

TEACHING TRANSLATION THROUGH A GIVEN TEXT

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RESUMEN

Nuestro principal propósito al presentar a los alumnos este texto determinado, una historia corta de Roald Dahl titulada *The Hitchiker*, es que analicen el texto en profundidad, concentrándose en primer lugar en su comprensión, para que luego y, tras descubrir que las variedades de lengua dentro de la historia es la principal dificultad que se les presenta al traducir, sepan resolver todas las dificultades, combinando las dos competencias que debe poseer todo buen traductor: la lingüística y la traslativa.

ABSTRACT

On presenting a text (in this case a short story titled *The Hitchiker* by Roald Dahl), our first aim is to encourage the students to analyse the text in depth, concentrating first on its comprehension and then, and after realising that it is the variety of language within the story that appeared to present the greatest difficulty, they should solve all these non-easy decisions, combining the two competences which should have a good translator: linguistic and traslative.

Our article has been written in three parts. The first one deals with why we chose to work with Roald Dahl's short story *The Hitchiker* and how we presented the story to our students so that they would respond positively to it and to the work they would have to do on it. In the second part we touch on the theory of the varieties of language. Here we consider the work done by Catford, Mayoral, Hatim and Mason, Newmark, etc. The final part deals with some practical aspects of teaching translation with specific reference to Dahl's story.

Most teachers would probably agree that it is not so much what we teach, but the way that we teach it that gets good results. Taking this notion as a cue, we considered the various ways of presenting and teaching the material we want to use.

Before selecting a text we had to define our main aims and objectives as teachers of translations. As such our final aim is to send students out as competent translators. During the teaching-learning process, we should always attempt to offer a range of worthwhile skills, attitudes and insights which will help move towards becoming competent translators. As teachers we must ensure a deepening of understanding and an awareness of knowledge that will assist the students' future actions so that as translators they can make sound judgements that will lead them to writing acceptable translations.

All teachers should consider the learners' capacity before embarking on any teaching-learning process, but simply awareness of this capacity is not enough: there must be a minimum of willingness from the part of the student for the process to be effective. Our main aim in choosing the text was utilitarian in nature: to help our students improve their capacity / ability as translators.

So the student who has, along with his linguistic knowledge and skills, an enquiring mind and who is well informed with respect to the history, culture and customs of the country or countries of the languages he works in, is the one who is more likely to be successful in his work.

In order for the student of translation to achieve success in his work, he must be adequately motivated. It seems that drive and performance are closely linked and obviously the difficulty of the task affects the drive of the student. In this sense great care was taken when selecting this text. If a text is too simple, students either tend to scorn it or they tend not to apply themselves readily to it as they consider it "beneath" them. If the text is too difficult the tendency is often to shy away from tackling it though a student's reaction to a text may also be determined by his personality, his degree of self-esteem, competitiveness, his needs to achieve, etc.

In the case of our students basic motivation to improve language competence was already present. The task of the teacher was therefore to add further motivating stimuli to the already existing motivation.

The process of motivation sees the release of energy which can be utilized for, and directed towards the comprehension, assimilation and application of

translation techniques. Extrinsic factors such as teachers personality, work condition and teaching techniques help determine the final outcome of the piece of work to be translated.

As previously stated, before choosing the text it was assumed that all the students were linguistically competent in both the source and the target languages. That is, it was taken for granted that they had all gone well beyond the stage of making basic grammatical errors. It was also assumed that the students' style of expression and degree of fluency made possible an understandable translation. In other words, the students were taken as being technically competent.

Why was this particular text chosen for translation? It was decided that we want the students to undertake a piece of work which would take approximately four weeks to complete. Therefore we needed a text that was neither too long nor too short. We also wanted to choose a text that was well written, interesting and exciting enough to maintain the readers' and translators' interest. We wanted to find a text that was neither too easy nor too difficult for our students. Finally, we hope to find a text that would provide a source for further learning in terms of language and culture. Dahl's story *The hitchiker*, seemed to fit the bill.

Adequate background knowledge of information is often necessary to promote progress. On this basis the students were supplied with brief biographical details of Roald Dahl and a list of books for further reading. It was hoped that on learning a little about the author and his life, the students would tune-in more with the why's and wherefore's of his writings, and this would indirectly help in the task of translating the story chosen.

Although Dahl's story is generally published as a complete tale, the students were deliberately presented with a version that had been split into 12 smaller sections. These sections were accompanied by illustrations which were presumably intended to serve as stimuli to promote the imagination of the reader. It was hoped that the subdivisions of the text would make the task of translating it, appear less daunting for the students. Similarly it was hoped that the illustrations would not only activate the students' imagination and thus possibly facilitate the task of translating, but it was also hoped that they would provide relief from the continual river of lines.

Each section of the story had a title which, if understood correctly, served as a pointer which provided information as regards the direction the story was taking.

The students were required to read the text at home: it was suggested that they read it for pleasure, without worrying excessively about the odd words they did not understand. (At the same time, they were urged to seek out the meaning of any key word or expression which they felt might obscure the real meaning of the text for them).

The story was later discussed in class and the students had the opportunity to air any problems that had as regards their understanding of the text, problems with vocabulary, etc.

As a safety-net mechanism, the discussions were deliberately engineered so that the students were tested on their comprehension of the text. Few problems were encountered on this score. It was the variety of language within the story that appeared to present the greatest difficulty. The narrator of the story, who was a writer, presents the reader with an educated style of English, the hitchiker himself has a Cockney style vernacular and the the third character, the policeman, presents us an unmarked style.

On arriving at this point the students were presented bibliography of some authors such as Catford, Newmark, Hatim and Mason, Mayoral, etc. who have examined the problem of language variety within a text to be translated. Then the students were divided in groups and after working on one author they presented their conclusions to the rest of the class.

With reference to Dahl's story our students had no difficulty in translating the words spoken by the narrator and the policeman, but the idiolect spoken by the main character, the hitchiker, caused several problems. The origins of our hitchiker are never actually stated but the way his speech style is written, suggests that he is a Londoner. If it is accepted that social class helps determine style of speech delivery, then idiolect with respect to social class must be considered.

Different classes of speech are easily recognizable in English and these depend, to a great extent, upon the background of the speaker. Factors such as place of birth, age, education and occupation are of prime importance. It is almost as if class distinctions can be made upon the basis of pronunciation, vocabulary and expressions used and grammatical structures employed. The case is not quite so clear cut in Spanish, which on translating the story is our target language.

It could therefore be said that in English, there almost exists an upper and a lower cut; the principal difference between them being the use of the vulgar or bad language.

Although at the end of the 19th century, the dropping of the "h" was considered fashionable, nowadays it could almost be used as a class indicator. The same could be said for the dropping of the "g" at the end of words.

The dropping of both, the "h" and the "g" was a constant feature in the hitchiker speech:

writin' books ; tellin' somethin' ; 'ee ; 'ow ; 'ats.

It is very difficult not to find different varieties of language within the same text and we have to state that these varieties correspond to different social class levels.

In the case of Dahl's story, we have the educated narrator and the street-wise hitchiker. Both men obviously come from different social-cultural backgrounds and they both have different styles of speech. Even within the speech of the narrator we can find more emotive responses such as:

That's torn it! Oh, my sainted aunt!

Attempting to convey the adequate degree of response by each of the characters was difficult when translating into Spanish. It was very difficult to establish what the unit of translation was. That was to be tackled. On following Mayoral's suggestions we would take the subdivisions of the text that share the same situational and psychological parameters. This means that we do not agree with those who consider the sentence as the unit of translation.

Translating dialects is always problematic. According to Catford, unmarked dialects in the source language can be translated into unmarked dialects in the target language (TL). Even if this source language dialect does not exist in the TL, then a new literary dialect can be created. (Nida discussed this back in 1947).

However in the case of *The hitchiker* the original text contains marked speech and so the translator should attempt to find an equivalent dialect in the TL language. If we follow that, the translator would have to find a geographically equivalent dialect in the TL.

Another important principle that we cannot forget is the intertextuality through which texts are recognized in terms of their dependance on other texts. Here the students were demanded of the translation of the Cockney dialect in *Pygmalion*. On looking at Spanish translations of Shaw's *Pygmalion* and on listening to the dialogue of the film *My Fair Lady*, it can be seen that a dialect of a specific area of Madrid has been used. However in the Argentine version of the play, the Argentinean accent was used.

There is no physically geographic equivalence but the socio-cultural elements of the big city are certainly evident. However on several occasions, the desired effect is not quite achieved and it sometimes ends up being rather comical.

At this point we should follow Hatim and Mason's suggestions looking for a human, social and geographical dialect, modifying the standard language with some phonetical, lexical and grammatical marks, but without forgetting Newmark's words of producing a natural variation.

Let's proceed now with some practical aspects, the final part of our work.

We have already stated that the hitchiker's speech is phonetically marked, for example when he utters words such as:

takin' ; achin' ; goin' ; 'ow ; 'ee ; 'im, etc.

It is also marked by certain grammatical (or non grammatical) features:

ain't = *isn't* ; *aren't*

I 'as to be = *I have to be*

It don't pay = *It doesn't pay*

You simply follows after = *follow*

You writers is nosey parkers = *are*

He constantly uses a double negative, which can be considered as an idiolect:

... if you weren't no good...

... I never takes nothin'...

Many of Dahl's stories, among which we find *The Hitchiker*, have been translated into Spanish by Anagrama Ed. This translation is not consistent with the original in the sense that no variation in language amongst the three characters is found. They all speak in standard Spanish and only a few lexical features are found:

<i>English</i>	<i>Spanish</i>
<i>guv'nor</i>	<i>jefe</i>
<i>nosey parkers</i>	<i>fisgones</i>
<i>whoppin' big fine</i>	<i>multa morrocotuda</i>

If it is believed that the readers of both the source and the target texts should receive the same impressions from the story, then as far as loss is concerned our students should ask themselves:

- 1- Does a dialect that conforms to all the marked features in the source language exist in our target language?
- 2- Should a literary dialect be created on this occasion?

Before attempting to find an equivalent dialect, the translator must first pose the questions:

- What is equivalence?
- Can total equivalence exist?

Three factors that greatly influence the notion of equivalence are:

- the text and the language it is written in
- the translator and the language he is translating into
- the reader

As regards the text, the problems increase when the translator encounters ambiguities, when there is ambivalence at both semantic and syntactic levels.

It is often impossible for a translator to be totally objective because he has to make choices between various synonyms, etc. A great temptation for a translator (and more for a student-translator) is to assume the role of an interpreter in the sense of becoming the mediator between the author and the reader; if he is not careful, he can find himself dolying up a text.

The reader is perhaps the most important factor to be considered as far as the translating process is concerned. It is the translator knowledge of his future public that determines where a certain translation is acceptable or not.

Other authors support the notion of functional equivalence, where the function of a text in the source language is maintained in the target language, and final equivalence when the function of the TL itself is considered. This is where Katherina Reiss and Vermeer make the difference between equivalence (where the same function exists), and adjustment (where the function tends the finality of the translation itself).

After having carried out a detailed analysis of the source language text, the translator must decide what the functions of the original are and consequently what the functions of the final text should be. He must also decide which equivalences to opt for and above all whether or not he should supress part of the original or whether he should offer a compensatory translation.

All this sort of non-easy decisions, combined with the sensitivity to the author's intentions, "loyalty" to Christiane Nord, is what makes the translative competence. Linguistic competence between two languages has been by far the most important factor, but now we can state that all students must have at the end of their diploma both competences, if they want to become good translators.

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