed to make use of translation at some point in history. Translation has played a major role in trade, the diffusion of religious beliefs, the processes of colonization and decolonization, technological discoveries (e.g. in architecture or in the processing of raw materials), and, of course, intellectual and artistic development. Even a glimpse at how translation has been regarded (both as a discipline of knowledge and as a craft) provides fascinating food for thought: from mythical views like the one portrayed in the Tower of Babel's biblical account, to more practical and empirical approaches, and from the latter to solid theoretical descriptions in modern translation studies.

In the second part of this dissertation, I will more specifically focus on a number of key dilemmas that feature prominently in the discipline and practice of translation around topics like temporal variation, the cultural component of translation and the issue of equivalence.

Finally, in the last part of this graduation paper, I will approach existing typologies of translation, since such taxonomies can at best clarify what is a complex scene and help us cope with some of the above-mentioned dilemmas. Sound, perceptive classifications where the classifying criteria are clearly established and not intermingled are no doubt beneficial in many regards, including translation assessment and translation teaching.

2. TRANSLATION: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

2.1 ON THE ORIGINS OF TRANSLATION

There are a few elements that had to be certainly present in the birth of translation. As a medium of communication, it goes without saying that the contact between two different languages had to be the first step. Mythological accounts like the biblical narrative about the Tower of Babel and the alleged scattering of languages that ensued are powerful and appealing and have been extensively analyzed —remarkably by George Steiner in his groundbreaking classic *After Babel* (1975). The episode is neatly summarized in the following account by Hosni Mostafa El-dali where the connection with translation is already made explicit:

For centuries, people believed in the relation between translation and the story of the tower of Babel in the book Genesis. According to the Bible, the descendants of Noah decided, after the great flood, to settle down in a plain in the land of Shinar. There they committed a great sin. Instead of setting up a society that fits God's will, they decided to challenge his authority and build a tower that could reach Heaven. However, this plan was not completed, as God, recognizing their wish, regained control over them through a linguistic stratagem. He caused them to speak different languages so as not to understand each other. Then he scattered them all over the earth. After that incident, the number of languages increased through diversion, and people started to look for ways to communicate, hence the birth of translation. (El-dali 2011: 30 in Benabdelali 2006).

W. Barnstone's succinct rephrasing of the myth is particularly suitable at this point:

With the fall of Babel, God dispersed the word, gave us tongues and the solitude of difference, and also the impossible but pleasurable duty to repair our separation. After the destruction the deity implicitly challenged us to look up again and rebuild the tower of another Babel. The act of translation is the other Babel, that impossible tower (Barnstone 1993: 3).

This biblical story underscores the fact that thousands of years ago some individual stared in amazement at the diversity of languages and fabricated this myth to somehow cope with the mystery. Moreover, the writer of the biblical passage provided a grand narrative that constitutes the frame for the epistemological status of translation —an activity and also a branch of knowledge that as such dates back to time immemorial¹.

By contrast, non-mythical, non-religious accounts of the origins of translation, like Sonia Firdaus' *Evolution of Translation Theories and Practice* hinge on communicative psycholinguistic criteria: "[...] the process of translation commenced with the birth of the first human being when he started to communicate with his partners to express his thoughts into words. That can be called the initial and the first step in the history of translation." (Firdaus 2012: 277). Indeed for Firdaus any individual engaging in the process of conveying to others his/her internal thoughts by verbal means is somehow performing a work of translation. From this point of view, intralingual translation was the first step in the long journey that we are considering. Having said that, we should note that there is a substantial difference between translation and the ordinary communication that takes place within a single linguistic system: "[...] if we agree that 'all communicators are translators' (Bell, 1991), we must remember that the role of the translator is different from that of the 'normal communicator': the translator is a bilingual mediating agent between monolingual communication participants in two different language communities." (El-dali 2011: 29).

For translation, on the other hand, to become interlingual, it took individuals to learn at least a foreign language and, consequently, become bilingual to some degree. The requirement for the translator to possess a sound command of the source language as well as native communicative skills in the target language must have existed since the inception of translation as a practical activity. As Eugene A. Nida pointed out in his work *Theories of Translation*:

¹Miguel Ángel García Vega situates the beginning of this journey in the early civilizations of the Mediterranean and Mesopotamia (García Vega 1994: 21).

[...] inter-lingual communication has been going on since the dawn of human history. As early as the third millennium B.C., bilingual lists of words – evidently for the use of translators – were being made in Mesopotamia, and today translating and interpreting are going on in more than a thousand languages – in fact, wherever there are bilinguals. (Nida 1991: 19).

Translators must have been very valuable assets throughout history, if only because in every commercial relationship between civilizations, bargaining across languages was a regular part of trade exchanges. As history moved forward, the social regard in which translators were held underwent a constant morphing, while the steady growth of interlingual communication encouraged the thriving of translation as both a discipline and a science in its own right. In fact, there were some periods in history where translators enjoyed the status of creative artists: “[...] the translator was compared to an artist with a moral duty both to the work of the original author and to the receiver.” (El-dali 2011: 30).

It appears, therefore, that interlingual translation has been going on at least since 3000 B.C. as it's shown by historical records. Who knows if there were any instances of translated texts or words before that date? If that is the case, the evidence for it has not been found yet.

2.2 THE NEED FOR TRANSLATION

It seems that the most obvious explanation for what created the demand for translation was the very need to transfer ideas or information from one language into another and to establish a line of communication with another culture. We may even claim that translation evolved from the condition of man as *zoon politikon*, to use the Aristotelian term: from his ability to create communities and spread civic ties. The “political” component that justifies the need for translation also includes the more specific context of power relations, which should not be ignored in considering the historical underpinnings of this activity: “[...] translation was employed as a mode, to realize the political and religious goals of the ruling classes, as represented by Kings and religious leaders respectively” (Firdaus 2012: 281). The spread of Christianity, for example, was hugely fostered by the translations of the Bible, since

“With the spread of Christianity, translation takes a new role of disseminating the word of God.” (Firdaus 2012: 281).

In his article “Traducción y cultura en el ámbito literario” Miguel Saénz remarks that: “[...] la traducción es una de las hijas naturales de los procesos de colonización y descolonización, y [...] su práctica está necesariamente condicionada por los equilibrios de poder entre las culturas. [...]” (Saénz 2009: 763-764). In the view of this Spanish scholar and translator, translation often served as a tool for ruling other cultures and controlling the colonized civilizations in the benefit of stronger cultures:

Antonio de Nebrija, como es sabido, escribió en 1492 que “siempre la lengua fue compañera del imperio”⁵. La palabra “imperio” no tenía entonces la connotaciones negativas que hoy tiene, pero la frase refleja muy bien la conciencia que tuvieron los conquistadores españoles de la importancia del idioma. [...] su misión era infundirles [a los indígenas] otra cultura, traicionando a la suya propia.” (Saénz 2009: 765).

Sometimes, however, political domination was not a one-way phenomenon, since the subjected peoples could be technically or culturally superior or at least potentially beneficial (i.e. in areas like architectural crafts, social organization, processing of raw materials, etc.) In such cases, deciphering the language of the conquered could be a highly profitable activity. Thus, it seems clear that every contact between different languages has often been accompanied by material interest. We could argue that historically translation has acted like a bridge that both filled communication gaps and satisfied the self-interests of each culture.

[...] translation arose organically out of attempts to communicate with people who spoke another language; its origins lay in commerce and trade, politics and war. Translators and interpreters were trained and hired by people with money and power who wanted to make sure that their messages were conveyed faithfully to the other side of a negotiation, and that they understood exactly what the other side was saying to them (El-dali 2011: 38).

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned material drivers that justify the emergence and development of translation in history, the latter extended into the domain of cultural exchange and, more specifically, grew into a vector of literary influence. The Romans' interest over translation and imitation (Firdaus 2012: 281) is a case in point, and so is the transmission of the Greek classics via translation: a phenomenon that largely transformed the intellectual life of the West. In the seventh century, and with the expansion of Islam, the diffusion of ideas became a fundamental pillar of what would develop into an extremely thriving and hegemonic culture. When Muslims conquered Spain they started to build a great library so their intellectuals would have every source they would need to study and develop their knowledge (Laughlin1995: 119). In this context, translation certainly played a major role:

The ideal Islamic ruler became the one who, like the early Abbasid caliphs, promoted classical science and learning, now heavily domesticated in Islamic civilization. The cultivation of each of the translated fields [...] and the new developments in them in Arabic and (later) in Persian [...] sustained the vitality of the classical tradition in the Islamic world well into premodern times (Grafton et al., 2010: 493).

Such was the influence of Arabic translations (and commentaries) in the Western transmission of Greek and classical culture that they became a major tool in reconnecting, for example, the West itself with Greek philosophy. (Laughlin1995: 121). In fact all branches of science and art —literature included— hugely benefitted from the gigantic input of translation during the Middle Ages. Yet the phenomenon cannot be circumscribed to a single historical period, but is truly universal:

Translation of literature played a very significant role in the development of the history and civilization of human beings. Hence, if it were not for translation, the world would have been living in darkness; through translation Greeks acquired knowledge from Hebrew language, and Romans from Greeks and Arabs; English from all the above mentioned sources respectively. (Firdaus 2012: 280).

There is no doubt that the extraordinary growth of translation in Western civilization had a huge impact on the enormous cultural borrowings it became the vehicle for.

2.3 THE GROWTH OF TRANSLATION AND THE ROLE OF THE SCRIPTURES

The history of translation theory is vast and complex, and it would take much more than a graduation paper to develop the topic adequately. We may, however, attempt to provide a rough general framework including its main stages and characteristics. George Steiner's proposal regarding the division of translation history into four flexible periods provides a safe enough backdrop (Steiner 1992: 248-250). The "immediate empirical focus" which characterized the long period since the first century B.C. to the late eighteenth century was followed by the imprint of German Romanticism and its focus on a more theoretical "hermeneutic inquiry", while the latter gave way in turn to the "modern" period (extending into the twentieth century and with a strong focus on general linguistics) and, finally to the subsequent surge of the discipline of Translation Studies as we know it today.

Mention should be made of the huge influence of Bible translation on the development of an intellectual discourse on translation which largely hinged on the debate over fidelity, which otherwise constitutes a focal point of historical theories on translation: How to translate the divine words faithfully was a serious issue because of dogmatic and political concerns (Firdaus 2012:281).

It is reasonable to think that if it had not been for the relentless efforts of the Church to expand its political and intellectual influence across the known world, the development of better hermeneutic techniques and the ensuing critical and theoretical framework that contributed to the growth of translation as a branch of knowledge would not have been the same. Be that as it may, going back to approximately 2 centuries B.C., a Koine Greek version of the Hebrew scriptures was translated in several stages until the task was completed in 132 B.C.; a feat that is thought to have been achieved thanks to the relevant investment of Ptolemy II Philadelphus who supposedly contracted 72 Jewish scholars to complete the task (the reason why this version was named the Septuagint). This landmark in the history of

translation epitomizes the importance of Scriptural versions in the following centuries in fuelling and strengthening this discipline. The Septuagint was the first translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek and became the accepted text of the Old Testament in the Christian Church and the basis of its canon. A few centuries later, and following other attempts to create alternative versions of the Septuagint, the canonical Christian Bible became formally established by Bishop Cyril of Jerusalem in 350.

Interestingly, when the ancient scribes copied manuscripts and codices, the margins were annotated with so-called *marginal glosses*: corrections, clarifications regarding mistakes spotted in the process of transcription and occasional comments. And so, when other scribes made a new copy of that copy, it was not unusual for one such gloss to be included as part of the text itself. In this way, as time went by, each region evolved a different version of the original text with its unique mix of omissions and additions: an illustration of the role played by chance events in the transmission of culture by means of translation during the course of History.

Bible translation also illustrates phenomena of censorship and ideological control that accompanied the historical growth of translation. During the Middle Ages any rendering of the Old Testament was utterly discouraged, perhaps to prevent its corruption and to maintain the spread of one authoritative version. In 1199, Pope Innocent III banned unauthorized versions of the Bible due to the Cathar and Waldensian heresies. The Synods of Toulouse and Tarragona, in 1234, outlawed possession of such translations. It has been proven that some vernacular renderings were allowed whereas others were subject to a thorough scrutiny. Central to these interventions was the need to choose a definitive and canonical text that would contain the divine truth for a whole community of believers, and that was not a light decision to make, especially when mistranslations or unsanctioned interpretations could entail the translator's imprisonment (Luis de León, 1527-1591) or even the loss of his life. That was the case of William Tyndale (1494-1536), who had to leave part of his work unfinished due to his execution. Contravening the official prohibition, he translated into English the New Testament as well as the Pentateuch and the Book of Jonah. Nevertheless, Tyndale's work was supplemented by that of Myles Coverdale (1488-1569) and published

under a pseudonym as the Mathew Bible, the first complete modern English translations of the Bible.

On another level, Bible translation has become a major domain for fruitful debates about the kind of translation dilemmas that I shall be addressing in the following section, particularly the contradistinction between word for word translation or message equivalence—otherwise called sense-for-sense or dynamic equivalence (Nida, 1964).

The further away one gets from word for word translation, the easier the text becomes to read while relying more on the theological, linguistic or cultural understanding of the translator, which one would not normally expect a lay reader to require. On the other hand, as one gets closer to a word for word translation, the text becomes more literal but still relies on similar problems of meaningful translation at the word level and makes it difficult for lay readers to interpret due to their unfamiliarity with ancient idioms and other historical and cultural contexts. (Wikipedia. «Bible Translations». Web. Retrieved on 29 May 2016.)²

It is to these major translation issues that we will now turn.

3. TRANSLATION DILEMMAS

The act of translating always implies a subjective judgement on what, according to our personal experience and knowledge, a text or piece of oral discourse means in another language. That judgement inevitably leads us to interpretation, all the more so when the translation is performed on a text from the past, and this interpretation is in many cases an unconscious process: “Any thorough reading of a text out of the past of one’s own language

² A telling example of both the enduring impact of chance events and oversights in the translation-transmission of major cultural artifacts like the Bible culture and of the risks involved in word-for-word translation is the rendition of Matthew 19:24, which in the King James Bible (the authorized version of the English Bible from 1611) reads: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter in the kingdom of God.” The mistake is originally attributed to Jerome (c.347-420), who in his Vulgate Latin Bible translated the Greek term *Kamelos* as ‘camelum’, when it really meant *mooring rope*.

and literature is a manifold act of interpretation. In the great majority of cases, this act is hardly performed or even consciously recognized.” (Steiner 1992: 18).

Thus, even though we may not be engaging a deliberate act of translation, we often conduct an act of interpretation, since, every time we receive input in a different tongue from our own, and even in our native one for that matter, we cannot avoid interpreting. In a way, that act of interpretation involves some mode of translation, regardless of whether that process involves intralingual or interlingual, explicit or implicit, translation. Steiner himself describes interpretation “as that which gives life beyond the moment and place of immediate utterance or transcription” (Steiner 1992:28).

3.1 TRANSLATION AND TEMPORAL VARIATION

On the other hand, there are complex issues that heavily condition the process of translation and lead to nearly unresolvable dilemmas. One such complexity has to do with language change and the problem of translating across historical periods, especially when one tries to render outdated or very old language varieties. As Steiner points out language is in a continuous process of change, —in a kind of “Heraclitean flux” that has become a focal point of interest for some schools of modern semantics. Since every single language is immersed in a non-stop evolving cycle as long as it continues to be used by a community of speakers, this means that the older a text is, the harder it will be for a translator to reproduce in the target language the same meaning as a text had when it was first written or produced:

“[...] every language act has a temporal determinant. No semantic form is timeless. When using a word we wake into resonance, as it were, its entire previous history. A text is embedded in a specific historical time; it has what linguists call diachronic structure.” (Steiner 1992: 24).

Translating temporal (Mayoral 1990: 35-37) or diachronic variation (Rabadán 1991:111) can lead to a situation where the translator feels between a rock and a hard place.

Strategies suggested by several translation scholars are neatly summarized and discussed in a paper by Samaniego and Fernández (2002) and they mostly point in the direction of a compromise between not sounding either too modern or too archaic (the

approach based on choosing a historical dialect of real existence in the target language not being desirable or even feasible).

3.2 THE CULTURAL COMPONENT

Translation is not simply about words and the act of translation involves not only two different languages, but also two cultures (Toury 1995: 200). To a greater or lesser degree, many texts are culturally-loaded —i.e., they reflect “the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression” (Newmark 1988: 94) — and this means that full equivalence may not be always available, particularly when the distance between the two cultural systems at work is specifically wide. In the words of a translation scholar, “The more aware the translator can become of these complexities, including power differentials between cultures and genders, the better a translator s/he will be.” (El-dali 2011: 37 in Robinson 2005: 191).

Indeed, translation involves bridging both a linguistic and a cultural gap (Nida 1964: 130), two sides of the same coin that are inextricably linked, since “no language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture; and no culture can exist which does not have at its center, the structure of natural language” (Lotman & Uspensky 1978: 211-232). This was already known in ancient times, when culturally prosperous civilizations like Rome or Islam had highly skilled and well-educated translators who were more than aware of the connections between cultural and linguistic knowledge and language, and translated in accordance with this approach. (Robinson 2005: 191).

The strategies used to cope with this problem differ widely and ultimately, and depend on the specific context of individual translations (the expected TL readership being not the least important factor), but they generally range between “foreignizing” and “domestication” (Venuti 1995:20; Sun 2011: 160 &ff.) Comprehensive classifications have been provided, often in pragmatic and education-oriented settings (Newmark 1988: 81-91), but this no territory for simple unequivocal standards or for a clear consensus:

Long debates have been held over when to paraphrase, when to use the nearest local equivalent, when to coin a new word by translating literally, and when to transcribe.

And these ‘untranslatable’ culture – bound words and phrases continue to fascinate translators and translation theorists (El-dali 2011: 37; cf. Rheingold 2000; Renner 1989).

What remains true, in any case, is that since the 1980s translation has come to be seen more and more as cross-cultural, rather than purely linguistic communication: the ‘cultural shift’ described by Susan Bassnet and Andre Lefevere among others (2002:1).

3.3 EQUIVALENCE

Ultimately, what is at stake is the widely discussed attainability of equivalence in translation, a concept which was mentioned for the first time by J. R. Firth in 1957. Two forms are considered equivalent when: “a linguistic unit in one language has the same intended meaning or message encoded in another language” (Veselinova 2014: 54). An extremely interesting discussion of the notion of equivalence can be found in Mona Baker’s detailed list of conditions against which the concept of equivalence can be defined. Baker explores the notion of equivalence at different levels in relation to the translation process, including all the different facets of translation and thus bringing together the linguistic and the communicative approach. More specifically, she discerns the following equivalence types:

- Equivalence that can appear at word level and above word level.
- Grammatical equivalence, against the backdrop of the diversity of grammatical categories across languages.
- Textual equivalence, which refers to the equivalence between a SL text and a TL text in terms of information and cohesion.
- Pragmatic equivalence, which refers to implicatures and strategies of avoidance during the translation process. (Baker 1992).

Eugene Nida, in turn, distinguishes between two types of equivalence, formal and dynamic, where formal equivalence ‘focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content. In such a translation one is concerned with such correspondences as poetry to poetry, sentence to sentence, and concept to concept.’ (1964: 156-192) Nida calls this

type of translation a ‘gloss translation’ —one that aims at enabling the reader to understand as much of the SL context as possible. Dynamic equivalence is based on the principle of equivalent effect, i.e. that the relationship between receiver and message should aim at being the same as that between the original receivers and the SL message. (Bassnet 1980: 34).

Even though the issue of equivalence is certainly controversial and lends itself to a whole range of subjective interpretations that we cannot afford to extensively discuss within the limits of the present paper, the emphasis on this topic by translation scholars and their painstaking efforts in order to produce a well-defined taxonomy of this phenomenon is surely remarkable. One positive effect of this superabundance of theoretical discussions is their potential for translation teaching and training. Baker’s own classification of the several problems involved in attaining equivalence, for example, leads to the suggestion of specific strategies to cope with the problem (Baker 1992). By contrast, the downside of the debate on this topic is that it may eventually lead to the inference that wherever translation is performed there is always an inevitable loss and that ultimately full equivalence between languages is, somehow, unachievable. This claim is often made, for example, in the context of literary language and, more specifically, literary metaphors (Cf. Dagut 1976:24). Nevertheless, and leaving aside the specificity of some kinds of literary language, this judgment is an unmerited weight that should be taken off translation:

Once the principle is that sameness cannot exist between two languages, it becomes possible to approach the question of loss and gain in the translation process. It is again an indication of the low status of translation that so much time should have been spent on discussing what is lost in the transfer of a text from SL to TL whilst ignoring what can also be gained, for the translator can at times enrich or clarify the SL text as a direct result of the translation process. Moreover, what is often seen as ‘lost’ from the SL context may be replaced in the TL context, [...]. (Bassnet 1980: 38).

Perhaps the kind of dilemmas involved in translation equivalence can be seen in perspective against the broader canvass provided by Steiner’s philosophy of language:

In translation the dialectic of unison and of plurality is dramatically at work. In one sense, each act of translation is an endeavor to abolish multiplicity and to bring different world pictures back into perfect congruence. In other sense, is an attempt to reinvent the shape of meaning, to find and justify an alternate statement. (Steiner 1992: 246).

4. TRANSLATION TYPES

In an attempt to accurately represent the phenomenon of translation and to account for the multiplicity of communication contexts in which it takes place, numerous taxonomies of translation types have been proposed entailing an extensive terminology that may occasionally be somewhat baffling and sometimes even appear to contradict one another. As with all classifications, the heart of the matter lies in understanding what specific criteria inform each nomenclature. A convenient starting point is afforded by Roman Jakobson's typology in his paper "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation", where he discerns three major types: 1) Intralingual translation or rewording (an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs in the same language); 2) Interlingual translation or translation proper (an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language); and 3.) Intersemiotic translation or transmutation (an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems). (Jakobson 1959: 232-239). Needless to say, it is the second of these three categories that we are mostly concerned with and where the issue of equivalence as developed above attains its relevance.

More specifically within the domain of interlingual translation, Peter Newmark's binary formula "communicative VS semantic translation" continues to be clarifying and highly descriptive. His dictum that, by contrast with the relative freedom that the translator of a purely pragmatic text enjoys in recasting the grammar of sentences for the sake of clarity, "the syntax in semantic translation which gives the text stresses and rhythm is [...] as sacred as the words." (Newmark 1981: 47) provides a convenient framework for traditional discussions on the role of "creativity" and "fidelity" in translation. While it is true that a

literary text where syntax is deliberately manipulated in order to achieve a rhetorical or functional effect demands a translation that mirrors or mimics such grammatical features (i.e. a fully “semantic” rendering), the natural differences between the two languages involved may prevent a close-up rendition of all syntactic markers. Perhaps Newmark’s distinction between semantic and communicative (the latter simply requiring that “both content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership.” [1988: 47]) must be seen as a continuum rather than as a discrete dichotomy, even though there is no denying that in aesthetically-marked texts,

The tone of a passage is the key to its communicative effectiveness. Tentativeness, urgency, menace, flattery, persuasiveness, all have certain markers which are more apparent in the syntax than the lexis, and may be reflected in the tense, mood and voice of a few significant verbs (...) For the translator it requires a considerable acquaintance with modern stylistic analysis. Otherwise he will not be competent to translate, say, the self-doubt of Kafka’s subjunctives. Syntax, which is a more generalized and abstract measure of language than lexis, gives the feeling-tone of a text. (Newmark 1981: 150).

Also Jean Delisle’s (1980: 29-69) classification relies on binary oppositions. A key distinction in this regard hinges on the dichotomy pragmatic texts (those conveying a message in a more or less simple and straightforward way, without foregrounded figures of speech or aesthetic sophistication) vs literary texts. To put it simply although perhaps too bluntly, it makes a big difference whether one is translating a toaster’s instructions for use or a novel or short story, where issues of point of view (often resting on grammatical markers like tense, deixis or verbal mood) may be critical and therefore demand a minute observation by the translator.

Yet another dualistic opposition in Delisle’s conceptual framework is represented by the poles general vs. specialized —both used against the background of the source text’s degree of specialization: the degree to which it serves specific purposes and resorts to restricted or technical terminology. The distinction is certainly sound, the only possible objection being that in one way or another every text possesses some degree of specialization or that at least there are many hybrid cases where a general text may include occasional items

of specialized language. Again the idea of a continuum rather than a clear-cut boundary may provide a useful antidote against an excessively strict understanding of otherwise very useful classifications. Many journalistic, timeless features, for example, could hardly be classified as specialized, notwithstanding the fact that they may include here and there references that would require some specialized research by their translators.

Thirdly, Delisle's distinction between an academically-oriented vs. a professionally-oriented translation is clearly sensible and particularly relevant in the context of translation teaching: even in academic settings, there is a big difference between using translation practice as a means to improving the acquisition of a second language or as a fundamental part of a programme designed to train future professionals of translation; and also between both and the paying job named translation (and interpretation) that delivers a service demanded by private customers or public institutions. Finally Deslisle's discernment between translations aiming at word equivalence (roughly the word-for-word strategy) and those others pursuing message equivalence —closer perhaps to Newmark's semantic translation, although not entirely identical with it— is also enlightening.

Special mention must be made in this quick review of typological work of the highly valuable recapitulation by Ottawa-based translation expert Roda P. Roberts, which she enriches with her own comprehensive taxonomy partly by subdividing and refining the major items in Newmark's and Delisle's models. The advantage of Robert's contribution is that it rests on a balanced appreciation of the merits and flaws of previous work in the field, to which we should add the fact that her review is particularly keen on interrelating preexisting taxonomies without mixing their criteria. Thus her discrimination between professional-based typologies and those others motivated by a theoretical drive, and her keenness on not confusing both, or her differentiation between classifications depending on whether their focus lies on the source text or on the target text may appear to rely on pure common sense, but also entail sophisticated arguments and, moreover, pay good service in clarifying the typological scene.

Robert's framework, in short, provides a neat streamlining of previous attempts to bring order to translation studies and to scientifically describe an activity as old as civilization

but also plural and clearly context-dependent. It ultimately provides a useful toolkit for further work in translation research, translation teaching and professional translation work. Regarding the latter, for example, one may wonder whether a sound classification of translation types may provide a solid foundation for a professional milieu which includes translation customers, translation administrators and translators themselves, since all of them would be able to understand and specify their requirements precisely, thus facilitating the commissioning and delivery of *à la carte* translations.³

CONCLUSION

At present, the number of known living languages varies from 6,000 to 7,000. Language diversity, and more particularly its origins, have been a puzzle which our predecessors have constantly attempted to explain from manifold perspectives —some of them mythical and ultimately related to supernatural creation narratives (and, interestingly, regarding such a diversity as a curse rather than a blessing); others more empirical and scientific against the backdrop of natural evolution. Whether a divine punishment or the result of time-driven organic growth, the plurality of languages inevitably entailed the need (and indeed the very *raison d'être*) for translation.

In the first part of this dissertation I have particularly focused on some determining material factors that historically drove the growth of translation as a human activity. The consideration (if only superficially, given the scope of this paper) of such factors highlights

³See in this regard Hosni Mostafa El-dali's negative view of an industry where interests other than purely professional ones often distort the translators' practice in ways which may hopefully be countered by a neutral frame of reference derived from a sound descriptive typology: "Today as well, professional translators must in most cases conform to the expectations of the people who pay them to translate. If a client says edit, the translator edits; if the client says do not edit, the translator does not edit. If the client says do a literal translation, and then a literal back-translation to prove you've followed my orders, that is exactly what the translator does. Translators can refuse to do a job that they find morally repugnant, or professionally unethical, or practically impossible; they can also resist and attempt to reshape the orders they get from the people with the money. But the whats and the hows and the whys of translation are by and large controlled by publishers, clients, and agencies – not by universal norms (Robinson, 2005, p. 196). (El-dali 2011: 38 in Robinson 2005: 196).

the importance of power relations in this process: knowledge is power, and every past civilization aimed to extend its supremacy, to colonize other territories, to grow politically and culturally stronger. And in so doing translation became a particularly serviceable tool.

On the other hand, the growing robustness of this activity as an instrument of political hegemony and a vehicle for cultural transmission (epitomized by scriptural translation) led to the generation of a large body of scholarly knowledge (first normative and later more descriptive and scientific) that gradually consolidated into a theoretical discipline, in turn the foundation of present-day translation studies. Central issues within this branch of knowledge revolve around problematic areas like temporal variation, the cultural component and the issue of equivalence, to which the second part of this paper is devoted.

In dealing with such troublesome areas, whether in prescriptive, more purely theoretical or simply practical and even professional terms, the clear definition of a neat and at the same time flexible taxonomy of translation types proves particularly enlightening. Even a superficial review of some of the available literature on this topic, reveals the usefulness of such a conceptual framework in coming to terms with the kind of difficulties discussed in the central part of this dissertation. For this reason, I decided to explore some of these classifications in the final portion of this text and even ventured to suggest their potential application in a professional context where translation is also, let us not forget it, a flourishing industry. If a comprehensive set of standards based on a taxonomy agreed upon by the whole translation community came into place, we would see a breakthrough in professional praxis that would certainly make the lives of many people easier.

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