

# PUTTING MEANINGS INTO WORDS: ENGLISH *-LY* ADVERBS IN SPANISH TRANSLATION\*

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## Abstract

Traditionally *-ly* adverbs in English have been associated to the expression of manner, but this suffix is also attached to lexical items that actualise a wide range of other meanings. In Spanish, the formal equivalents of *-ly* adverbs are adverbs ending in *-mente*. However, these differ from their English counterparts in various aspects, such as frequency of occurrence and pragmatic use. An English-Spanish parallel corpus of contemporary written texts (ACTRES Project corpus) will be used to identify the different translation possibilities adopted to transfer the semantic functions that may be conveyed by *-ly* adverbs. The aim is to establish an inventory of translation solutions and unveil possible regularities between formal resource(s) and meaning function(s) in these translated uses.

## Introduction

Many different kinds of words can function as an adverb. Adverbs also show a wide range of semantic concepts and disparate syntactic distribution (Kovacci 1999:707-715). Although both English and Spanish use different parts of speech/morphological resources to convey adverbial meanings, their definition as adverbs is language-specific and tends to be based on syntactic distribution. Most taxonomies classify adverbs in terms of their meaning. There are, however, specific groups of adverbs defined by their formal features which are generally associated with certain semantic functions. Cross-linguistically, and for our language pair, the most productive of these formally marked adverb groups is *-ly* adverbs in English and *-mente* adverbs in Spanish. Because the principle of perceived cross-linguistic similarity (Rabadán: in press) is always at work, there is a tendency to assume that any *-ly* adverb is best translated by its *-mente* counterpart. Corpus-based empirical data falsify this assumption and reveal translational possibilities for *-ly* adverbs other than Spanish *-mente* adverbs, which are not immediately evident.

## Method and Data

The methodological procedure makes use of the ACTRES (Spanish acronym for *Contrastive Analysis and Translation English-Spanish*) parallel corpus containing English original texts and their corresponding Spanish translations. The ACTRES corpus includes today 1,800,000 words, but it is still under construction and it is intended that it will reach two million words, one per language, approximately (Rabadán: in press). For the purpose of this study, a smaller corpus has been extracted from the larger parallel corpus. It contains nearly 40,000 words in each language and includes texts from each of the subcorpora represented in the ACTRES corpus (books, press, ephemera).

## Experimentation English- Spanish

### *Analysis of source language data (English)*

A first search of the formal input *\*ly* provided 660 hits in the source language (English). Of these, 177 were manually discarded because they represented different categories, i.e., nouns, verbs or adjectives (*July, Italy, fly, friendly*, etc.). Although it is certainly frequent to find omissions of *-ly* adverbs in Spanish translations, we found 6 instances

in which the whole sentence/paragraph is not transferred into Spanish. As this cannot reasonably be taken as a translation choice for the adverb(s), these particular cases were not considered for the analysis.

The remaining 477 cases of *-ly* adverbs constitute the population of our case study. The analysis yielded 234 different word forms, most of which occurred only once in the corpus, as compared with 28 forms which occurred 5 times or more. Following authors such as Biber et al. (1999), among others, all the instances were analyzed for semantic function in their co-texts and classified accordingly, as shown in Fig. 1, which shows the frequency rates of each semantic category in the English part of the sample corpus.

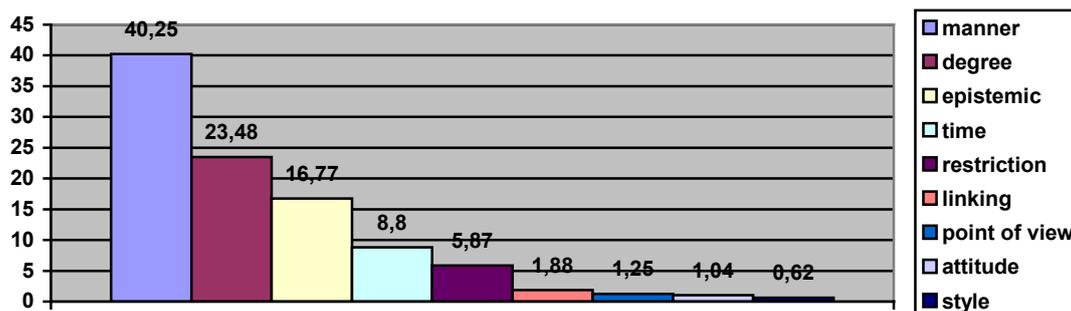


Figure 1: Semantic categories of *-ly* adverbs in the corpus.

In general, the data supports previous findings that state that “circumstance adverbials are by far the most common class of adverbial” (Biber et al. 1999:765). Manner has been found to be the most frequent semantic function of *-ly* adverbs in English, which was also expected. However, more than half the occurrences of *-ly* adverbs correspond to meanings other than circumstance or manner. Degree happens to be particularly frequent, at 23.48%. Next, epistemic adverbs occur with a relatively high frequency (16.77%), which is mainly due to the fact that the adverb *really*, has the highest frequency of occurrence of all adverbs in the sample corpus (24 cases).

#### *Analysis of translation data (Spanish)*

In order to semantically classify all the different translations into Spanish found in the parallel corpus for *-ly* adverbs we have devised an eclectic typology of translational labels based on broad grammatical, semantic and translational criteria. The terms reflect traditional categories, and are generally accepted expressions in the field of translation studies, for instance ‘modulation’ (Salkie 2001) or ‘transposition’ (Vinay & Darbelnet 1958: 36).

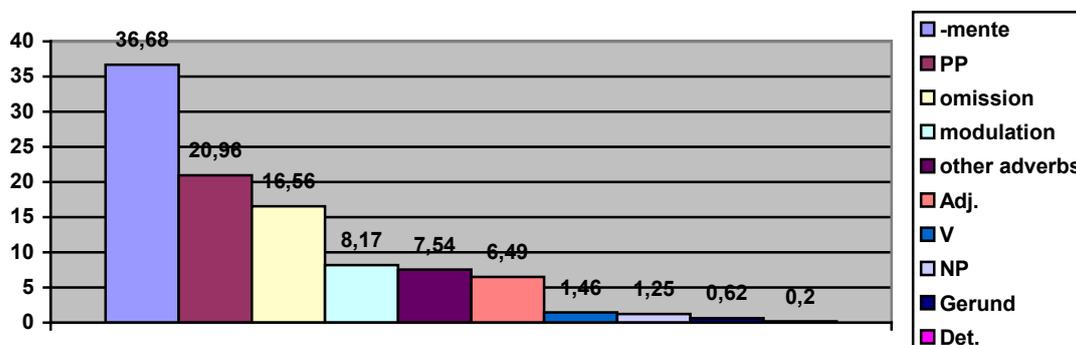


Figure 2: Translational options for *-ly* adverbs into Spanish.

As expected, the most frequent translation of *-ly* adverbs are *-mente* adverbs. However, they account for only 36% of cases, most of which are cognates (ex. 1). All the other resources put together show a much higher percentage of occurrence than *-mente* derivation, which suggests that this resource is far from being central in Spanish.

- (1) Roh's election signalled that many South Koreans want to make up with what they see as an eccentric, gun- crazy, but essentially harmless relative.

*La victoria en las urnas de Roh puede interpretarse como un signo de que muchos surcoreanos quieren hacer las paces con el que consideran un pariente excéntrico y obsesionado por las armas, pero esencialmente inofensivo.*

The remaining 64% of instances of *-ly* adverbs are translated by alternative resources that are not *-mente* adverbs. In terms of typicality, the second choice is an analytic resource - PPs used as adverbials (20%), as in ex. (2). One possible reason for this preference is the well-known fact that *-mente* adverbs in Spanish are not pragmatically equivalent to *-ly* adverbs in Spanish. Explanations frequently offered for this preference are that a) *-mente* adverbs carry stylistically formal connotations, b) they tend to be longer word units, and c) occur less frequently in general in the language (Hoye 1997).

- (2) Awkwardly, for she still had her cigarette, she picked up the vase and balanced it on the rim of the basin.

*Con torpeza, pues aún tenía el cigarrillo en la mano, Cecilia cogió el jarrón y lo depositó en el borde de la piletta.*

The third most common translational option found is omission with 16%. We think that there are several reasons for such a high frequency. On the one hand, the translator may have decided to obliterate part of the meaning of the source text by omitting the *-ly* adverb in the Spanish translation for various reasons (limitation in the number of words, peripherality of adverbial functions in general, slips due to pressure of time, etc.). On the other hand, we regard some cases to be 'idiomatic omissions'. By this we mean those instances where keeping the adverbial meaning of the *-ly* form would have been redundant and led to meaningless 'overtranslation' into Spanish, as in ex. (3):

- (3) Harry knew Aunt Petunia would simply love to be the one to call the hotline number.

*Harry sabía que a tía Petunia le habría encantado llamar a aquel teléfono directo.*

The cases included in the category modulation refer to instances where the adverbial function is not clearly expressed by a single element or phrase but spread over several lexical units in the target language and. Modulation, as a type of oblique translation, frequently overlaps with transposition and applies to cases such as ex. (4):

- (4) The Centre lies discreetly hidden, yet its entrance, just 25m from the west door, is easily found by visitors as they leave the cathedral.

*El centro se encuentra oculto discretamente y, aún así, al abandonar la catedral, los visitantes no tienen dificultad para localizar su entrada.*

Next in the scale of frequency come adverbs other than *-mente* adverbs, as in ex. (5):

- (5) That strategy had developed during the Clinton years; it informed his unexpected embrace of George Bush in 2001; it was greatly reinforced by the 9/11 attacks; now it would face its hardest test.

*Una estrategia que desarrolló ya en los años de Clinton, inspiró su inesperada acogida a George W. Bus en 2001, se vio muy reforzada por los atentados del 11-S y ahora iba a enfrentarse a su prueba más difícil.*

All of the minor categories are cases of transposition, especially into adjectives (ex. 6), but also verbs, NPs, gerunds and determiners.

- (6) He stood there dumbly as she walked away from him, barefoot across the lawn, and he watched her darkened hair swing heavily across her shoulders, drenching her blouse.

*Permaneció callado mientras ella se alejaba descalza por el césped, y observó el pesado cimbreo de su pelo negro sobre los hombros que le empapaba la blusa.*

#### *From meaning to form*

The results from analyzing the translational options of *-ly* adverbs meaning manner closely resemble those obtained for the whole corpus (see Fig. 2). This similarity to the general trend seems quite normal as manner accounts for 40% of all instances. The statistics are as follows: *-mente* adverbs are the first option (39.06%), followed by PPs (24.47%), omission (16.14%), adjective (9.37%), modulation (6.77%), other adverbs (2.08), gerund (1.56%) and NP (0.52%). The only noticeable aspect is the frequency rate of the transposition into adjectives, which is slightly higher than the general trend in the whole corpus, and the fact that all the cases of gerund fall into this category of manner.

The favourite option (31.25%) for translating degree adverbs are again *-mente* adverbs, followed by other adverbs (20.53%), the latter a much more common choice in this group than for the whole corpus. Omission and PPs (16.07% for both) occupy the mid range, with modulation fetching just over 8%. Transposition into NPs represents 3.57%, into adj. 2.67%. Other types of transposition do not reach 1%.

The most frequent choice when translating epistemic stance adverbs is, again, *-mente* adverbs (36.25%), and the less favoured one is 'other adverbs' (3.75%). The only type of transposition involved in translating epistemic *-ly* adverbs are PPs (25%), which, together with omission (21.25%) and modulation (13.75%) show a higher frequency here than in the general trend. In the latter case, this is the group where it has the highest frequency, and tends to follow the pattern 'copula+adj+que': *estaba claro que; es evidente que; lo más probable era que, etc.*

Concerning the translations of time *-ly* adverbs, there is much less omission (7.14%) and modulation (4.76%) than in the general trend. In contrast, there is much more transposition: PPs (19.04%), adj. (9.52%), verbs (9.52%) and NPs (2.38%). Translation by other adverbs comes to 9.52%. The translation of restriction adverbs shows a rather different distribution of frequency rates: *-mente* adverbs occur much less frequently than in general, whereas omission soars from 16% in the general account to 25% in the case of restrictive adverbs (this includes 'idiomatic omission' as in ex. 3 above). The increase in the frequency of transposition into adjectives (14.28%) and verbs (7.14%) and the decrease of the use of PPs (14.28%) and modulation (3.57%) also differ from the general data. The rest of the categories yielded less than 10 occurrences each, which means that the results are mainly indicative and need further validation. 5 out of the 9 instances of linking adverbs were translated by *-mente* adverbs, which is

congruent with the general data. The other instances are single occurrences of omission, transposition into PP and adjective and modulation. 4 out of the 6 instances of ‘point of view adverbs’ were also translated by *-mente* adverbs. The other cases are single occurrences of modulation and transposition into adjective. *-mente* adverbs and transposition into PPs are both used twice as translations of attitude adverbs; modulation happens just once. Style adverbs were translated by means of omission (2 cases), and *-mente* adverbs (1 case).

## Conclusions

The most relevant conclusions drawn from this analysis can be divided into a) those that refer exclusively to the source language, and b) those that are of a translational nature.

Most *-ly* adverbs were found to express some kind of circumstantial meaning, whereas stance and linking were rather infrequent, except for epistemic functions, which is the third most frequent semantic category in the analysis. The most common category is manner (40% of all instances), which is the function traditionally associated with the *-ly* suffix. Still, 60% of *-ly* adverbs do not express manner, but other meanings such as degree (23% of the cases). Most cases were easily assigned to one or another category, but occasionally there was a merging or overlapping of meaning, which affected particularly the pairing time-manner. One example is the adverb *suddenly*, which may have a primary function – manner – and a subsidiary function – time.

Concerning the translation solutions, the most frequent option in Spanish were *-mente* adverbs, but still they only account for 36% of the occurrences. Besides, there is a strong suspicion that this resource was overused in translated Spanish, to the detriment of other, more idiomatic solutions, although this will need verification using original Spanish language data. The fact that transposition into PPs occupies the second position reflects the analytic preferences of Spanish, which typically uses PPs to convey adverbial meanings. About 16% of instances of *-ly* adverbs were omitted in the Spanish translations. This high rate can be explained by several factors. As mentioned above, the omission can be totally idiomatic as it avoids unwanted redundancy in the Spanish text. Besides, a markedly peripheral position of the adverb in clause structure seems to underlie certain cases of omission. A further omission situation happens when part of the semantic load conveyed by certain adverbs in English –particularly stance adverbs– is quite naturally encoded in Spanish by verbal mood and tense, which renders these adverbs unnecessary in the target text. Modulation obeys to a higher degree of explicitation, which is a universal feature of translated language irrespective of language (Baker 1999). In addition, the analytic preferences of Spanish may be seen as a reinforcement of this type of behaviour.

These empirical results are relevant for a) the semantic analysis of STs, b) building of an inventory of English-Spanish translational solutions, when used in conjunction with contrastive analysis data, and c) helping establish the typicality rates between particular adverbial functions and the Spanish formal structures used to convey those meanings. Further studies may focus on a comparison of these results with original Spanish usage, which would contribute the necessary target language fit verification (Chesterman 2004:6).

## Notes

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