

A NEW FACTOR IN TRANSLATION THEORY, AN OLD FACTOR IN TRANSLATION PRACTICE: THE CLIENT

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1. *A translation model must account for variation.*

One extremely important factor that is missing (or not made relevant enough) in almost every translation theory is the role of the translator's client or employer. This factor is now slowly beginning to be recognized as playing a role of some importance in the production of any translation (TT). The first question to ask then is why have the majority of scholars (many of whom have been so clear-thinking in providing answers to problems confronting translators and/or brought up by the critics) not taken this factor into account? If we can at last widely acknowledge that the translator's client or employer is a factor to be reckoned with, the next question is what kind of a variable is it?

The answer to the first question possibly explains the late arrival of other innovations in translation theory, and it is as simple as the fact that translation theory has always lagged behind the actual work translators were doing. Another reason is probably the sheer weight of tradition and convention, as well as the prescientific, arbitrary nature of most translation studies. First of all, there is the long-standing tradition of taking the word as the main point of reference for any discussion or study of the translating process. In this sense we might say that the progress made in theoretical studies of translation can be explained as a history of moving further and further away from the word to explore the outer circles of the field, while almost unconsciously maintaining the word as the centre of these concentric circles. Then there is the fact that new translation theories have always had to wait for new literary or linguistic theories on which to feed. It was only when *communication* became the new key word, that scholars began to look beyond the word and even beyond the text, into what was going to be known as *context*. But, as Hatim and Mason (1990:38) put it,

"Under the influence of Firth and Malinowski, description of **communicative events** is now fairly widely recognized as a proper goal of linguistic analysis. [...] Translators, for their part, have long been aware of the role of **SITUATIONAL FACTORS** (source, status, client, use to be made of translation, etc.); it was only in linguistics that the realization was slow to come about."

The first participants that were noticed in any context were the speaker/writer on the one hand, and the listener/reader on the other, and texts were understood to be acts of communication between the two sides. The next step in the mapping of context was the incorporation of the global socio-cultural context and background. This way of defining context may have worked very well for many different types of communication acts and probably provided adequate ways of interpreting many literary works and 'naturally occurring' utterances. And because it worked for certain literary and linguistic theories and models it was eventually adopted by subsequent translation theories. But in translation, at least, there is another kind of participant lodged somewhere between the apparently 'immediate' participants and the rest of society: the person who orders the translation in the first place, the translation initiator, the one who starts the ball rolling. It is precisely because this person does 'start the ball rolling' that he or she cannot be overlooked in any full explanation of the translating process. While discussing the translator's motivation, Hatim and Mason (1990:12) say

"To study translations in isolation from the factors affecting their production is consequently to miss out an important dimension of the phenomenon. In fact, the social context of translating is probably a MORE IMPORTANT VARIABLE than the textual genre, which has imposed such rigid distinctions on types of translating in the past."

Along with the word, another dead weight that tradition has loaded on the back of translation studies and slowed down progress is the notion that somewhere, somehow, there must be a perfectly unique translation (TT) for every text, and that it is therefore the goal of translation theory to find a magic formula that will enable translators to *uncover* the latent TT. This notion nips in the bud the very essence of translation and translating: i.e. variation. It is only in the recognition and careful evaluation of all the intervening variables that translation studies can honestly make any progress. In Bell's words (1991:11),

"Tyler's Translation Rules are all normative prescriptions deriving directly from the subjective and evaluative description of the 'good translation'. They are like the rules of etiquette; what people are told they ought and ought not to do in particular circumstances, by reference to essentially arbitrary norms of behaviour."

If we approach the subject by assuming, however unconsciously, that the *right* version is simply lying under the surface of the text waiting to be uncovered, we can only end up by aspiring to spell out a technique or set of rules, which, if properly observed, will lead the translator to *finding* the one and only TT for a given text. Such a technique has still not been found, nor has any set of translation rules proved to be anywhere near objective. This approach was ultimately disproved by the relative failure of the first experiments in machine translation. Again from Bell (1991:22):

"In short, instead of making subjective and arbitrary judgements on the extent to which one translation is better than another and insisting that goodness resides in the

faithful adherence to an imposed set of commandments, our orientation has to be towards the objective specification of the steps and stages through which the translator works as the ST [source text] in the original language is transformed into the target text; a focus on the process which creates the translation rather than on the translation itself."

So, if we start by admitting that there can be different renderings of a given text depending on the conditions in which the translation takes place, then translation theory is no longer tempted to be prescriptive and becomes descriptive. It becomes a question of discovering all of the potential factors that may or may not intervene in a given translation. Then these factors will have to be described (a) separately, as being either priorities or restrictions within the process; and (b) according to how they interrelate. It is important to see that a translation is carried out within a framework of priorities and restrictions set by the translator himself in the light of all the textual, contextual and professional factors. In a theory taking this approach, we will say that if something cannot be accounted for it will be due to the fact that some factor or other that has not been properly evaluated or identified. This approach should create an awareness in scholars to look out for new factors (or new aspects of known factors) in their endeavour to make improved translation models. It should also provide a clear framework for critics to better understand and assess the quality of translations. It is in this kind of approach to translation theory that the translator's client or *translation initiator* (TI), to use a term coined by Hewson and Martin (1991:113), is beginning to be recognized as a factor of any importance. On the same page of *Redefining Translation* one can read,

"The Translation Initiator (TI) - as the term indicates, this is the driving force behind the act of Translation, and whose identity and express wishes have a fundamental influence on the Translation operation."

The implications of accepting the translation initiator as an intervening factor are quite important. It means basically that there is another link in an imaginary chain-process that enables somebody who has written something in a given language to come into contact with somebody who, in principle, cannot read that language. In other words, the translator is not the only one to interfere with the original. This in turn means that we will have to revise all that has been claimed to be the part and parcel of the translator's responsibility and see whether some of it should really be laid at the client's door. Hewson and Martin are quite right in reminding us that,

"A translator bound to no one is something of a rarity nowadays. The most unhampered translator would not only be translating at his own instigation (i.e. he chooses his own text, with all that that implies), but also for himself and in conditions which he himself sets. In fact he can do precisely what he likes and how he likes, and his work is thus virtually unparametrable." (1991:161)

We will also have to look in depth to see how the client or TI can help or hinder the translator in his or her work. In short, what is the translator's position in the translating process?

In many theories of translation, it is the translator who holds responsibility for practically all the decisions that have to be taken regarding translation problems, and therefore these theories are addressed to translators and translation teachers only. Hatim and Mason are an example of this and they do not seem to have grasped the full implications of considering the client as a factor in the process even though they proclaim the importance of contextual factors. They say,

"What is 'required' of any given communicative purpose within a TL [target language] cultural environment is then a matter for the translator's judgement. It is in these terms that we may define appropriateness." (1991:94)

This is only partly true unless we are willing to admit that part of the translator's judgement rests on the kind of order he or she has received from the client and anything relevant that might be known about the client or TI.

More recently it has been realised that some of the decisions concerning the translation of a text can be taken at an earlier stage than the actual translating process, i.e. by the translator's client. If the client fails to fulfill his/her proper role, as unfortunately so often happens, then the translator will be forced into the very tricky situation of making these decisions him or herself without knowing for sure what it was the client wanted when the translation was ordered. Of course, the translator may be his or her own TI, but when this is not the case the translator immediately becomes dependent on the TI's instructions, so it is important that these be as clear and comprehensive as possible.

Moreover, it has often been the case that translators have been unjustly criticized for serious mistakes in their work that are entirely accountable to the client for not having given clear instructions in the first place but, instead, simply saying 'translate this' and thinking that was enough.

The problem that many translation theories run into is that for them translating necessarily means accounting for all of the elements that are part of the original text. However, if one looks at real translating contexts, the TI tends either to require only one or two particular aspects of a message, or to give a very general translation order. When one looks at the whole range of clients, one comes to see that they often represent a *conflict of interests*, and that the translation order given to the translator to some extent reflects this state of affairs. Bell tells us that the crucial variable is

"[...] the *purpose* for which the translation is being made, not some inherent characteristic of the translation itself. [...] variation is in no sense an inconvenient characteristic of language in use but its very nature without which it would be unable to function as a communication system [...] we need to specify the choices which are available to the communicator and the functions such choices may be called upon to play. [...] Parameters of variation: What? Why? When? How? Where? and Who?" (1991:7)

And Hatim and Mason on the subject of the translator's motivation say,

"The translator's motivations are inextricably bound up with the **socio-cultural context** of the translating process. There has to be a need for a translation, which may be client-driven, market-driven, translator-driven." (1990:12)

2. *How can the Translation Initiator influence the translation?*

This question is answered in the following 5 points:

1) It is the TI who first receives the Source Text, and even if he or she does not understand the language it is written in, the TI must know something about the text, at least who or where it comes from. It is on the basis of the TI's knowledge of the text that he or she will decide whether the text is to be translated, why and what for. It is in the answer to the question 'why' -or 'what for'- a text is to be translated that the first variable -of the many that come into play- is fixed and henceforth becomes a fundamental guideline for the translator, and this is why the TI must know why the text is going to be translated and then let the translator know. Again Hewson and Martin are the only ones to point this out:

"The premise that translation does not 'just happen', but results from (1) a need, and (2) an order. The order corresponds to the instructions given by the TI to ensure that communication takes place." (1991:113)

2) How much the client or TI values the importance of a top-quality translation is a basic variable. The economic factor obviously has a great influence on the work done, with repercussions at every possible level. Although there is evidence that this is now changing for the better, the fate of the profession would still seem to rest on a naïve or prescientific conception of what translation actually involves. Hewson and Martin (1991:156) provide us with the following example of an all-too-frequent phenomenon:

"Translation is still often considered as a costly extra which is better done cheaply and badly, rather than paying the price. Much comment has recently been made in France about small companies who lose their export markets because they are unwilling to invest the necessary money in speakers of the foreign language."

3) An important variable is how well the TI understands some of the difficulties involved in translating in general, and, more specifically, if the TI understands the problems posed by the text to be translated. Nowadays, most translators are paid according to number of words, the languages involved, the degree of technical knowledge required, and whether the translation is urgent; but maybe other variables also need to be considered, such as the quality or success of the TT, especially for certain kind of texts.

4) It is necessary for many clients, especially publishers and large companies or institutions, to have a stylebook that illustrates the client's style and covers as many points as possible. For example, in the translation of certain texts where Spanish is

the language of the target text, translators are given a list of words that must be avoided. This happens when the client knows that the Spanish version will be read in most if not all of the Spanish-speaking communities in the world, and wishes to avoid the use of words that are slang or taboo in some dialects however harmless they may be in the translator's dialect. If the TI does not tell the translator who the TT readers are going to be, how else can he know? The same is true for other aspects of the translation.

5) The case of censorship, whether subtle or blatant, may be ascribed to a repressed context or to the TI. In both cases one could consider they may not only be instrumental in ordering a translation on the one hand but in preventing a text from being translated on the other. An example of this is the Koran, which has only very recently been translated, previously being labeled as 'untranslatable'. There are more subtle examples of TI interference in deciding that certain elements should be altered or left out. One has to look out for apparently quite remarkable omissions or drastic changes that cannot be put down to translator incompetence or cultural gaps. A case in point is an English TV comedy which included a half-wit character from Spain; the other characters were told that this was easily explained by the fact that he was from Barcelona. When the programme was dubbed for Catalan viewers this character's birthplace was changed to Mexico.

And here is an example from Hewson and Martin about the translation into French of *The Day of the Jackal*,

"There are clearly no language or apparent cultural difficulties preventing a fairly straightforward translation of the novel. The Translation order would therefore appear to reflect the particular identity and motivation of the TI. [...] Although we are not in a position to explain away all the changes, we would be tempted to suggest that a certain ideological stance and certain preconceptions are behind the transformation of the blond Anglo-Saxon killer. Or one might argue that the TI was motivated by his perception of the reading public's taste, emphasizing the historical aspect at the expense of the glorification of the 'exceptional' qualities of the foreign (perceived as anti-French) hero -whether as a killer or as a seducer. Or necessary adaptations to ensure maximum sales." (1991:156)

The final sentence of this quotation is particularly relevant and underlines the importance of market factors both as a driving force for the translation to be ordered in the first place and, consequently, a priority that must be kept in mind at all stages of the translating process. TIs are often unaware of the relationship between how much they are willing to invest in their translations, as mentioned in points 2 and 3, and the resulting financial success or failure of the final product. A lack of adequate economic incentive may also explain some striking omissions and other surprising weaknesses.

3. *Assessing the importance of identifying the Translation Initiator*

The client's role is so important because the actual translation should be made to suit his or her instructions, and those very instructions can be determining in themselves if they are specific or restrictive enough. The TI can be a help or an obstacle. If one considers the factors that come into play during the translating process as either priorities or restrictions (constraints), the TI can then usually be perceived as a restriction, or as setting up certain restrictions or conditions.

There are different types of restrictions; most of them might be placed under one of the following headings: textual, contextual or professional. The TI would normally be perceived as a professional restriction; ambiguity would be an example of a textual restriction; an ST and a TT written for audiences completely opposite cultural values is an example of a contextual restriction. Strictly speaking, the TI is not a restriction in him or herself, but the source of a number of restrictions.

This must not be understood in a purely negative sense; 'restriction' will sometimes mean the margins within which the translator is to work, or the contextualization of the translation, and this sort of 'restriction' is imposed on any text. For example, lip-movement and timing are restrictions imposed on film translating.

Of course, TIs are not always a restricting factor, sometimes they can be quite helpful. For example, a stylebook might be seen as a constraint imposed on the translator's creativity; this is sometimes true, but having such a clear set of criteria is usually an advantageous guideline. The TI is sometimes better acquainted with the subject-matter and its terminology than the translator, who can benefit from the TI's knowledge if he or she is willing to communicate it. Sometimes the TI knows exactly what kind of translation needs to be produced and should then spell out the (realistic) requirements as clearly as possible. In a sense, this article is a call for clients and companies to become more aware of how they can help their translators to improve the standard of their work. Another aim of this paper is to advise critics to hold their fire before they have become fully aware of the conditions in which the translator has had to produce his or her work, i.e. what the specific priorities and restrictions were for that particular translation.

Hewson and Martin are the first to stop and look into this question in any detail. In *Redefining Translation* they even make various classifications, which I have slightly re-arranged and extended, according to the following variables:

1) *The TIs' familiarity with the language and culture of the ST or TT.* This is not done for the sake of making yet another classification but because of its significance as a factor in the translation process. They say (1991:114),

"The choices which the translator will make will no longer depend on internal (or in fact personal) criteria, but on a whole series of parameters which will be more or less clearly expressed in the translation order. [...] It immediately becomes apparent that the socio-cultural identity of the TI is of prime importance."

This position will normally determine the TI's access to the ST and his comprehension (and potential criticism) of the TT.

2) *Whether the TI can be identified with any of the other participants in the translating context.* The TI could be the author of the original, a/the reader of the original, the translator, a/the reader of the translation, or none of these.

"The identity of the TI may in itself prove to be a determining factor in the choice of a TT. This is important to bear in mind when the TI is also the receiver."
(1991:165)

The TI, we might add, is also free to choose the translator.

3) *The degree of familiarity with the ST, its intentions and its implications.* Hewson and Martin have the following to say about this,

"A ST can never be regarded as an 'innocent' document. As it has been chosen to be translated, it is thought of in most cases as a read document whose purpose of communication has already been defined." (1991:166)

The TI may be in one of these four possible relationships with the ST: (a) the TI has produced the document him or herself (maybe we could include in this category 'anonymous' texts produced for companies or institutions who, in turn, order the translation of these texts); (b) he or she has read the ST (here we need to know how well the text was understood and how it was interpreted); (c) the TI has not read the ST, so the whole responsibility for the translation is given to the translator (hopefully it is clear by now that this is not a desirable situation); (d) the ST has still not been written at the time of the translation order; an example of this might be multilingual instruction booklets. Another example might be staff translators who know they will have to translate letters when they arrive.

4) *The relationship between the TI and the target language readership and culture.* When the TI is closely identified with, or a part of, the TT readership he or she can be very helpful in guiding the translator when the readership is not simply the whole target language community but a strictly-definable group within that community. The TI's knowledge of such a group and its needs and expectations should be reflected either in the translation order or in a stylebook. Such a detailed definition of requirements will reduce the range of acceptable renderings.

5) *The degree of familiarity with the theoretical, practical and professional problems involved in the translation order.* The TI's awareness of his own role in the process and his experience as a TI. In *Redefining Translation* we read:

"A second point we should consider is the probable ignorance of the TI regarding the problems which all translators face. The TI may make totally unrealistic demands on the TO [translation order], requiring 'the same using the same'. Translating a pun, for example, using the same elements as in the ST is often virtually impossible, and when the translator is given no latitude, this can lead to an unsatisfactory TT from every point of view. As for the naïve assumption equating LC1 [Language & Culture of the ST] and LC2 [Language & Culture of the TT] receivers' needs, this can lead to a

totally unrealistic Translation order. If the translator is asked to maintain certain LCI-specific elements, this can not only change the message, but even produce the opposite effect of the required one." (1991:172)

If, in a spoken text, the translator is being asked to produce the equivalent socially determined text, he will often have to work with the largest possible translation unit in order to account for general aims of communication, rather than translating, for example, expression by expression. This means that the TI should not be demanding an expression-by-expression translation of such a text.

There will be cases where the TI factor will be fundamental to the whole process and other cases where this factor will hardly be operative. But we cannot know which case is which unless we first realise that it is a factor that has to be accounted for in any translation. I would go so far as to say that in the past, when there was not so much professional translation going on, the TI factor already existed even if it could not best be described as 'the client'. In the case of Bible translation it is quite clear that the TI is almost always the Church, and just imagine the number and range of heresies the translators could be perpetrating if they did not take this factor into consideration. The Church was also the TI of many other texts, and it often laid down clear guidelines as to what was to be translated and how.

A present-day example of the importance of identifying the TI and pinpointing his or her needs and potential usefulness to the translator as a source of information is the case of advertisements. A translator cannot (honestly) begin to translate an advertisement without knowing quite a few things beforehand; the main one is the answer to the question, Is the TT supposed to be an advertisement that will be published with the aim of selling a product? And of course only the TI can answer that question. Depending on the TI's characteristics he or she will also have to help in answering as many questions as possible; e.g. What product is being sold? What are the salient characteristics of the target ST readership? What are the characteristics of the target TT readership? In this respect, the translator will already begin to show his or her translating competence by asking for all the necessary information if it is not readily provided by the TI, because one of the many skills that a translator should display is his or her ability to find out (as efficiently as possible) what he or she does not yet know.

4. *The Translation Initiator and the translator*

Translating parameters which are not properly defined by the TI, or are unrealistic or even simply highly demanding, become 'restrictions' for the translator. Conversely, the TI may help the translator by defining clear realistic conditions and expectations for the production of the TT. I propose that these 'restrictions' be regarded as 'restrictions reversed' which means the absence of a potential restriction. Hewson and Martin say something to the same effect:

"Once these parameters have been spelt out, the role of the translator is in fact considerably simplified when it comes to choosing between the different TT forms available. [...] The 'hidden' factors in the Translation Operation are

much more important than is often imagined. [...] A full consideration of all of the parameters not only aids the translator in his task, but also enables the translation critic to evaluate the TT produced in a more objective light." (1991:171)

The translator must realise that for every potential restriction there will be moments where the restriction will not be operative (restriction reversed) and must be ready to exploit situations of greater manoeuvrability to his or her own advantage in order to better fulfill the predefined set of priorities. Bell hints at this when he writes,

"What is crucial is the ability to recognize alternatives that are available in the original, the choices that can be found in the TL and the realization that choices forclose others." (1991:72)

In short, what this paper is advocating is that everybody involved in translation, including translators, publishers, multinational companies, teachers and academics, become fully aware of the TI's role in the translating process in order to raise the standard of translating and make improved translation models. One last example of the symptoms of a lack of awareness regarding this factor is that one of the problems commonly found in the teaching of translation is the fact that the TI (the teacher in this case) often has very definite criteria in mind when setting a text to be translated, but these are simply not spelt out, or are mentioned in the vaguest possible terms ('respecting the beauty of an ST', etc.). The result is discouraging for the student. Worse still is the teacher who does not even have a set of criteria, merely his or her own rendering and expects the students (without telling them how) to produce exactly the same TT as their teacher. Peter Newmark has repeatedly stressed the importance of contextualizing the translation for the student, or as he puts it, defining the occasion of the translation, i.e. Where was the ST published? Who was the ST readership? Where will the TT be published and who for? Who is paying? What is expected of the translation?

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RESUM

Un factor nou dins la teoria, però un factor des de sempre a la pràctica: el client de la traducció

Aquest article es proposa delimitar el veritable paper que juguen en la gènesi de les traduccions les persones que les encarreguen i defensa la necessitat que les circumstàncies d'aquest aspecte de la traducció siguin contemplades dins els models que es proposin per la producció i la crítica de les traduccions.

SUMMARY

This paper attempts to identify the actual importance of the so-far underrated role played by the people who order translations and defends the incorporation of these people as an active variable within translation theories and translation criticism.