

Important considerations to render literary material from English to Spanish

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Abstract

Writing which falls into the category of literature requires great care on the part of the translator to make sure that he/she understands the historical and cultural background of the story and the nuances of the language. The objective of the present research paper is to study how the cultural and language situations of a certain region of the United States affect the effectiveness and accuracy of translation into Spanish and if this type of translation can be performed without altering the meaning of the original text.

A text that implies unique cultural and language situations can be accurately translated by using equivalence techniques and by adapting it to a similar situation in the target text. The methodology used to prove this hypothesis consists of an analysis of the translation of an American short story, *The Loves of Alonzo Fitz Clarence and Rosannah Ethelton*, written by Mark Twain in 1878. A variety of resources used by the author of the story were studied, as well as, a considerable number of words and expressions that were made up by Twain to enrich the dialogues and descriptions, but which pose difficulties in rendering into the target language.

Final comments drawn from the analysis and the probation of the hypothesis provide the strategies with which the different language and cultural implications were translated by using the adaptation and the equivalence techniques.

The present investigation may be a useful tool for those who study the translation process and the current research in this field.

1. Introduction and justification

According to Nida (1964), the cultural and language situations may cause severe complications to the translator when he/she is to translate from one language to another.

Taylor (1998) says that there are two contexts involved in the translation of literary material which consist of the author and his readers, and also the setting of the story with its characters and their roles. This kind of translations requires much care on the part of the translator to make sure that the historical and cultural background of the story is well understood. This is different from the generic detective story or thriller,

whose settings make little difference to the narrative and whose characters seem interchangeable with countless others of the same genre.

Amongst the literary movements that imply cultural and language situations there is the realism movement, which recorded episodes of the life as the way it was without idealization. Realists, often rely heavily on local colour, deliberately attempting to portray faithfully the customs, speech, dress, and living and working conditions of their chosen locale. Realists also stress characterization as a critical (if not the critical) element of a literary work states Rieck (2006).

One of the greatest exponents of this movement was Mark Twain. He is considered the American Shakespeare, due to his prolific work. He wrote with great eloquence and detail about the American life, the society, and the events of the time. Twain was a writer that travelled around the United States and the world. This helped him to be a great observer who enjoyed writing with humour vivid descriptions of places, people, landscapes, and situations. He used to create new words and phrases in his writing. He also made use of idiolects from different regions of the United States, such as Missouri, in the Mississippi area. Moving from the West to the East and on to Europe, living among boatmen, slaves, miners, journalists, and aristocrats, Twain heard the multiplicity of human voices that find their way into his work. Foreign languages, dialects, the politics of speech acts, technical jargons, and misunderstandings were represented in his works, contributing to the invention of new words and phrases. Amongst the idiolects that he used, the dialect from the Mississippi area is his most renown due to the success of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876).

In the *Loves of Alonzo Fitz Clarence and Rossannah Ethelton* (1878), the language register and the style is from the upper class people, very rich in expressions and detailed descriptions. Due to this reasons, in this work the translator has to keep in the target language, the language register and the style as similar as the original, keeping the richness of the expressions and descriptions.

Material to be translated is designed source text (ST) which after the intricate process that takes place in the mind of the translator is rendered into the target text (TT). Understanding is a prerequisite to translate; therefore the translator must be

sufficiently familiar with the languages with which he/she is working to. Other qualities of the translator certainly include comprehensive general world knowledge, integrity, cognitive ability and a facility with words.

2. Objective

Since this work describes the translating process from English to Spanish of a short story *Loves of Alonzo Fitz Clarence and Rossannah Ethelton*, some portions of the text were analyzed considering important tasks as part of the translator's work like to be acknowledged with the biography of the author and the possible influence of his personal life in the text. It was also necessary to do an investigation about the external factors of the time in which the story was written, the significance and the message of the story, and its associations with feelings and current world.

An interpretation of the comments and sentiments of the readers, and the familiarization with the language e.g. cultural and language situations, that implies use of sociolect, dialect, jargon, etc. particularly of the region in which the story was set were key features for this paper, along with the selection of the translating strategies to render appropriately the difficulties found. According to Leonardi (2002), a text that implies unique cultural and language situations can be accurately translated by using equivalence techniques, by adapting it to a similar situation in the target text.

The present research paper has as a main objective:

1. To study how the language and cultural situations of a certain region of the United States affect the effectiveness and accuracy of the translation of literary material into Mexican Spanish.

3. Hypothesis

That the use of equivalent techniques is essential for translation of literary material containing cultural and language situations is the hypothesis upon which the research project is based. An attempt will be made to demonstrate the validity of this premise by comparing the results obtained by rendering selected words, phrases or

passages from the translations of *The Loves of Alonzo Fitz Clarence and Rossannah Ethelton* using both literal techniques and equivalent strategies. This being said is essential to qualify the use of the word equivalence, which in this context signifies a meaning oriented translation.

The strategies described by Vinay and Darbelnet or Nida are employed wherever literal translation fails to convey the perceived message of the source text. Equivalence, according to Webster (1994) is the state of being equivalent or equal. Equivalence as far as words are concerned suggests synonyms. Proponents of equivalence based-theory of translation usually define equivalence as the relationship between a source text and a target that allows the TT to be considered as a translation of the ST in the first place as Routledge, *Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (1998) states.

Vinay and Darbelnet (quoted by Kenny: 1998) sustain that equivalence is a process whereby the translator is able to replicate the same situation as in the original, whilst using completely different wording. According to the above authors it is essential for the translator to understand the "situation" in the source language before looking for its equivalence in the target language. Vinay and Darbelnet go on to state without hesitation that equivalence techniques are the ideal method when the translator has to deal with cultural and language situations, idioms, clichés, or onomatopoeia.

The maintenance of equivalence between the source text and the target text according to Baker requires that the translator considers three main factors: the target audience, the purpose of the translation and the text type.

These theories emphasize that the judgment of the translator is crucial when reference materials prove inadequate. They recognize the limitations of relying solely on linguistic techniques to produce a translation which truly conveys the message and intent of the source text. It would seem, however, that having a working definition of equivalence is basic to any theoretical approach to translation.

4. Methodology

In order to reach the objective and prove the hypothesis, the methodology included the following steps:

1. A bibliographic research to choose the text to work amongst the works of Twain.
2. A comprehensive reading of the original text.
3. A research on the internet, and bibliographic resources to place the play in time in order to know the main events that happened.
4. A selection of the unknown words and expressions in the original text.
5. A translation process applying the literal and the equivalence techniques.
6. A research in dictionaries, thesaurus, the web and some language experts for the possible meanings of the unknown words in the target language.
7. A morpho-syntactic analysis of the translation difficulties encountered, which helped to organize the paragraphs to sound as natural as possible in the target language and in which the translation team worked on punctuation, syntax, use of language and other nuances.
8. After deciding on the final version of the paragraphs in the target language, the difficult terms were analyzed to find out what techniques were used to render them.

In order to examine the research proposed by this project: whether or not equivalence is the appropriate approach for translating literary material containing cultural and language situations, a questionnaire was devised. This survey offers a series of difficult words or phrases taken from the English source text along with possible Spanish translations. Ten individuals were then asked to select the most meaningful Spanish translation in their respective contexts of the difficulties encountered in the source text. Candidates were selected from the local Spanish and English speaking community, based on their educational level and experience in translating from English into Spanish. They are professional translators and interpreters. The findings present the techniques mostly used to render appropriately the difficulties found in literary texts containing cultural and language situations. The questionnaire was presented in the following format:

QUESTIONNAIRE RELATING TO TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES (Bello, Portillo, Garduño: 2005)

DIRECTIONS: Please choose the best option from words underlined in the following Spanish sentences. Best option is intended to mean the word or words which seem to retain the meaning of the English text. Please indicate your choice by crossing out the most desirable option. If none of them satisfy you, please give a possible suggested translation.

e.g. 1. – “Alonzo Fitz Clarence was sitting in his snug and elegant little parlor, in a lovely blue silk dressing-gown, with **cuffs and facings of crimson** satin, elaborately quilted.” *Alonso Fitz Clarence estaba sentado en su cómodo, abrigado y elegante saloncito, envuelto en un precioso batín (acolchado/apachonado) de seda azul, ricamente adornado con puños y cuello de satín rojo oscuro.*

Subsequently, there was an analysis of the answers of the questionnaire based on the literal and the equivalent techniques.

5. Analysis

Analysis is defined by Webster as an examination of a complex, its elements, and their relations (1994). The analysis of the questionnaire consisted on identifying which techniques had the individuals taken as the most appropriate term to render the example given. As part of the analysis, a variety of resources used by the author of the story were studied, as the kind of idiolects that he used, the idioms and the reading of different texts to comprehend his works. Also, a considerable number of words and expressions were made up by Twain to enrich the dialogues and descriptions, but which pose difficulties in rendering them into the target language.

The purpose of the analysis performed in this paper was to find out what techniques were the most recurrent during the translation process in order to prove the hypothesis. This short story represented a big challenge due to its language register and here are represented some of the most difficult paragraphs to work with.

In an effort to analyze translation, prominent contemporary theorists have identify the techniques which they find most useful. Then in order to provide a method of translation which can guide students and practitioners of this art, procedures have been outlined and techniques have been defined and named.

Vinay and Darbelnet (1977), state that translations are nearly always longer than an original script due precisely to the frequent need for expansion or amplification. The translation techniques outlined by them include *borrowing, calque, literal translation, transposition, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation*. The seven techniques described by Vinay and Darbelnet can be divided into two groups. The first group consists of literal translation which includes literal as a technique itself, borrowing, and calque, all of which are forms of direct translation. The second group consists of equivalence translation which includes transposition, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation; these represent what is called oblique or indirect approaches to translation.

Literal translation, one of the three types of direct translation, can be further divided. Firstly, there is word-for-word translation, where each word is translated using the first definition of such word in a bilingual dictionary keeping the original word order. Secondly, there is a slightly more flexible technique which is also designated literal but which allows minimal adjustments of word order, along with some addition and omission of words as required by the target language grammar.

Borrowing, one of the three types of direct translation, is where the source language word or expression is taken directly into the target text without any change.

Calque, the third type of direct translation, is a special kind of borrowing. Calque involves the literal translation of a word or part of a word, thus creating a neologism, or new word, in the target language

Transposition is one of the four types of oblique translation and is usually defined as the changing of one part of speech for another without changing the sense.

Adaptation, another of the four types of oblique translation, involves the change required to transmit meaning when a situation in the source culture does not exist in the target culture.

Equivalence is often listed as one of the four types of indirect translation per Vinay and Darbelnet. However, further qualification is required because the word equivalence is also used in a broader sense to describe the entire act of translation or the product of a translation process. Equivalence, as a strategy or technique, comes

into play when the translation unit is an idiomatic expression, a cliché, slang, a proverb or saying, or a specific cultural reference, and it becomes necessary for the translator to look for some equivalent concept in the target culture.

There is modulation which is one of the four oblique types of translation. Modulation, as a translation technique, involves changing the semantics and point of view of the source text. Literary devices, such as simile and metaphor, are best translated by means of a modulation technique.

Paraphrasing is the polar opposite of literal word-for-word translation. To paraphrase is defined as restatement of a text or passage giving the meaning in another form (Vinay and Darbelnet 1977).

On the other hand, López Guix and Wilkinson (1999) suggest that in most cases literal technique is the appropriate starting point for a translation, turning to the various equivalence techniques only as needed, keeping the afore mentioned aims of translation firmly in mind. According to Darwish (1989:4), a shifting between literal technique and search for equivalence in the target language eventually becomes almost automatic.

1. A passage from the source text translated literally in the present paper is as follows: "Alonzo Fitz Clarence was sitting in his snug and elegant little parlor, in a lovely blue silk dressing-gown, with cuffs and facings of crimson satin, elaborately quilted." *Alonso Fitz Clarence estaba sentado en su cómodo, abrigado y elegante saloncito, envuelto en un precioso batín **acolchado/apachonado** de seda azul, ricamente adornado con puños y cuello de satín rojo oscuro.*

It is an example of literal translation the rendering of this sentence because the Spanish version contains the same number of words. As for the most appropriate translation for the term given, "acolchado" was preferred by the experts.

2. Borrowing was used on the following paragraph: "Ah, I never have heard 'In the Sweet By-and-by' sung like that before!" — *¡Nunca antes había escuchado **'In the Sweet By-and-By'** cantada de esa manera!*

In this example the borrowing technique is perfectly applied to the title of the song 'In the Sweet By-and-by' which does not have a correspondent expression in Spanish because there is not a version in Spanish.

3. The use of the adaptation technique was applied in “There was a feeble but frantic sound for some little time, as if wool-upped, disembodied spirits were exchanging kisses; then Rosannah said, ‘Excuse me just a moment, dear; I have an appointment, and am called to meet it.’ *Hubo un débil pero frenético sonido por un momento —como el de alguna prenda al ponerse/como la criolina de un vestido—, espíritus incorpóreos intercambiaban besos; entonces Rosannah dijo: —Discúlpame un momento, querido; tengo una cita y debo reunirme con ella.*

The problem in this paragraph was the expression: “...as if wool-upped”, which was not found in the original language as an idiom, saying, or slang. Thus, to solve the problem the technique used was adaptation, and the chosen term was the first given option, which sounds more meaningful in the Spanish of this day and age.

4. Another case in which adaptation technique was used was: “The mourners go about the streets with their umbrellas running streams from the end of every whalebone.” *Los dolientes salen a las calles con sus sombrillas, esparciendo chorros de agua por la punta de cada **varilla/del esqueleto.***

The problem to solve was: “...every whalebone”; this expression represents a cultural situation, due to the fact that in the 1800’s the umbrellas were made of whalebone, whereas nowadays that is out of use because they are made out of metal. The adaptation technique was used in order to translate this situation. Therefore, the first option was the more equivalent term.

5. In the following case, the transposition technique was used: “A forlorn dog, with bowed head and tail withdrawn from service, was pressing his quaking body against a windward wall for shelter and protection.” *Un perro triste y abandonado, con la cabeza inclinada y **la cola inservible/la cola entre las patas** presionaba su escuálido cuerpo contra el muro de contención del viento en busca de refugio y protección.*

The example taken to be translated was: “...tail withdrawn from service”; and the technique used was transposition. The verb withdrawn from the ST was changed by an adjective in the TT. The first option was the more appropriate translation which expresses what the author really means.

6. The following is a very descriptive paragraph rich in vocabulary: “Her dress and adornment were marked by that exquisite harmony that can come only of a fine natural taste perfected by culture. Her gown was of a simple magenta tulle, cut bias,

traversed by three rows of light-blue flounces, with the selvage edges turned up with ashes-of-roses chenille; overdress of dark bay tarlatan with scarlet satin lambrequins; corn-colored polonaise, en zanier, looped with mother-of-pearl buttons and silver cord, and hauled aft and made fast by buff velvet lashings; basque of lavender reps, picked out with valenciennes; low neck, short sleeves; maroon velvet necktie edged with delicate pink silk; inside handkerchief of some simple three-ply ingrain fabric of a soft saffron tint; coral bracelets and locket-chain; coiffure of forget-me-nots and lilies-of-the-valley massed around a noble calla." *Su vestido y su exquisitez estaban marcados por la sutil armonía que solo puede tenerse con el buen gusto natural perfeccionado por la cultura. Su vestido consistía en un tul de color magenta cortado en sesgo, adornado con tres capas de volantes color azul pálido, con rosas de cerezo bordadas con felpa en las orillas volteadas hacia arriba, adornado con muselina satinada de color escarlata. Un corsé azul lavanda, de escote bajo resaltado con encajes; mangas cortas, cuello de terciopelo marrón ribeteado con delicada seda rosa; dentro, un pañuelo de un material sencillo, de tres hilos, de un suave color azafrán. Completaban el atuendo, una polonesa de color amarillo, algo estrafalaria, con botonaduras de madreperla y cordones plateados, jalados y atados firmemente con gamuza aterciopelada, pulseras de coral, una cadena con guardapelo, un tocado de nomeolvides y lirios del valle agrupados alrededor de un noble alcatraz.*

The translation problem was the detailed description of the dress. Therefore, to render this case the techniques used were expansion and equivalence. The first one was used because it was necessary to give more details in Spanish so that the readers could have a complete picture of the dress. The equivalence technique was used because there was a difference in structure.

7. Two problems arose in the following paragraph: "Plague take the weather! I don't see how you can have the heart to serve me so, Lon."
 —**¡Al carajo con el clima!/¡al diablo con el clima!** *No sé como tienes corazón para bromearme/burlarte así Lon.*

The main expressions to translate in this paragraph were: "plague take the weather" and "... to serve me so"; to solve these problems it was necessary to use adaptation because both expressions did not have corresponding meanings in the TT. As a consequence, the first options were the more convenient for both given cases.

8. This case is an example of the use of the equivalence technique: "I float in a gorgeous cloud land, a boundless firmament of enchanted and bewildering ecstasy!"

¡Vivo **entre nubes de color rosa/ando en las nubes**, en un firmamento de encanto infinito y éxtasis apabullante!

The problem in this paragraph was "...float in a gorgeous cloud land", and the technique used to solve it was equivalence because *vivo entre nubes de color de rosa* is widely accepted than the second option

9. This particular case shows the employment of the adaptation technique: "So we be the happiest ones that that day's suit looks down upon in the whole broad expanse of the globe, why need we care? Call it the 1st of April, dear." *Entonces seremos los más felices en ese día. **Ese día será el día más sublime a lo largo y ancho del mundo entero/Ese día será el más significativo de toda mi vida; ¿por qué habría de importarnos? Será el primero de abril, querida.***

There was a complicated expression in this case which is the following: "...that day's suit looks down upon in the whole ..." the technique used to solve it was adaptation due that the first option does not express a total and natural sense to the reader.

10. "Indeed, I did. I made him the April fool! Si, de verdad. ¡Le hice una broma, **inocente palomita! ¡inocente angelito!**

The expression to translate in this example was: "April fool", since this expression is an idiom, it has its correspondent expression in the TT which the most equivalent is the first option.

6. Conclusions

The hypothesis upon which this paper is based states that equivalence methods are essential for the translation of a source text containing cultural and language situations into Spanish if the target text is to exhibit a similar meaning.

Participants who filled in the questionnaire were requested to choose between a literal rendering and a translation achieved by one of the various equivalence techniques. Over all, research subjects opted for equivalence over literal

translation eighty-three percent of the time. A range of seventy to one hundred percent was observed through out the exercise.

The experience of working with a source text of established literary status as part of the present project was instructive as to the need to be ever vigilant for the subtleties and innuendos in literary material. It follows, therefore, that ordinary reference materials often fails to provide even a hint as to the cultural significance of such little phrases. Once there is an awareness of cultural and language situations, equivalence immediately comes into play.

These findings appear to bear out the hypothesis of this endeavor, that it is essential to make use of equivalence techniques when translating source text containing American cultural and language situations into Mexican Spanish in order to maintain meaning in the product. It can be asserted further, that not only is the goal of accuracy sacrificed with adherence to a literal method of translation, but the vitality of the target text is certain to be diminished.

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