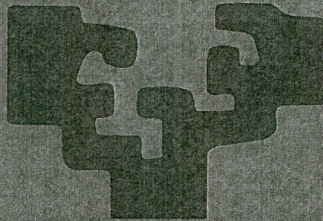


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# **TRANSVASES CULTURALES:**

**LITERATURA**

**CINE**

**TRADUCCIÓN**

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DÁMASO ALONSO'S TRANSLATIONS OF THE PASSIVE VOICE IN  
*EL RETRATO DEL ARTISTA ADOLESCENTE*:  
FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Karen Joan DUNCAN

**1.- Introduction.**

A previous paper presented at the "Primer Congreso Internacional sobre Traducción" Barcelona 1992 aimed to examine the different ways in which a given translator -in this case a well-known Spanish author- deals with the specific problem of translating the passive voice, a linguistic feature which is said to be far more frequent in English than in Spanish. The aspects examined in that paper will be referred to further on. The present paper has two aims: on the one hand to study, from a statistical point of view, a certain aspect of the English original and the translations thereof which were outside the scope of the previous paper, but which would seem relevant if we are to find any rhyme or reason in any given translator's work, or in a tendency within the Spanish language. In this sense, this paper will try to find out whether there is any relationship between the syntactic nature of an English verb and its translation. The other aim of this paper is to show some applications of the theoretical concept of "equivalencia" as explained by Fernández Polo (Barcelona 1992) to the practical field of the translation of passives. This paper will, therefore, be divided into three sections: firstly a brief summary of my previous paper, followed by the study of the corpus basis of the present paper. The third section will present those aspects of Fernández Polo's paper which would seem relevant to the translation of the passive as exemplified in the corpus of Alonso's translation of Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.

**1.- Theoretical Background.**

Some theoretical notions have to be explained before referring to the text itself: 'Active' vs. 'Passive' in English and 'Activa' vs. 'Media' in Spanish. Active voice is defined by Crystal (1985) as: "a term used in the grammatical analysis of voice ... where, from a semantic point of view, the grammatical subject is typically the actor in relation to the verb", whereas in the passive "the grammatical subject is typically the recipient or goal of the action denoted by the verb". From a formal point of view, Quirk et al. (1985: 159-60) mention factors such as verb-form passive -aux. BE + -ed ptc. -, rearrangement of two clause elements and one addition and formulates the correspondence as:

NP<sub>1</sub> + Active Verb Phrase + NP<sub>2</sub> →  
 NP<sub>2</sub> + Passive Verb Phrase + [by NP<sub>1</sub>]

The main theoretical study used as starting point in the classification of the translated forms is that of Pena (1982), according to whom there would be two types of voice: "activa", characterised by "-afección" and "media" characterised by "+afección". According to this author, verbs known as "reflexiva-recíproca", "interna", and "pasiva" would all be "acepciones" of this "voz media".

A further aspect to be borne in mind is one which I have decided to call "activation", the process opposite to passivization, i.e. the transformation from a passive form to an active one.

### 3.- Summary of the Barcelona Paper.

To cut a long story short, the Barcelona paper showed that, generally speaking, Joyce's original passives had been translated in three different ways:

A) translations in which the passive was maintained, i.e. 'literal' translations: exs. 1-4

1a) 'The kiss, which had been withheld by one, was given by both.' (p.65)<sup>1</sup>.

1b) 'El beso que la una había negado, era dado por los dos.' (p.78).

2a) 'A thing like that had been done before by somebody in History.' (p.49).

2b) 'Una cosa así había sido hecha antes en la historia por alguien.' (p.59).

3a) 'Adam and Eve were then created by God.' (p.108).

3b) 'Adán y Eva fueron creados por Dios.' (p.131).

4a) 'The phrase had been spoken lightly with design.' (p.141).

4b) 'La frase había sido dejada caer con intención.' (p. 175).

B) translations which could be called 'semi-passives'. Within this group are included all those constructions which possess some characteristics of the Passive Voice, but lack others. From a semantic point of view, the subject is the affectee rather than the agent. From a formal point of view, they either do not present a formal characteristic, namely the presence of SER, but the participle is present, or, they have no formal characteristics whatsoever of the passive voice, as is the case of the so-called 'voz media'. Such is the case of examples 5 to 9:

5a) 'The strife in their minds was quelled.' (p.220).

5b) 'Y las almas de ambos quedaron quietadas.' (p.227).

6a) 'The chapel was flooded by the dull scarlet light.' (p.107).

6b) 'La capilla estaba inundada por la triste luz rojiza.' (p.130).

7a) 'The memory of the great saint is honoured by the boys of this college.' (p.101).

7b) 'La memoria de este gran santo se ve honrada por los alumnos de este colegio.' (p.122).

8a) 'His heart was touched.' (p.116).

8b) 'Su corazón se sintió tocado.' (p.141).

9a) 'No sound was to be heard.' (p.200).

9b) 'No se oía ruido alguno.' (p.251).

C) The third group is formed by all those instances in which "activation" was found. Within this group, three subgroups - compulsory actives, indefinite third person, and full activation - were established. Example 10 illustrates almost<sup>2</sup> compulsory actives:

10a) 'He was born in a poor cowhouse.' (p.109).

10b) 'Nació en un pobre establo.' (p.132). Examples 11 and 12 would belong to the second group:

11a) 'It is called a tundra in Lower Drumcondra.' (p. 171).

11b) 'Pues lo llaman así en el Bajo Drumcondra.' (p.212).

12a) 'Simon Moonan and Tusker are going to be flogged.' (p.41).

12b) 'A Simon Moonan y a Camellos los van a azotar.' (p. 49).

Finally, examples 13 to 16 illustrate full activation:

13a) 'But their souls were seen by God.' (p.126).

13b) 'Pero Dios veía sus almas.' (p.156).

14a) 'After it [a mountain of sand] had all been carried away.' (p.121).

14b) 'Cuando el pajarillo hubiera terminado de transportarla.' (p.148).

15a) 'A formula was given out.' (p.174).

15b) 'El profesor expuso una fórmula.' (p.215).

16a) 'Before absolution was given him.' (p.139).

16b) 'Antes de recibir la absolución.' (p.172).

The Barcelona paper revealed at least one interesting point: active and semi-passive translations were far more frequent than passive ones. Such being the case, it seemed that it would be necessary to study the relationship between the syntactic nature of the English verb and the type of translation found in Spanish.

#### 4.- Analysis of the English Forms.

The corpus of this study was 252 forms found in the passive. Following Quirk et al. (1985, chapters 2 and 16), these verbs were grouped, from a syntactic point of view, into five different types, characterised as follows:

1) monotransitive: those which "require a direct object"<sup>3</sup>.

2) ditransitive: "two object NPs: an indirect object ... and a direct object."

3) complex transitive: elements following the verb are generally “object and object complement.”

4) prepositional verbs: “lexical verb followed by a preposition.”

5) phrasal verbs: “verbs plus an adverb particle.”

The analysis of the corpus revealed that of the 252 instances, 195 were monotransitive, 26 ditransitive, 13 complex transitive, 7 prepositional and 11 phrasal. Despite the fact that monotransitive verbs were far more frequent, on breaking down the numbers into the corresponding translation possibilities, we discover that there are subtleties. It would seem that a given English word does require one translation but not another: monotransitive verbs were translated in 70 instances as passives, in 74 as ‘media’ and 51 as active (36, 38 and 26%, respectively); ditransitive verbs were translated as passives in 4 instances and as ‘media’ or as active in 11 instances (15 and 43%); complex transitives were translated only once as a passive but 4 times via the ‘media’, and 8 times as an active (7.6, 30 and 61%); prepositional verbs were translated twice as passives, and in 5 instances as active (28 and 71.4%); finally, the 11 cases of phrasal verbs were translated as passives in 3 instances, and remaining 8 as actives (27% and 72%, respectively).

Although the numbers in themselves are far from conclusive, if we examine the porcentual frequency of each verbal type and the translations thereof, some very tentative conclusions arise:

1. Within the monotransitive group, passive and ‘media’ translations are, by far, more frequent than ‘active’ translations.
2. Monotransitive verbs are more frequent translated as passives than any other type of verb.
3. Ditransitive verbs tend towards ‘media’ and ‘active’ translation.
4. As regard complex transitive verbs, active is preferred to ‘media’.
5. Finally, with prepositional and phrasal verbs, the tendency would be for an active translation.

### **5.- Some Considerations Concerning “equivalencia”.**

The second aim of this paper is to refer to some practical applications of a concept taken from translation theory, namely, that of ‘equivalencia de experiencia’, as analysed by Fernández Polo (Barcelona 1992). According to this author, who refers to Beaugrande and Dressler, “toda traducción debe presentar un grado de dificultad de procesamiento lo más parecido posible al del texto original”. The analysis of this concept leads Fernández to a study, amongst other ideas, of the reasons for mistranslation. As far as the translation of passives, both in general and in our particular translator, is concerned, I would like to point out the following aspects. On the one hand, if “la única equivalencia posible entre un texto traducido y su original” is based on the similarity in the “grado de difi-

cultad del procedimiento”, some translations are not so “easy” for the reader of the Spanish version as they would be for an English reader. In other words, where an English reader would hardly bat an eyelid at examples 2a or 4a, a reader of the Spanish version, I believe, would find 2b and 4b difficult to follow.

The second aspect of Fernández’s paper which has a practical application here is to be found in those cases in which “el traductor simplifica, aclara, resuelve ... dificultades de todo tipo.” Examples 14, 15 and 16 are examples of this insofar as they prove that, via “activation”, the translator is expliciting what remains unknown in the original version.

## **6.- Conclusions.**

1. Taking into account the points hinted at in the previous section, it would seem necessary, or at least advisable, that certain theoretical notions should be borne in mind by any translator, if she or he wants the translation to be “readable”.

2. As for corpus-based analyses, more studies of frequency of usage within the Spanish language are required in order to guide the translator as regards usage in Spanish.

3. The study of Alonso’s translation seems to reveal that the more complex the syntax of the English sentence, the greater the tendency towards “media” and “active” forms in Spanish. However, more extensive corpora and comparative analyses with non-translated works in Spanish are required before establishing hard-and-fast rules.

**NOTES**

<sup>1</sup> page numbers referred to hereafter are: for the English text, the 1985 Panther-Granada edition; for the Spanish version, the 1989 Alianza-Editorial edition.

<sup>2</sup> 'almost' because the following instance was found:

"He was born of a virgin pure" (p.109)

"Fue nacido de una virgen pura" (p.132). All other instances of BE BORN were translated via NACER.

<sup>3</sup> Quotations in this section, defining syntactic classifications refer to Quirk et al. 1985.



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