Norms, memes and cognitive schemes: constructing meaning in translation teaching

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ABSTRACT

The concept of "meme" proposed by Chesterman (1997; 2000) describes the activity of translation as the spreading of ideas towards other cultures by means of the addition of new texts.

The memetic metamorphosis is the reflection of a mental process in which the translator creates the interaction of the cognitive schemes of the target culture with those of the source culture. The overlapping of schemes is also ruled by the mental representation of a "cognitive scheme of cooperation between actors" (cf. Risku 1998: 52) established by the translator. This scheme of cooperation is based on certain norms of meaning negotiation and, therefore, conditions the translators mental representation of the "projected source text" (cf. Hönig 1997: 51). Negotiation of meaning in translation can exist – micro- and macro-strategically – at different textual levels, and this negotiation of meaning that exists in the cultural overlapping of cognitive schemes enables intercultural communication. The idea of "scheme" proposed in the present paper, in relation to "translational norms" (Toury 1995) and "memes" (Chesterman 1997), is partially based on Eco's cognitive semantics (1999) and it serves as a useful theoretical construct for negotiating meaning in translation teaching. We will further describe how texts change when they are translated by means of an example to show the effectiveness of this theory.

1. Introduction

If translation represents communication between cultures, its main task is to optimally assure and adapt the transmission of *memes* from one culture to another, according to a range of particular circumstances. The concept of "meme", which was introduced by Chesterman in the field of Translation Studies (1997; 2000), describes the translation activity not from the point of view of its traditional definition, that is, as the mere transcodification of original texts, but as the spreading of ideas from one culture to other cultures through the addition of new texts.

The memetic metamorphosis is the reflection of a mental process in which the translator creates the interaction of the cognitive schemes of the target culture with those of the source culture by means of the translation strategies of foreignisation and domestication. The overlapping of schemes is also governed by the mental representation of a "cognitive scheme of cooperation between actors" (cf. Risku 1998: 52) established by the translator. This scheme of cooperation is based on certain norms of meaning negotiation and, therefore, conditions the translator's mental representation of the "projected source text" (cf. Hönig 1997: 51) in order to hypothetically enable successful performance between actors of different cultures. Negotiation of meaning in translation can exist - micro- and macro-strategically - at different textual levels, and in particular meaning "cores" or "atoms" implied in the conceptual interaction of the source text with the target text, that are socially and conventionally shared by both cultures. In this sense, certain inputs of meaning are integrated in a generic mental space of the translator's mind (cf. Fauconnier & Turner 2002), that contains what the inputs of a specific meaning of the source and target text have in common through analogy and identity. This negotiation of meaning that exists in the cultural overlapping of cognitive schemes enables intercultural communication. We will further describe how texts change when they are translated.

2. COGNITIVE SCHEME OF COOPERATION BETWEEN ACTORS

The negotiation of meaning in the translation process is first rooted in the particular circumstances that define the target communicative situation. On the whole, the dominant translation norms (Toury 1995) are what has a bearing on the translator's mental representation of the source text (ST), geared towards the prospective production of the target text (TT), a mental state that Hönig (1997: 51) calls "projected ST" and that is defined as one of the multiple mental states in the process of translation. In turn, this mental projection of the ST is also modulated by the translator's own emotions and environment, as well as the documentary tools available to him or her at a given moment in the translation process. We can therefore talk about a situated cognition that is relevant to the construction and reconstruction of the translator's mental projection.

A distinction can be made between several types of translation norms that will have an effect on the gestaltic configuration comprising the different mental levels of ST projection (cf. Toury 1980: 53; 1995: 58):

- a) preliminary norms have to do with the "translation policy" (i.e. those factors that govern the choice of text types, or even of individual texts, to be imported through translation into a particular culture/language at a particular point in time) and the "directness of translation" (which involves the threshold of tolerance for translating from languages other than the original source language).
- b) operational norms, in turn, may be conceived of as directing the decisions made during the act of translation itself. They affect the "matrix" of the text, i.e. the modes of distributing linguistic material in it (matricial norms), as well as the "textual make-up" and "verbal formulation" as such (textual-linguistic norms). They thus govern either directly or indirectly the relationships that can be obtained between the target and source texts, i.e. what is more likely to remain unchanged under transformation and what will change.

Alongside these norms, also noteworthy is the degree of cognitive-functional fluctuation necessary between the pole of adequacy and the pole of acceptability that the translator establishes in his or her mental projection of the ST. The translator's specific compromise between both poles is defined by Toury (1980: 54: 1995: 56) as the initial norm: the translator will either adhere to ST norms and textual relationships (adequacy) or the norms and textual relationships that operate in the target culture (acceptability). In this regard, each TT will exhibit an idiosyncratic and fluctuating combination of elements on all textual levels both macro- and micro-strategically – that tends towards these two poles in a dynamic fashion due to the specific intertextual relationship produced between the TT and its ST. Fluctuation may occur throughout the text, in portions of it, or else in small textual units; it all depends on the specific translation process and its communicative and cognitive circumstances. Arising within this complex weave that defines the specific intertextual relationship between a TT and a ST is the concept of "meme", intended as a unit of cultural transmission or a unit of cultural imitation that propagates among human beings.

Apart from translation norms, the cognitive scheme of cooperation between actors is also constructed from the translator's mental representation of the target receivers for whom the TT is meant. This mental representation is often regarded as an idealised cognitive model (cf. Lakoff 1987: 68) or as prototypicity effects (cf. Kleiber 1993: 123) influenced by the following communicative variables: a) Who should the ST be translated for? b) What interests tie the circle of target receivers to the ST? c) To what use will the translation of the ST be put by the circle of target receivers? (for the methodological grounds of these premises, see Hönig 1997: 77 and García Álvarez 2004: 467-469).

The cognitive scheme of cooperation between actors, which contributes to the translator's conscious reflection on the proper choice of translation strategies, converges with the overlapping of intercultural schemes on the functional-cognitive level derived from the interpretation of the ST informational content, and which is produced when the translator reflects, integrates and adapts his or her own schemes, perceptions and circumstances with the schemes,

perceptions and circumstances of the ST in order to make his or her successful performance hypothetically possible. The translation strategies used to achieve the dissemination, maintenance or modification of memes in a target culture are foreignisation and domestication, and they may occur at different textual levels of the TT (e.g. at the typological, pragmatic, matricial, conceptual level). Foreignising means importing memes from the culture that is foreign to the TT, whereas domesticating is adapting, modifying, substituting and even omitting these memes through approximation and analogy with certain schematic configurations of the target culture, taking into account the perceptive semiosis of target receivers.

3. CONSTRUCTING INTERCULTURAL SCHEMES AND NEGOTIATING MEANING

Translation prototypically represents the means of propagating and adapting memes from one culture to another based on the objects, situations or events that Eco (1999: 145) establishes in order to describe the way in which we speak and communicate, which are: a) objects, situations or events with which we may have had or may have direct experience (e.g. dog, chair, walking); b) objects, situations or events that we have not experienced but may have the chance to (e.g. duck-bill platypus, perform an appendix operation); and c) objects and situations that someone has undoubtedly experienced and about which we are given sufficient instructions by the community so that we can talk about it as if we did in fact have experience with it (e.g. dinosaurs, Australopithecus). In this regard, Kleiber (1993: 50) talks about the acquisition of two types of knowledge in conceptual understanding: a) knowledge by description (knowledge about the concept acquired through books and other persons), and b) knowledge by acquaintance (perceptive, experiential or empirical knowledge about a given concept). In the translation process, depending on the degree of specialisation of the subject matter to be translated, the translator acquires part of the unknown conceptual knowledge through different documentary sources, or else by consulting so-called "informants". Faced with the unknown, the translator applies his or her own native schemes in order to make sense of the foreign ones, operating in terms of approximation and analogy.

During the process of intercultural schematic construction, the translator hypothetically devises an area of interpretative consensus, which Eco (1999: 160) calls "nuclear content" (NC) based on the activated cognitive scheme of cooperation between actors. The phenomenon of communicative agreement between actors of different cultures arises from the translator's subjective, personal construction vis-à-vis the overlapping of intercultural cognitive schemes, the so-called "cognitive types" (CTs), which are the result of his or her perceptive judgement. In his or her mentally projected conceptual interrelation, the translator puts different CTs into play (for the comparison of native schemes with foreign schemes as well as for a single scheme, whether native or foreign), namely: schemes of objects, situations, events, actions, scripts, specific competences, cause-effect relations, and schemes of instructional, temporal, spatial, logical, morphological, bodily and motor relationships. These mental

connections of schemes are of many kinds: connections between frames and roles in frames; connections of identity, transformation or representation; analogical connections; metaphoric connections; and vital relations mappings as part-whole, representation, role, disanalogy, property, similarity, category or intentionality (cf. Fauconnier & Turner 2002: 93-102). In these projections of many kinds, generalised consensus of meaning or interpretative consensus (NC) takes place.

Running parallel to this generalised consensus of meaning, there is conceptual knowledge – in both propositional and perceptive form – that is more complex and in continual expansion, encompassing non-indispensable notions for perceptive recognition called "molar content" (MC). This cognitive concept created by Eco (1997:165) may take different forms depending on the subject matter and represents portions of sector-specific competence. The sum of MCs is identified to a certain extent with the Encyclopaedia as a regulative idea and semiotic postulate. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between NC and MC, since both semiotic concepts may have fuzzy edges limited according to the particular conceptual and encyclopedic knowledge of actors in the process of translation.

The textual manifestation of NC and MC may also take varied forms, such as words, gestures, images and diagrams. One of their most prototypical manifestation in translation is to be found in the textual strategy of paraphrasing.

4. METHODOLOGY (A CASE STUDY)

In the mental representation of paraphrasing, in which the interaction of cognitive types (CTs) takes place, the translator necessarily engages in different types of projections, whether propositional, image-schematic, metaphoric or metonymic ones (cf. Lakoff's terminology [1987: 68]: propositional structures, image-schematic structures, metaphoric mappings, metonymic mappings), and which will be made manifest in the specific choice of NC (and MC). The aforementioned translation norms will determine the saliency feature of this NC (and MC) in the target text.

With the aim of elucidating NCs (and MCs) – albeit in highly-condensed fashion –, an example is provided in what follows by means of a German ST that discusses some of Vienna's prototypical eating and drinking places. An account in English of the memetic metamorphosis produced when the given ST is translated into Spanish is provided afterwards. The mental processing of schematic interaction is conceived within the framework of my own translation process:

WOHIN GEHEN WIR ESSEN?

Wiens Heimstätten der Gemütlichkeit – das Beisl, das Café und der Heurige - sind lebendiger denn je, und seine Köche unternehmen kreative Höhenflüge.

Paris hat seine Bistros, Madrid seine Bodegas, Prag seine Bierstuben und London seine Pubs. Wien dagegen kann gleich mit drei gastronomischen Institutionen aufwarten: Dem Kaffeehaus, dem Beisl und dem Heurigen.

Die Literatur über das Wiener Kaffeehaus füllt schon ganze Bibliotheken. Bereits im Biedermeier und mehr noch um 1900 waren die Cafés Brennpunkte des Wiener Geisteslebens. Seit alters dienten sie, wie Alfred Pogar schrieb, "Leuten, die allein sein wollen, aber dazu Gesellschaft brauchen", als "öffentliches Wohnzimmer". Heute finden sich, über die ganze Stadt verstreut, mehr als 500 solcher Oasen, wo Sie als Gast unbehelligt stundenlang bei einer Schale Melange und dem obligaten Glas Wiener Hochquellwassers sitzen können und wo nicht nur ein großes Sortiment an Zeitungen, sondern vielerorts auch Schachbretter, Bridgekarten oder gar Billardtische die Zeit lustvoll zu vertreiben helfen [...]

English version:

Homesteads of Cosiness – the Beisl, the Café and the Heurige – Are More Alive Than Ever Paris has its bistros, Madrid its bodegas, Prague its beer halls and London its pubs. In this same vein, Vienna can offer three long-established eating and drinking places of its own: the coffee house, the Beisl and the Heurige.

The literature on Viennese coffee houses fills whole libraries. As early as the Biedermeier period and even more so around 1900, cafés were centres of Viennese intellectual life. For ages they have served, as Alfred Polgar wrote, "as a respite for people living in society, but who want to be alone", as a kind of "public living room". Today there are more than 500 such oases scattered across the city, where you can sit undisturbed for hours with a cup of *Melange* and the indispensable glass of pure Viennese spring water. In addition to a large assortment of newspapers, in many of them you can also partake in a game of chess, bridge or billiards to while away the hours [...].

TRANSLATION NORMS:

- 1. Preliminary norms: 1.1. PERSUADE the target receiver about the eating and drinking places in a highly generalised fashion; 1.2. text type required for the TT: TOURIST BROCHURE; 1.3. TARGET RECEIVER: TT targeted at adult Spanish readership with an average cultural background that is unfamiliar with Vienna and its cuisine.
- 2. Operational norms: 2.1. footnotes and translator's notes are not to be used 2.2. foreign words can be included 2.3. the rhetorical resources of the ST should be reflected and reproduced in the TT, provided that they are suitable for the target receiver 2.4. do not exceed word limits (4-word limit for title; 24-word limit for subtitle; approx. 270 words for the main text).

PROJECTED ST:

1. MAIN SCHEMES OR COGNITIVE TYPES (CTs): The consulting of parallel texts, dictionaries and visual images about the main ST concepts, Beisl, Café and Heurige (FOREIGNISATIONS), leads us to apply target CTs for their understanding through analogy and approximation (DOMESTICATIONS). The perceptive and propositional semiosis acquired through documentation provides us with paraphrases that more or less accurately reflect each one of these concepts and contain an area of consensus of interpretants (NC) vis-à-vis the comparative overlapping of target schemes, and, depending on the case, an area of broadened knowledge (MC). It should be noted that the paraphrases used seek to reflect only those potential concept characteristics that we need to understand the ST's implicit informational content. Of the multiple interpretive potential of each concept, a hypothetical selection has been made of only those CT features that are necessary for the understanding of the ST and the suitable production of the informational content in the TT:

- A) A Viennese café (NC), known as a Kaffeehaus (MC) in Austria, is an elegant and low-key establishment with 19th-century Romantic-style decoration (NC or MC, depending on the target receiver's cultural presuppositive knowledge of this historical information), which serves the well-known Melange (MC), a cup of coffee with frothy cream (NC), the indispensable and healthy glass of water which comes from Viennese springs (NC) in the Alps (MC/NC) called Hochquellwasser (MC), and where patrons have a wide assortment of newspapers (NC) and games, such as chess, bridge and billiards (NC). It is also an inviting place for conversation (NC).
- B) A Beisl (MC) is a kind of Viennese-style restaurant or tavern, which is popular and affordable (NC), and which represents a key place where Austrians get together to enjoy food and drink (NC), where small portions of homemade dishes are usually served (NC). These eateries may be decorated in different styles on their façades and interiors (NC). They have a very cosy decoration and usually have a bar, apart from the table area (NC).
- C) A Heurige (MC) is a kind of Viennese-style old-time tavern/wine bar (NC), which serves Heurigenwein (MC), young or new wine of the latest vintage (NC), after which the place is named (MC). These establishments are particularly frequent on the outskirts of the capital and in villages, especially in winegrowing areas (NC/MC).

The actual perlocutionary effect that these paraphrases of the gradual configuration of the translator's personal CTs and of the idealised target receiver could have on these foreign concepts does not imply a correspondence with the effects derived from the CTs configuration of the original receiver (German, Swiss, Austrian). Nevertheless, we may perceive that the aforementioned NCs contain specific atoms of meaning in which there is a consensus between both cultures that make intercultural communication possible, despite the fact that a Viennese café, Beisl, and Heurige may manifest multiple and varied morphological, functional, temporal, objectual and situational CTs, given the perceptive and propositional saliency features (cf. Arntz & Picht 1995: 81) of each receiver, because the focus of perceptual attention on objects depends on the idiosyncrasy of each individual and consequently occurs in a different manner from individual to individual. The saliency features of a concept are related to the gestaltic idea of profile/base proposed by Langacker (1987: 183-189), who indicates that we perceive objects by focusing our attention on some of their features (profile) while leaving others hidden (base), depending on the context in which that object is mentally represented.

Based on the three conceptual cores of the text (Beisl, Wiener Café, Heurige), the CTs unfold towards other mentally overlapping CTs that are closely bound up with schemes of objects, events and actions that take place in a Viennese café. Note that the saliency features activated for each of the objects and events mentioned in the text are listed below. These features are based on the classification proposed by Arntz and Picht regarding material objects (1995: 81):

- a) morphological features, which involve the features of an object such as its form (round, wide), material (wooden, metal), colour (red, ivory), position (vertical, hanging) or time (modern, traditional);
- b) relational features based on the origin (those indicating the inventor, discoverer or country of origin), use (easily handled), comparison (larger than), valuation (cheaper than) or location in space (located at the rear);
- c) functional features of power or performance (maximum speed, production speed) or use (for transportation, to quench thirst).

1.1. OBJECT SCHEMES IN THE VIENNESE CAFÉ:

- 1.1.1. "Schale Melange": a cup of coffee containing milk (NC), with an equal proportion of content (NC/MC) that is characterised by its froth (NC) (MORPHOLOGICAL SALIENCY FEATURES OF FORM, MATERIAL, COLOUR).
- 1.1.2. "Wiener Hochquellwasser": pure water that is good for the health (NC/MC) that comes from springs in the Viennese Alps (MC), indispensable for allaying the thirst caused by the Melange (NC/MC) (RELATIONAL SALIENCY FEATURES OF VALUATION AND ORIGIN AND FUNCTIONAL SALIENCY FEATURE OF USE)

1.2. Event schemes in the viennese café:

- 1.2.1. "Biedemeier": an era of bourgeois Romanticism (1815-1848), a style emerging from the decorative arts during the German restoration (MC), and which is characterised for its functionality and comfort, suiting the bourgeois lifestyles of the day (MC) (MORPHOLOGICAL SALIENCY FEATURES OF MATERIAL, ORIGIN AND TIME: "Decorative style of Austrian bourgeois Romanticism, 1815-1848"). On the other hand, the source text audience schemes of "art", "decoration", "romanticism", "bourgeoisie", "19th century", "elegance", "sumptuousness", "comfort", "Austro-Hungarian empire", etc., dynamically interact in the comprehension of this foreign concept (NCs/MCs).
- 1.2.2. "quote by Alfred Polgar" (two overlapping schemes): a Viennese café is a place for social get-togethers of the Viennese intelligentsia that is characterised by its low-key atmosphere (MC). Alfred Polgar was a frequent patron, especially of the Café Central (MC) (RELATIONAL SALIENCY FEATURES OF VALUATION AND FUNCTIONAL SALIENCY FEATURE OF USE). The source text native schemes of "place for social get-togethers", "intelligentsia", "low-key", etc., dynamically interact in the intercultural schematisation (NCs/MCs).

1.3. ACTION SCHEMES IN THE VIENNESE CAFÉ:

1.3.1. "Read the newspaper" (an overlapping of native and foreign *scripts* due to the effects of prototypicity, the search for NCs consensus-based interpretants).
1.3.2. "assorted games" (native and foreign *scripts* bound up with "chess", "bridge", "billiards", the search for NCs consensus-based interpretants).

5. Conclusions

The NCs and MCs analysis of the previously described concepts leads us to the formulation of certain structures in the process of translation (in the mental states of the projected TT and the TT in real-time output, cf. García Álvarez 2004) that will exhibit a specific combination of foreignising and domesticating elements in the TT, depending on the prospective translation norms, the communicative aims pursued and the target receiver's idealised cognitive schemes, which are variables that determine the specific textual function performed by each one of these concepts in the TT in its environment. In this regard, the TT will exhibit a certain degree of fluctuation between the aforementioned poles of adequacy and acceptability (cf. Toury 1980, 1995) that will likewise define the intertextual relationship between both texts.

CONCEPTUAL METAMORPHOSIS of the Spanish text:

Los famosos lugares vieneses de la cordialidad (NC; DOMESTICATION; ADEQUACY): el Beisl, el Kaffehaus y el Heurige (MC; FOREIGNISATION) ponen a su alcance una cocina creativa de altos vuelos (NC; DOMESTICATION; ACCEPTABILITY).

París tiene sus bistros (NC; foreignisation), Madrid sus bodegas (NC; domestication) Praga sus cervecerías (NC; domestication) y Londres sus pubs (NC; foreignisation). Viena, por el contrario cuenta con tres importantes instituciones gastronómicas (NC; domestication): el elegante Café (NC; domestication) o Kaffehaus (MC; foreignisation), las populares tabernas (NC; domestication) Beisl (MC; foreignisation) y las bodegas (NC; domestication) Heurige (MC; foreignisation), donde podrá degustar el exquisito vino vienés de última cosecha (MCs/NCs; domestication; adequacy).

La literatura que habla sobre el Café vienés está presente en todas las bibliotecas (MC; ADEQUACY). Ya en el época romántica (NC; DOMESTICATION) del Biedermeier (MC; FOREIGNISATION) y, sobre todo, alrededor de 1900, los Cafés vieneses constituían el centro álgido de reunión de la intelectualidad burguesa (NC/MC; DOMESTICATION; ADEQUACY), un "salón público" (NC; DOMESTICATION) destinado a "aquellos que en sociedad quieren estar solos" (NC/MC; DOMESTICATION; ADEQUACY), según palabras del conocido escritor austriaco (NC; DOMESTICATION; ACCEPTABILITY), Alfred Polgar (MC; FOREIGNISATION). Hoy se encuentran dispersos por toda la ciudad más de quinientos de estos oasis (NC/MC; ADEQUACY), donde usted podrá disfrutar del sosiego durante horas (NC; DOMESTICATION; ADEQUACY), acompañado de una taza de café con crema espumosa, el aromático (NCs; domestication; acceptability) Melange (MC; FOREIGNISATION), y del indispensable vaso de agua pura de los manantiales vieneses (NC/MC; DOMESTICATION; ADEQUACY). Para pasar el tiempo plácidamente, los cafés vieneses le proporcionarán no solo un amplio y variado surtido de periódicos (NCs; ADEQUACY), sino también estancias destinadas a la práctica de juegos como el ajedrez, el bridge o el billar (NCs; ADEQUACY) [...]

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