VII Simposio
sobre la traducción, la interpretación y la terminología

La traducción: un mundo en constante evolución

Ponencia: Trans-Assistance: Propuesta de un asistente para el estudio de la Traducción en la carrera de Lengua Inglesa.


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Introduction

What made us work on this article was our dissatisfaction with the lack of systematic study and practice in the learning process in translation courses in English Language Studies syllabus. By lack of systematicity we mean that the typical translation experience of students consists in coping with the specific translation problems in a text, problems that are seen and solved as unique cases and that are never again seen in other texts so that their solution is an individual, unique act rather than the application of a systematic procedure or technique.

We think that a solution could be found in the study of ready-made translations to find the different equivalents in context and to be able to systematize knowledge about the typical solutions to translation problems. This could be accompanied by the establishment of debates with other students to make explicit the pros and cons of specific solutions.

We believe that by using some of the technology associated with corpus linguistics we could be able to provide learners with the means of a more systematic study of translation problems and the solution given by professional translators to these problems.

To achieve our purpose we decided to build a textual database with literary texts, specifically English and American novels translated into Spanish.
Informatics and translation

There are some competences that define the translator, such as the transference sub-competence that refers to the knowledge and abilities of the translator or the heuristic sub-competence or the knowledge of the appropriate documentation resources and the tools the translator might use. The new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) as support for the professional translator include office automation, i.e. texts, graphics and pictures processors, information retrieval systems, dictionaries and glossaries, terminological bases and other reference means in CD-Rom, databases made by the translator himself and automatic and assisted translation memory programs.

There has been a revolution in the translator’s professional work because of Internet. For example: the translator can make consultations to check orthography or the use and norm of the language or can also find parallel texts that facilitate terminology, idiomatic requisites, etc. When we are on-line we can consult mono, bi and multilingual dictionaries, automatic translation programs and all kind of reference archives or consult texts corpora, for instance, to find the technical phraseology (collocations) that we do not usually see in terminological dictionaries. The translator’s work has become easier, on one hand, thanks to personal, universities, and associations web pages that have turned themselves into a way to access to specialized glossaries, electronic dictionaries and reference corpora and all kind of services; and on the other hand, thanks to the debate forums in which translators help each other.

We would like to point out the importance that ICT have been gaining in training translators and interpreters: there are subjects devoted to informatics applied to translation, to documentation, to terminology (besides the use of off-line and on-line resources in translation classes), and there are also courses on translation and the new technologies.

Now, it is important to stress that the computer as a tool of the professional translator was first used in the second half of the 1980’s in the curriculum of translators’ and interpreters’ training centers in Spain and Germany. There were created subjects that offered essentially training on operating systems and texts and graphics processors. Specifically in our country, in the Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas, a similar subject was included in the curriculum of English Language Studies. In the year 1998, the subject Computer-Assisted Translation started to be taught in order to help the students improve their translation skills working with parallel texts.
The use of ICT in translators training is preceded by the approach CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) that at the beginning was essentially referred to the use of the computer to support professors in their teaching activities and as a means for self-learning.

In the middle of the 1990’s in universities and institutes there were open self-learning classrooms, especially for foreign languages self-learning or the improvement of the mother tongue. There were a huge amount of materials and computer self-learning exercises available in those classrooms in order to facilitate and accelerate the learners’ study. We want to make it clear that this is not about imposing the computer (virtual instructor) over the real instructor because a computer cannot obviously supplant a flesh-and-blood instructor and still less in such a complicated field that is language and translation teaching.

Two opposed or complementary translation approaches

In the early 1950s and throughout the 1960s, translation studies was largely treated as a branch of applied linguistics, and indeed linguistics in general was seen as the main discipline which is capable of informing the study of translation. In the 1970s, and particularly during the 1980s, translation scholars began to draw more heavily on theoretical frameworks and methodologies borrowed from other disciplines, including psychology, communication theory, literary theory, anthropology, philosophy and, more recently, cultural studies. There are now a number of distinct theoretical perspectives from which translation can be studied: communicative/functional approaches, linguistic approaches, psycholinguistic/cognitive approaches, interpretive approaches, etc.

In this article the authors focus on the comparative stylistic approach and the interpretive approach only since in English Language Studies, in the subject Translation, English Language students are trained just in the last approach mentioned above and it is firmly believed that students’ translational skills can be improved if they work with these two approaches together. Besides, it is thought that comparative stylistics approach is much related to the use of linguistics corpora, so it would be easier for students to see what translation procedures professional translators use in their way from the source language to the target language, especially when they have the originals in English and their translations into Spanish one next to the other. But, now, let’s see what they consist in.

Contrastive analysis is a linguistic study of two languages, aiming to identify differences between them in general or in selected areas. There is a certain kind of contradiction inherent in
this, in that the two languages must have some common measure by which they can be compared; otherwise the contrastive task is not possible.

The most remarkable work in this field is that of Vinay and Darbelnet (1958), where they define a series of translation procedures. These authors propose seven basic procedures, classified into two groups: direct or literal, related to literal translation and oblique that have to do with the oblique translation. Literal translation provides an exact correspondence between two languages according to lexis and structure, and it is only possible between languages and cultures very close to each other. Oblique translation does not allow to make a word-by-word translation.

Among the procedures proposed by these authors for the first type of translation (literal) are the borrowing, the calque, and the literal translation. Among those who belong to the second group (oblique), the transposition can be found, the modulation, the equivalence and the adaptation.

Vinay and Darbelnet also propose a series of additional procedures. Most of them, except the compensation and the inversion, are opposed pairs: dissolution opposed to concentration, amplification opposed to economy, expansion opposed to condensation, explicitation opposed to implicitation, generalization opposed to particularization, articulation opposed to juxtaposition, and grammaticalization opposed to lexicalization.

Vinay and Darbelnet also made a list consisting of five steps a translator should follow when translating from the source language to the target language:

- Identification of the translation units.
- Examination of the text in the source language, evaluating the descriptive, affective and intellectual content of the units.
- Reconstruction of the message’s metalinguistic context.
- Evaluation of the stylistic effects.
- Generation and revision of the text in the target language.
Vinay and Darbelnet define the translation unit as the minimum segment of expression whose signs are joined in such a way that they should not be translated individually, and they also stress that it is not about individual words.

At a practical level, comparative stylistics approach is most useful in pointing out areas where direct translation of a term or phrase will not convey accurately in the second language the intended meaning of the first. At a global level, it leads the translator to look at broader issues such as whether the structure of the discourse for a given text-type is the same in both languages.

Now, the interpretive approach, sometimes referred to as the interpretative approach, is also known as the theory of sense. It is an approach to interpreting and translation adopted by members of the ESIT group, sometimes referred to as the Paris School, of professors sharing the theoretical conceptions underpinning the teaching at the École Supérieure d’Interprétariat et de Traduction of Paris: M. Lederer, D. Seleskovitch, F. Herbulot but also J. Delisle and M. Pergnier.

Initially developed in the late 1960’s on the basis of research in Conference Interpreting, the interpretive theory of translation was subsequently extended to the written translation of non-literary or pragmatic texts (Delisle, 1980) and to the teaching of translation and interpreting.

The main representative of the Paris School is Danica Seleskovitch. Drawing on her extensive experience of professional conference interpreting, Seleskovitch (1977) developed a theory based on the distinction between linguistic meaning and non-verbal sense, where non-verbal sense is defined in relation to a translating process which consists of three stages: interpretation or exegesis of discourse, de-verbalization, and reformulation.

Interpreting is not based on verbal memory but on the appropriation of meaning, followed by reformulation in the target language. Translators, too, will reconstruct the meaning of the source language text and convey it to the readers of the translation. They will, however, normally go one step further than interpreters, by attempting to equate the expression of sense, to a certain extent, with the linguistic meanings of the source language.

The translation process is seen not as a direct conversion of the linguistic meaning of the source language but as a conversion from the source language to sense and then an
expression of sense in the target language. Translation is thus not seen as a linear transcoding operation but rather as a dynamic process of comprehension and re-expression of ideas.

Jean Delisle, a Canadian scholar, developed a more detailed version of the interpretive approach to translation, based on discourse analysis and text linguistics, where the interpretation of the text is defined in terms of specific criteria such as contextual analysis and preserving textual organicity, with particular reference to the teaching of translation and interpreting. Delisle focuses on the intellectual process involved in translation, the cognitive process of interlingual transfer, and stresses the non-verbal stage of conceptualization. He views translation as a heuristic process of intelligent discourse analysis involving three stages: comprehension (decoding the source-text linguistic signs with reference to the language system and defining the conceptual content of an utterance by drawing on the referential context in which it is embedded); reformulation (reverbalizing the concepts of the source utterance by means of the signifiers of another language through reasoning, successive associations of thoughts and logical assumptions); verification (process of back-translation which allows the translator to apply a qualitative analysis of selected solutions and equivalents with the purpose of confirming the accuracy of the final translation.

Translation scholars must recognize that no approach, however sophisticated, can provide the answer to all the questions raised in the discipline nor the tools and methodology required for conducting research in all areas of translation studies. There can be no benefit in setting various approaches in opposition to each other nor in resisting the integration of insights achieved through the application of various tools of research, whatever their origin. Fortunately, more and more scholars are beginning to celebrate rather than resist the plurality of perspectives that characterizes the discipline. While critical of certain aspects of specific approaches, such scholars are still able to see the various frameworks available as essentially complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

Translation studies can and will hopefully continue to draw on a variety of discourses and disciplines and to encourage pluralism and heterogeneity. Fragmentation and the compartmentalization of approaches can only weaken the position of the discipline and obscure opportunities for further progress in the field.
Creation of the database of texts

Corpus linguistics is the branch of linguistics that studies language on the basis of corpora, i.e., bodies of texts assembled in a principled way. Within corpus linguistics generally, the term corpus is usually used to mean any collection of running text held in electronic form and analyzable automatically or semi-automatically (rather than manually) (Baker 1995). The fact that corpora are held electronically, that is in form accessible to computers, means that huge quantities of text can be stored. Corpora differ from other large collections of machine-readable text (for example, archives or electronic text libraries), in that they are built according to explicit design criteria for a specific purpose. Design criteria typically involve decisions such as whether spoken and written language are to be included, what text types should be accounted for, what period of text production is to be covered, and whether text samples or full texts are to be included (Atkins et al. 1992; Baker 1995; Sinclair 1991). Once a suitable breakdown of text types, author profiles, etc., has been decided upon, the actual texts chosen for inclusion in a corpus can be selected randomly. Alternatively, a corpus-builder can intervene more deliberately in the selection of actual texts, choosing texts according to increasingly specific criteria. Finally, corpus-builders must secure permission from copyright-holders in order to store texts in electronic form and to use them in subsequent research.

The study of language on the basis of text corpora can be traced back to around 1960 with the launch of the Survey of English Usage (SEU) at London University and the advent of computers which made it possible to store large amounts of material. Since its beginning in the 1960s, the corpus as a source of systematically retrievable data, and as a test bed for hypotheses, has become widely used by linguists, resulting in findings that include some with obvious implications for translation.

Translation scholars may have different needs, for example for corpora that contain data from more than one language, especially those containing specialized texts, can be used in translation pedagogy, to reinforce students’ knowledge of normal target language patterns, in terminology extraction, or to detect frequencies of use, collocations, etc.

From a conceptual point of view, three types of corpus, that are more relevant in our field, can be distinguished: parallel corpora, multilingual corpora and comparable corpora. The contrastive analysis (i.e. between two languages) of parallel corpora, made up of texts in their original language and their translations to other languages, offers the possibility to find tendencies or
general rules for the translation between two languages, besides, it is a source for lexicographers, terminologists and assisted and automatic translation systems programmers.

A multilingual corpus contains compilations of similar texts (i.e. designed and collected with the same criteria) in different languages. A multilingual corpus therefore consists of texts that have not been translated; rather they are all originals in their respective languages. Thanks to it, languages can be seen in their natural environment, a very interesting issue in languages teaching, terminology and compared linguistics.

What seems to be more interesting for translation theory is comparable corpora that gather original texts of a certain subject and translated texts (not translations of the original texts) that share the same characteristics to compare them and discover the very nature of translation, although the less frequent and common cases happen to be the most interesting thing of the very nature of translation.

Corpus linguistics provides interesting techniques for spotting statistically significant and even unconventional collocational patterns in vast quantities of text and such techniques are being extended to bilingual corpora. Corpora and the software for processing them undoubtedly provide translation scholars with powerful tools for studying the very nature of translation.

Translation studies makes very particular demands on corpora and ongoing research in translation studies may lead to new ways of looking at corpora, just as corpora are already leading to new ways of looking at translation.

For our research, it was created a small corpus, consisting of 3 texts until now but that it will continue on growing according to the development of this research. It was decided to make a literary parallel corpus with some of the most famous and relevant novels written originally in English in the 1950’s and early 60’s and their translations into Spanish. Since students of English Language Studies have to face daily numerous problems when translating from English to Spanish, the creation of a tool that would assist students in their difficulties when doing a translation was considered to be very helpful. Also teacher would benefit from it, by using this tool to show students quick and diverse examples of translation shifts in different contexts. This way, they could see the solutions other translators have given to different cases.
Conclusions

The proposal that we have made has been implemented through several platforms such as HTML windows help systems, web HTML and Adobe Acrobat portable document format (PDF). For exemplification in this presentation we use the Adobe version.

True conclusions for this paper would require an evaluation of the use of the proposed aid system by translation students in different stages of their training. Such work is still pending but will be the main concern of the research team in the following months.
Bibliography