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Politics of translation: assimilation and reflexivity in the transformation of academic texts

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Abstract

For many at the periphery and semi-periphery of the global academic field, translation or self-translation into English has become a prerequisite for the pursuit of an academic career. This article focuses on the academic translators who translate humanities and social science texts and the crucial but highly invisible role of their everyday translation practices in relation to the dominance of Anglophone discourses and concepts. It articulates an interdisciplinary theorization of the politics of translation through the concepts of assimilatory and reflexive translation, which are applied to an empirical investigation based on semi-structured interviews conducted with academic translators in the context of Spain. The analysis brings to light their backgrounds, professional profiles and perceptions of their working conditions, as well as their views of science and good writing. Academic translators predominantly adopt an assimilatory translation strategy, reformulating texts to adapt them to Anglophone academic conventions. However, habitual collaboration between translators and authors gives rise to deliberation among both actors on how to recreate texts in the new linguistic situation. Such collaboration holds great potential for the development of more reflexive forms of translation in which an invitation to consider translation strategies and decisions is extended to authors and users of translations at large.

Keywords

academic translation, assimilatory translation, collaboration, politics of translation, reflexive translation,

Introduction

For many at the periphery and semi-periphery of the global academic field, translation or self-translation into English has become a prerequisite for the pursuit of an academic career. This gives rise to the proliferation of a specific type of academic translation that is regularly occurring yet not in full view. No sustained attention has been devoted to the role of these everyday translation practices in relation to the dominance of Anglophone discourses and concepts. This article focuses on the academic translators who translate humanities and social science texts from Spanish and Catalan into English. To contextualize their understanding of translation and translating strategies, it articulates a theorization of the politics of translation through the concepts of assimilatory and reflexive translation, which is elaborated in the first section. After this, three subsequent sections explore academic translators' backgrounds, professional profiles and perceptions of working conditions; their views of science and good writing in connection with the predominance of what is found to be an assimilatory translation strategy; and the potential of reflexive translation through recounts of collaboration between translators and academic authors. The overarching goal is to bring this new conceptualization of the politics of translation into dialogue with empirical research to clarify the actual and potential roles of academic translators in the context of Spain and what is and could be involved in the task of this under-researched type of translation.

Progress in science on an international scale

In a forgotten, unfinished short text entitled 'Translation-for and against,' Walter Benjamin drew an outline of the pros and cons of translation. At the very top of this list, he wrote: 'What can be said in favor of translation? Progress in science on an international scale (Latin, Leibniz's universal language)' (2002: 250).[1] Today this constitutes a surprising statement for two main reasons. The first relates to a persistent dearth of reflection on translation as a key mediating process in the production and circulation of scientific texts, indeed, as a condition of possibility of our disciplinary undertakings, and to a lack of recognition of academic translation as a special type of translation in its own right.

   The sociology of translation has called attention to the unequal nature of linguistic exchanges in a very hierarchical international scientific field and to the fact that it is the translating context that determines which translations are undertaken and the manner in which this is done (Heilbron, 1999; de Swaan, 2001, 2004; Wolf and Fukari, 2007; Bielsa, 2011). As Pierre Bourdieu stated, texts travel without their contexts (2002), and this is the source of all types of misunderstandings. A study of these misunderstandings, or what Lawrence Venuti calls the scandals of translation (1998), has proven to be a productive undertaking for social science (see, for instance, Calhoun, Lipuma and Postone, 1993; Sapiro, Santoro and Baert, 2020). As Benjamin himself already noted in his short outline, turning a con into a pro, productive misunderstandings are precisely the value of bad translations, and 'the fact that a book is translated already creates a certain misunderstanding of it' (2002: 250–251). Yet the role of translation in theory building and exchange and in empirical social research has remained remarkably understudied and translation is still often simply perceived as a mechanical process of word substitution (Temple, 1997; Borchgrevink, 2003; Gibb and Danero Iglesias, 2017; Bielsa, 2022b).

In translation studies, it is only very recently that a consciousness has emerged around the distinct significance of academic translation. In a chapter dedicated to the topic that appeared in *The Cambridge Handbook of Translation*, Krisztina Károly asserts that the translation of academic texts has received less attention than other fields of non-literary translation (news translation, legal or business translation, etc.) (2022: 340). This contrasts with Friedrich Schleiermacher's approach to the fields of scholarship and art as the only province of the *translator proper*, as opposed to the *interpreter*, who works in the world of commerce, to which news translation and legal translation are closely related in spirit and nature (Robinson, 2002: 226). For Schleiermacher the difference between the two is that only the translator must creatively deal with the spirit of language and the author's unique ways of seeing and making connections, the true realm of translation, whereas the interpreter merely provides a rendering of a text that is dominated by its object in a new language. This foundational text clearly resonates with Benjamin's highlighting of academic translation at the top of his list, yet could not be further removed from the reality of the discipline of translation studies today, where news translation and legal translation are burgeoning fields of research.

The second reason for the strangeness of Benjamin's note is the way in which it explicitly relates translation to the universal language of science. A lingua franca, like Latin in the past or English today, is normally considered to be an alternative to translation. In the search for solutions to linguistic difference, a lingua franca is one and translation is another. If there is a shared language, there is no need for translation. Why, then, did Benjamin jot down the progress of science internationally and the names of languages that aspired to universality as points in favor of translation? That he did uncovers the fact that a lingua franca and translation are not mutually exclusive. If everyone cannot write in the lingua franca, to contribute to the progress of science on an international scale, translation into the lingua franca is a necessary step.

Having established this fact, this article empirically investigates an increasingly important, but particularly invisible form of academic translation: the initiatives undertaken by authors from semi-peripheral languages to publish in international Anglophone journals. In countries like Spain or Portugal (Bennett, 2007), the use of academic translators to produce English-language versions of research papers originally written in other languages is widespread. Based on the analysis of the data obtained from semi-structured interviews with specialized academic translators, this article delves into their transformative labor and its implications for knowledge production, conceiving of translation as both a social relation and a linguistic practice involving decisions about words and textual structures. Key to such an undertaking is a theorization of the politics of translation, which has been a persistent theme of interdisciplinary scholarly reflection (Berman, 1992; Spivak, 2000; Gal, 2015; Bielsa and Aguilera, 2017). In translation studies, the most widespread conceptualization of the politics of translation, Venuti's approach to domestication and foreignization (2008) seems no longer adequate in a context in which the very categories of domestic and foreign have become increasingly blurred. Over the years a range of issues have been found with domestication and foreignization by a number of authors (Baker, 2007; Cronin, 1998; Cussel, 2021; Hatim, 1999; Pym, 1996; Shamma, 2009; Tymoczko, 2010), leaving them with an uncertain status – criticized and questioned, yet lingering all the same. Moreover, because of its implicit denial of objectivism and, arguably, of the very universalism that shapes scientific practice, it is not suitable for an examination of academic translation or for interdisciplinary research in the social sciences. As Bourdieu himself already argued,

Armed with a knowledge of the structures and mechanisms that escape, although for different reasons, from indigenous and foreign notice alike, such as the principles of construction of social space or the mechanisms of reproduction of that space common to all societies (or to a subset of societies), the researcher, at once more modest and more ambitious than the curiosity-lover, proposes a constructed model that aims at *universal validity* (1993: 272).

In this article, we propose and empirically apply an alternative conception around the notions of assimilatory and reflexive translation that is explicitly conceived to further interdisciplinary work in the humanities and social sciences. Assimilatory translation refers to a type of translation that mainly operates by applying tried and tested solutions to linguistic difference, mostly in terms of preestablished equivalences. It has the great advantage of being the most effective form of communicating ideas and of relying on pre-existing routines, which enormously simplify translation work. Assimilatory translation seeks to fit cultural and linguistic difference to available conventions in the translating language, thus constructing an image of unmediated access to the other which obscures that translation has taken place. Similar in this aspect to Venuti's notion of domestication, the term 'assimilatory' as opposed to 'domestic' has the important advantage of making visible its direct connection with extensive cultural and political practices that have been the mark of modern capitalist societies. Assimilatory translation refers not just to (literary) texts, but to a whole range of social practices that rely on conventional and routinised responses to cultural and linguistic difference, which often – although not necessarily – work by effectively disallowing that difference. Assimilation is a familiar term and has been widely discussed in the social sciences, particularly in relation to the process of acculturation required of immigrants to adapt to new societies. After its unquestioned acceptance in the 1950s and 1960s, its underlying ethnocentrism was fundamentally challenged and new multiculturalist policies sought to foster forms of integration that are considered more just (Kymlicka, 1995). However, assimilation continues to be an important element of contemporary cultural politics in persisting debates on the presence and accommodation of Muslims in the West (Modood, 2013) or in renewed calls for policing cultural homogeneity from populism and the far right (Traverso, 2019).

In addition, the concept of assimilation is not essentially foreign to translation studies, and has already been employed to highlight the significance of prevailing strategies in academic translation in a southern European context that is very similar to the one we investigate in this article:

> Our job is, essentially, to present the alien knowledge *in a form that will enable it to be assimilated* into one or another of the ready-made categories existing for the purpose, which means ensuring that it is properly structured, that it makes use of the appropriate terminology and tropes – in short, couching it in the accepted discourse. (Bennett, 2007: 154, emphasis added)

Here, Bennett refers to what it takes to make a text originating in countries like Portugal or Spain suitable for publication in English, which 'often involves not only the elimination of characteristic lexical features and ornament, but also the complete destruction and reconstruction of the entire infrastructure of the text, with far-reaching consequences as regards the worldview encoded in it' (2007: 155), a process of assimilation which she describes as a form of epistemicide. It is the mark of assimilatory translation that once it has taken place it cannot be reconstructed or undone, as the

heterogeneity of the original has been effectively eliminated through a translating process that presents itself as both invisible and final at the same time.

Reflexive translation fundamentally calls into question both this assertion of translation as a finished and univocal process and the translators' ownership of the decisions and choices that translation entails. Reflexive translation constitutes a progressive form of translation in a postmonolingual world because it does not seek to occlude the linguistic and cultural heterogeneity that are a mark of highly diverse and interconnected societies (Yildiz, 2012). Moreover, by opening up translators' interventions to the scrutiny of users, it serves to better equip translation for the key mediating function it plays in the contemporary world.[2] Instead of offering a final interpretation of a complex cultural object and hiding its partiality, by making itself visible in different ways reflexive translation calls its users to reflect on the decisions facing the translator and on how the translator's choices affect what is communicated and the way translations are used. Through these means, reflexive translation challenges the notion of translation as a mechanical process of word substitution, which is still widely prevalent in society at large, thus contributing to an increased awareness of translation's social and political significance. As is the case of assimilation, reflexivity is already part of the basic vocabulary of sociology (Giddens, 1991a, 1991b; Beck, 1992; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Beck, Giddens and Lash, 1994; Archer, 2007, 2012), such that the notion of reflexive translation directly speaks to social scientific concerns. In addition, discussion has begun to emerge of the need for greater linguistic reflexivity on the part of social scientists conducting research with subjects in languages other than English, which is seen as vital to enhancing the accuracy of ethnographic methodologies (de Casanova & Mose, 2017; Gibb & Iglesias, 2017).

A translation that did not follow any preestablished routines would be impossible, much like one that is devoid of reflexivity. Thus, the contrast between assimilatory and reflexive translation can never be absolute. Rather, the difference between them lies in their approaches to the reflexive process that the mediation of difference through translation entails.[3] Reflexive translation is interrogative and critical in terms of what Margaret Archer has approached as meta-reflexivity (2007) and extends the translator's reflexivity to others, whereas assimilatory translation hides the translator's reflexivity from users as part of producing a fluid, competent or transparent translation. A reflexive translation makes 'the fact of the different linguistic situation one of its themes' (Benjamin, 2002: 250). It provides, where necessary, contextual information that is lost in the new language and calls attention to the translator's voice (Hermans, 1996, 2014). This reveals the transformative labor involved in making a text written in one language usable in a different linguistic situation, the contribution of translation to the progress of science on an international scale.

Academic translators' professional profiles and perceptions of working conditions

The empirical study involved eighteen semi-structured interviews with translators (11 men and 7 women) specialized in texts from the humanities and social sciences. The interviews took place between April and December 2021 on videoconferencing software (Microsoft Teams and Zoom). The participants were recruited through several translators professional associations and the authors' academic networks. We conducted the interviews in Catalan, English or Spanish.[4] Each interview had a duration of 30 to 80 minutes, depending on the extensiveness of the interviewees' responses. The interview guide had three parts: the first related to the background and professional profile of the

translators; the second contained questions about the relationship between the translators and authors; and the third was about translation strategies, with a particular focus on articles for publication in international journals. The questions on strategies included whether the translators reformulated texts so that they would read more fluently or rather stayed as close as possible to the author's original wording; whether they thought a fluent translation made it more likely for articles to be accepted for publication; and if they sought to make strange, baroque or overtly ornamental expressions more conventional in English.

All the study participants translate into English from Spanish or Catalan and seven of them also translate from French, though only occasionally. The majority are from the United Kingdom (11), five are from the United States, one is a Spanish-British binational, and one is Spanish. All are native English speakers except for Patricia,[5] who is bilingual but grew up in Spain. The average experience was 17.3 years, ranging from Linda with 35 years to David with 3 years. All are university educated: 10 have degrees in language-related areas (linguistics, Spanish studies, French studies, etc.), five have degrees in the social sciences and three have an undergraduate degree in translation and interpreting. Those who studied languages report having taken a range of subjects across the humanities as part of their degree requirements. Seven in total have a postgraduate degree in translation and interpreting and four have commenced (but not completed), completed or are currently undertaking doctoral studies. This indicates that in general they have a very high level of tertiary education that often combines language learning with studies in the humanities and social sciences.

Many of the interviewees did not necessarily set out to become translators, but rather, having relocated to Spain, work translating into English fell into their laps or they decided to branch out from English teaching. Given that so few of them studied translation and interpreting at the undergraduate level, this indirect route to becoming translators is perhaps unsurprising. The following responses to how they started out are illustrative of a general trend:

> Lo típico de España, a través de un amigo, de una amiga, la amiga del amigo [The typical story in Spain, through a friend or a friend of a friend] (Karen).
> Before I retrained as a translator, I taught English for a few years. The usual story (Robert).

Some initially did general translation and then specialized in academic translation, while others were academic translators from the beginning because this was the type of work they were offered through word-of-mouth. Most report having to gradually build up a client base, while combining translation with other professional activities. Before working as academic translators, several interviewees had taught English at universities or worked as linguists at university language services.[6] This meant that they were in the right place at the right time when academic translation needs arose. This also meant that they had the beginnings of a contact base in the academic world.

> Cuando yo llegué aquí a España tenía 25 años (eso fue hace 34 años) y encontré trabajo enseguida en lo que se llamaba entonces el servicio de idiomas de la Universidad de X. Y en el edificio donde estábamos también estaba el X, que pertenece al CSIC. X no, nunca ha sido una ciudad muy internacional y necesitaban un traductor. Entonces se enteraron de que yo estaba ahí y se pusieron en contacto conmigo. Y empecé a traducir para ellos [When I came to Spain, I was 25 years old (this was 34 years ago) and I found work straight away at what was then called the language service at the University of X. And the building where we worked was also home to X, which belongs to CSIC [the Spanish National Research Council]. X isn't, has never been a very international city and they needed a translator.

Then they found out that I was there and got in contact with me. And I started translating for them] (Linda).

Ensenyes tant a alumnes com al professorat. 'Fas traduccions?' I dius 'bueno, no', però aquí començava a fer traduccions de tant en tant. I després va arribar el moment en que vaig dir 'mira, m'hi dedico a temps complet i deixo d'ensenyar [You teach both students and professors. 'Do you do translations?' And you say, 'um, no', but I started translating now and then. And then the time came when I said, 'I'm going to work full-time as a translator and stop teaching] (Nancy).

In this case, their jobs as language specialists in some capacity and their proximity to academics and academic institutions is what opened the doors to becoming full-time translators. Some learnt the skills needed to translate on-the-job, while others decided to undertake relevant postgraduate or continuing education courses (such as diplomas through the Chartered Institute of Linguists in the UK or workshops through professional associations). However, doing these courses tends to be as much about improving knowledge and abilities as about having a stamp of professionalism to boost their profiles. The stories the interviewees told about how they somewhat fortuitously became translators and the way in which they move between various language-related professional activities and translation, as well as between work and study, is an indication of their significant flexibility, continuous learning and the role of practice-based learning in the translation profession.

Almost all the participants are freelance (known as *autónomo* in Spain) and one is an in-house translator for a language service at a university. Their translation commissions come from academic authors directly or through translation agencies or university language services, or a combination of all three. Only one translator referred to an academic journal that commissions him to translate articles that have already been accepted for publication. While two participants only work in academic translation, many of the others refer to it as their main source of work, which they combine with other types of translation. The subject matter of the research they translate is very broad across the humanities and social sciences, as well as the natural sciences and technology. Often there is a direct relationship between their undergraduate degrees, broadly speaking, and the disciplines in which they translate (or most translate). A background, for example, in sociology makes them feel more at home when translating sociological articles. Regardless, to make a living they must be able to translate across several disciplines. Their specialization in a particular discipline also frequently relates to having done a job for a certain author and that author then recommending them to the members of their research group or their peers who are working on similar research topics. This can lead to a steady source of work in similar areas of research and a profound understanding of their terminology and methodology.

Basically what tends to happen is you get recommended from one person to another because you've done work on a particular field or in a particular field for one person and they get published, then they recommend you to somebody else within the same field (Sam).

Most of the translators report academic translation to be an area where commissions are plentiful and almost all of them consider their work to be valued. The key to a sense of recognition and satisfaction relates to three main factors: rate of pay, reasonable deadlines and relationships with authors. All the translators interviewed except one considered their academic translation work to be well paid. Several of them noted that they do not accept rates below what they know the job is worth in terms of time and effort, in which case

they will reject the commission. The more experienced translators that we interviewed set their rates according to their own estimation of what a job is worth to them (how long it will take them and how much they want to earn). Having a good reputation and coming with the endorsement of academics who are pleased with the quality of their work makes it possible to charge higher rates. As a rule, the interviewees suggested that researchers allow a longer time window for academic translations, as compared with translations in the commercial sector. This significantly improves the quality of the service that translators can offer as they have the necessary time to research terminology, revise the text and consult with the author. Several of the translators reported having close working relationships with academic authors, some of which are long term. For example, sometimes academics acknowledge the key role that their translators have played in advancing their career or even securing tenure. Though, this 'close' relationship can still have a degree of anonymity as it is mostly developed via email correspondence or back-and-forth comments in a Word document:

> És una relació molt personal perquè m'escriuen 'ei, fa molt que no parlem, com estàs?'. És amb el temps molt amable, però si està al costat meu en un tren un dia, no saben qui sóc [It's a very personal relationship because they write, 'hey, it's been a while, how are you?' It comes to be really nice, but if they were sat next to me on a train one day, they wouldn't know who I am] (Nancy).

The working relationship is thus personal and pleasant; the translators often have the feeling of knowing the authors through their written communications, yet they are two people who would not recognize one another in the street. While there is certainly a great deal more scope for collaboration in academic translation (for reasons which will be expounded upon in the final section of this article), it still appears to be a largely solitary activity.

As a rule, work through agencies seems to minimize these three factors as it involves lower rates, tighter deadlines and less direct communication with the author since the translator's main point of contact is the agency.

> Yeah, I mean, it's again like it's much easier when it's a direct client because you can have, you know, emails going back and forth. Whereas sometimes when it's with an agency or university, you're more concerned about bothering them all the time with emails (Jordan).

Some translators also mentioned that there has been a downward turn in rates in the translation market and the amount they charge direct clients is either on par or higher than what some agencies advertise. Despite these details, in general the interviewees perceive their working conditions to be favorable.

The common practice in literary translation is to acknowledge the translator on the copyright page or sometimes on the front cover (normally if the translator is of renown). Questionably, within translation studies, Károly presents invisibility as a given fact in academic translation and encourages us to think of the ideal academic translator as a disseminator of science across borders who is communicatively competent and highly specialized, yet should provide these skills and expertise in conditions of invisibility (2022: 357). When it comes to the interviewees' work as translators of academic articles published in international journals, in most cases their name does not appear – anywhere. That is to say, they are not acknowledged for their role as the translator of the article. In the rare case when some form of acknowledgement is given, it is not explicitly for the translation. These acknowledgements can often be indirect or understated, as for example the following sentence that appeared at the very end of the Acknowledgements section

(in this instance, it was an academic book and the translators were not credited on the copyright page):

> 'Y gracias a X y a X por su inglés y su paciencia.' Y dices 'bueno, vale'. Pero no dice que lo habíamos traducido ['Thanks to X and X for their English and their patience'. And you think, 'um, right'. But it doesn't say that we translated it] (Patricia).

Such a furtive reference to the translators suggests that academic authors may wish to conceal the fact that they do not write their publications in English themselves. It also indicates the covert nature of the most extensive form of translation in Anglophone journals, which the vast majority of guidelines to authors tend to reinforce. Furthermore, the reference to the task of translation as 'English' and 'patience' could indicate the commonly held belief that translating requires no more than being a competent user of a language and time at one's disposal.

The issue of acknowledgement is not straightforward as it relates to a series of factors, particularly ethics and who has the final say over the translation decisions or ownership of the finished document. Several of the translators certainly expressed the view that ethically it is important that their labor be accounted for:

> I think the work of translators and proofreaders in general should be acknowledged, not just academic translation. I don't know whether it's a limitation of space or just because we're invisible (Jordan).
>
> I try to be acknowledged. Well, this is also something that I learned at X […], but sort of the ethics of making sure you're being acknowledged because otherwise somebody is taking credit for work that they couldn't do, you know, didn't do (Nadia).

However, there is no general practice of consistently requesting some form of acknowledgement. Among the interviewees, there was some concern around being credited as the translator in cases where the author makes changes to their translation without consulting them or requesting their permission. In such cases, they are uneasy about these corrections, which may be incorrect or with which they might not agree, being attributed to them. Some translators also consider that they offer a service in return for which they merely expect payment.

> Personalment penso que jo ofereixo un servei, que no necessito ser nombrat per realitzar aquest servei perquè l'he cobrat i amb això en tinc prou [Personally, I think that I offer a service, I don't need to be named to provide that service because I charged for it and that's enough for me] (Joseph).

From these reflections on the thorny question of acknowledgement, it can be concluded that it is an area of at least fluctuating concern for most of the translators, though they are not entirely sure how to proactively address it. There is a standard practice of non-acknowledgement or tacit acknowledgement of the translators of journal articles. Responsibility for this can be attributed to the authors in part, but the publishers of journals and their editorial boards also play a role in terms of their submission guidelines, which generally refer to translation only in relation to the paid editing services on offer. The absence of a custom of citing the translator (as in literary translation) is symptomatic of the widespread invisibilization of translation in international academic journal publishing.

Assimilatory translation: views of good writing and science

Perhaps unsurprisingly, in this extremely asymmetric context where translation is mostly invisible, the predominant strategy that the academic translators in our study adopt is assimilatory translation. This is evidenced by the fact that all the translators described how they reformulate texts to adapt them to the conventions of Anglophone academic journals. This involves simplifying them by reordering or breaking up sentences and paragraphs and making expressions more conventional, as natural as possible, toned down, plainer, diluted or softened, and cleansed (their choice of words, some of which have been translated). They mostly seek to produce a text free of Spanish or Catalan stylistic patterns, transforming linguistic difference into standard expression in English. The final text should appear to have been conceived and originally written in English, thus obscuring the intervention of translation.

> I try to make the text sound like it was written by, you know, a fluent writer of English. And I know that there are people who probably like having the traces of the former language, but I try to erase all of the traces of the original language and make it sound like it was composed of and thought of in English (Nadia).

The degree of reformulation involved in their assimilatory method is extensive, recalling common practices in journalistic translation that modify texts in drastic ways to make them suitable to new audiences. The term 'transediting,' which in its original meaning refers to widespread journalistic practices (Bassnett & Bielsa, 2009: 63-65), was used by one interviewee to describe academic translation: 'It's almost like a transedit rather than a translation' (Sam).

Most of the translators believe that such reformulation significantly affects the articles' chances of acceptance by journals and the extent of revisions that editors will request. In fact, some report not having reformulated in this way in the past, considering it to be too interventionist, and then finding that the article they had translated was rejected.

> Basically, if an author wants their paper to be published in the journal, I try to put myself in the position of the people at the journal. What are they expecting to see? What are they expecting to read? If I maintain long sentences in Spanish, they're just going to lose, they won't follow the thread. It'll be too much (Roger).
>
> Cuando no quieres perder la voz . . . del autor o de la autora, pero a la vez tiene que publicar, entonces lo más importante es que publique [When you don't want to lose the voice . . . of the author, but at the same time they need to publish, the most important thing is to get them published] (Linda).

Hence, the decision to translate in this way is shaped by the fact that they see as fundamental to their role as translator the production of an English-language article that will be considered publishable by journals. For example, one translator explains that he 'would really love to translate the text as it's actually written' (Sam) but is sure that it would be rejected at peer review as the journal acts as a gatekeeper. In this case, his translator behavior does not reflect his personal preference, but his understanding that he is expected to translate the article in such a way that it will meet approval from journal editors and peer reviewers. As skilled readers and producers of this particular genre, academic translators know the appropriate language and structure and have learnt from experience what gets accepted. Performing the dual role of translator and editor, they make the necessary adjustments to achieve the ultimate goal: publication.

The translators' views of what constitutes good writing recall George Orwell's *Politics and the English Language* (1946), a famous text that has long been a staple in introductory writing courses. Orwell provides examples from academic essays and political writing to illustrate the debasement of modern prose and criticize its lack of precision and concreteness, stale imaginary and metaphors, and the use of meaningless words and pretentious diction (which he associates with the illusion of grandness of Greek or Latin words). He recommends the use of the fewest and shortest words available to express the meaning desired. The recommendations in the classic textbook *Academic writing for graduate students* (Swales & Feak, 1994), though it does not provide hard-and-fast rules, are like Orwell's style guide as they strive in different ways toward clarity of meaning (whether through the use of single verbs instead of phrasal verbs, nominalization, linking words, clear organization, providing definitions, etc.). While Orwell connects his program for good writing to the political project of restoring meaning to language, most of the translators we interviewed connect their stylistic choices to their understanding of science. In the majority view, the need to adopt an assimilatory strategy is not only because of the particularities of the English language or good writing, but also due to demands for clarity and communicability when it comes to scientific writing.

> Aquí si estamos hablando de ciencia – sociología es una ciencia – hay una forma de escribir la ciencia. Claridad es lo más importante. No necesitamos tantas florituras [Here if we're talking about science – sociology is a science – there is a way of writing science. Clarity is the most important thing. We don't need so much flourish] (Martha).

In this view of writing science, the role of language is to clearly communicate ideas that exist outside of it and, necessarily, beyond the linguistic differences among languages.

> Obviously, an article is about something and everything that's around that something like language to express it is important as well because it helps people understand what's going on. But you know, it's always about something and that something is the terminology. The ideas that they're really trying to express, that I think is key (David).
> But the science doesn't vary from one language to the other, so the science is always the same (Sam).
> Coses d'aquestes, normalment vaig editant mentre tradueixo. Però clar, el contingut en sí no canvio res; això és sagrat. Però els estils d'escriure, hi ha alguns autors, per exemple, sobretot al departament on treballo, que adopten un to una mica massa acadèmic . . . I aquestes paraules acadèmiques que són una mica antigues ara (el mateix passa en català i castellà). I jo intento escriure en un anglès molt clean, clean English [I normally edit things like that while I translate. But, of course, I don't change the content itself; that's sacred. But the writing styles, there are some authors, for example, especially at the department where I work, who adopt a tone that is too academic . . . And academic words that are a little old-fashioned now (the same goes in Catalan and Spanish). I try to write in an English that is molt clean, clean English] (Olivia).

According to these comments, the 'science' in social science writing is unaffected by the form in which it takes, language, or in its expression across different languages; instead, its notions can be contained within terminology.

Here, an instrumentalist conception of the relationship between language and science prevails: language is an instrument through which true statements about a world that exists independently from it can be made. Such a blunt separation between content (science), the alteration of which is beyond the pale, and form (language), which can be altered, is not suitable for all types of writing in the humanities and social sciences. The *Guidelines for the Translation of Social Science Texts* pose the question: 'How much of

the meaning of a social science text is conveyed by form? If the form is lost, is not something of the content lost as well?' (Heim & Tymowski, 2006: 7). Likewise, Abram de Swaan writes that 'these disciplines are much more strongly bound to language' (2004: 140). To achieve some degree of exactitude, authors in these areas of research must aim for 'meticulous precision' in the way they use language and terminology that also has everyday meaning. This overlapping usage and tension is the source of the very meaningfulness of social science writing. As a result, it is difficult to draw a clear distinction between the text's content – which according to some of the translators is untouchable (Olivia) or invariable (Sam) – and the form the authors use to express it, as the content is at least in part produced through careful turns of language.

The invariability of science should give us pause, especially as many of the translators confidently expressed this view, yet really it is the subject of wide-ranging debates. According to Immanuel Wallerstein, at the heart of translating social science texts is the transmission of concepts which are shared by some, but not all, and are often open to variation and conflict (1981: 88). He provided a set of guidelines for attempting the 'tall order' of translating concepts in social science texts. In these guidelines, he underlines that texts and concepts are culturally determined and are often produced in dialogue with thinkers in other languages or for international audiences. An equipped translator must have a firm grasp on the relevant intellectual texts and their cultural meanings, as well as the crisscrossing of concepts among thinkers in different languages. Aspects of this description of an academic translator clearly coincide with that of an academic.

Wallerstein's guidelines were concerned with imposing some form of order and consistency to widespread polylinguistic conversations in the social sciences. In a similar vein, Raewyn Connell argues that a mosaic of different knowledges working separately from one another is not useful as one of the keys to the social sciences is being able to seek generalization beyond single cases (2007: 223). However, in Wallerstein's case, this leads him to place too much faith in the possibility of equivalence. For this, Joshua Price criticizes Wallerstein, arguing that he seeks to fix the meaning of concepts to facilitate a universal conversation, which is neither possible nor desirable. Price does not view social science translation as the mere transmission of concepts. It is, in his view, part and parcel of elaborating the concepts themselves, whose meaning is always incomplete, as found in the practice of cultural translation in anthropology (2008: 350-351): 'Rather than fixing the definitions, translating a social scientific concept would rework the earlier concept, superimpose itself' (2008: 355). Like Wallerstein, he underscores a similarity in the labor of translators and social scientists: they clarify concepts through an innovative use of language that takes old words to new heights, placing pressure on them so that they transform and provide an unusual view.

It is possible that avoiding standard equivalents and, instead, clarifying or developing concepts would place too much strain on these mostly freelance translator's time, making the intellectual labor required not worthwhile with respect to the reimbursement offered. With that said, as this type of translation is relatively well-paid, it is an area where there is more scope for the innovative practice for which Price advocates. At any rate, academic translators should be aware that the strategies and decisions that they adopt when translating a concept are never neutral, they always do work on that concept, even when a standard equivalent is selected (as this reenforces its equivalence).

Only one translator among those interviewed rejected in theory and in practice the dominant strategy of assimilatory translation:

En inglés es como chup, chup, chup, chup, chup, estos son los hechos, esto es lo que concluyes, ¿no? Y es todo como muy escueto y todo eso. Pero el estilo de argumentación de los historiadores españoles no es así. No es así porque nunca ha sido así y hay que respetar su voz. Para mí es muy importante respetar la voz de estos autores, ¿no? A veces, a lo mejor te encuentras estas frases que son más largas, son más complejas. Y entonces digo, bueno, es que esto se podría decir pa, pa-pa, pa-pa, pa-pa. ¿Pero mi autor hablaría así? No [In English, it's like glub, glub, glub, glub, glub, these are the facts, this is your conclusion, right? And it's all very succinct and all that. But the argumentation style of Spanish historians is not like that. It's not like that because it's never been like that and their voice must be respected. For me, it's important to respect the voice of these authors, right? Sometimes, maybe you come across those longer sentences, they're more complex. So, I say, well, I could say it like pow, pow, pow, pow. But would my author talk like that? No] (Patricia).

For this translator, it is important to recreate the way the authors write, as well as the relationship between content and form, because she is aware of and respects the place that their mode of argumentation has within the Spanish intellectual tradition. Reflexive translation, which will be empirically explored in the following section, better responds to the imperative to openly thematize 'the fact of the different linguistic situation' (Benjamin, 2002: 250), thus providing the space for a practice that does not presuppose the elimination of cultural difference through translation.

It is finally necessarily to emphasize that assimilatory translation, despite all its perils, is difficult, time-consuming, creative, and often pleasurable work:

I like the aesthetics of the academic article in English when it's done cleverly and beautifully. And I guess there's no reason that it couldn't be beautiful when you see traces of the original language, I mean that that could be beautiful. But for some reason I am most attracted to the idea of taking something and translating it utterly, you know, not just the meaning, but translating it so that it fits into its new home. I guess, you know, making it fully localized, right, so it doesn't carry any trace of its origins. I don't know, I get a kick out of that (Nadia).

Through an assimilatory strategy, this translator dedicates her reflexivity to localizing the text for Anglophone academic audiences, effectively eliminating any linguistic or cultural difference present in the original. Such reflexivity is a key part of the translating process, but it is left out of the final product, hidden from the users of the translation.

Reflexivity and collaboration in academic translation

If we shift the focus from the habitual practice of reformulating texts to another habitual, though less studied practice, which is that of collaboration between translators and authors, the interview data reveals that this is an area where extensive reflexivity about translation among both actors can flourish. Collaboration on- and offline is a dynamic that is attracting increasing attention in translations studies, leading Alexa Alfer and Cornelia Zwischenberger to propose the blended concept 'translaboration' (Alfer, 2017; Zwischenberger, 2020). Zwischenberger highlights the transcultural nature of collaboration as several parties join their heterogenous perspectives and actions to create hybrid products or solutions. However, the form collaboration takes in the case of academic translation has not been explored and there have been recent calls for more research in this area (Curry & Lillis, 2019).

Collaboration is essential in academic translation as this area ordinarily entails significant back-and-forth correspondence between translators and authors and several rounds of revision. The initial translation that translators send authors is not a final version or the end of their communication. In fact, the first users with whom the translators discuss the translation strategy they have adopted and the decisions they have made to address the critical questions that arise throughout the translation process are the authors. This is particularly the case when translators work for authors directly. Collaboration is also enhanced by the growing level of English among academics in Spain, who read extensively in this language even if they are unable to produce academic texts in English themselves. This puts them in a better position to evaluate the translation decisions and assist with the relevant terminology. Furthermore, academic translators sometimes work with unpolished versions that authors have written for translation into English and publication in an international journal. As a result, the text is still open to developments, which leaves room for translators to collaborate with authors on transforming the text into a finished piece.

Our data reveals several forms of ordinary collaboration among translators and academics which significantly shape textual outputs:

1)   Translators and authors discuss how to re/construct ideas. All the translators routinely pose questions to authors regarding words or phrases that may be ambiguous or problematic, as well as possible additions or reformulations to make certain ideas or contexts clearer in the new linguistic situation.

> Puede ser que haya momentos cuando es difícil capturar si es un uso de la lengua que es bastante, con las raíces bastante en, I don't know, la literatura española, la cultura española. Esto puede ser difícil. Es la parte más difícil de la traducción. Entonces es importante la comunicación, you know, tengo que hablar bastante, comunicarme bien con el autor me ayuda para entender bien qué quiere decir [It can happen that there are moments when it's difficult to detect if it's a use of language that's quite, rooted in, I don't know, Spanish literature, Spanish culture. That can be difficult. That's the most difficult part of translation. So, communication is important, you know, I have to talk a lot, communicating well with the author helps me really understand what they want to say] (Richard).

As this interviewee is aware that the author's language and intention may be bound up in Spanish intertexts with which he is less familiar, he relies on discussion with the author to identify these threads of meaning that might otherwise remain buried in the source text. Academic translation is enriched by the possibility of such exchanges, in which the meeting of two different perspectives of the text and its materials shine a light on how to reconstruct its key nuances such that they will be useable for a new set of readers.

2) Translators' queries provoke authors to rethink their arguments. In some cases, the translators' questions regarding the meaning of certain phrases or the structure of the text serve to alert authors to gaps or shortcomings in their arguments. Thus, the difficulties that translators encounter while translating the text lead authors to rewrite or reorganize certain fragments.

3) Translators explain their strategies to authors. Many of the translators report communicating with authors so that the latter can grasp the reasons behind the changes introduced without feeling like their research has been simplified or that the translated text is too far removed from the original wording:

Que els agradava tant repetir el mateix concepte, però d'una altra manera. I jo, 'és que ho has dit ja una vegada; jo no puc posar-ho dues vegades de dues maneres diferents. Estàs dient una cosa i jo posaré una cosa'. I feia que un text molt llarg s'escurcés molt. I a l'autor li podia no agradar aquest producte, perquè era massa simple, massa senzill: 'Però m'has deixat moltes coses!' No, no, no, el que fas és el teu article i l'he resumit d'una forma que un anglès el llegiria [They loved repeating the same concept, but in different way. And I, 'it's just that you've already said that; I can't put it twice in two different ways. You're saying one thing and I'll say one thing'. And that made a long text much shorter. And the author might not have liked the outcome, because it was too simple, too straight forward: 'But you've left lots of things out!' No, no, no, you do your article and I've summarized it in a way that an English speaker would read it] (Nancy).

In this didactic aspect of collaboration, this translator clarifies to the author what she sees as the need for brevity and precision in English academic discourse. The translator's reflexivity, in this case, is orientated toward making the foreign text fit pre-existing categories of discourse. She then explains to the author what these are and how they have guided her translation decisions. In situations such as this, the space created is less heterogenous than in Zwischenberger's translaboration because the translator's perspective usually wins out and an assimilatory strategy triumphs. The translator is the expert in the English language and its academic discourses, and the author relies on that knowledge in the competitive business of publishing articles.

4) Translators are invested in the authors' goal. The questions and explanations that translators send to authors reveal the extent of their interest in understanding their ideas and representing their arguments correctly, as well as producing a high-quality translation that is free of errors or inconsistencies.

No lliuro un text dient 'bé, jo he fet el que he pogut pels diners, ja s'espabilaran'. Això mai [I don't deliver a text thinking, 'good, I've done what I could for the money, now they'll figure out the rest'. I never do that] (Joseph).

This comment indicates that this interviewee does not see the situation as "their article" and 'my translation.' Rather, he willingly cares about the outcome and participates in what is at the end of the day the authors' professional goal: publishing their research in recognized international venues.

Through these types of collaboration, it appears that translators and authors develop respectful working relationships. This contrasts with Zwischenberger's and Alfer's special issue on translaboration, where all the articles refer to power imbalances among the parties or more or less explicit forms of conflict. However, it does concur with Richard Sennett's approach to the rituals, pleasures and politics of cooperation as key to developing the skills for living with others in contemporary society (2012).

The translators that we interviewed feel that the authors for whom they work are very grateful when it comes to receiving questions and explanations. Likewise, nearly all the translators highlighted that they thoroughly appreciate and enjoy receiving feedback, which they see as an essential part of the translation process. When authors provide them with no or little response to their questions or doubts, some of the translators denounce that the former are not giving the translation of their texts the consideration they should. In these cases, the translators' invitation to establish a collaborative dynamic is met with silence or cursory replies. This is frustrating as the authors' input is enormously helpful for resolving queries and improving the overall quality of translations:

> Having access to the author is a luxury, which is very very much appreciated by a translator. And having that, having a close working relationship with the author as well means that you feel that you can reach out to them […]. And in terms of the author's responses, they're normally very good because you have that working relationship with them […]. Some of the authors say to me, this is how we've written it, but you write it how you want to, which is a massive responsibility. And I actually don't like them saying that to me because I feel that they've, that's gone too far in trusting what I do. Which is very nice of them to actually trust you that much, but it's their work, it's not my work. It's their article, it's their chapter (Sam).

For this interviewee, the ideal translator-author working relationship is based on trust and good communication. The authors he works with place a vote of confidence in his expertise, which indicates a measure of respect that is not so common in the translation profession. The flipside of this high degree of trust, which several of the interviewees mentioned, is the diffuseness of the role of the translator, which at least in principle is not to make changes of their own accord, but to develop any necessary corrections in consultation with the author. From the interview data, it is clear that the translators are content with their role *as translators* and are not interested in recognition as authors or the responsibility of authorship. Theirs is a modest, yet vital, intervention into someone else's text.

The process of translating academic texts is not usually collaborative from the beginning. In fact, instructions from authors to translators tend to be very limited when the translation is initially commissioned. As several of the translators remark, academics do not necessarily understand what translation is or what translating a text entails. This is the case even though some of them are bilingual speakers of Catalan and Spanish, which goes to show that contrary to popular belief, speaking more than one language does not a translator make. Some of the metaphors that the translators use to describe authors' views of translation as a straightforward, mechanical process are 'to press a button' (Mary) or 'photocopy it out in the other language' (Nadia). This lack of awareness of the nature of translation must be one of the factors relating to the very few initial instructions. However, communication increases throughout the translation process, providing more opportunities for joint reflexivity around translation issues. Once authors have an initial translation in hand, they often comment on terminological issues or particular renderings. Moreover, the nature of academic journals' review process means that collaboration often extends over time as translators participate in the translation of article revisions and sometimes even the correspondence between authors and journal editors.

This collaboration tends to occur not only for a single article, but for a series of publications, as translators often work with authors repeatedly and acquire sound knowledge not just of their areas of research, but also their writing styles. As translators often end up working with authors from similar disciplines, they develop a good understanding of the relevant concepts, on which they conduct research as part of making translation decisions. This turns them into tacit specialists with a highly informed interpretive capacity.

> Amb el temps sabia cada cop més sobre una disciplina concreta i després d'un temps ja em considerava especialitzat [Gradually I knew more and more about a certain discipline and after a while I now consider myself specialized] (Joseph).

One would hope, in the opposite direction, that authors become increasingly familiar with the specialized practice of academic translation and how the translator's choices deeply affect what a text communicates or how it can be used. Mutual familiarity with the other

person's area of expertise enriches the common ground on which collaboration can take place.

Some unsolicited references to the possibility of more intensive forms of collaboration also identify what could be seen as the ideal conditions for the proliferation of new experimental forms of reflexive translation:

> Yo creo que la cosa ideal con la traducción sería trabajar de una manera juntos, cada uno en el mismo sitio, sentados al lado, leyendo juntos y hablando del texto. Yo no sé de nadie que trabaje así, ¿no? [I think the ideal thing with translation would be to work together, in the same place, side by side, reading together and talking about the text. I don't know anyone who works like that, right?] (Richard).

While a collaboration where translator and author read, interpret and translate the text together is desirable but rare, another translator mentioned that she has had this experience and considers it to be one of the highlights of her career:

> Antes [. . .] tenía mucha más relación cara a cara con los autores. Entonces hice lo que considero uno de mis logros profesionales, traducir un artículo sobre Kant, muy complicado, pero trabajábamos codo a codo. El autor y yo todas las semanas nos juntábamos y al final se publicó en una revista [. . .] que era muy de los top. [Before [. . .] I had a lot more of a relationship with the authors. That was when I did what I consider one of my professional accomplishments, translating an article on Kant, really complicated, but we worked shoulder to shoulder. Every week the author and I got together and in the end it was published in a journal [. . .], which was a really top journal] (Karen).

This interviewee savored the opportunity to meet with the author in person on a weekly basis and nut out a complicated philosophical text that called for a welcome departure from the usual solitariness of her work. This unique form of collaboration maximizes reflexivity and leads to complex, innovative and even playful translations. In the following fragment, another interviewee refers to a prolonged collaboration with an author as a result of which their own secret language emerged in their textual exchanges:

> Recuerdo hace muchísimos años la primera vez que tuve que revisar una traducción que había hecho para X. Como sabes, X va punto por punto, hasta llegar un momento en que era un tipo de como, no sé, un juego entre nosotros. Y siempre meto algo en la traducción a ver si lo pilla [I remember many many years ago the first time I had to revise a translation I'd done for X. As you know, X is very thorough, it got to the point that it was like, I don't know, a game between us. I always throw something in there to see if they catch it] (William).

The analysis of the empirical data has found that collaboration, in various forms and degrees, is a standard practice in academic translation. Translators share part of the reflexive process of translation with the authors, discussing how to recreate ideas in the new linguistic situation and reflecting on translation decisions. These discussions reveal the partiality and open-endedness of translation and ultimately transform the texts under construction. Even if a predominantly assimilatory strategy prevails because it is considered more suitable for getting an edge in the unequal business of international academic publishing, ideally such a strategy should be decided upon by translators and authors who are both fully aware of the transformations it entails and their epistemological implications. A reflexive translation strategy would take one step further and give all users, not just the authors, the chance to reflect on how the translation has been made. Through these reflexive collaborations, it is also possible to achieve what De

Swaan, borrowing from Bourdieu, refers to as de-Anglicising English or the sharing of English among all its users on fairer terms (De Swaan, 2004: 145). While academics who speak English as a second language are not on equal footing with the translators who are not only native speakers (bar one) but also trained linguistic experts, they still contribute to the translation of their work into English, assisting translators to develop solutions that capture the contextual, cultural or intellectual richness of the original expression in Spanish or Catalan. This, at least, shares English on different terms from those of assimilatory translation; rather than smothering other languages and non-Anglophone academic discourses, it may just give them some space, however slight, to breathe.

Conclusion

This article has found that when translating Spanish or Catalan texts from the humanities and social sciences into English, academic translators extensively reformulate language and structure to emulate the dominant conventions in Anglophone international journals. They employ what we have called an assimilatory strategy as experience tells them that this is what best conforms to journals' expectations, hence increasing the likelihood of successful publication. The adoption of this strategy also relates to the common understanding among the translators we interviewed that what is communicated through scientific research is not molded by language. They believe that the content of science is knowable beyond language. In this respect, they tend to willingly bow to scientific demands for clarity and communicability. However, in our view, this position makes it difficult for these translators to see the conceptual work that they in fact routinely perform through their choices about words and structure. In this sense, academic translators are often faced with similar decisions to academics in terms of how to precisely express an idea such that it has meaning, precision and weight, as well as relevance and use in the context at hand.

Academic translation has also been shown to be a special type of translation that is marked by invisibility and non-acknowledgement. Even though this type of translation has become increasingly common, it is not an area that has attracted much attention in translation studies or the humanities and social sciences at large. Publishing in English in international journals is vital for career stabilization and advancement, yet in non-Anglophone contexts the language skills required to do so could hardly have appeared overnight. This is where translators come onto the scene and their role in the reconstruction of ideas and discourses, a crucial but modest intervention on which this article has shed light. Despite the high degree of textual reformulation that has been identified, which is arguably more extensive than in other types of translation, the labor of academic translators is seldom recognized. The common practice is to pay translators for their services but not to acknowledge them in the published article.

The key discovery of this article has been the paradox that in an area of translation where assimilation is king, there is vast potential for reflexive translation through already existing forms of collaboration. Our study has found that through collaboration, translators and authors negotiate how to recreate texts in the new linguistic situation, while each has an effect on the task of the other. Translators lead authors to rethink their arguments and authors help translators reconstruct key nuances. While these collaborations often involve translators explaining or justifying the employment of an assimilatory strategy, they hold great potential for something different. Collaboration could become a space for the negotiation of difficult translation issues and the development of unique solutions in which the differing languages, perspectives and

knowledges of both actors are allowed to enhance complexity and richness. The English that is the academic lingua franca need not be a formulaic, simplified language which only draws on the social, cultural and intellectual contexts of its native speakers in the global North. Through more reflexive forms of translation, it could become a more open and equal space of plurilingual exchange. However, this will only occur if reflexivity on the practice of translation is extended not only to academic authors, as has been found, but also to other users of translations, that is, to readers across the world.

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[1] For an account of Benjamin's intense engagement with the theory and practice of translation throughout his life see (Bielsa, 2022a).

[2] This conception of reflexive translation extends Benjamin's approach to the politicisation of art in 'The Author as Producer' to translation (see Bielsa, 2023: chapter 6).

[3] This is a key distinction from Venuti's domestication/foreignisation, the difference between which hinges on the extent of formal fluency but not the degree of access to the complexities of the process of translation.

[4] The interviewees were able to choose which language they preferred. In the case of the author whose first language is English, the question of doing the interviews in Catalan or Spanish did not arise. The other two authors communicated with participants in Catalan or Spanish in initial communications, and the information sheet was in Catalan. This probably influenced the translators' choice to continue communicating in these languages.

[5] All names are pseudonyms to protect the identity of the research participants.

[6] In Spain a university language service provides all kinds of linguistic assistance, including language classes, translations, proofreading, consulting on linguistic-related issues, etc.