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A FRAMEWORK FOR THE DESCRIPTION  
OF DRAMA TRANSLATIONS

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## A FRAMEWORK FOR THE DESCRIPTION OF DRAMA TRANSLATIONS

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The purpose of this paper<sup>1</sup> is to draw attention to the still largely neglected field of drama translation and to propose a framework for the description of translated playtexts.

Most of the literature on drama translation is devoted to the so called second translation or transposition of the play from page to stage<sup>2</sup>, i.e., a process of intralingual translation/transposition which has little to do with what we may call the conventional interlingual process of translation. This being the case, I would like to make my position clear from the outset: the target of this study is the translation from page(SL) to page(TL). The object of study is not intra- but inter-lingual translations (from English into Spanish) of playtexts.

This does not mean, however, that the performance of the translated texts, or even of their SL counterparts, will be neglected in any way. But the focus of research and study is the printed page of a dramatic text which has undergone a process of translation. For as Bassnett (1985:102) points out:

the time has come to set aside 'performability' as a criteria for translating too, and to focus more closely on the linguistic structures of the text itself. For, after all, it is only within the written that the performable can be encoded and there are infinite performance decodings possible in any playtext. The written text, *troué* though it may be, is the raw material on which the translator has to work and it is with the written text, rather than with a hypothetical performance that the translation must begin.

When attempting to study and describe such texts, one is faced with more than one dilemma. It must be decided first whether the description of playtexts is in anyway different from that of novels or poems. And if it is different, one is faced with the task of defining the limits of its specificity. The twofold nature of drama, written-to-be-performed, is a fundamental question in any approach to this field of study and most of of the ways in which it differs from other literary products stem from what Van den Broeck (1986:97) calls "the dual nature of theatrical discourse".

The aim of this paper, then, is to outline a general framework for the description of this process of translation and its ensuing products: the playtexts in the TL. Both SL and TL texts will be considered, as they are the only tangible material translators and theatre groups alike use as the basis for their respective work. Unlike the written page, the performance of the playtext, although taken into consideration in so far as it is an integral part of the phenomenon of theatre, is not the centre of the present study.

This paper offers a framework for the description of Spanish translations of plays originally written in English. This paper offers a framework which has proved crucial for this type of work, and which is largely the fruit of the answers so far discovered to these questions. The framework will hopefully be adapted and revised in the future being, as it is, part of "the empirical study of actual translations"<sup>3</sup> (Delabastita 1990: 99), thus part also of a continuous interplay between practice and theory, "for only descriptive research on a large scale can warrant a sufficiently refined theoretical insight" (Van den Broeck 1986: 109).

The overall object of study is translated drama in Spain, and more specifically the thirty years of translations that span from the 1950s to the 1980s. The role played by translated drama and its aftermath in the society and theatre world of that time is the ultimate goal of this study.

Once again we are faced with a dilemma since although individual translations have to be studied, they are but parts of a larger whole which functions as the overriding, unifying frame. Thus "large corpora of translated texts of different types and sorts would be submitted to comparative analysis and description" (Van den Broeck 1985: 59), but these large corpora, are formed by smaller units, individual works, to be studied both specifically and in close relationship to the whole. Similarly, the problems posed by individual works render results which are also valid in the larger context of the corpus under research.

Various fundamental questions which arose specifically from the work done on three plays were the starting point. The implications for the study of the above mentioned corpus of translated plays will be reflected in the framework that follows.

## SUGGESTED FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY OF TRANSLATED PLAYS

Lambert & Van Gorp in their article "On Describing Translations" (1985: 52-3) offer a four-stage scheme for the description of literary translations. This scheme is both comprehensive and practical enough to describe translated texts in a large cultural context, breaking away from the page proper. This scheme, adapted in some aspects to the study of translated drama, is offered here with the basic divisions and terminology used by Lambert & Van Gorp.

*Preliminary data* will include information about the publication of the play, the playtext proper, and the metatexts that may be included in the edition of the play.

- Publication data: publishing company, type of collection the play may belong to, copyright (by the SL or/and TL author, SL and/or TL publishing company, etc...) and date of publication.

- Data about the playtext. This includes information as to whether the SL or/and TL title or author are mentioned, and whether a label has been given to the TL product (translation, version, adaptation, etc...).

- Metatexts: introduction or preface by the SL or/and TL author, director of SL or/and TL performance, editor; as well as information about the SL or/and TL performance (date of SL or/and TL performance, cast, etc...) . 'Blurb' and/or quotations from newspapers, periodicals where the SL or/and TL play or/and performance was reviewed.

The information about the play taken from the edition of the drama text will lead us to the first provisional hypotheses about the translation. Already in this initial stage of our work we shall be able to see whether the TT is presented as a reading, acting edition (prospective or retrospective translation) or neither. The position of the TT on the scale whose extremes are the adequacy pole and the acceptability pole could be specified. These initial hypotheses may be further corroborated as we advance into the study of the textual levels (both macro and micro levels) and finally in the intersystemic stage of the study.

### *TEXTUAL LEVEL: MACRO LEVEL*

In this second stage the specific structure of the dramatic text is the main concern. Thus the specificity of the dramatic text becomes obvious and has to be accounted for. Here again the twofold nature of drama is present.

The written playtext consists of dialogue<sup>4</sup> and frame, to use House's terminology<sup>5</sup>. That is, the text to be spoken on the stage by actors on the one hand, and the stage directions and indications written by the author for the director, actors, readers, etc..., on the other.

This dramatic text (frame & dialogue) is divided into smaller units. Acts and scenes are traditional divisions of plays marked in the published text by identifiable printing conventions. Nevertheless other units are called for when tackling the actual description of (a) specific text(s). Thus a smaller unit such as the utterance is deemed necessary when describing the macro structure of the play. The *utterance* is defined as the words to be delivered by a certain actor, including the name of the character, the words to be said on the stage and the stage directions related to these words. These statements when delivered on stage ("mise en scène") could be called as Pavis terms, "stage utterances"<sup>6</sup>.

If on the level of formal structure the translation of the play is described in terms of acts, scenes and *utterances*; episodes and some other thematic divisions of the dramatic intrigue have to be defined on the level of content. Similarly, the development of plot and characters may have to be taken into account in each specific play.

Once the distribution (of form as well as content) of the translation is checked against the source play, the first hypotheses formulated after the study of preliminary data will most probably be either modified or at any rate developed. It should become much more patent now whether the translation is of the acceptable or adequate type, and where on this scale the translation under study stands.

### *Textual level: micro level*

On the micro-structural level we shall consider the text as language. Once we have described the way the division of the play into acts, scenes and *utterances*, has been rendered in the TT; we can proceed to describe the text proper.

It is precisely at this stage of the description that an appropriate unit of comparison and description is even more crucial. This should not be an ideal, abstract, universal unit, but one which proves to be useful in the majority of cases, if not in all.

In playtexts this unit would appear to be the *utterance*<sup>7</sup>, defined as the lines spoken by an actor and characterised in the written playtext by the interaction of both frame and dialogue introduced by the name of the character with different printing conventions. The label “utterance” will refer to the actual text as defined above.

In the macro-structural level we consider the division of the dramatic text into acts, scenes and smaller units: *utterances*. As we have pointed out above the dramatic text is presented in two different layers: frame (stage directions, name of the character, etc.) and dialogue (the speech to be uttered on the stage). This twofold nature of drama is of utmost importance when attempting the more precise study of the translation process the text has undergone.

In this level we shall be looking at optional shifts of varied nature (morphological, syntactic, semantic) and affecting different layers: frame and/or dialogue; or different levels: the word, phrase, sentence, *utterance*, etc... . These optional shifts may be of four types: addition, deletion, modification and non-equivalence, using the classification proposed by Santoyo (1979)<sup>8</sup>.

This microcospic description of the text is juxtaposed with the previous hypotheses and these, in turn, will be enriched by the results of the micro-structural study, resulting in more satisfying conclusions as to the type of translation concerned.

#### *Intersystemic level (intertextuality)*<sup>9</sup>.

In this last level of description of the translated text we draw both on the hypotheses we have discussed in the previous stages and on the following information:

- Other translations of the play (acting, reading editions, ...) and possible relationship between them and the TT under consideration.
- The question of the source text (or texts). Sometimes the ST has to be traced back as different acting, reading or revised editions might exist. Naive as it may seem, the question of the ST may often complicate the study and affect the conclusions drawn.
- Information about the performance(s) of the playtext in the source culture and/or target culture. Number of performances, type and name of the company, places where it was shown, etc.
- The readership and/or audience and critics' reaction to these performances and/or editions of the play. Reviews in the press, etc...

This fourth stage is particularly important in theatre due to the dual nature of drama and the social dimension of the play which may be read or/and watched on a stage. Theatre critics record their own reaction to the performance (and eventually the reading of the drama) and that of others.

### THREE PLAYS: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

As I have pointed out above, although the goal of this ongoing work is to study a large corpus of plays, single plays have also been submitted to close study. The three plays to which I shall refer in this section have posed fundamental questions to the general study of translated drama.

The comparison and description of *La cocina (The Kitchen)*, a play by Arnold Wesker, emphasised the importance of the preliminary stage of the framework. This

play is also a prototype of a reading edition in itself and, as such, an excellent object of study.

The TT studied is the 1973 Spanish edition of the play published by Editorial Fundamentos in "Los Cuadernos Prácticos", a collection dedicated to political, religious, literary and philosophical essays. The SL publishing company as well as the date of first SL edition are mentioned (Jonathan Cape, 1960). The copyright is held by both publishing companies.

As far as information about the publication is concerned, this play may already be considered unusual. For one thing, translated plays are more often than not published in drama collections. These are mostly editions of plays performed in Spanish theatres (TL acting editions). Or else, they tend to be published in collections of literature whose authors are considered to be canonical. (TL reading editions). This edition of the play is an exception in that it has been published in a collection focusing on socio-political issues.

If we look into the playtext itself we can see that both the SL and TL title, SL and TL authors are mentioned and that the product is labelled "translation". The SL author is explicitly mentioned along with the TL title in the first page. This shows that the TT is presented as a reading edition of a close, so-called "faithful" translation.

Metatexts in this edition provide even more significant information. Already on the front page we are presented with a quotation by the author and a comment on the human dimension of the play. The introduction and notes for directors and character description Arnold Wesker wrote for the English edition of the play are translated here and offered to the TL reader. Apart from the SL metatexts which are present in the TL edition, this edition offers an interview with the playwright (December 1972, just before the play was published). The SL cast opens the play proper and the information about the two first performances in Great Britain is given in Spanish.

The opinions expressed by the author in the interview and the obvious emphasis on the SL performance(s) and even the SL edition which is very closely followed, corroborate our previous hypothesis and in some ways complete it. *La cocina* seems to be an ST-oriented reading edition of the adequate type. No concessions are made to the target culture. Since it does not seem to be performance-oriented we would expect the frame to be less carefully rendered than the dialogue of the play.

A study of the macro-structural level of the TT shows that the overall structure is maintained as are stage directions and *utterances*. This shows that there seems to be no difference between frame and dialogue as far as translation strategies are concerned. In spite of being a reading edition in every formal aspect, this translation does not neglect the frame in favour of the dialogue and renders stage directions as faithfully as it does what the characters actually say.

A micro-structural study of samples taken from the play shows a clear strategy used by the translator: he adheres closely to the source text and does not make any concessions to the target culture. Cultural terms are not substituted but maintained. The play takes place in London, the characters are still British and so is "the kitchen" and "the food" (two very important symbolic elements of the play).

The intersystemic stage of the study of this play is much more interesting. No other Spanish translations of the play could be traced. But there was more than one source text and they were more difficult to find. Of the four editions in English kept in the British Library, the edition mentioned in the Spanish translation as ST (Jonathan Cape 1967) proved to be the ST used for this translation.

*The Kitchen* was performed in Spain in 1973 (7th September). The translator and adaptor of the performance text is also Juan Caño (translator of the TT). So we may assume that the translation used in the performance did not differ greatly from the text published by Fundamentos.

The production was highly acclaimed by Spanish theatregoers. Over 100 performances bear witness to the success of the play on the stage. Theatre reviewers were also enthusiastic about it and this was reflected in the Prize to the best foreign play of the year, and the national prize to the best director awarded for this production of *The Kitchen*.

Our TT (*La cocina*) is a reading edition, an adequate translation and a very close rendering of the ST used as a basis for the TL performance: the same translator, the same number of characters, the author present in the performance. This seems to be both a retrospective translation, in so far as the edition gives information about the SL performance(s), and it may be considered prospective since the translation published by Fundamentos is basically the same as that staged a few months later.

In *The Kitchen* the preliminary stage and the intersystemic dimension are the most illuminating parts of our study. Without these two stages attempting to locate the play and its function in the Spanish theatre scene of a given period would be meaningless. Hence the great importance of these two stages, and this four-stage scheme, in the general study of translated drama.

The study of the Spanish translation of Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge*, is focused on the function and use of macro-structure in the analysis of plays.

*Panorama desde el puente*, a play by Arthur Miller, adapted by J.L. Alonso, a much acclaimed Spanish stage director, was published in 1980 (MK Ediciones, "Colección Escena"—devoted mainly to performed plays both Spanish and foreign—). The SL title is mentioned in the edition as well as the name of the SL author. Copyright by the adaptor and the Spanish publishing company. The English edition used is not mentioned and the TT is labelled "adaptation".

The cast of characters and actors corresponds to the Spanish performance of the adaptation (11th January, 1980) which was directed by J.L. Alonso, the translator. The director-translator is also the author of the introduction to the Spanish edition and of the 'blurb' on the back cover where he gives information about the two different versions of this play. The first one was produced in New York and the revised version was used in Europe.

All these preliminary data lead to the first hypothesis about this play: we are dealing with an acting edition, a prospective translation, which is closer to the acceptability pole. We expect, therefore, cultural adaptations and an emphasis on the TL and target culture. This TT thus presented seems to be a prototype of acting editions of foreign plays.

The macro-structural stage of our study unveils a much more complex reality. It is due to this complexity that the need for a smaller structural and descriptive unit was felt. The ST consists of two acts and so does the TT. But the text is further structured. One of the characters, Alfieri, marks divisions of episodes, thematic divisions. In attempting to trace these thematic divisions, the need for an even smaller structural unit became a priority. It was a practical problem since the comparison ST-TT on a macro-structural level became almost impossible. The *utterance* as defined above appeared to provide an answer.

The ST is divided into two acts, in the first act we find 695 utterances, in the first act of the TT: 429 utterances. Although, as we shall see later, there is more than one

ST available, the difference in the number of utterances demonstrates that the TT is a partial, performance-oriented translation.

The micro-structural study of some parts of the TT showed that both frame and dialogue had undergone a similar process of translation characterised by deletions and modifications (syntactic, semantic and morphological) affecting structural units such as the *utterance* (form) and episode (content), and different language levels. There are virtually no cases of addition or non-equivalence. The relationship between characters, the development of characters as well as the sequence of events is different from that of the ST.

If we consider the SL and TL performances we observe a significant time gap between the first (New York, 1955) and second performance in English (London, 1956) on the one hand, and this TT Spanish performance (1980) on the other. These two performances are explicitly mentioned by the translator. No mention is made, however, of an earlier Spanish performance of the play in Madrid in 1958. The name of the translators of the playtext used in this production or the production itself are omitted in this edition.

Alonso acknowledges the existence of at least two English versions of the play but he does not make any reference to the Spanish translation of the first version (Buenos Aires, 1956) that might very well have been used, in addition to the 1958 text and production, in the making of this adaptation.

The question of source texts is of some importance here for, although the translator openly states that he offers the revised version performed in Europe, at least six different English editions of this play have been found in the British Library. Two of them published in 1957, one in 1958 and the other three in 1961. All these editions differ in the way they are presented (acting or reading editions) and in very minute details of distribution, but they are all printings of the revised edition (1957). Although the translator of our TT mentions this second revised edition as the basis of his adaptation, the comparison of TT and source texts shows that this TT is only partly a rendering of the ST and that the numerous shifts between ST and TT cannot be accounted for within the boundaries of the ST(s).

This "adaptation" of *A View from the Bridge* is a jigsaw put together with pieces taken from both the source text(s) and their corresponding Spanish counterparts. Some of the ST "pieces" may be recognised in the TT, but the TT author has adapted them to a different style: his own.

When the play was staged in Spain in 1958, the critics praised both the work of the actors and director and that of the translator. In the reviews that followed the 1980 performance most critics related this production to the 1958 performance drawing a comparison which Alonso himself had avoided.

We may conclude that the director of the 1980 performance and adaptor of the written edition of this performance, has made use of both a written and stage tradition of this play in Spanish and has consequently modified the tone of the play, the interaction between characters and the way they are portrayed, leaving just the basic skeleton of the story which is presented in a completely different way. The personal stamp of Alonso as director and playwright is present in the TT we have considered.

Finally, the study is Thornton Wilder's *Nuestra ciudad* (*Our Town*) has been of much use to the development of the framework described above.

*Nuestra ciudad* was published by Escelicer (a renowned theatre publishing company) in its collection Escena (Stage) no. 702, in 1971. Unlike the vast majority of plays in this collection which are published immediately after their production in a



theatre, this edition makes reference to a TV production of the play. The ST title is given and the copyright is by the translator of the play (J.A. Lejarraga and J.M. Arozamena). The product is labelled as "version" and it is clearly stated that this is the text corresponding to the TV production (23.7.71). There is also a note about the Spanish title of the play (*Nuestra ciudad*) which the TT authors keep because it was thus translated the first time it was staged in Spain. This direct reference to the first version of the play in Spanish is explicit and direct.

This version is therefore presented as an acting edition and the translators acknowledge the existence of a previous acting edition.

The macro-structure of the text is complex as far as content and form is concerned. Here again, it is necessary to use a unit to describe the translation which is different from the traditional division into acts and scenes.

The play consists of three acts and no scenes as such, but one of the characters, the stage manager, marks the changes in space and time. Although he is not part of the action, he occasionally plays the part of another character. It is the episodes marked by the stage manager's part that we considered as basic units for the comparison. On a lower level the unit "utterance" was also necessary to complete the macro-study of the text.

A comparison of the ST and TT on this macro level showed that three utterances by the stage manager, and therefore three higher units of the first act, had been omitted. The number of deletions at this level was not particularly outstanding. Neither is the fact that two characters were missing of great importance, since their parts were very short. In the TT published they were omitted and in the performance possibly taken over by another character/actor.

The six editions of the ST found in the British Library seemed to present few differences. Some of these differences accounted for some of the deletions in the TT since two of the six editions showed these changes in the ST.

Our findings on the micro-level corroborated the working hypothesis that the TT was very much of the adequate type, ST-oriented as well as very respectful of the first edition and performance of the text in Spanish (1944) which they mention and seem to have made use of.

The TT under study, which in the preliminary stage could have been considered a translation of the acceptable type, is very much adapted to the times and the medium (TV), and is a translation of a canonized text drawing on a canonical translation (1944) and a canonical performance. Although conceived and made for TV there are no concessions whatsoever to the screen. No transference from page to screen (or from stage to screen) has taken place. This, as was frequent in televised drama of the time, is theatre televised, not adapted.

## SOME CONCLUSIONS

Drama translation and the description of translated drama is distinct in that it is structurally more complex and dual in nature. Whether a play is staged or not, it still retains all the characteristics which make it performable.

The only object of study when describing translation of playtexts seems to be the printed translated text. The performance as an object of study is too elusive since it cannot be reproduced.

Drama texts have to be described and compared in terms of structural units in which the dramatic text (both frame and dialogue) is divided: namely acts, scenes, smaller units given by the development of the dramatic intrigue and *utterances*. These units proved to be valuable in the first stage of analysis when describing the type of translation strategies and models used by a translator. They were also necessary, at the micro structural level. When describing the processes of transference of language proper, the utterance proved particularly useful.

Preliminary data of the kind shown in the examples are vital when dealing with individual plays, and in particular in the overall study of larger corpora, in which the study of individual plays is merely a first step. The intersystemic level of study gains more significance when observing translations in the larger framework of the study (translation of drama in Spain 1950s-1980s), although partial conclusions may be and have been drawn.

The study of individual translations poses fundamental questions to be solved, a case in point being the problem of the unit of description (and comparison) and the problem of dramatic intrigue in specific dramatic texts like those studied here.

This study is the result of a need, the need to establish a basic framework for the description and comparison of translations of drama texts. It has proved useful, as I hope has been shown, and it will necessarily have to be revised in the future. If nothing else it provides us with tools with which to do our job: describe translations and study strategies and models in translated literature. It is a working tool and as such it has been presented here.

## Notes

1. This paper is mostly the product of my stay at the University of Leuven (KUL) in 1990 (CERA Chair for Translation and Culture, Research Seminars organized every year since 1989 by Prof. José Lambert).
2. *Page to Stage* is the title of one of the collections of articles edited by Zuber in 1984.
3. The 'empirical study' of translations has been largely neglected up until now.
4. Bassnett in 'Ways through the Labyrinth' points out that songs may be considered part of the dialogue.
5. House uses these terms in *A Model for Translation Quality Assessment*.
6. See Pavis's article "From Text to Performance".
7. I have adopted the term 'réplica' in Spanish.
8. This classification was presented in a workshop at the III AEDEAN Conference held in Santiago de Compostela (17-20 December, 1979).
9. Rabadán uses this term (1991).

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