

The Pragmatics of Translation: Effectiveness and Efficiency in the Spanish Translation of *The Good Terrorist*

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At the time of defining the role of the translator we may highlight that of a text producer as his/her main function. His/her task as text producer is characterized by three functions:

a) s/he is, first of all, a reader of the text upon which he is to work, but a special type of reader, since s/he is able to read and fully understand the SL (Source language) while belonging to a different cultural world. This special status differentiates him/her from the average target reader,

b) secondly, s/he is an interpreter of both source language and culture,

c) thirdly, s/he is also a creator. Translators do not transfer texts from one language into another: they interpret and rewrite, creating a new product.

As for the translator's aim when translating, and in accordance with Hatim and Mason's thesis {B. Hatim & I. Mason (1990), *Discourse and the translator*. London: Longman}, we may describe his/her goal as that of achieving functional or pragmatic equivalence, that is to say, that the piece of discourse s/he produces provokes in the target reader an equivalent reaction to that the ST (Source text) was intended to produce in the source reader. His/her task is mainly to reproduce the intended effects of the translated texts, that is, to allow scope for the widest range of responses in the reader.

Translation is a decision-making process. In order to achieve equivalence of intended effects, the translator has to make continuous assumptions about what the target readers may or may not share with the

source reader and, in view of this shared knowledge, the translator has to provide the target reader with the necessary tools for decoding the message: whenever the translator thinks that the target reader lacks the necessary knowledge of the world to decipher information and, therefore, to react in an appropriate way, the translator will have to compensate for it. It is at this point that the question of effectiveness and efficiency emerges. Hatim and Mason state {1990: 93}: "Any text seeks to achieve a balance between new, evoked and inferrable entities, such that the fusion of the three allows the reader/hearer to infer the producer's communicative intention".

The balance that Hatim and Mason speak of is regulated by the principles of effectiveness and efficiency, that is, "achieving maximum transmission of relevant content or fulfilment of a communicative goal (effectiveness), achieving it in the most economical way, involving minimum expenditure of processing effort (efficiency)" {1990:93}. In all, the translator's work should be characterized by an ability to transmit the maximum of relevant content in the most economical way, that is, the message should be communicated in such a way that the target reader makes the minimum effort in processing the information. Whenever the target reader is required to make an extra effort, this should be justified and compensated for by a gain in understanding.

This principle is, in fact, an elaboration of the notion of "given and new information" and of the mechanisms of communication on the whole: it is understood that all communication takes place on a basis of shared knowledge, of shared values and beliefs. This constitutes a corpus of "given" or old information, a necessary base without which communication would be impossible, and which constitutes a frame for new information to be conveyed.

Hatim and Mason's principle of effectiveness and efficiency is also closely related to Grice's maxims, which could be summed up as "how to be maximally effective and efficient in communication". It is in this light that Grice's maxims should be understood and, in this respect, we could highlight the maxim of quantity (make your contribution as informative, but no more informative than, is required) and the maxim of relation (be relevant) as the most influential for the matter with which we are dealing.

Linked to Grice's maxim of relation and, therefore, to the question of the balance between effectiveness and efficiency, E. A. Gutt states his theories in his book *Translation and Relevance* {(1991). Oxford: Basil Blackwell}. Although he dismisses the concept of "functional equivalence" because it seems to him vague and useless, he somehow partakes of the principle of equivalence of intended effects, based on the standpoint of the transmission of the most relevant content. Gutt's proposal is based on Sperber and Wilson's "relevance theory", which argues that "to communicate is to claim an individual's attention; hence, to communicate

is to imply that the information communicated is relevant." {Sperber and Wilson in Hatim and Mason 1990: 95}

However, as far as the translation process is concerned, what is relevant in one environment (Source Text) may be less so in another (Target Text), what is relevant for one reader (Source reader) may be irrelevant for another (Target reader). The translator, therefore, needs to work on the assessment of relevance for intended receivers and, for the completion of this task, the principle of effectiveness and efficiency may be helpful. This is specially so when dealing with cultural terms. Since the translator is involved in a different socio-cultural context, s/he may expect that the world knowledge possessed by the author and the target readers is likely to differ, although some overlapping may be expected. There will be entities inferrable in the ST which will have to be made explicit in the TT. In these cases the translator should carefully weigh the gain in information against the processing effort involved and, to be able to do so, the translator not only needs to be bilingual but also bicultural.

As an approach to the practice of translation, Hatim and Mason propose an analytical framework, developed on the grounds of a three-fold communicative dimension of context:

- a) register analysis
- b) pragmatic dimension
- c) semiotic dimension

A hierarchical link seems to relate the three dimensions, the semiotic being the highest in status and the register analysis the lowest. The semiotic dimension of context entails a step further in the analysis of discourse and helps to locate a message within a system of conventions, beliefs and assumptions of a given culture. Cross-cultural translation, therefore, cannot do without this dimension, which involves the study of intertextuality. Hatim and Mason's framework seems to be broad enough to include, not only stylistic considerations, as previous approaches have done, but also a pragmatic and semiotic perspective. The pragmatic and the semiotic approach seem to be linked by the notion of "intentionality", that is, the author's intention (pragmatic aspect) when using an item which acts as a sign (semiotic aspect).

Several examples may illustrate the way the pragmatic and semiotic dimensions of context provide helpful insights about the intentionality of the author and, therefore, help the translator to decide on what is and what is not relevant, what he should make explicit and what he has to leave out. The examples are extracts from *The Good terrorist* {Doris

Lessing, (1986). London: Collins} and its translation into Spanish *La Buena terrorista* {translation by Mireia Bofill (1987). Barcelona: Edhasa}¹.

1. The Albert Memorial was favourite for a few minutes, and then Faye said no, she adored it; she wouldn't harm a hair of its head. Hotels. *No. 10. The Home Office. M.I.5's information computer. The War Office.*" (p. 320)

The last phrases are intertextual signs which point to an overall intertextual link throughout the novel: the political discourse. These signs have to be interpreted in the light of their relationship with other references inside and outside the text.

The author assumes a common area of knowledge to be shared by her readers, which is the field of British Government institutions. This "assumed familiarity" may not be so for a reader who is not the one intended by the author. Therefore, the translator has to make his own assumptions about what the target readers may or may not share with the ST author. In analysing the Spanish translation we will be able to infer what the translator's decisions on his reader's knowledge were in this particular instance:

El Albert Memorial fue el favorito durante unos instantes, y después Faye dijo que no, que le encantaba, que no querría dañar ni un pelo de su cabeza. Hoteles. *El número 10 de Downing Street. El Home Office. El ordenador de datos del M.I.5. El Ministerio de la Guerra.* (p. 425)

Different methods of translation have been used, not always successfully. In my opinion *Home Office* should have been translated by the equivalent organism in Spain ("El Ministerio del Interior"), as well as *War Office* ("El Ministerio de Defensa"). *M.I.5* should have been transferred as "El Servicio de Inteligencia británico", in the same way as *No.10* has been translated as *El número 10 de Downing Street*, presumably because the translator felt the need to make explicit some information for the target reader that constituted "given information" for the source reader. In doing so she was carefully considering the balance between effectiveness and efficiency, to which we were referring previously.

2. The salt of the earth! Alice was dutifully saying to herself watching the scene of workers fuelling

¹ The examples commented on are extracted on are extracts from *The Good Terrorist* and its translation into Spanish *La Buena terrorista*. Words and phrases analysed are not underlined in the original.

themselves for a hard day's work with plates of *eggs, chips, sausages, fried bread, baked beans* - the lot. Cholesterol, agonised Alice, and they all looked so unhealthy! They had a pallid greasy look like bacon fat or undercooked chips. In the pocket of each, or on the tables, being read, was *The Sun* or *The Mirror*. (pp. 44-45)

The phrases underlined constitute intertextual signs which interrelate in order to form an overall intertextual strand. They all point to the idea of "working class". *Eggs, chips, sausages, fried bread, baked beans* point at poor-quality food, unhealthiness. *The Sun* and *The Mirror* imply lack of education, vulgarity and coarseness.

There are two semiotic strands underrunning the novel and referring to "working class": one in which the working class is depicted as good opposed to evil, represented by the bourgeoisie, and a second and deeper one in which the working class is something depreciable. These two strands collide, which is representative of Alice's schizophrenia. To miss one of them is to miss the character. The Spanish translator rendered the passage as follows:

¡La sal de la tierra!, se dijo aplicadamente Alice mientras contemplaba el cuadro de los trabajadores que acumulaban energías para una jornada de duro trabajo comiendo platos de *huevos, patatas fritas, salchichas, pan frito, tocino...* Llenos de colesterol, pensó acongojada Alice, y ¡todos tienen un aspecto tan poco saludable! Tenían el pálido tinte grasiento del tocino, o de unas patatas fritas mal cocidas. En el bolsillo de cada uno, o encima de las mesas, mientras lo leían, se veían ejemplares del *Sun* o del *Mirror*. (p. 60)

The transcription of the title of the newspapers in the Spanish text does not help the target reader to infer the full extent of their meaningful dimension, thus obstructing his ability to establish a second semiotic construct underlying the novel. The translator seems to assume, or be indifferent to, whether her readers may share a certain knowledge of the British press with the original author. Some addition of information would have been needed in this case to facilitate the target reader's task of deciphering and inferring, such as "se veían ejemplares de periódicos sensacionalistas como el *Sun* o el *Mirror*". The analysis of the author's intention establishes once more a link between Pragmatics and Semiotics.

3. Roberta... had a comfortable, accommodating homely voice with the sound of the *North* in it. Her

own voice? No, it was a made-up one. Modelled on *Coronation Street*, probably. (p. 27)

Coronation Street is a reference which will hardly be understood by readers who have no knowledge of British television programmes. What is the full semiotic value of the sign? It interacts with *North*, another sign within the text. Shared knowledge helps us to relate north to "industrialisation", and then to "working class". The reader finds him/herself back again at the semiotic strand of political discourse. In order to connect these signs, the reader needs a certain knowledge that the author assumes he already has. Once more, the problem for the translator arises when the target reader does not have the same tools as the intended reader to infer, decipher and process the message. The translator opts for an addition of information to make clear what *Coronation Street* refers to:

Roberta... tenía una voz llana, cómoda y acomodaticia, con acento del Norte, ¿su propia voz? No, una voz ficticia, probablemente sacada de la serie *Coronation Street*." (p. 37)

The target reader learns through this translation that Roberta has a Northern accent, probably copied from a series called "Coronation Street", which, consequently, must take place in the North of England. However, the most relevant information here, and that which the target reader should be able to infer, is not that Roberta has a Northern accent, but that Northern accent is associated with the working class in British English. In the Spanish text the translator fails to establish this link.

4. Then they spent a morning in *Harrods*, buying with their eyes... Then they went to *Regent's Park* and walked about among puddles. (p. 242)

Pasaron una mañana en *Harrods*, comprando con la imaginación... Fueron a *Regent's Park* y estuvieron paseando entre los charcos. (pp.321-2)

When dealing with proper names several considerations must be taken into account: transcribing them allows the text to keep the flavour of the original; however, it may happen that a loss in understanding results from it. In this particular instance *Harrods* and *Regent's Park* may somehow be familiar to Spanish readers and, even if they are not, the context allows readers to relate those terms to the superordinate by means of the verbal forms "comprando" (*Harrods*: tienda) and "paseando" (*Regent's Park*: parque). No further explanation was required. A simple device of transcription, therefore, can be the most appropriate procedure in order to keep the right balance between effectiveness and efficiency and to comply with Grice's maxims. Let's see the following example, though:

Did you know she's at Bart's? (p. 329)

¿Sabías que trabaja en el hospital de Saint Bartholomew? (p. 341)

The translator in her text not only provides the full proper name but also gives the superordinate (el hospital). Whereas transcription was an appropriate device to be used in the previous example, as familiarity and context allowed the Spanish reader to decipher the meaning correctly, this time neither familiarity nor context will help. The extra effort which the Spanish reader is demanded to make will be compensated for by a gain in understanding. The explanation in the Spanish text is, therefore, justified.

5. It was a front door, solid and sure of itself, in a little side street full of *suburban* gardens and similar comfortable houses." (p. 5)

...

Alice flew out, and looked first into the garden where the woman neighbour had spoken to her. *Suburban order*. But there was a tall hedge at the other side of this house, and beyond it... She ran into the main road, and along it a short way, and saw, which she had not done before, because she had made her little excursions by another route, a house identical to the one she was reclaiming, with broken windows, slipped slates, a look of desertion, and a rubbish-filled garden. It stank. (p. 51)

Semiotically, "suburban" can be understood as a sign which interacts with other signs within the text. Its full significant dimension is, on the one hand, enlarged by its appearance in the same sequence with signs such as "solid", "sure", "similar comfortable houses", all of them pointing to the ideas of "security", "order", "middle class". Furthermore, the meaningful capacity of this same reference is limited by its contraposition to other signs such as "slates missing" and "broken windows". Having defined the full extent of its significant dimension, the sign "suburban" interacts with the same reference in another passage whose semiotic capacity, on its turn, is also being defined through its interaction with other signs within the text in which it appears: "suburban order" is opposed to "broken windows", "slipped slates", "looked of desertion" and "a rubbish-filled garden".

Semiotics, once again may help the translator to identify the author's intention with regard to the function of a particular sign within the context. The case being discussed constitutes another clue given by the author to the reader to grasp the contrast between "middle class" and a lower status in society, which underlies the text. This intended meaning leads us

to consider the concepts of ideology and social discourse, which bring us back to a semiotic dimension of the context. Pragmatics and Semiotics, once more, interact in the interpretation of meaning and should help the translator to decide on the choices to be made for the transference of the reference.

Let us look at the Spanish version:

Era una puerta de entrada, sólida y segura de sí misma, en una callecita lateral llena de jardines *suburbanos* y de casas confortables parecidas a ésta. (p. 8)

...

Alice se precipitó al exterior y primero miró en dirección al jardín desde donde le había hablado la vecina. *Orden suburbano*. Pero al otro lado de la casa crecía un alto seto, y detrás... Salió corriendo a la calle y avanzó un corto trecho, y descubrió lo que no había visto hasta entonces, porque había realizado sus pequeñas excursiones siguiendo otra ruta: una casa idéntica a la que estaba intentando recuperar, con los cristales rotos, las tejas caídas, un aire de abandono, y un jardín lleno de basura. Apeataba. (p. 69)

The Spanish term "suburbio" does not correspond in meaning to the English term "suburban". The interactive relationship of "suburbano" with other signs within the same text and with signs in other texts cannot be considered as equivalent to the set of relationships established by "suburban". "Suburbano" cannot collocate with "sólida", "segura" and "casas confortables"; on the contrary, its relationship with them is one of opposition. On the other hand, in the Spanish text there is no conflict between "suburbano" and "faltaban tejas" or "cristales rotos". In fact, its connotation of "poverty" is expanded by them.

In the second passage there is an opposition between "order" and "suburbano" and, once more, "suburbano" is aligned with "cristales rotos", "tejas caídas", "aire de abandono" and "jardín lleno de basura".

Not only is the semiotic network of relationships disrupted but also the author's intended meaning fails to be conveyed. The translator should have used a different Spanish reference which would fulfil an equivalent pragmatic function and lead to equivalent semiotic interactions. "Area residencial" would have been a more successful option as it would not have modified the semiotic value of the reference and it would have transmitted the author's intention without an increase in the reader's effort to decode the message, thus keeping the right balance between

effectiveness and efficiency, that is, communicating the maximum amount of relevant content in the most economical way.

In all, we may perceive the valuable help provided by Pragmatics and Semiotics at the time of interpreting texts. Translators are provided with useful insights which help them to make decisions about what should be left out; about which effects the author intended to provoke through the original text, and how these effects should be transferred to the target text in order to make it functionally or pragmatically equivalent.

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