

A SHORT GUIDE TO TRANSLATION

SPECIFICALLY AIMED AT TRANSLATORS OF BUDDHISM

Created by Dr. Mariana Orozco Jutorán
Senior Lecturer, Departament of Translation and Interpreting
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona,
member of the Research Group TRAFIL
(Translating Remote Philosophies to Facilitate Understanding)
<http://grupsderecerca.uab.cat/trafil/en>

for the FPMT Translation Offices

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INTRODUCTION

I would like to begin this *Short Guide to Translation* by advising readers that in no way does it aim to take the place of a course in written translation. It is also not a textbook providing an in-depth knowledge of how to translate. What it does do is set the ground rules for translating in order to make readers think about, and ultimately question, any preconceived ideas they may have about translation.

This guide has been written specifically to provide Dharma translators, most of whom are volunteers and have no formal training in the field of translation, with a basic knowledge of the theory of translation so that they can look at their translations in a new light and perhaps improve upon the quality of their translated texts.

The guide is eminently practical, and although each example is backed by a translation theory, neither the names of those responsible for the theory, nor the theoretical schools that they belong to, nor the names of the books they have published, appear. In terms of the labour market today, we could say that the theoretical aspects of translation underlying the examples given provide the ‘added value to the final product’ Dharma translators have to offer.

The exercises included in this guide are those that I would normally use in my translation classes in university. Because they are exercises that are carried out in a classroom, where there is the possibility of student-teacher interaction, it has sometimes been difficult to adapt them to this presentation. I would therefore ask you, the readers, to imagine that when I ask you a question, you are in my classroom. Attempt to answer questions spontaneously, if possible in writing, so that you have a record of what you have said (or rather, what you thought) because later on in the text I will discuss the possible answers to those questions, and without a written record, it may not be easy to remember exactly what you answered.

The exercises and examples given in the text are for the language pair English and Spanish. This is the language pair I work with and for which I have the largest number of examples. In Appendix 1 (Short glossary of terms), however, some examples are given in Tibetan etc. I suggest you read through the glossary before beginning to read the rest of the guide so as to familiarise yourself with terms such as *direct translation* or *target text*.

Some of the exercises you will come across may seem fragmented, i.e., the link between a particular exercise and the translation process as such may not be clear. There is a reason for this. Translation is not *declarative knowledge*, i.e., something that may be studied or memorised. Translation is *operative knowledge*, i.e., knowing *how* to do something, like driving a car.

I often use the metaphor of a car to describe what goes on when we translate. Imagine you have never driven a car before and you are told to sit in the driver’s seat. You are then told that to be able to drive properly you have to use all three mirrors (when turning, overtaking, braking, etc.); all four gears (as well as using the clutch, you have to use the right gear depending on the speed you are travelling at and the number of revolutions of the engine); the steering wheel, the brake, the accelerator; the indicators when turning left or right or stopping; the fog-lights, sidelights, headlights (full or dipped, depending on the weather conditions and the time of day); the windscreen wipers (if it rains); and, on top of all that, you have to pay particular attention to what is going on the road in front of you (traffic signs, traffic lights, cars, motorbikes, and cyclists, as well as pedestrians crossing the road, cars or motorbikes that suddenly brake or turn left or right, etc.).

Doesn’t it seem impossible to be able to control everything at the same time? However, with experience, not only do we do all this without thinking, but we can even have a conversation with the person sitting beside us, look for the name of a street or the number of a house, etc.

Translating is like driving, only there is an additional problem—some acquired habits that need to be broken. This is because we have used all the skills and abilities needed to be able to translate on other occasions (and for different reasons). To go back to the metaphor of the car... Instead of

having no knowledge at all of how to drive a car, it's as if we had always driven go-karts (which have only two pedals, are driven round closed circuits where there are no traffic signs, no pedestrians, no mirrors to use, etc.) and now we are faced with driving a “proper” car. To do this we have to “unlearn” much of what we have already learnt as go-kart drivers so as to be able to drive properly on the open road.

If I were to comment on everything that a translation needs in order to be considered a “good” translation, I would only bewilder my readers. For this reason, I prefer to present exercises covering each of the important aspects of translation separately: first the mirrors, then the lights, then the traffic signs, etc., even if, in the end, translators have to combine all these elements together in a text. With experience, putting these different elements together should, and does, become automatic (although, as we shall see, the process may still not necessarily produce the best results in our translations).

I hope this guide will be useful to those of you who read it. My aim in writing it has been to share my thoughts on translation with you—just that, and no more. I apologise for any errors or mistakes you may find—they are mine and mine alone. It has been with the best of intentions that I have set about this exercise so that we can learn more about translation together.



QUESTIONNAIRE

Before beginning my translation classes I would normally have a “getting-to-know-each-other” session, chat about what the students already know about translation, what their expectations are regarding the class, etc. As this is not possible in our case, I suggest we do something else which I am sure will be equally useful—although for some of you it may be a little annoying!

QUESTIONNAIRE ABOUT TRANSLATION

1. What is translation for you? Define it in one sentence

.....
.....
.....

2. What should a good translator know? List the most important points

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

3. What instruments are available to help a translator translate? List all the ones you know.

.....
.....
.....
.....

4. If you find a term that you do not understand in a text, what should you do first? Order the following options, putting a 1 by the one you would choose first and a 3 by the one you would choose last.

- consult a bilingual dictionary
- try to understand the meaning of the word from the context
- consult a source-language monolingual dictionary

5. If, when you are translating, you find a source-language expression that you understand but your translation does not express its meaning sufficiently, clearly, or exactly, what do you do first to find an appropriate equivalent? Order the following options, putting a 1 by the one you would choose first and a 3 by the one you would choose last.

- consult a bilingual dictionary
- try to express the same idea in as many ways as possible in the target language
- consult a target-language monolingual dictionary

6. When you are translating, what do you think is the basic unit you are translating?

- a. the word
- b. the sentence
- c. something else:

7. Underline the elements you think intervene in a translation.

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------|--------------------|---|
| client | source-text | author | socio-cultural environment of the source text |
| date of the source text | | | socio-cultural environment of the target text |
| date of the translation | | source-text reader | target-text reader |
| function of the source text | | | function of the translation |

8. The main problems encountered when translating are vocabulary problems.

T
F

9. Your translation of a sales contract for the British company WHL Inc. will be different if you are translating it for a lawyer who wants to use it as proof in a court-case, or for a subsidiary of WHL Inc. that needs the translation to sign contracts with other companies.

T
F

10. All translators should be able to translate as efficiently into the foreign language as into their mother tongue.

T
F

11. A good translator should be able to translate all types of texts with the same degree of efficiency.

T
F

12. When a translator reads a text before translating it, the process is the same as for any other reader of the text.

T
F

13. A bilingual dictionary is the main instrument used to find appropriate equivalents in the target language.

T
F

When you finish answering this questionnaire, please keep the answers, we will discuss them later on in a further chapter of this guide.



Chapter 1

TRANSLATION: AN ACT OF COMMUNICATION AND A MENTAL PROCESS

The following article was published in the on-line magazine of the British Broadcasting Corporation. Read the article and compare what the article has to say about translation with your thoughts on translation as expressed in your answers to the questionnaire above. If we were in a face-to-face situation, I would ask you to comment on the article (whether you think the author is justified in his opinions; whether you were aware or not of what he describes; whether you think he is exaggerating or not, etc.). Since this is not the case, please think about the content of the article so that you can compare my comments on the article with yours (not that my comments are the "correct" ones; rather the idea is to start a "mental" dialogue)

BBC NEWS | Magazine | Getting lost in the translation

Dot.life - Where technology meets life, every Monday

By Brendan O'Neill

Relying on online translation tools can be a risky business, especially if you expect too much of it. For the time being, might translation be something best left to the humans?

Earlier this month the small German town of Homberg-an-der-Efze, north of Frankfurt, had to pulp an entire print run of its English-language tourism brochure - after officials used an internet translating tool to translate the German text.

According to one report, the brochure was "rendered meaningless" by the online tool. Tourists were promised "casual value", the literal translation of the German word for "leisure potential", at venues such as the "free bath" - better known as an "open-air swimming pool".

Martin Wagner, mayor of Homberg-an-der-Efze, admits that the town made a "blunder". As a result of officials trying to save money by getting the internet to do a translator's job, a total of 7500 brochures had to be binned.

This story highlights some of the pitfalls of translating online. There are many instant translation tools on the web - but they are best used for individual words and short phrases, rather than for brochures, books or anything complex.

Confused

For example, one of the joys of the web is that it grants you access to an array of foreign news sources. Yet if you were to use a translation tool to try to make sense of such reports, you could end up with a rather skewed and surreal view of the world.

A recent report in the French daily Le Monde dealt with Tony Blair's determination to remain as British prime minister, despite the post-Iraq and Hutton controversies. When the French text was run through an online instant translation service, it ended up more confusing than convincing. "With listening to it", Le Monde reportedly reported, "in the event of victory Tony Blair intends to remain with the capacity until the term of the legislature..."

Even the most subtle computer program doesn't think –
and you need to be able to think in order to translate.

Sabine Reul

The German newspaper Die Zeit recently ran a piece on America's efforts to sell the "Roadmap to Peace" to Israelis and Palestinians. According to another translation tool, Die Zeit's report said: "The US-government makes bent previously a large around Israel and the occupied zones, although both Powell and Rumsfeld in that sewed East delayed have itself." That sounds more like Double Dutch than English Dutch than English.

'Deprived visit!'

ABC, one of Spain's leading newspapers, reported on Spanish prime minister Jose Maria Aznar's meeting with Tony Blair at Chequers. The text of the report, when put through the works, reveals that: "The official description of the encounter is 'deprived visit', but Spanish governmental sources confirmed that the main boarded subjects were the process of European integration and, like no, the every day more delicate situation in Iraq and Near East."

Why is foreign text "rendered meaningless" in this way, when passed through an online translation tool? According to Sabine Reul, who runs the Frankfurt-based translation company Textburo Reul, translation tools have limited uses - and problems arise when web users expect too much from them.

"A translation tool works for some things," says Reul. "Say a British company wants to order a box of screws from a German supplier. A sentence like 'We need one box of a certain type of screw' is something that a machine could translate reasonably accurately - though primitively."

Yet when it comes to translating blocks of text - words and sentences that convey thoughts and sentiments - online tools are bound to fail, she adds.

"Beyond simple sentences, the online process simply doesn't work because machines don't understand grammar and semantics, never mind idiom and style."

"Language is not a system of signs in the mechanical sense of the word", says Reul. "It is a living medium that is used to convey thought. And that is where machines fail. Human input is indispensable as long as computers cannot think."

Reul and other translators look forward to the day when clever computers might help to ease their workload - but that time has not arrived yet.

"It would be nice if computers could do the job. And certainly the quest for machine translation has prompted a lot of linguistic research that may prove valuable in unforeseen ways. But experience to date confirms that even the most subtle computer program doesn't think - and you need to be able to think in order to translate."

Until the dawn of thinking computers, online translation tools are best reserved for words, basic sentences and useful holiday phrases. For tourism brochures, newspaper reports and the rest, you will have to rely on some old-fashioned "human input".

Story from BBC NEWS:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/magazine/3186936.stm>

Published: 2003/10/13 13:43:23 GMT

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The Limitations of Automatic Translation Software

It is now generally accepted that computers (or rather automatic translation software) cannot do the work of a translator. To the reasons given in this article, i.e., computers do not "know" grammar, semantics, style (although this is not quite true¹), we can add others that the author has not commented on—perhaps because he feels they are implicit in the act of "thinking." For example, when translating, it is vital to think of the **context**, since many of the decisions regarding the words we use in a translation depend on it. If we were asked to translate the English word *cheese* into, for example, Spanish, we would most likely say "queso." The computer would probably do the same. But could we translate *cheese* using a word other than "queso"?

¹ Computational linguistics today has evolved to such an extent that there are now software programs, such as ontologies of English and other languages that provide all the necessary data for computers to be able to construct grammatically correct, meaningful sentences. Computers can thus "control" semantics fairly well, including some of the more common everyday expressions. Of all these software programs and those specifically used for compiling texts that have been analysed in depth (corpus software), the one known as *artificial language* is perfectly able to follow the main grammatical rules. As yet, however, it has not been able to master style—largely because this is a question of taste and, as we all know, "one man's meat is another man's poison."

Maybe not, but if I were to suggest a different context... Some friends are going to have their photograph taken and the person taking the picture tells them to, “*Say cheese.*” Now I’m sure you will have already thought of an alternative translation for *cheese* in your own language. In Spanish it would be something like “*patata*” (potato), or “*mirad al pajarito*” (look at the little bird in the sky)—the words you would usually use to make people smile for a photograph.

This example may seem rather forced, but in fact it isn’t, as words often appear in different contexts and, depending on the context, require different translations. If we think of how we say the same thing in different situations (when we speak to people we do not know, to friends, to colleagues at work, or to our family) we usually vary the register of our language and, as a result, our choice of words. Context, then, is vital to ensure that what we say sounds normal or **natural**. The problem with translations performed by computers is that they do not read as either normal or natural.

Another thing computers cannot deal with is **intertextuality**, i.e., reference made in the source text to other texts that are familiar to the target-text reader. Direct reference is not always made to the title of the text referred to (titles of books or films can be found in specialist web pages to see if the titles have already been translated). Sometimes only tacit reference is made. For example, take a text about children’s fascination with fictional characters. Imagine an English book that you have to translate into your own language in which the following sentence appears “*The times when Ernie and Bert entertained children are gone, and now something much more sophisticated such as Harry Potter is needed to keep their attention...*”

All computer programs (and more than one translator!) would leave these proper names in their original form since, as a general rule, names that appear in a source text are never translated. However, in this case, the translator should have realised that there is an intertextual reference in this sentence—a reference to the television series *Sesame Street*.

In Spain, when this series was first shown on television, the names “Ernie” and “Bert” were translated into Spanish. If we want our target reader in Spanish, for example, to react to our translated text in the same way as a reader of the original English text, we have to translate the names “Ernie” and “Bert” into their Spanish equivalents. This is because the names “Ernie” and “Bert” would not be familiar to viewers of the series in Spanish, whereas they would easily be recognised as “Epi y Blas.” The translator should have known, or instinctively realised, that the author of the source text was speaking of specific characters (if you enter “*Sesame Street*” or “Ernie and Bert” in Google you will find the solution). Translators should also be aware of the differences between the source-text and the target-text cultures. This brings us to a third point—computers will never be able to deal with **cultural differences**.

Apart from cultural differences that everyone can think of (for example, English *Christmas crackers*, which do not exist in other countries) there are many more subtle differences in cultural concepts such as, for example, the concept of *summer camp*. Some translators would translate the term as “campamento de verano” in Spanish, and perhaps in some contexts this would be acceptable. However, it would not be acceptable in contexts where reference is made to children going to the tuck shop at the *summer camp*, or where they are walking around the grounds of the camp. This is because a Spanish reader’s concept of a “campamento de verano” is one of pitched tents or possibly a house where children go for a few days on a school trip, but nothing as sophisticated as American *summer camps* that consist of several buildings and various sports facilities.

Computers cannot satisfactorily solve the problem of the difference in **semantic fields** in languages either. For example, in English, in the semantic field *breakfast* there are words like *scrambled egg*, *bacon*, *sausages*, and *tomato*. In the semantic field “desayuno,” in Spanish, these terms do not exist (nor does the concept or the idea). Instead, there are other words such as “cruasán,” “ensaimada,”

“galletas,” “café con leche.” Although some terms exist in both fields, e.g., *toast* and “tostadas,” there are not many. No doubt the terms in the semantic field equivalent to *breakfast* in English are very different in your language too. At first sight this fact would appear to be of little importance but when we look at the question of **textual coherence** we will see that it is.

Why can't computers deal with these problems? The reason is that computers have a basic number of inflexible rules to follow (remember the example: *cheese* = “queso”). If we behaved in the same way as computers do, i.e., limiting ourselves to fixed rules “by default,” our translations would at best have room for improvement and at worst be incomprehensible for our readers.

There is no doubt that we too choose “fixed” equivalents in our brains, but for different reasons from computers (which have no information). For example, many of us learn foreign languages by associating one word with another (*cheese* = “queso”). Our brains have taken note of these equivalents such that, like any mental process, they take the shortest, most direct route to save time and energy. If the equivalent for *cheese* is “queso,” why look for any other option?

In the example given of the photographer asking his subjects to “Say *cheese*,” our brains end up searching for another valid option as clearly “queso” causes a breakdown in communication. If instead we are looking at something more subtle as in the example of *summer camp*, our brain does not see the need to search for the “ideal” equivalent unless we have thought about what we are doing before we translate, due to which we have re-programmed our brain so that it does not look for the quickest possible solution.

On other occasions we behave like computers, using an inappropriate translation equivalent because we think that we are being “faithful” to the author of the source text (something we will discuss in a later chapter). But in fact, the opposite occurs. By trying to be faithful, we end up communicating something the reader cannot understand.

For whatever reason it may be, we often behave like computers and only take into consideration the words in a text, only sometimes do we take into consideration the sentence as a whole, and only occasionally, very occasionally, do we put ourselves in the shoes of the person who is going to read our translation—the very person we are translating for.

The title of this chapter speaks of translation as an **act of communication**. Although we are all aware of this fact, we should remember it at all times when translating. Translators should never forget that their translation (which we refer to as the target text) has an aim or **function**. **No text is ever translated just for the sake of translating it**, there is always a reason. Someone, usually the client who asks for a certain text to be translated, wants the target-language reader to understand the original message that was communicated in a language and culture s/he is not familiar with.

This might seem obvious, but we often forget *why* we are translating a text and *who* is going to read it. A single text may even be translated for different kinds of audiences. For example, the same play by Shakespeare may be translated for children, to put on stage, or for an educated audience such as English Literature undergraduates, whereby three completely different translations would be needed.

The moment in history when a text is translated can affect the translation too. I'm sure that the speeches given by Hitler, for example, were not translated in the same way at the time they were given—when they served as propaganda for his ideas in other languages and cultures—as when they are translated today, when our view of history is different. Even a word can acquire different connotations with the passage of time. Take, for example, the word *gender*. Today, because of its repeated presence in the media in association with other terms such as *gender-based violence*, *gender inequalities*, *gender norms*, etc., it has acquired connotations that never existed ten years ago. This shows that the same word should be translated differently depending on the time in history in which it is used.

Many of the problems arising during the process of translating (“Should I choose this word or that word?” “Will they understand what I’m trying to say?”) can be solved by keeping in mind **the potential target-text readers** and putting yourself in their shoes. First, however, you have to decide who your potential target-text readers are, what sort of profile they have, e.g., age group, interests, level of education, knowledge of the subject of the text, etc. You may even have to imagine your potential readers. Take, for example, the translation of Shakespeare. One translator may imagine a child s/he knows; another may imagine an actor or actress; a third, a 20-year-old university undergraduate. Of course the translation may fall into the hands of someone who does not fit your “ideal” profile, but just by translating for that potential reader and having him/her in mind at all times helps you produce a translation that is **coherent** from the point of view of translation criteria (coherence is usually only noticed when it is lacking!).



Chapter 2

CONTEXT, REGISTER, TONE: OUR “PASSIVE” KNOWLEDGE

And now for a practical exercise. In the box below you will find a series of expressions:

What a lovely surprise!	Please, convey our thanks to....
Thanks a lot	We would like to acknowledge our thanks to....
Many thanks	And, in conclusion, a word of thanks to.....
I can never repay you	Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to....
I'm extremely grateful	It was most kind of you to.....
How (very) kind!	I would like you to know how grateful I am for...
You shouldn't have...!	I'm most obliged
Ta	

As you will have noticed, all these expressions have something in common—the message is the same, they express gratitude. Why, then, are there so many versions? If you look more closely, you will see that the expressions in the right-hand column are more appropriate for thanking someone for something in writing, while those in the left-hand column are more often spoken. This doesn't mean you can't use the expressions in the right-hand column when speaking—it's just that those in the left-hand column are more colloquial, more what a person we are talking to would expect to hear. The other expressions are of a more formal register—what you would expect in a written text unless transcribing a dialogue or the spoken word.

If we were to ask ourselves why there are so many ways of saying the same thing, we would come to the conclusion that, depending on the context, i.e., the situation in which the message is communicated, we would say things in one way or another.

This brings us to our next exercise. Think of a context for two of the expressions in the right-hand column and two of the expressions in the left-hand column. Try to describe, in as much detail as possible, the context within which you would use each expression, saying who the people are who are doing the talking and doing the listening, what their relationship is, what the context is, how they are communicating (face-to-face, in writing, etc.). For example “Many thanks”: because I can't get to the box office before it shuts, my best friend - both of us are in our late 20s - has offered to collect the tickets I bought for a concert we are going to and I say: “*Many thanks.*”

Once you have described the context, ask yourself “What would the same people in the same context say in my language?” and write down the equivalent in your language... In the above example for “Many thanks” in Spanish, we could simply say “*gracias*” or “*muchas gracias,*” but I don't want you to use the usual equivalent of the word in your language “Thanks” or any nouns or verbs or derivatives of verbs such as “to thank,” “thankful,” “to be grateful,” “gratitude,” etc.

Now do the exercise.



This exercise may have proved a little more difficult than you expected. The reason is that we are used to using the same expression all the time—normally the first one that comes to mind and the one that is closest to the English. It is the one that our brain has stored as “equivalent”; remember *cheese* = “queso,” so *thanks* = “*gracias.*”

In fact, if, instead of asking you to do this particular exercise, I had asked you to translate all the expressions in the text box, you would probably have used your language equivalent for *thanks* and derivatives of verbs like *to thank* for almost all of them—which just goes to show how much

vocabulary, how many expressions, and how much linguistic knowledge we have in our brains that we never use because we use the first word that comes into our head!

If we were to always do this—use the first word that comes into our head—we would not do the language we are translating into any favours, because we would never use expressions such as: “You’re a brick,” “Bless you!” “You’re too good,” “I really appreciate it,” etc. The aim of the exercise that you just did is precisely to show that we must make an effort to change the way our brains normally work so as to activate all the passive knowledge that we have stored in the back of our minds. Once we have activated that knowledge, then of course we still have to decide which words or expressions are the most appropriate to use depending on the different factors affecting the particular text we are translating. It’s not that we have to think of the most outlandish or the most creative term to use—we simply have to be aware of the fact that a huge amount of useful knowledge we already possess often goes to waste.

This exercise also shows that if you had translated the expressions without taking into consideration the context, you would probably have used your language equivalent of “thanks” much more often than you in fact did, and your translation would not have sounded as natural as the words and expressions that you instead chose to use in a particular context. By imagining the context in which the expressions are used, you effectively put yourself in the shoes of the reader (or in this case the author) and thereby knew what s/he would expect to hear/read in that situation.

Imagine, for example, that the context we have chosen for the expression “*Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to...*” is a letter written by a 40-year-old employee leaving a company for which he has worked for 15 years, having worked his way up in the firm to a post of great responsibility. With all this information in mind we would be able to find the right register (standard to formal) and the right tone (close to fellow workers, but somewhat distant, given his position). However, we might still translate this expression into Spanish as “*finalmente, me gustaría expresar mi gratitud...*” Although a Spaniard would be able to understand the translated text, it would not sound natural because it follows the English structure too closely. A more acceptable rendering would be “*no querría terminar sin expresar [a todos mis colaboradores] mi gratitud por la inestimable ayuda [que me han prestado durante todos estos años]...*” (back translation: I would not want to end without expressing my gratitude [to my colleagues] for the invaluable help that they have given me all these years). What appears in square brackets is what I have added to show you how, when something is communicated naturally, it automatically assumes the correct sentence structure. In the case of Spanish and English, sentence structure rarely coincides because Spanish syntax follows different rules. Using the same context given above, translate the expression “*Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to...*” into your own language. Did you notice how different the sentence structure in your language is from the English sentence structure when you communicate naturally?

If we are able to notice whether the translation of an expression like the one above sounds natural or not (in register, tone, and syntax within the context it was expressed), imagine the effect on a complete text if these factors are not taken into consideration. When translating, it is absolutely vital that you do not lose sight of the context and mentally position yourself in that context so as to be able to communicate a message that sounds natural given the particular circumstance.



Chapter 3

TRANSLATION UNITS

When people are asked what they find most difficult about translation, they often say “the words” (or they might say “vocabulary” or “terminology”). It is quite normal to see a word as a problem if we do not know what it means or how to express it in the target language. But when this happens, we tend to focus all our attention on that word and forget that words never exist in a vacuum. If they did, there would be no such thing as “context.”

Words always appear within a context, alongside other words that work together with them to give them meaning. We are talking now of **coherence** and **cohesion**.

Again, I will use a metaphor to explain these two concepts. Imagine that you want to knit a wool sweater and each strand of wool in the sweater is a word or term, a phrase or a sentence, i.e., a segment of a text. When all the strands of wool are knitted together they make a sweater. If we suddenly change the colour of the wool in one place or another, the overall appearance of the sweater will change and, unless we have changed the colour for a particular reason, the sweater will not look as nice as it might have done. There are “faults” in it. The sweater can be worn equally well but it will not be quite as attractive.

This is what often happens with written texts. We constantly find texts with “faults” in them (spelling, grammar, typographical errors, etc.). And even when we cannot find any “fault” in particular, we can still feel that, for some reason, the text “isn’t quite right.” When we can’t put our finger on anything in particular that accounts for this feeling, it is usually a problem of textual cohesion and coherence. To continue with the metaphor... If the sweater you are knitting is all one colour it should not be too difficult to knit once you have decided which stitch to use, the type of wool, etc. However, if you decide to knit a sweater with a design or letters on it, then things begin to get a little more complicated. Working with wools of different colours you have to know exactly what stitch is in which colour to make the design. Instead of knitting something you could knit almost with your eyes closed (just like when we write a text ourselves, we never have to think about how to put our words together, we just do it “automatically”), now you have to pay a lot of attention to what you are doing.

If we apply our metaphor to translation, things become even more complicated because translators are given a text-sweater that has already been knitted, but with no indications as to how it was knitted. They are then asked to copy it using different strands (=cohesive mechanisms) of a different type of material (=another language). If, for example, the material used in the original sweater is wool (= English), and the sweater has to be copied in cotton (= your language), depending on why you are knitting the sweater (=target text) and who is going to wear the sweater (= target-text reader) some colours may have to be changed (= taste/expectations of the reader).

The difference in the strands of the language-material used to knit our text-sweater (a difference that can cause problems when you are knitting the same pattern with strands of wool of different thicknesses resulting in having to change the way you knit the sweater, whereby it is knitted to scale) clearly illustrates the concept of cohesion. Each language has its own cohesive mechanisms which differ from those of other languages.

In English, for example, it is acceptable to repeat a word a number of times in a text. Repetition gives readers the feeling of a cohesive whole when one sentence and the next refer to the same thing. In other words, it shows that they are closely linked. In Spanish, however, there are different means of creating the sensation of a cohesive whole—it is done by repeating ideas, not words. Repeating words in Spanish impoverishes the style of a text, due to which synonyms, paraphrasing, anaphora etc. are used instead. Similarly, English uses many more possessives than Spanish. For example “*I have to do my homework*” or “*It touched my face.*” In Spanish we would say “*tengo que*

hacer los deberes” (back translation: I have to do the homework) or “*me tocó la cara*” (literally: to me it touched the face). This is because we think it obvious that the homework and the face belong to the person who is speaking. When it is not so, we specify who they belong to using morphological markers: “*tengo que hacer los deberes de mi hermano, porque le ayudo cada tarde*” (literally: I have to do the homework of my brother because to him I help each afternoon).

To create the same effect in the target-text reader as in the reader of the source text, each language uses very different cohesive devices. If the translator is not aware of this fact, s/he will end up reproducing the cohesive devices of the original text in the target text and the text will “sound odd,” although we may not be able to pinpoint exactly why.

In the text box below you will find the “academic” definition of cohesion and the main cohesive devices used in English:

Definition: Cohesion is the means whereby each element (word, clause, or sentence) in a text is linked to other elements in the text. It serves to signal resources used to repeat, vary, or link the elements of a text.

Cohesive devices

1. Exophoric reference (making reference to elements outside the text: intertextuality; e.g., “as Calderón de la Barca said, ‘Life is but a dream’”)
2. Endophoric reference (making reference to elements within a text)
 - 2.1. Cataphoric (making forward reference to elements in a text : deictic—adverbs of time and place, articles, demonstratives, personal pronouns)
 - 2.2. Anaphoric (making reference to elements already mentioned in the text: deictic, synonymy, hyperonymy, knowledge of the world, e.g., “Barack Obama... The President...”)
3. Recurrence (repetition of elements to emphasize, to continue the discourse, etc.; e.g., “The public applauded enthusiastically. The applause lasted ten minutes...”)
4. Parallelism (repetition of elements or identical structures, e.g., “All this we will do. All this we can do.”)
5. Paraphrase (repeating an idea using different words)
6. Ellipsis (omission of elements, e.g., Does she like spinach? No, she doesn’t [like spinach]; Who is going to the concert? Peter and I [are going to the concert])
7. Connection (relationship between units in a text that is signalled by using conjunctions, adverbs, punctuation)
 - 7.1. Conjunction (copulative conjunctions denote an addition, cause, consequence, or supposition: e.g., *as, and, as, both, because, even, for, if, that, then, since, seeing, so*)
 - 7.2. Disjunction (disjunctive conjunctions denote opposition of meaning: *or, nor, either, neither, than, though, although, yet, but, except, whether, lest, unless, save, provided, notwithstanding, whereas*)
 - 7.3. Real condition (cause and effect)
 - 7.4. Hypothetical condition (conditionals)
 - 7.5. Contrast (adversative conjunctions denote opposition of meaning: *but, however, nevertheless, yet*; concessive conjunctions are used to concede a given point: *though, although, even though, while, and even if*)
 - 7.6. Place and time (place conjunctions include *where* and *in which*; time conjunctions indicate the time that an event takes place: *when, as soon as, before, after, by the time, by*)

Now let us look at the definition of **coherence** and the devices used to make a text coherent:

Definition: Coherence links the concepts in a text thus making it meaningful.

Comments: A reader always presumes that a text is coherent. The text is built round certain concepts: objects, situations, events, actions, agents, states, attributes, places, time, instruments, causes, functions, etc.

Coherence devices:

1. Repetition. The propositions in a text are linked by repeating key elements.
2. Progression. The text develops as a result of the constant introduction of new information.
3. Absence of contradiction. No elements contradict elements that have already been introduced (at least not in content).
4. Relation. The events referred to are related to the world (real or imaginary) that is represented.

One of the things we translators should think about is the belief that readers always expect to be able to understand a text and that a text is coherent within pre-established “rules of the game.”

For example, when we go to the cinema we know that what we are seeing is not “real,” i.e., the people on the screen are actors and actresses who have shot the scene hundreds of times, and that the blood and gore we see is make-up. Even so, we pay to be able to enjoy seeing what is not real and we interact with the characters and identify with the situations as if they *were* real. It is not that we are being silly—it’s just that we have a tacit agreement that, for the duration of the film we are watching, we are going to accept the rules of the game, i.e., I, the spectator, accept that what I see on the screen is real. However, in return I have the right to make certain demands. If, for example, a microphone suddenly appeared on screen because the film editor had forgotten to edit it out, the public would immediately show its disapproval by whistling or protesting in different ways, writing negative critiques of the film, etc.

The rules of the game are different depending on the film we are watching. If I am watching *Lord of the Rings*, I would expect to see hobbits and strange beings with supernatural powers. But if I am watching the film *Titanic* and a hobbit suddenly appears on deck, I would be most upset because hobbits do not form part of the universe that I believe the film I am watching belongs to, given that the film *Titanic* is based on fact not fiction. I would feel that the tacit agreement has been broken and I would probably get up from my seat and leave the cinema. I would say that I had not enjoyed the film and I would not recommend it to others. However, if that same situation (a *hobbit* in the film *Titanic*) were to occur in a film directed by Monty Python or Mel Brooks, it *would* be acceptable because the film would be a comedy and spectators would expect strange things to happen to make them laugh.

Exactly the same thing happens with written texts. Nobody begins reading a text thinking that they are not going to be able to understand it—even when the text is a “literary experiment” such as in Ionesco’s theatre of the absurd. In this case readers expect the text to be absurd and accept the rules of the game. They would only be surprised and upset if they did not know what to expect in Ionesco’s plays or if they did not know that his intention is to be absurd, i.e., if they are not aware of the rules of the game. Translators must therefore think about what the rules of the game are, what readers expect, what tacit agreements they come to, etc.

All of these examples show us that a **text as a whole** is a **translation unit**.

In an ideal world, we would be able to remember the entire content of a source text so as to be able to translate it naturally into another language without looking at, or stopping to focus on, specific segments of the source text. In that way we could be sure that we would not be carried away by the cohesive devices of the source language. But because we are human and our memories are limited, we translate our texts in “bits.” Nevertheless, we should never lose sight of the fact that the “bits” of text we translate are linked directly to other “bits,” and we should try to create the impression in our target audience that our translated text is a coherent, cohesive text that fulfils the norms of the target-text language.

It is important, then, that the way in which we go about our translation is as that described in the next chapter.



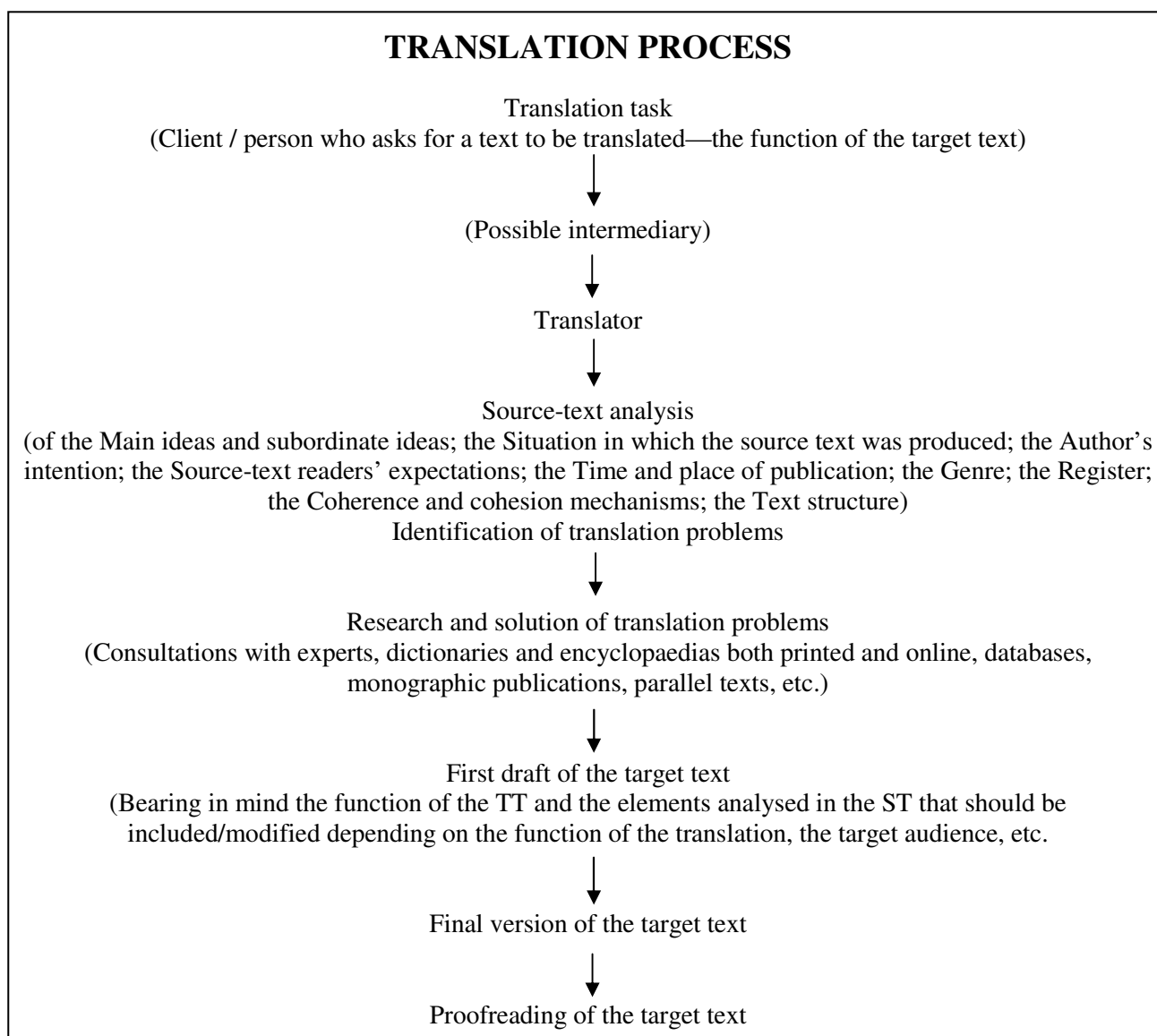
Chapter 4

THE STAGES OF THE TRANSLATION PROCESS

When someone who has not thought about translation very much sets about translating, what s/he usually does is to read part of the original text (just how much depends on the time available and the interest s/he has in the subject of the text) and then immediately puts pen to paper (or turns on the computer) and begins to translate. S/he may or may not consult a bilingual dictionary for the translation of a particular word s/he does not understand in the part of the text that s/he is translating.

In this chapter, I am going to explain why this approach to translation does not work and why it makes a lot more work for the translator while at the same time producing a target text that is less than perfect.

The text box below shows the different stages of the translation process from the beginning (when the client decides the original text needs to be translated) to the end (when the translator submits the translated text to the client).



When the client, or person asking for a text to be translated, asks a translator to translate a text, s/he already has a specific aim in mind. Indeed, if s/he had not thought about why the text needed to be translated or who was going to read it, s/he would never have thought of getting it translated. This may seem a rather silly thing to say but in fact clients often have not given the question much thought. When they give a translator a text to translate only rarely do they specify the **translation brief**, i.e., rarely do they say why they want the text translated and who the target text is for. It's not that they want to keep this information to themselves, nor that they do not know why—it's just they do not know that this information is relevant and indeed necessary in order for the translator to do a good job (the exceptions to this rule are experienced clients such as publishing houses who not only provide a translation brief specifying the age range and socio-cultural background of the potential readers, but also accompany the translation brief with a style sheet).

In the absence of the necessary information, it is the translator's responsibility to ask or find out what the translated text is to be used for. Obviously you have to be diplomatic and find a skilful way of asking the client so that s/he does not think you are incompetent but rather that you are showing interest in ensuring the target text is as close as possible to what s/he expects. Should there be an intermediary between the translator and the client, it is important to find out what the *client* wants the translation for, not what the intermediary thinks s/he wants it for.

Once the translator has received a copy of the text to be translated and the information necessary to be able to imagine the ideal reader of the target text, the first thing to do is to read the entire text to get a clear idea of the context within which each element of the text works and, after a second reading, analyse the text. A text analysis involves thinking about (and if necessary, especially the first few times you translate, making a note of) the following points:

First, we have to bear in mind **the reaction of the source-text reader to the original text**, because this is the reaction you, the translator, wish to evoke in the target-text reader.

Secondly, we should try to work out **the main ideas and the subordinate ideas** and whether there is anything in the text that is not explicitly expressed but implicitly understood (in which case it should not be made any clearer than it is in the original text, although we have to ensure that our translated text makes the target-text reader understand the same information as the source-text reader).

Thirdly, we should think about whether there is anything special about **the conditions in which the original text was composed** that may be worth taking into account when translating it. For example, it may be that the text to be translated is not a source text but a transcription of a paper presented at a conference that has already been translated into another language (it would not be the first time that teachings in Tibetan have been translated orally into English and the written transcription of the oral translation presented to be translated into another language as if it were the original text).

Moreover, if an original text is the transcription of an oral presentation, it will probably contain several markers of oral speech (repetition with different filler words; a more colloquial register so as to get closer to the audience; non-verbal communication which, of course, will not be present in the written version such as when the speaker made a gesture or pointed to something in the room; references to a situation in the conference or the culture of the place in which the conference was held that would have to be explained to the reader). The presence of these markers would have to be contrasted with the expectations of the target reader who, if s/he is to receive the text, does not expect to find "Mmm..., well..., yeah..." On the other hand, the intentions of the source-text author must be taken into account (what s/he meant to say, what emotions and or ideas s/he wanted to provoke in the reader); the expectations of the target-text reader (whether these expectations are fulfilled or whether, on the other hand, the author has exaggerated to provoke his audience or make

them laugh, etc.); the time and place the text was first published if relevant (for example, a 15th century text must be understood in a historical and social context that is completely different from that of today due to which the translator may have to research how people lived in those days or what was then considered to be “normal”).

Fourthly, we should note **the genre the text belongs to** (the overall text structure, the format of the text, whether it is a newspaper article, recipe, medical report, web site, etc.) to see whether or not the characteristic features of this genre are the same as the equivalent genre in the target-text language (if not, a decision has to be made as to what should be done, bearing in mind the target-text function) and to see if the function of the source text (informative, argumentative, operative, exhortative, aesthetic, etc.) coincides with the target-text function or whether any changes have to be made (not in the information load or the message, but to the way in which the message is communicated by using one method of translation instead of another).

Fifthly, we should make a note of **the mechanisms of coherence and cohesion** in the source text so as not to reproduce them in the target text.

This brings us to the sixth point which is **the identification of translation problems**. Translation problems should be identified before starting to translate so that when we finish producing the first rough copy of our target text we can concentrate on correcting the target language using the appropriate style, cohesive mechanisms, etc. that make the text sound natural and spontaneous.

The text boxes below show different types of translation problems and some strategies that can be used to solve them.

TRANSLATION PROBLEMS

The types of problems found at different stages of the translation process are:

- 1. Comprehension:** Problems that arise when an element in the source text is not understood:
 - ◆Linguistic (terms, expressions, sentence structure, cohesive devices, etc.)
 - ◆Extralinguistic: cultural (i.e., cultural items that differ between the two cultures involved in the translation); encyclopaedic (world knowledge, e.g., not knowing how to refer to the city of *Geneva* in your own language) or thematic (i.e., not understanding a concept associated with a particular field of knowledge such as Law, Economics, Science, Dharma...)
- 2. Transfer:** Problems that are caused by elements not recognised as possibly giving rise to calques or interferences when transferred into the target-text language or culture. These problems arise as a result of differences between languages at lexical, morphosyntactic, stylistic, and textual levels:
 - ◆Linguistic (terms, expressions, or sentence structure that give rise to calques or interference in language transfer)
 - ◆Extralinguistic (cultural items that may seem odd in the target-text culture, e.g., inexistent customs)
- 3. Reformulation:** Problems that arise when the translator does not know how to express something s/he has understood in the source text in the target-text language:
 - ◆Linguistic (problems of text production, register, lexical or syntactic resources, mode, field, tenor, dialect, etc.)
 - ◆Extralinguistic (problems finding the most appropriate method of explaining, adapting, substituting, etc. cultural, thematic, or encyclopaedic elements in a text)
- 4. Decision-making:** Problems that arise when the translation brief is not taken into account nor, as a result, the target-text audience. These problems have to do with the author’s intention, presuppositions, and implicit elements of the source text, the characteristics of the target-text audience, and the context within which the translation is done.

STRATEGIES TO SOLVE TRANSLATION PROBLEMS

1. Problems of comprehension

◆Linguistic:

- Consult source-language monolingual dictionaries; consult speakers of the source language; find parallel texts in the source language.
- Work out the structure of the text; think about how the text develops and how the information given is linked; separate the main ideas from the subordinate ideas; use logical thinking, think more about the ideas in the text than the text format; imagine the events described in the text.

◆Extralinguistic:

- Consult monographic publications, encyclopaedias, databases, Internet.
- Consult speakers of the source language or experts in the subject the text deals with; find parallel texts in the source-text language.

2. Problems of transfer

◆Linguistic: consult monographic publications that deal with calques between source-text and target-text language pairs, target-text language dictionaries of usage.

◆Reformulate out loud—imagine that you are explaining yourself to someone, etc. in order to make sure you are aware of a problem of transfer (you may not be aware of interference from the source-text language).

◆Extralinguistic: consult speakers of the target language; acquire more encyclopaedic and cultural knowledge; find parallel texts in the target language.

3. Problems of reformulation

◆Linguistic: consult target-text language dictionaries (dictionaries of usage; reference dictionaries; thesaurus; books on how to write and on style in writing) style guides, grammar books, parallel texts, use analogy. It is important to read texts of recognised quality in the target-text language to improve reformulation skills.

◆Ask yourself what *you* would say in a particular communicative situation; put yourself in the shoes of the source-text author; think of the target reader; reformulate out loud; repeat the same item a number of times in different ways; try to be natural; don't trust words and structures that seem "odd" in the target language; avoid words that are close to the source-text language; avoid the same word order as in the source text, etc.

◆Extralinguistic: choose the most appropriate solution taking into account the function of the target text and the expectations of the target audience; consult different methods of translation.

4. Decision-making problems

Consult the client; put yourself in the shoes of the target-text reader; give the target text to a potential target-text reader; think about the translation brief; think about the function of the text and the expectations of the target-text audience.

I know from experience that it is difficult not to be tempted to solve problems as we come across them in our texts. That is why I am now going to give you a number of good reasons why we should not do this.

If we solve problems as we translate, we will waste a lot of time going backwards and forwards to the same reference source at different times during our translation. If we always use the same dictionary, this may not seem to be too much of a problem, but if we need to do research so as to ensure that the language and the style of our translated text is appropriate, or if we have to go, say, to a library to consult some of our reference sources, then things become more complicated.

If, instead of online or printed reference sources we need to consult an expert—someone we can, and should, consult to clarify questions concerning the content of the original text that we do not

understand (and, remember, it is not a question of more or less understanding a text but thoroughly understanding what the author of the original text wants to say and how s/he says it)—then clearly we cannot expect that person to be at our beck and call while we translate. Even if that person were willing and patient enough to answer all our questions we would lose sight of the overall cohesion of our text if we asked a lot of different questions at different times. Remember that the ideas in a text are interwoven (or knitted) together as a whole, and we cannot separate them out artificially if we want to give our target text the same appearance of a cohesive whole as that of the original (I am talking here about fairly long texts, but obviously if the original text is a page long, or less, then our process of research will be a lot simpler).

It is true that, as we translate, problems arise that we did not anticipate. This is because they are the kind of problems that come up as we write our target text and there is little we can do about them until we come across them. They cannot be foreseen. Those that *can* be foreseen should be solved *before* we begin to translate.

If, while we translate, we try to solve problems as they arise, a funny thing happens. Our text “springs leaks.” Let me explain. If you are quietly sitting at home and suddenly see the roof is leaking, you would immediately focus on the leak and fix it. This is because you can see the leak and you can’t ignore it. But if there was a sudden downpour and the house began to flood, you would probably forget about the leak because you would be more worried about saving yourself, the furniture, etc. Dealing with the flood would become your first priority.

What does this tell us about translation? Well, if we were an author writing a text we would automatically express ourselves naturally and would therefore focus our attention on the language we use, the style, the format of our text, whether or not we are effectively communicating the feelings or knowledge we want to communicate to our readers, etc. But if we are writing and trying to solve translation problems at one and the same time, because the translation problems are more important and need our full attention, our target text begins to “spring leaks” and our language begins to suffer. We begin to make mistakes—spelling mistakes, grammar mistakes, etc.—that we would never have made if we had not been obsessed with finding the right information, word, or phrase to solve a particular problem. We forget, too, the normal, spontaneous cohesive devices used in our native languages and we allow ourselves to be duped into using the same devices as the source-text language. We find it difficult to “get away” from the original text. So much so that we can sometimes even convince ourselves that an expression we would normally never use in our native language *is* normal. The fact that you think the meaning of the expression is clear, even if it isn’t “normal” usage, is no excuse.

Take this example: if I were to go to a Spanish friend’s birthday party and say “*por muchos años*” (back translation: ‘for many years’), he would understand what I mean to say, although he might think “What a funny way to wish me ‘Happy birthday.’” Because I live in Catalonia, he might think, “Ah, I know, she has literally translated the Catalan form of wishing a person a happy birthday ‘*per molts anys*’ into Spanish.” Either way “*por muchos años*” is neither natural nor correct in Spanish, and it is certainly not a good translation of “Happy birthday” (= “*Felicidades*”).

Now, a word of advice. If you think that your translation keeps dangerously close to the original, i.e., that it is the kind of translation a computer might produce, then it is not a good translation. Think about that “added value” we mentioned before. Why employ translators if they do not give their clients that added value? Automatic translation services would be enough. If in fact they were, then more and more our work would become unnecessary.

We are bombarded every day with oral and written texts in our native languages that are full of anglicisms that affect not only words but also sentence structure. This happens at least in Spanish and French, whereas I really don’t know if that is the case in your own language. Anyway, translators must be aware of their role in society in “fixating” the use of words, just like any other profession that works with languages (e.g., writers and newspaper reporters). It is not enough to say of a word “Everyone knows what it means” and leave it at that.

If we classify the translation problems that we have identified prior to beginning our translation in accordance with the reference sources we have available to solve them (whereby we solve all the problems associated with each reference source at the same time), and we solve the problems before we start translating, then we can be sure that we will be able to produce a target text that reads naturally, is free of errors, and is a coherent and cohesive unit that the target-text audience will easily understand.

Finally, after writing the first draft of your translated text, you should set it aside and let it “rest” for a day or two. The idea is to “break the spell” of the source text (the tendency to keep too close to the source-text structure) before starting on the final version of your translation in which you will be checking the language used and ensuring that you have effectively fulfilled the translation brief.

The last stage of the translation process is the proof reading of your text. This is when you should make sure that the target text contains all the information given in the original text (e.g., that dates, figures, numbers, names etc. have been copied correctly, units of measure translated, etc.). It is also when you read the text for the last time in order to check the style and look for any points that may have been missed during the different stages of the translation process.



Chapter 5

THE CONCEPT OF FIDELITY

All translators that have thought a little about translation want to be faithful to the author. Nobody, when they start a translation, sets out to see what changes they can make in the source text because they do not like what the author says. Nevertheless, there is a general concern about being unfaithful to the author. This anxiety is counterproductive when faithfulness to the author means that a translator sticks so closely to the source text that in the end s/he produces a text that target readers do not understand or that at the very least sounds strange to them—even though they are not exactly sure why.

I'm sure we all agree that if a translation is not meaningful or sounds “odd,” then it is not faithful to the author. It is quite the opposite in fact because it means that the author has not been able to communicate his/her message to the readers. I'm convinced that if we were to ask any author what is the most important thing that s/he wants from a translation, it would be to have his/her readers understand what s/he wanted to tell them (otherwise if s/he had known how to speak their language s/he would have told them him/herself).

What happens, in fact, is that many of the translators who believe that being faithful to the author is keeping as close as possible to the words and the sentence structures of the original text, so as not to “interfere” or modify the text in any way, end up acting like computers. In other words, they produce translations like those of an automatic translator. In fact one of the features of automatic translators is that they receive data and produce data without using common sense or taking into consideration all those points I have drawn your attention to in this guide.

When we act like a computer we use the wrong equivalents, and although we may think we are being particularly faithful to the author of the original text by doing so, we are in fact doing the opposite and producing a target text that the target reader cannot easily understand.

By bearing in mind the principles of translation commented upon in this guide, and following the steps set out in Chapter 4, you should be able to produce a translation that is faithful to the original and its author by effectively communicating his/her message.

Since many people who have never translated, and who have never even thought about what translation involves, are familiar with the expression “*Traduttore, traditore*” (“*Translator, traitor*”) and say it is impossible to translate well, I think it is now time for us to think a little about these commonly held beliefs (or should I say superstitions?). Imagine you have to translate the word *breakfast*. Initially there would appear to be no problem translating this word and no doubt you would translate it with an equivalent in your language for the first meal of the day. Although this translation would often be acceptable, it may sometimes be necessary to give more details. This is because, when reading *breakfast*, an Englishman would think of scrambled eggs, sausages, bacon, fried tomato, and a cup of tea, whereas a person sharing your language and culture would probably think of something very different in association with the first meal of the day. If the sentence we have to translate is just *he had breakfast*, and little importance is given to the event in the text, then your translation equivalent of *breakfast* as the first meal of the day would be acceptable. However, if the sentence goes further and says “*what he missed most was the smell and the taste of those lovely homemade breakfasts*” a more acceptable translation would include those elements of your translation equivalent of *breakfast* that appeal to the target-text readers' senses and evoke feelings of pleasure and nostalgia. Or maybe you would prefer to be explicit about some elements of an English breakfast that are missed by the character, such as “*the smell of bacon and sausages.*” It may be argued that this translation is not faithful to the original because words have been added, but I would argue that these words, or rather concepts, were in the mind of the author, and, what is even more important, are in the mind of an English reader when s/he reads the word “*breakfast.*”

Remember that our ultimate objective is that our target reader gets the same information, perceptions, etc. that the original reader got by reading the original text.

Depending on the reader and the translation brief, the strategies we use to translate will vary because our objectives are different, i.e., the intercultural transfer of text elements will differ depending on the knowledge readers have of the subject at hand (so information may have to be added, points clarified, etc.).

What I want you to notice is that **if we focus our attention on the words to be translated in a text, we needn't bother to translate.** It would be quicker and more effective to use a good automatic translator and then, if necessary, proofread the final text. The result would not be the best but we would have saved ourselves a lot of time and effort. However, if we want to get our target-text audience to feel, understand, and assimilate what a source-text reader would feel, understand, and assimilate, then we have to go beyond the words to the underlying concepts in a text. This usually causes suspicion, and the question arises as to where the line is to be drawn between adding words to produce the desired effect in the reader and adding one's own ideas and concepts. The answer lies in the translator's common sense and professionalism.

We should not forget that translation is a mental activity and that translators, like any other human being, have an influence on their texts (I am sure this is easier for Dharma translators to understand than perhaps other translators). We are continually interpreting and applying our "subjectivity" and our "mental filters" to everything, whether we like it or not. Having said that, we must try to be objective. We must try to put ourselves in the shoes of the author or at least use our common sense to ensure that we are not changing, adding to, or omitting any of the information, data, or message that the author of the original text wished to communicate.

The use of square brackets

In this context, I would like to comment on the use of square brackets, since Dharma translators tend to use them when they are not necessary. The idea is that, when using the communicative method of translation, the reader of the target text should understand the same message as the original reader. Therefore, if the subject of the sentence is not repeated in the source language (because the source-text reader understands that it is the subject even it isn't repeated), whereas in the target language it needs to be repeated for the sake of clarity, there is no need to show that we have added something by using square brackets. This is because we are only making the target reader understand the same message as the original reader; we are not adding ideas or information to the author's original message.

For instance, if a Tibetan reader reads "not observed" (*dmigs med*) in Tibetan and understands "not observed to be truly existent," when translating "not observed" into English we also have to make sure that the English reader understands "not observed to be truly existent." In this case there is no need to use square brackets because we are not changing the message, nor are we adding any meaning that was not clear to the original reader.

In fact the only place in which square brackets are necessary is that, when quoting something someone either said or wrote, we add something inside the quote in order to clarify the meaning for the reader, such as a subject or an object that was not written or said because it was understood by the audience at the time the original message was transmitted. This use of square brackets is also made when not translating, for instance by journalists. An example of their proper usage would be the following: "The court decision for him [Kaplan] to be extradited was taken on Monday."

On the other hand, on the rare occasions when the literal translation method or the philological translation method are used (see the definitions in the text box below), since the target text cannot be read or understood alone without the original text, and since the target reader is assumed to know the original language at least slightly in order to be able to understand the translation, then, and only then, are square brackets used to show the reader that some grammatical features have been "added"

to the other language's grammar structure. However such cases would be very unusual since most Dharma translations are not done for the target reader to learn Tibetan, but are done with the objective of the target reader understanding the message of the source text, whereby the most appropriate translation method is the communicative one.

Translation methods

An important aspect of the concept of fidelity is the method of translation used, this being defined as "the development of the translation process in accordance with the translator's objectives." There are four basic methods of translation:

Literal translation: this method focuses exclusively on the interlingual transfer of linguistic elements in the source text (word for word, phrase for phrase, sentence for sentence) by translating the morphology and syntax into the target language, i.e., a simple interlingual "transcodification" e.g., publishing a bilingual version of the *Bodhicaryavatara* (the Tibetan on the left-hand page and the English on the right-hand page) to help readers with a little knowledge of the Tibetan language read the source text as well as improve their knowledge of Tibetan. The final version in the target language would not work as a target text on its own in that it could not be read and understood without knowing a little Tibetan so as to be able to read the source text at the same time.

Philological translation: the aim of this method is to produce an erudite, annotated critical translation with commentaries on linguistic and historical items. It focuses on a scholarly public e.g., translating the *Bodhicaryavatara* for scholars who are going to study not only its contents but also its language or the cultural aspects that appear in it.

Interpretative-communicative translation: the aim of this method is to maintain the function of the source text in the target text and to produce the same effect e.g., translating the *Bodhicaryavatara* for those who live in accordance with the Dharma and want to apply the principles contained in this book to their daily lives.

Free translation: the aim is to adapt the translation, for example, to a different socio-cultural context, to a more informal discourse, from poetry to prose, etc., eliminating elements from the text if necessary, e.g., translating the *Bodhicaryavatara* for Western adolescents who have had no contact with the Dharma, or translating Shakespeare for children.

Sometimes the translator, when considering the method of translation to be used for his/her text, makes the mistake of asking the client what kind of translation s/he wants. I say "makes the mistake" because the client usually does not know what methods of translation exist and what they involve. However, most clients think (wrongly) that a "literal" translation is the most reliable because it translates word for word and thus ensures faithfulness to the original.

Let me share an interesting story with you. Several years ago, a group of students in their final year of studying legal translation in the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting where I teach, decided to write their final year dissertation on the client's concept of a translation brief. They visited a large number of solicitors' offices in Barcelona and asked the lawyers there to complete a questionnaire. Amongst other things they asked them what method of translation they would like used for their translations. They were asked to choose between a literal or a communicative translation. All replied that they would prefer a literal translation. A few months later, the students presented the lawyers with two target texts that had been translated from the same source text (a legal document). One was a literal translation of the source text, while the other had been translated using the interpretative-communicative method. When the lawyers were asked which translation they considered the most acceptable, all chose the communicative one. In this way the students

demonstrated that the “client,” or general public, do not know what they mean when they say a “literal” translation—they believe that *literal* means faithful to the original.

Now that we can recognise these differences and have understood that a translation can be faithful even if we use other methods of translation, we are free to use the most appropriate method for each occasion. In fact, more often than not, the interpretive-communicative approach is used for most translation tasks and fulfils the function of most target texts.

One last point about literal translation. If we painstakingly try to keep to the vocabulary and syntax of the original text, our text will read like a translation, not an original text. This is again a point of debate—should a translation read like an original text or like a translation? To answer this question we should remember what we said in Chapter 3—there is a tacit agreement between the author and the reader. The reader knows perfectly well that the text s/he is reading is a translation, the same as the cinema audience knows that what they are watching on the screen is not real. Readers do not *want* to be reminded that it is not the original author who is communicating with them. They prefer to believe that they are reading the original text because, if it hadn’t been for the fact they cannot speak the language, they *would* have read the original version. The target text must therefore read naturally, without any breakdowns in communication. It’s not a question of deceiving the reader. It is a question of respecting the tacit agreement that exists between the translator and the reader (which will vary depending on the translation method used).



Chapter 6

REFERENCE SOURCES

If we want to translate well, our choice of reference sources regarding the languages we use is of great importance. Translators cannot, and indeed have no need to, know everything about the languages they are working with. They need only two skills: the ability to understand texts written in the source-text language and the ability to write in their own native language.

Having said that, they must be able to research anything they do not know or cannot remember if these two skills are to be developed to their maximum effect. Translators should not skimp on the amount of time and effort taken to do research in order to be sure that they fully understand the source text and to ensure that the target text is written correctly and reads naturally.

No translator who is worth his/her salt would not consult several information sources while translating. Dictionaries of many kinds, such as a thesaurus, are basic tools. Sometimes a word you know just doesn't come to mind. That is when it is useful to consult a dictionary of synonyms, that is, a thesaurus (if you can think of a synonym or a similar idea), or a combinatory dictionary, such as the *Bbi Dictionary of English Word Combinations*, when you feel that there must be a word that better describes something but you do not know it, yet you remember other words that usually go together with it, or when you are looking for collocations.

It is difficult to choose between the different reference sources available because there are so many on the market and everyone's needs are different. Moreover, in the case of this guide, for a multilingual audience, it is not possible to provide a list of advised reference dictionaries or other types of "tools."

On the other hand, the information available on Internet is very useful if it is used properly. For instance, you should know how to check whether a web page is a reliable source of information, and know how to use directories, thesauruses, search engines, etc, and what they can be used for. Since there are literally thousands of different resources available on-line and a wide range of literature describing each of them, I will not go into this subject in any more depth.



Chapter 7

COMMENTS ON THE QUESTIONNAIRE

In this last chapter we are going to go over your answers to the questionnaire at the beginning of this guide. I am not interested in checking whether or not you gave the right answer—I just want you to see how your own ideas about translation have changed after reading this guide. If this guide has done what I intended it to do, then after reading it you should have changed a number of your preconceived ideas about translation and improved your knowledge in other areas. At least I sincerely hope so!

I'd like you now to read what you wrote in answer to each question and think about what you would answer now. If your opinion has changed, that's a good sign! My comments are based on what might be considered the "ideal" answer but it is not necessarily what you should have answered (you have not studied translation and cannot be expected to know what that answer is), nor is it the best answer since there may be other experts who would give a different answer. My aim is not to be judgemental but to encourage you to think about the fascinating world of translation.

1. What is translation for you? Define it in one sentence.

In answer to this question five points should be mentioned. Translation involves: (i) the use of two languages (understanding the source-text language and writing in the target-text language); (ii) a text; (iii) extralinguistic knowledge (cultural, encyclopaedic, thematic, etc.); (iv) a communication act (with a client, text function, target audience, etc.) and, lastly, (v) a complex mental process (factors intervene that in most cases make it impossible for computers to translate properly given that they lack rationality, creativity, and the ability to think critically).

2. What should a good translator know? List the most important points

Translators should have a combination of the following five competences: (i) linguistic (the ability to understand the source-text language and to write in the target-text language); (ii) extralinguistic (cultural, encyclopaedic, thematic); (iii) transfer (the ability to switch from one language to another without any interference, calques, etc., using the cohesive devices of the target-text language); (iv) professional or instrumental (knowing how to research the subject of the source text; finding and using the reference sources necessary; knowing the job market; being self-critical, etc.); and (v) psychological (the ability to analyse, synthesize, reason, be creative, etc.).

3. What instruments are available to help a translator translate? List all the ones you know.

Four main categories should be mentioned (together with the titles of those you consider most useful): (i) lexicographic (encyclopaedias, dictionaries of all kinds, style books, grammar books, etc.); (ii) online resources (databases, web pages, search engines, meta-search engines, directories, etc.); (iii) experts in the subject of the text (e.g., Dharma) who can be consulted in case of doubts; (iv) parallel texts (to compare equivalents, concordances, collocations, etc.).

4. If you find a term that you do not understand in a text, what should you do first? Order the following options, putting a 1 by the one you would choose first and a 3 by the one you would choose last.

3. Consult a bilingual dictionary

1. Try to understand the meaning of the word from the context
2. Consult a source-language monolingual dictionary

You should first try to deduce the meaning of an expression from the context. The context will never let you down. Sometimes common sense alone will lead you to the meaning, although it is always advisable to consult a dictionary just to make sure. If you are unable to deduce the meaning from the context, you should consult a source-language monolingual dictionary to make sure that you understand the meaning of the word in the original language. You are then free to choose the meaning that is most appropriate to the context. If instead you look up the meaning of a term in a bilingual dictionary—which is never as comprehensive in its definitions of terms as a monolingual dictionary—you will run the risk of missing out on other possible alternatives and focusing on one particular equivalent just because it appears in the bilingual dictionary. Once you have consulted a monolingual dictionary and have understood the meaning of the term, a bilingual dictionary will help you find its most appropriate equivalent. It will not help you understand terms in the source-text language.

5. If, when you are translating, you find a source-language expression that you understand but your translation does not express its meaning sufficiently clearly, or exactly, what do you first do to find an appropriate equivalent? Order the following options, putting a 1 by the one you would choose first and a 3 by the one you would choose last.

3. Consult a bilingual dictionary

- 1/2. Try to express the same idea in as many ways as possible in the target language
- 1/2. Consult a target-text monolingual dictionary

Both the second and third options are useful in order to find appropriate expressions because the language content of the entries in monolingual dictionaries (whether they are reference dictionaries or dictionaries of synonyms) is always richer than that of bilingual dictionaries. Moreover, we ourselves know a lot of vocabulary and expressions that we do not usually use (take for example the exercise on “thank you”) due to which, if we make the effort to activate this knowledge, we will often find it easier to find equivalents ourselves rather than consult dictionaries.

This is not to say bilingual dictionaries should not be used. But they need to be used carefully, not taking for granted that the equivalent they suggest is going to be the best choice for our text and context.

6. When you are translating, what do you think is the basic unit you are translating?

- a. the word
- b. the sentence
- c. something else**

In this case the answer should be “something else,” and reference made to “paragraph” or “text” (text is the best option), since we translate ideas and messages as whole units.

7. Underline the elements you think intervene in a translation.

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|---|
| client | source-text author | socio-cultural environment of the source text |
| date of the source text | | socio-cultural environment of the target text |
| date of the translation. | source-text reader | target-text reader |
| function of the source text | | function of the target text |

All these options should have been underlined since they all intervene, or can intervene, in a translation (depending on the context within which the source text is produced and the function of the target text—as we have seen in the different examples given in this guide).

8. The main problems encountered when translating are vocabulary problems.

F

This is not true because vocabulary problems can be solved using dictionaries, online resources, and parallel or specialist texts. There are much more serious problems that require more complex solutions (such as when we need to be creative).

9. Your translation of a sales contract for the British company WHL Inc. will be different if you are translating it for a lawyer who wants to use it as proof in a court-case, or for a subsidiary company attached to WHL Inc. that needs the translation to sign contracts with other companies.

T

This is true, because if the target text is to be used as proof in a court-case an “informative” translation is needed, in which the content of the source text is clearly explained in the target text (the literal translation method could be used, while making constant reference to the source text, since both texts would probably be read together). On the other hand, if the function of the text is to use the contract in your own country, the target text must conform to the requirements of the legal system in your country. A number of points in the text would probably have to be modified (for example, in the case of the contract being signed in Spain you would have to include the identity card number of the Spanish nationals and the passport number of the British nationals party to the contract). In this case the translation method of choice would be the interpretative-communicative method, given the specific characteristics of the contract.

10. All translators should be able to translate as efficiently into the foreign language as into their mother tongue.

F

Translators have much greater possibilities of translating efficiently into their mother tongue because they are more proficient in their writing skills, whereas this may not necessarily be the case in regard to translators’ writing skills in a foreign language.

11. A good translator should be able to translate all types of texts with the same degree of efficiency.

F

Translators should try to specialise in one or two fields, and not in many, otherwise the task of translating will not be time-cost effective (speaking of quality translations, of course). It takes time to familiarise oneself with a subject (particularly if it is complex, as is the case of specialised translation, legal translation, Dharma...), as well as with the most useful reference sources available for a particular field.

12. When a translator reads a text before translating it, the process is the same as for any other reader of the text.

F

Translators must make an in-depth textual analysis, identify translation problems, and think about the function of the text, whereby their reading of a text is not as “superficial” as that of other readers.

13. A bilingual dictionary is the main instrument used to find appropriate equivalents in the target language.

F

Several other options for finding translation equivalents that are more useful than bilingual dictionaries have been suggested in this guide.



Appendix

GLOSSARY OF TERMS REGARDING TRANSLATION

Adaptation: a translation strategy that consists of substituting a cultural element of the source text with an equivalent item in the target-text culture.

Example: the Tibetan term for “vulture” is translated into Spanish as “águila” (eagle) in the hagiography of Shabkar (Mathieu Ricard) because “vulture” in the source text/culture has positive connotations whilst in the target-text culture it has negative connotations. An equivalent term is found for use in the target-text culture that has the same positive connotations as in the source text/culture.

Calque: a translation strategy whereby a term or structure in the source-language text is translated literally to produce a target language equivalent. This strategy is positive if appropriate in a given context, otherwise it negatively affects the quality of the target text (especially in the case of English-Spanish translations that contain large numbers of anglicisms and calques).

Concept/term: a distinction is made between a concept, or idea, and the word (term) used in a language to refer to that concept.

Example: the concept *bodhi* (i.e., the mental image we have when we hear the term) is usually translated in English as *enlightenment* or *awakening*.

Translation strategies: these are the different ways in which translators solve translation problems. For instance, to solve problems of comprehension of the source text a translator can: work out the structure of the text; look at the way in which the information in the text is linked and developed; differentiate between the main idea and supporting ideas; use logical reasoning; look at the content rather than the form; imagine what is happening in the text, etc. To understand a particular word, the translator can consult a monolingual dictionary, an encyclopaedia, etc. A description of the different types of translation problems and the strategies that are used to solve them can be found in the text boxes in Chapter 4.

Purpose of a text: this refers to the function of the target text and answers the questions: Why is the text being translated? For what purpose? For who? In what context?

Interpreting: this term refers to oral translation as opposed to written translation. Interpreting may be simultaneous, consecutive, bi-lateral, etc.

Target language: the language into which a text is translated.

Source language: the original language in which a text that is to be translated is written.

Loan: a translation strategy that consists of incorporating a term from another language into the target-language text, without adapting it or changing its spelling. Like a *calque* this may be a positive or negative measure depending on whether the loan detracts from or enriches the language. Examples: *lama*, *stupa*, *mandala*.

Translation problem: an element in the source text that the translator finds difficult to translate into the target text.

Target text (TT): the translated text. Also known as the target-language text.

Source text (ST): the text that is being translated. Also known as the source-language text.

Parallel text: a parallel text is a text, either in the source language or the target language, that is of the same genre as the source text (macrostructure, format, degree of specialisation, etc.); and has the same function. It may be used to find equivalences, collocations, decide on the format expected by readers, etc.

Translation: a process of interpretation and communication whereby a written text is reformulated in another language to fulfil a specific function in another socio-cultural context.

Direct translation: a term used to describe translation into the translator's mother tongue. This type of translation is the most frequent as it usually gives the best results.

Inverse translation: a term used to describe translation into a language that is not the translator's mother tongue. To be able to do this type of translation well, translators must be proficient in writing in the foreign language as well as have an in-depth knowledge of the foreign-language culture and society.