

Translation criticism as an independent area of study: Developing a framework for objective criticism

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1. Introduction

'Translation Studies' is an ambiguous concept. It contains at the same time the idea of translation theory, translation production and that of translation product. As production, if we consider texts as evidence of a communicative transaction taking place within a social framework, the way is open to a view of translating which is not restricted to a particular field. We could mention literary translation, technical translation or include such diverse activities as film subtitling and dubbing, simultaneous interpreting, abstracting and summarising, translating and adapting for children, advertising or cartoon translation to name but a few. As a product the actual translations, the regularities and irregularities they evince, the teaching of translation and the practice of translation criticism are areas that can easily be included in this general perspective, even though they are quite different.

Many attempts have been done to clarify these issues from different points of view, both theoretical and practical. In 1985 Lambert and Van Gorp (1985: 50-51) already insisted on the necessity of giving systematicity to the definition of Translation Studies: *'It is new, however, to stress the need to combine and connect them (all the aspects of the translation problem) systematically, and to insist on their systematic nature, both on the intersystemic and on the intra-systemic level.* Some studies seem to meet

these new criteria. Wilss (1982), Toury (1985), Hewson & Martin (1991) or my own Ph.D dissertation (Valero, 1990). But we think new attempts must be done to clarify all the aspects included under the heading 'Translation Studies': Translation Theory, Translating Activity, Teaching of Translation and Translation Criticism. Each one constitutes a different research field.

II. Translation Criticism

A. Attempts of definition

This piece of work deals with the last aspect mentioned above. The approach can be said to indicate tentative steps in the clarification of the task of Translation Criticism (TC): to make quality assessment of a translation as a whole as objectively as possible being open to analyse both positive and negative factors. As Newmark (1979: 101) pointed out: *'The flavour of excellence in a translation is as intangible as that in a poem... but the badness, error and inaccuracy in a translation is not hard to expose'*. TC is not a catalogue of failures as one may be tempted to think - and one of the reasons for the relative lack of space devoted to it by theorist. Wilss (1982: 217) made a clear comment on the key problems a decade ago:

In view of the lack of a suitable methodological frame of reference, practical TC has until recently confined itself either to the discussion of phenomena which are lexically or syntactically clear failures (therefore falling, strictly speaking, into the area of error analysis; Strabberger 1956) or it has practised an encyclopedic approach, trying more or less plausibly to integrate a host of observations partly of linguistic nature, into a frame of reference which creates the impression on being rather haphazard and therefore lacks persuasive power.

In 1985 R. van den Broeck (1985: 55) made the same complaints and added a significant comment about translation critics: Nearly all of them were amateurs in the field of translation. TC was then amateurish and not seriously taken. This is still a common rule. Recent developments in Translation Studies has taken it more seriously. But still the amount of articles published in this field is much less considerable than that on the theory and practice of translation. The hypothesis that TC in the west is underdeveloped is a clear evidence.

Furthermore there are no absolute standards of translation quality. As Juan C. Sager (1983: 121) points out, there are only more or less appropriate translations for the purpose of which they are intended. That means that different types of texts require different methods of translation and hence different methods of criticism. What has to be maintained in one type of texts, can be omitted without any noticeable harm in another type of texts. Moreover different translators may neglect or emphasize different elements on the text and cultural differences can be treated on a different way.

The same applies to evaluation. In this case the Translation Critic (Tc) is not confronted with a text to translate, but with two *completed communication situations* and it is he/she who, paradoxically enough, is the receiver of both LC1 (usually referred to as source language) and LC2 (usually referred to as target language) texts. Hewson & Martin (1991: 217) point to this idea and comment the necessity of considering language and culture together (LC). In 1980, G. Toury used the term 'polysystem' to referred to this concept). That means that the critic should analyse each of the completed communication situations separately and fully before comparing them. In doing this he/she should try to encompass as many different factors as possible to explain both the actual impact of a translated text, its relationship with LC1 text and the possibilities present in the LC2 system. But those are different objectives and accordingly different criteria and factors acquire varying importance. It can be considered as partial assessment of translators; or concerned with assessing the faithfulness of the translation with regard to content and intention; or in terms of the appropriateness for its intended purpose. But in any case the objective of the critic must be clear and some parameters can be established.

In this paper I intend: 1) to explore the type of scientific frame of reference which can be used in order to consider TC as an independent issue in 'Translation Studies', 2) to establish a general model of analysis whose adaptability and functionality permit it to be applied over the translation of specific texts. This final step will prove that the activity of the critic is more than a simple sport and needs to become a field of application its own right.

B. Defining a Model for Translation Criticism

1. Elements

Some considerations about the most important elements in TC discussion should be done. LC1 and LC2 texts appear to be the most important ones. But there are some other parameters and norms that

affect the translation operation and its assessment. This particular aspect is not a direct comparison of texts but a relativized overview of two complete situations. Picken (1983) and Hewson & Martin (1991) underline the main importance of two indispensable 'performers' who set in motion the translation operation and which should be taken into account by the Tc when possible: The Translation Initiator (TI) and the Translation Operator (TO). Let us explore their function briefly.

a) The Translator Initiator. The role of the initiator can determine the type of translation produced. It may belong to LC1, LC2 or indeed to any other LC. That is, the TI may be the same author, his/her representative in LC2, a publisher, the own translator, the reader or his/her representative... each one with a different grade of accessibility to ST.

In addition to this fact, we have to consider the TI's position in both economic and socio-cultural terms. The economic factor has a great influence on the work done with repercussions at every level (acceptability of TT, accuracy to TO, time employed, money earned, type of edition, marketing,...). At the same time the TI is subject to different and sometimes contradictory forces which are a reflection of his/her position in society and may be influenced by *all* the different motivations behind an act of communication to concentrate on one particular aspect of a message, asking for a very general translation to the TO, a summary or an adaptation.

In short, the LC2 text may reflect the particular identity and motivation of the TI. If he/she has a preponderant role, the TO ceases to be entirely responsible for the final text and the Tc should know it before a judgement.

b) The Translator Operator. The role of the operator (or translator) is a main factor not largely explored. Just some considerations will be enough to make us more aware of his/her influence in the text. Every translation is subject to a translational individuality principle and as such is basically an unrepeated event. The TO may have a greater or lesser degree of competence, but his/her work will also reflect an inevitable element of 'subjectivity' or style' which can be traced through certain lexical usages and syntactic forms, development of mannerisms or a certain approach to translating. That is, different reactions to the same text.

Further reasons can be mention: the TO's motivation and conditions of work, that is, (1) on his/her own. In which case (not a common one) the

critic still should appreciate the purpose and weight of the economic and socio-cultural environment or (2) as dependent on a TI. In this case some constraining factors may affect the LC2 text. We could mention material conditions, space available, purpose of communication and the identity of the TI who can even provide the TO with obligatory transfer techniques based on texts already produced in the LC2 as, for example, in the case of scientific translations when the Company involved has adopted some conventions or there are previous translations of terms accepted by the LC2 readers.

As for the role of the Tc, he/she has to cope with even more unpleasant problems. The Tc is confronted with the presence of two texts, with *two completed communication situations*, and, at the same time, is the receiver of both texts. He/she is the observer of the total communication process: author \Rightarrow LC1T \Rightarrow LC1R \Rightarrow TI \Rightarrow TO \Rightarrow LC2T \Rightarrow LC2R. So before attempting to compare them, the Tc should analyse each of the texts separately and fully in order to have as wide a vision as possible of the different parameters to be taken into account.

From this position the Tc is able to realize that he/she is analysing one of the many possible variations in a vast set; so it may be easy to highlight differences and to propose 'improvements'. However, this is not the critic's task, but to make quality assessment of a translation as a whole as objectively as possible.

Before a judgement, and avoiding a partial point of view, the critic has to weigh up the total number of factors, make an account of details and being also conscious of his socio-cultural position (usually thought as been 'above' the LC2T). Needless to say there cannot be a 'correct' and 'perfect' translation, let alone a perfect interpretation as Hewson and Martin point out (1991: 226). There is the risk that the critic -consciously or unconsciously- situates himself or herself somewhere on the continuum linking LC1-LC2 biases translations and thus be, as it were, programmed to applaud certain types of texts and reject others. In order to avoid it, the Tc needs a frame of reference and to be conscious of the purpose of his/her assessment.

2. Towards a model

Many attempts have been done to build up a method guaranteeing systematic description, explanation and evaluation of the LC2 texts. Since

there is yet no generally accepted methodology of analysing and interpreting texts let us only mention some of the proposals and models and suggest a new one considering our exploration as integrative more than as critical. That is, we do not intend to be exhaustive but rather explorative. At the same time we must have in mind the type of text we are considering accepting that the Tc should build himself/herself into the model used for the evaluation of LC2 texts. The following examples can assume an orientative role. The progressive development of the first scheme will derive in the application of our model to show the flexibility in which the Translation Criticism should claim its independent status without forgetting some fixed parameters.

Wilss (1982) proposes a text-internal approach aiming at a coherent concept within a norm/deviation frame of reference. He suggests that in order to be objective, TC must be focused in the area of communicative usage norms because for linguistic interaction there seems to exist in LC1 and LC2 a considerable volume of linguistic behavioral patterns and restrictive rules. As a tentative matrix he proposes the following scheme for evaluation:

	syntax	semantics	pragmatics
appropriate			
wrong			
inappropriate			
undecidable cases			
correct			

It is an attempt to work out a practicable methodology for empirical studies in a field which by its nature intermingles descriptive and evaluative aspects of research. Wilss accepts that TC cannot be exhaustively investigated within a linguistic framework ignoring the person of the translator: but he considers that the linguistic approach is the basis for a text related and a text-type-related translation-critical framework in a macrotextual context.

Raymond van den Broeck (1985) insists on a systematic description with three main stages: (1) comparative analysis of LC1 and LC2 texts not only as text structures, but also as systems of texts; (2) evaluative moment, taking into account not only the role of the translator, but also the translational method adopted by the translator in view of the reader of the LC2 text and the choices followed to attain his/her purpose; (3) the critical moment, which implies that the Tc makes a judgement based on the data

he/she has from the previous analysis. At this level, the Tc must never confuse his own initial norms with those of the translator. Broeck concludes saying that only if the Tc recognizes the initial norm adopted by the translator, will his critical account have any objective value.

Hewson & Martin (1991) provides an extended framework. They put more emphasis on socio-cultural aspects and suggest not a direct comparison but a relativized overview of two complete situations. The first step should be the study of both texts (LC1 and LC2Ts) as separate identities. That is important in order to determine their characteristics each one in its own culture because each one has a life of its own and it finds its place in its LC. That means that the LC2 text is absorbed in the second language culture. Analyzing in which sense this happens may explain some changes or choices.

The second step involves a parallel analysis. The Tc should compare both texts starting from a common source, the sender in LC1, who is indirectly the sender of LC2. This parallel analysis involves (1) *identifying where possible the potential or actual readership both in LC1 and LC2; and (2) analysing the diverse facets which go towards making up the 'message' of the St and T* (Hewson & Martin, 1991: 217).

We agreed with them that the evaluation is carried out for many different reasons, LC1-oriented, LC2-oriented, audience-intended... Depending on the criteria selected by the critic the judgement may differ. So first the Tc should define his/her particular position, then consider both texts as separate identities and then compare them by analysing the norms governing the discourse family in question, modulated by the particular circumstances to which the text belongs. Wilss seems to forget the first point and Broeck seems to put too much emphasis on a source-oriented text in LC2. As for Hewson and Martin, many shared points of view can be traced between this proposal and my own in *Aspectos sobre la novela y la traducción de The Scarlet Letter de N. Hawthorne: Propuesta metodológica de evaluación de obras literarias traducidas*. Zaragoza: Universidad de Zaragoza, Spain, 1990, Honors Thesis, Unpublished. In that case I suggested for the assessment of translated literary works two levels and different steps in each one:

1. Internal Level: Study of LC1 text (author's life, style, literary works, time, type of readership and other possible socio-cultural conditions which enable us to establish the 'methodological invariance' (Rabadan: 1989.

Hypothetical construction over some aspects of the Source Text that functions as an intermediate factor in the comparison between Source Text and Translated Text) similar to the concept of 'Adequate Translation' (Broeck: 1985. The invariant serving as a *tertium comparationis*', which should be ST-based) or 'Homologon' (Hewson & Martin 1991: 57) defined as: '*It is neither a neutral middle-term nor a converting element but a dynamic factor justified through its productivity in the confrontation of cultures*'. Some pages before we could read: '(...) *the homologon's specific function is to supply an 'explicating gloss*'.

2. External Level: Exhaustive comparative examination of the different translations not only with the ST but among all the translations. Four levels considered:

- a. semantical - lexical
- b. syntactical - morphological
- c. discursive - functional
- d. stylistics - pragmatic

Some reasons for this division:

a. Semantical-lexical level. Since corresponding LC1 and LC2 words do not usually have precisely the same semantic range, one of the main difficulties in translation will be lexical, not grammatical. The translator may be constantly exercised between the proportions of denotation and connotation in the LC1 text. A study of the selection of terms, equivalents, omissions or expansion of meaning by the translator could provide the critic steps for the evaluation of the translation.

b. Syntactical-morphological level. Language systems differ and the translator often has to cope with highly involved syntactic elements which he/she cannot possibly render on the basis of a syntactic one-to-one correspondence. A study of the grammatical differences between both systems and the solution adopted by the translator may provide the Tc new objective elements for his/her final account.

c. Discursive-functional level. The TO must inevitably negotiate not only the meaning between the producer of LC1 text and the reader of the LC2 text because of structural differences in their systems, but mostly because they belong to different cultural frameworks. We are referring to the concept of *discourse component*. As M. Vasconcellos (1986: 134-145) underlines: '*its systems specify not only the overall organization of a text but also the structure of the individual message*'. That is, different

individuals experience the reality in a different way and express it in a different way too. This fact will determine a series of selections and changes to adapt the text to this new social context. The Tc should recognise the translator's choices before a judgement.

d. Stylistics-pragmatic level. Different types of texts require different use of the language and, as a consequence, different types of translation. The translation of Literature has often been considered as a 'special case' due to a particular use of the language, but the translation of scientific texts or any specific field implies some conventions, too. This aesthetic factor must be considered in the translation. The translator, therefore, should preserve, as far as possible, the range of possible responses, as his reading of the LC1 text is only one among infinitely many possible readings, but it is the one which tends to be imposed upon the readership of the LC2 texts. The Tc should know these facts too.

These remarks, other similar attempts and many suggestions (House: 1977, Toury: 1980, Newmark: 1981, Rose: 1981, Bassnett: 1985, Bassnett & Lefevere: 1990... etc.) lead to the conclusion that language and culture are indissociable. The Tc should know both. That is, he/she should be *bicultural* and not only *bilingual* as he/she is involved in a process of interlingual and intercultural communication. As a consequence Translation Criticism does not involve re-usable techniques, but rather a variety of conversions which are to be assessed in relation to the comparative requirements of LC1 and LC2. So systematized conversion techniques can not be useful, but a model that can be adapted to specific types of texts and purposes of assessment under a general framework which will include the two main levels mentioned before and suggestions from other authors. The scheme below is a tentative proposal that pays attention to both LC1 and LC2 texts as separate units and as elements in TC discussions. Therefore other parameters affect the translation of the work, and even the Tc's task, and they need to be considered. The above model is an attempt to account for these conditions:

- I. Translation Critic's Norm
- II. Internal Level:
 - A. Type of text
 - B. Historical background in
 1. LC1
 2. LC2
 - C. Knowledge of the reader in

1. LC1
 2. LC2
- III. External Level.
- A. 'Main actors'
 1. The role of the translation initiator (TI)
 2. The role of the translation operator (TO)
 - B. Parallel comparison:
 1. Treatment of the language
 2. Changes due to TO's norm
- IV. Critical Assessment on these parameters and the Tc's norm.
 As we can see, the main framework will be provided by the two fundamental levels:
 Internal level
 External level.

The first one appears to be a relevant one as no text and no translation can exist without explicit socio-cultural determination. There is no socio-cultural vacuum. But there can be different types of texts and, as we have said before, each type of text requires different methods of translation criticism in order to assess its 'quality'. That means that the Tc should know the conditions in which LC1 and LC2 texts are produced in their respective polysystems (Toury: 1980). So, the stress will not be laid on the justification of any particular translation choice but on the conditions under which this decision can be reached.

The external level makes evident that absolute freedom of choice is an illusion or an excuse for irresponsibility as Hewson & Martin (1991: 185) points out. That implies that a set of identifiable translation strategies can be established after analysing the external elements that may affect the product and the internal ones that may be derived from the contact of two polysystems.

As we have said before this proposal tends to be integrative more than critical. In that sense this model is only a new step in the claim that translation criticism can be based on systemic description, intersubjective knowledge and understanding more than on taste and amateurism. Applying to the flexibility of the model and its applicability, we could say that the internal and external levels provide the basis for a framework that has to be observed before any critical account. Within the internal level, sections A and B should provide the adequate reference for

understanding some elements of the communicative chain before they intervene as a whole. As for the external level, section A is an essential one before attempting section B because the influence they can have in the use of the language for the TO together with the other socio-cultural parameters. Section B provides the linguistic framework in which the transfer takes place after analysing the main external elements that inevitably affect the process. Depending on the conclusions from internal and external (section A) level, the Tc should focus his/her attention on relevant points as the practice of criticism involves a mental multifactorial activity which, as in the case of its practice, can not be exhaustively investigated within a rigid framework. An example of the flexibility of the model could be its adaptation for the study of a specific type of text-underground comic books. In this particular case the socio-cultural parameters are strongly felt in both LC1 and LC2 texts. The scheme proposed will be:

- I. Translation Critic's Norm. Readability of Lc2 text
- II. Internal Level
 - A. Type of text
 - B. Historical background in
 1. LC1
 2. LC2
 - C. Knowledge of the reader in
 1. LC1
 2. LC2
- III. External Level
 - A. 'Main Actors'
 1. the role of the TI
 2. the role of the TO
 - B. Parallel Comparison:
 1. Treatment of the language:
 - Standard English
 - Non-Standard English
 2. Changes due to technical limitations:
 - Fixed drawings
 - Space available in the balloons.
 3. Translation of onomatopoeia
- IV. Critical Assessment on these parameters tending to check the readability of LC2 text.

In conclusion, as far as objective criticism is possible in the analysis of translated texts, it suggests that Translation Criticism can be considered as an independent area in Translation Studies. New tentatives will arise to clarify the task of this area of study that claims the right to become independent. In order to achieve it, we need specialized critics whose activity is more than a simple sport operating over a field of application its own right.

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