

***To Kill a Mockingbird* and its Three Spanish Translations: Analysis and Conclusions**

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Translation, like psychology, covers a multitude of sins. Like psychology, too, it flourishes in contemporary gardens, and therefore deserves to be asked what sort of flower it is, and what sort of gardeners cultivate it.

ARROWSMITH, W. & SHATTUCK, R. (1964).
The Craft and Context of Translation.
New York: Anchor Books, p. 51.

The flowers picked in this analysis are three Spanish translations:

- * an original novel (Orbis: 1983 (Bruguera, 1962); 284 pp.)
- * a condensed version (Selecciones del Reader's Digest, 1964: 141 pp.)
- * a film script (CIC-RCA Columbia Pictures Video, 1986)

of one of the most popular American best-sellers: HARPER LEE'S *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), translated in Spanish by *Matar un ruiseñor*. The novel had been critically acclaimed, winning the Pulitzer prize for Fiction in 1961, the Brotherhood Award of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and the Best-Sellers Magazine's Paperback of the Year Award (1962), among others.

To kill a Mockingbird, seen through the eyes of Jean Louise Finch, nicknamed Scout, who is growing from six to nine years old, but told with the experience of an autobiographical adult narrator, is a straightforward sequence of events, centered on the recollection of joys and sorrows of children learning about themselves and the world, especially about the struggle to obtain justice for a black person from a white jury, and located in Maycomb, a fictional small town in Alabama, the deep South of the U.S.

The gardeners, so as to continue with the metaphor, are BALDOMERO PORTA (in the original text), M. de los ANGELES (in the shortened version), and a dubbing studio translator –unknown– (as to the screenplay concerns).

The question raised here, an analysis of the above-mentioned Spanish translations, is answered after having applied Dr. Julio César SANTOYO's rendering assessment method, which include 100 potential deviations, studied in terms of units of language (phoneme/morpheme, word, phrase, sentence, paragraph and unit of structure), levels of language (lexical-semantic, morpho-syntactic, stylistic, suprasegmental, and structural) and operations (addition, omission, substitution, error, adoption, adaptation).

According to the analysis of Baldomero Porta's translation of HARPER LEE'S *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the results, regarding 661 deviations, can be classified in terms of:

Substitution (42'94%)

Substitution involved the following operations: extension; specification; reduction; interpretation; change of point of view, of order, from verse to prose; substitution of anthroponyms; creative and semantic transposition; toning down/up of expressions; retaining of local features; lack of sound correspondence, syntactic inversion, extension from pronoun to explicit nominal form, or from explicit nominal form to pronoun; variation of correspondence in idioms and sayings; of internal structure in source text, of tense, of grammatical category, of register, of lexical connotation; of stylistic derivatives, metaphor, antithesis, and hyperbole.

A comment must be made as to linguistic varieties: on four occasions the translator provides the reader with additional comments about the linguistic varieties used by the three black characters –Cal, Lula, and Tom– and a white illiterate one, Mr. Ewell, proving some of his linguistic

awareness and sense of responsibility, when having to convey black and low class English in Spanish. The four instances are not taken as negative deviations, because those translations were probably the best choice that BALDOMERO PORTA could have.

However, with regards to socio-cultural differences, I must say that there are instances regarding the field of fauna (Catawba worms), vegetation (wisteria wine), games (pinning the tail on the donkey), common objects (screen doors) and food (molasses buckets), which are not completely translated, showing thus a wide separation between both cultures.

On the other hand the eleven socio-cultural footnotes accompanying measures (converting farenheit degrees into centigrades, and feet into meters and centimeters), religion (referring to mennonites and rice Christians), anthroponyms (explaining the usage of names such as Miss Tutti and Miss Frutti; Mrs. Grace, Robert E. Lee Ewell, and Bull Finch), food (describing what a pound cake is) and a bazaar (alluding to Jitney Jungle), do contribute to a better understanding of the living customs, beliefs and social institutions, characteristic of the American community, and certainly prove the conscientious work aimed at by BALDOMERO PORTA.

To end up this section, I dare say that the most frequent deviation concerning substitution, which is semantic transposition, as well as a large majority of others involved in this operation, could have been avoided, and not arbitrarily replaced by personal inaccurate interpretation –sometimes also due to lack of attention–, if BALDOMERO PORTA had counted on a wider range of vocabulary and its usage, both in formal and colloquial contexts, professional training in the field of translation...; had consulted professional sources when necessary, and taken some of the linguistic challenges which the English text provided¹.

Omission (23.16%)

Omission involved the following operations: omission of indirect attribution, comparison, paragraph, sentence, phrase, word; reduction of

1 In an interview with Baldomero Porta, he said that he had learned English by having taught himself, and had got a degree from Escola d'Idiomes at Universitat Central. His training in translation had come from his practice while working with several publishing houses.

repetition, stylistic repetition, doublets, main clause + subordinate to main clause, paragraph to sentence, sentence to phrase, and phrase to word.

Omissions are mostly centered on reduction of units, and ignorance of repetitions, because of carelessness –the kind of units left out are certainly within the translation's linguistic domain–; rush –BALDOMERO PORTA himself had commented that very often Bruguera Publishing House had urged him to present his Spanish version–; lack of sufficient linguistic and literary awareness to perceive some of HARPER LEE's purposeful writing devices; and occasionally deliberate intention of substracting a whole paragraph, which included onomatopoeic sounds and poetical tones –for its difficulty–.

Error (22.85%)

Errors involved the following operations: printing error; translator's lapsus calami; literal translation; apparent lexical correspondence; opposite semantic meaning; substituted or inadequate correspondence; retaining of author's error, acronyms, and source text structures; inadequate expression in translated text; translator's faulty understanding; false friends; and ambiguity.

Besides printing errors, whose blame is to be put beyond the translator's work, in other words, close to proofreaders, printers, and so on, there are some mistakes, such as literality, both semantic and syntactic, inadequate equivalent terms, wrong comprehension, unawareness of cognates, etc., which can only be accounted for, when realizing BALDOMERO PORTA's good will but, once more, limited training and fluency, both applied to English, and sometimes, Spanish.

Another point needs to be made in relation to something which, though not considered an error, certainly exerts an influence on the Spanish style of the novel: the production of "laismo", and especially "leismo", that is, the ungrammatical usage of the object pronouns "la" and "le", in indirect and direct object position, instead of the proper "le" and "lo" pronouns:

... She took offense to routine courtesy
... la ofendía la cortesía habitual

LEE, H., 1982 (1960). *To Kill a Mockingbird*,
New York: Warner Books, p. 184;
1983 (1962). *Matar un ruiseñor*,
Barcelona: Ediciones Orbis, p. 197.

which the translator, as a professional, should have cared not to employ, unless the source text had demanded such pronouns or effect.

Addition (8.74%)

Addition involved the following operations: creative expansion; definition; explanation; creation of doublets; repetition; redundancy; affective addition; periphrastic extension; addition of modifiers; addition of amplifiers; person and place specification; generation of main clause and phrase; extension from word to sentence, from phrase to sentence, and from main clause to main clause plus subordinate.

Most additions, especially those registering the highest number of occurrences, seem to have been conceived in order to facilitate the reader's task, because in general terms, none of them is written with a view to give way to BALDOMERO PORTA's own creativity, but under the belief, sometimes misleading, that the audience needs to be explicitly and precisely told.

Adoption / Adaptation (2.30%)

Ways of addressing people, French terms, and ordinary words, are adopted in the translated text, due to fashion (they made the text sound more authentic, international...) or to real disability to grasp and decipher their meaning, due to the difficulty of the lexical version.

Both adopted and adapted terms are also the consequence of partial proofreading and direction on the publishing house part.

As to the study of M^a de los ANGELES' translation, the condensed version, which points out 517 instances showing deviations, the results have been as follows:

Substitution (52.08%)

The most notorious deviations found in the substitution process: preceding main sentences with the Spanish coordinate conjunction "y"; extending pronouns into full nominal forms; providing personal

interpretations, among others, which unfortunately lengthen the source style, adding heaviness to the reading, are mostly due to M^a de los ANGELES' natural inclination to creativity and dramatic effects, as well as to her/his² good command of English (both standard – general and specialized (legal..) and slang (children's...), and fluency in Mexican Spanish, which allowed her/him to play and feel at ease with both languages when carrying out the translation.

Addition (23.86%)

Again, semantic and grammatical extensions are mostly due to the translator's imagination, which cannot be restrained from incorporating all kinds of extra pieces of information, as well as emotional touches, if judged to be suitable by M^a de los ANGELES.

Omission (18.37%)

There are two reasons which perfectly explain the two types of subtraction in which this section could be divided: firstly the non-deliberate intention to leave out source structures, obviously weaker than the desire not to be restricted by fixed patterns –this one would apply to most reductions and omissions mentioned above–; secondly, the deliberate aim on the publishing house part (rather than the translator's, I daresay) to ignore certain topics (N. R. A. & Ku Klux Klan), which have been thought to be dangerous for their political significance.

Error (5.49%)

Some of the most common mistakes both at the semantic and morpho-syntactic levels are the result of an easy and fast rendering performed by

2 Neither *Reader's Digest* in Mexico City or Madrid, or *Voice of America* in Washington have been able to throw any light on the translator's last name or resumé. Therefore M^a de los Angeles could just be a pen-name.

the translator, who does not take enough advantage of her/his linguistic preparation and ability, and also, the consequence of an insufficient proofreading task.

Adaptation (0.36%)

The fact of having detected just one case of adaptation proves once more that M^a de los ANGELES was very good at finding equivalent terms, even if sometimes, as we have seen in the previous analysis, they did not adjust the source text precisely.

After having examined the Spanish dubbed version of the film *To kill a Mockingbird*, and pointed out 88 deviations, the conclusions which can be drawn are as follows:

Substitution (65.33%)

Substitution processes take place whenever the translator predicts cultural differences, casual or frozen registers, specific terms, etc. which he/she³ judges to be troublesome for a Spanish-speaking audience if kept as such; and so prefers to convert them into standardized concepts or expressions. Sometimes standardization and also other deviations pointed out come into existence for reasons such as speed, dubbing procedures...

Omission (17.33%)

Two explanations can be provided to account for omission in the Spanish film script: dubbing strategies, which once again may oblige translators to reduce source structures in certain position (narrator's voice, close-up

3 According to Televisión Española in Madrid, the Spanish version was dubbed in a studio in Barcelona: either La Voz de España, Parlo Films, or Balcárcel (the latter, no longer in existence). Needless to say that it has not been possible to trace down the translator.

sequences...), and insufficient and literary sensitivity to aim at reproducing, for instance, source repetitions –stylistic or not– in the translated text.

Addition (13.33%)

The small amount of cases which are registered in this section, are basically the consequence of imagination, used in benefit of a more dynamic and personal dubbed version.

Error (4%)

The only three errors found in the Spanish screenplay of *To Kill a Mockingbird* definitely prove the excellent command of both languages and professional "savoir faire" of the translator, proofreader, dubber... regarding translating techniques and movie rendering devices.

Adoption (1.31%)

"Nickel" is the only expression adopted by the translator, showing that he/she did not have difficulties in understanding source terms.

I would like to state that the Spanish dubbed film as a whole is a firm and alive picture of the time, conveyed in everyday speech, including a large variety of idioms, which corresponds to the form and feeling of realism intended, first by HARPER LEE, and afterwards, by HORTON FOOTE, the script writer.

As a general conclusion, I must say that I cannot simply judge the three Spanish translations as right or wrong; a scale of valuation has been established, according to the degree of coincidence of the interpretability of the translation with the interpretability of the original, as well as the thought that quality can not be assessed apart from the purpose of translation.

We should bear in mind and remember that the translator's task consists of realizing what the author says, what he/she means, how he/she says it, choosing the nearest equivalent in the translated text, by taking into consideration the probable thoughts of the author, his/her

readers, the new audience, the time... I would like to believe that my research may contribute in the future to more faithful versions of the best-seller I have been dealing with, and if possible, of others, as well. Recalling, once more, the initial quotation by SMITH PALMER BOVIE, I dare say that the field has been taken care of. Hopefully the sin is gone. Gardeners can go back to work, and more flowers can grow in peace.

I would like to finish now by quoting one of the most poetical paragraphs, a jewel shared by the three texts, which symbolically must remind us of the loss, that to a certain extent, all renderings, no matter what, no matter the number of analysis and conclusions carried out, are naturally to undergo:

Neighbours bring food with death and flowers with sickness and little things in between. Boo was our neighbor: he gave us two soap dolls, a broken watch and chain, a pair of good luck pennies, and our lives. But neighbors give in return. We never put back into the tree what we took out of it: we had given him nothing, and it made me sad.

LEE, H., 1982 (1960), *To Kill a Mockingbird*.
New York: Warner Books, p. 281