

TRANSLATION, INTERLINGUAL MEDIATION AND THE ELUSIVE CHIMERA OF EQUIVALENCE

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According to García Landa, communication succeeds if the interlocutor's representation of the meaning meant by a speaker matches that of the speaker himself. In this light, translation is seen as the (re-)production of such representations across the language barrier. Yet, in order to optimise -rather than simply enable- communication, translators and interpreters are often called upon to do more, less and something other than "translating." This explains the fact that equivalence has remained so moot and elusive a concept. Key words: **Communication, translation, interlingual mediation, relevant metacommunicative identity of meaning, deontologically accountable freedom.**

Selon García Landa, la communication réussit lorsque la représentation mentale que l'interlocuteur se fait du sens voulu par l'orateur coïncide avec celle que le locuteur lui-même s'en fait. De cet point de vue, la traduction consiste à (re-)produire de telles représentations à travers la barrière linguistique. Cependant, dans le but d'optimiser la communication et ne pas simplement de la rendre possible, souvent, traducteurs et interprètes doivent faire plus, moins et quelque chose d'autre que «traduire», ce qui explique le fait que le concept d'équivalence reste polémique, voir insaisissable. Mots clé : **Communication, traduction, médiation interlinguistique, identité metacommunicativement pertinent du sens, liberté déontologiquement responsable.**

I. Introduction

What follows is an overview of the general theory of interlingual mediation that I propound and explain in Viaggio (2006). The basic theoretical questions concern the delimitation and definition of a theory's object. In our case: What is translation? What is the sufficient/necessary relationship between two texts or utterances that we may call one the translation of the other? What, in short, is a translator to do in order for a translation to exist? Whatever our answers to these questions, they are bound to prove wanting in one crucial respect: We, translators (including interpreters), although mostly engaged in "translation," do things other than "translating." What is it that we do that we may call it by one name? What is the Searlean "constitutive rule" of whatever it is (good) translators and interpreters do always, in writing or orally, semantically or communicatively, documentarily or instrumentally, literally or freely, literarily or

pragmatically, visibly or invisibly, overtly or covertly? It is an age-old question that has received different answers, but, to date, none of them has been wholly satisfactory. The problem lies in that, regardless of the explicit or implicit definition -i.e. of the theory-governing the activity of translators across the centuries, and especially now that translation has become directly linked to the development of the productive forces of society, translators have had to do myriad things that have escaped any definition. One fact is, however, certain: translation is a form of communication between human beings, and not simply an operation between languages – or between oral or written texts. It is this perspective that spurs the best modern approaches (Nida (1964), Seleskovitch and Lederer (1989), Lvovskaja (1985 and 1997), Reiss and Vermeer (1996), Gutt (2001), García Landa (2001), and Osimo (2001 and 2002)).

II. Mariano García Landa: speech and translation as perceptual processes

García Landa is the first one to understand speech as the production of second-degree (i.e. social, non-natural) percepts whose object is sense – that which a speaker means to say. Such percepts are produced in specific acts of speech by specific human beings on specific human beings in specific social and historical situations. The central idea is that outside the specific speech act *sense does not exist*. Sense is not in the signs. It is the product of a nonce social perception produced in a specific social situation: Outside such nonce and fleeting acts of comprehension -including self-comprehension- there is no sense. Sense is as much on a piece of paper (or in the hard disc inside a computer) as Kevin Kostner is inside the TV set. It is the perceiving subject who interprets those signs or points of light in just three colours respectively as meaning meant or a face – the difference being that one perception is social, second-degree, and the other, first-degree, natural. What a speaker physically does, as a matter of fact, is produce differences in air pressure or doodlings¹: this is what an interlocutor perceives through his senses. Except that what a speaker wishes to produce is not differences in air pressure (let alone doodlings), nor is it they that an interlocutor understands. There is a decisive ontological distinction between the perception of the social, intentional object, and that of the acoustic chains (or the graphic representation thereof) which such

¹Or not even that: he can simply press keys that become bytes that will later become points of light on a screen.

percept is turned into or whence it derives. The object of a social perception is, always, an *intention*.

Intended sense comes to the speaker's awareness as a fleeting amalgam of ideational content and verbal form that is endowed with a certain emotive relief. This perception of one's own intended sense is the product of the concomitant activations of one's encyclopaedic and linguistic knowledge. In order to make manifest this percept, the speaker verbalizes his intended sense by means of a linguistic chain that must become sensorially perceptible as noise (or visual or tactile images), i.e. that must be turned into a natural, first-degree stimulus producing another natural, first-degree perception. At the other end of the act of communication, the interlocutor projects on the acoustic stimulus he has perceived his knowledge of the sign systems (the sedimentation of the countless acts of speech in which he has participated) and of the world², and associates those differences in air pressure with linguistic signs, so that he too can perceive a linguistic chain. This chain is analyzed in a vast mental laboratory in which all the other stimuli accompanying the speech perception proper enter into play together with a complex array of knowledge and experience. The end product of this process is a new second-degree, speech percept – sense as comprehended. Communication will have succeeded in so far as the object perceived by the speaker as his own meaning meant is the same now perceived by the interlocutor as meaning understood, i.e. insofar as there obtain between them a relation of identity. Such identity is not to be understood in the mathematical sense but as the relation established, as in natural perception, between a percept and its object (the term has caused a bit of an uproar; the reader may just substitute it mentally by “sameness”).

III. There is more to meaning than ideational content

So far – García Landa. Indeed, the fact that ideational content can be reverbalized without much ado is essential for translation. Indeed, the translation of pragmatic texts is mostly a matter of reproducing ideational content. This is what Reiss and Vermeer (1991) imply when they speak of a text as an *information offer*. And that is why it is almost universally recognized that they are “easier” to translate than literary texts,

² García Landa calls this wherewithal the “hermeneutic package.”

especially than the most formally marked specimens of lyric poetry, in which ideational content may lose most of its relevance. The problem is that there are many other layers of meaning that travel between speaker and interlocutor, even though they are not part of speech comprehension proper and, mostly, ensue from ideational comprehension. One of them is, perhaps, the emotive relief of what García Landa calls the “noetic (i.e. ideational) plate,” which vanishes immediately upon the perception of ideational content. If this is so, then in order to be perceived as a component of speech comprehension it requires being “transposed” into propositional form and/or the formal semantic and non-semantic attributes of the utterance (collocations, register, prosody, etc. – which, being, by definition, formal attributes, are at best imitable, but never “translatable”). In any event, all these non-ideational aspects of meaning are, indeed, outside speech production and comprehension *per se* and are certainly much more difficult to conceptualize, but they cannot simply be brushed aside. Not in human communication in general, and, definitely, not in translation or *-a fortiori-* interlingual mediation.

Furthermore, a model of communication through speech cannot ignore the metarepresentation of what might have been said instead of what has been actually uttered: The fact that a wife says to her husband ‘*I’m fond of you*’ rather than ‘*I love you*’ may be heavily loaded (and, as I shall stress, certainly no less the fact that she does not say anything at all). And equally loaded may be the fact that at an international gathering a Spanish delegate of Catalan origin intervenes in French rather than Spanish. Lexical and other positive choices become relevant, in other words, only insofar as an interlocutor can metarepresent the alternatives and the significance of the fact that they have not been chosen or, even, that they have been consciously discarded. Because that is very much a part of non-ideational meaning, either meant indirectly or, if not meant at all, then as comprehended by the interlocutor *despite* the speaker’s intentions. This is fraught with consequences for mediation, since the specific weight of an utterance’s form -especially semantic- may be more, or less, relevant as a positive choice. A few years ago, China and the US were at diplomatic loggerheads over the fact that a Chinese Mig had crashed in mid air with an American intelligence plane above the China Sea, as a result of which the Chinese pilot was missing and presumed dead, whilst the American plane was forced to perform an emergency landing on a Chinese island. All

the fuss was over whether the American aircraft was a “*spy*” plane (as characterized by more independent *Euronews*), or a “*surveillance*” plane (as labelled by the more obsequious *CNN*) legally ogling from afar. In this specific context the semantic difference between an “*apology*,” which is what the Chinese demanded, and an “*expression of regret*,” which was as far as the Americans were ready to go, are *not* interchangeable: they give rise to relevantly different (even contradictory) politically charged metarepresentations. In most other contexts, instead, they would be very much interchangeable: ‘*I’m sorry that your father is so ill, Peter,*’ will not give Peter much food for metarepresentational lucubrations about whether I said “*I’m sorry*” rather than “*I regret*” in order to convey that I feel responsible. Pretending that every speaker chooses his words as an embattled Minister about to lose a no-confidence vote, carefully weighing and then rejecting each and every alternative (which is, by the way, impossible), and that, therefore, every word present counts as much as every absent word, is as preposterous in direct communication as it is damaging when it comes to the notion of fidelity in interlingual mediation.

And there is more: a model of communication through speech cannot leave out the meaning of silence. True, silence is not a part of the utterance, but can be nevertheless meaning-laden. Very often, what is not being said is also an important part of what we understand, or, rather, of what we end up understanding after we have understood what has actually been said “officially.” Silence can be an ostensive means of communication -a negative stimulus, as it were- and when taken as such, it is interpreted via a metarepresentation of what is being left unsaid and a meta-metarepresentation of why it is left unsaid.

IV. What really counts is the metacommunicative framework

As we can see, the motivations and intentions that bring the interlocutors together -i.e. that give rise to the speech act to begin with- are a decisive part of the totality of human communication which transcends speech production and comprehension. If a mediator does not take stock of why and what for the interlocutors who engage him have themselves engaged in producing speech percepts in each other, he may be able to “translate” most competently, but he cannot possibly mediate effectively – or, at least, optimally. Since what he must see to is not ensuring sheer ideational or propositional

identity of meaning as meant and as comprehended, whatever the subsequent social consequences, but rather ensuring such an identity, coincidence or overlapping of metarepresented -ideational and non-ideational- meaning as will be also as pragmatically adequate as circumstances demand, advise or allow: He must ensure metacommunicatively **relevant** identity or sameness of meaning meant and understood..

No matter how hard he may try, a mediator cannot possibly reverbitalize the speaker's meaning meant exactly as he himself has understood it – he must of necessity modify at least parts of its perspective. The question, then, is not whether but how he is adequately to choose this new perspective. And, again, he cannot possibly unless he takes stock of the metacommunicative purpose and circumstances of both of the original speech act and of his own, which may be a very different one indeed (as *Skopostheorie* rightly stresses).

V. Translation and mediation

If translation proper is -borrowing Wittgenstein's notion- a language game consisting in re-saying in a second act of speech in another language that which has been said in a previous act of speech in a given language -i.e., re-producing the same meaning- mediation, as I understand it, is a larger game, consisting mostly and mainly, but not necessarily, of translating. Mediation -which need not be interlingual at all- has, indeed, as its primary task to help convey meaning by producing ideational identity and/or pragmatic correspondence (but not necessarily both) in different subjects in different situations, but always as a means to a further end: Achieving metacommunicatively relevant communication, which more often than not entails partial or even total manipulation of meaning. In view of the inescapable asymmetry between the ability, motivations, intentions and interests of any pair of interlocutors, these metacommunicative purposes can vary radically from the first speech act to the second. It behoves the mediator, then, to assess what counts as relevant identity this second time around. By this I mean **the necessary -from sufficient to optimum to total- degree of sameness of ideational meaning coupled with an apt -from sufficient to optimum- correlation between effects pursued by the mediator (on his own or in behalf of all or any of the parties), and achieved for the metacommunicative purposes at stake.**

Clearly, I submit, if human communication as a whole is inseparable a) from the motivations, intentions, interests, intelligence, ability and sensitivity of all direct and indirect interlocutors and participants or stakeholders in a given event (including the mediator himself and any relevant third parties), and b) from the effects that comprehension produces on subjects, then mediation -whether interlingual or not- cannot be invariably limited to reverbalizing a speaker's "official" meaning meant. That having been said, if the interlocutors are so far apart that there is no way of establishing metacommunicatively relevant identity between meaning meant and meaning comprehended, then there is nothing even the best mediator -whether monolingual or interlingual- can do: mediators too can face incurable patients.

As García Landa posits, translation as such, prototypically³, can indeed be defined and ontologically delimited simply as the noncommittal reproduction in a second speech act of ideational meaning as officially meant in a first act (which still leaves moot the question of whether sometimes linguistic form is better imitated even at the expense of sense comprehension). But, again, this definition, useful as it is conceptually to demarcate translation from other "language games," proves insufficient when it comes to actual translating. A translator, I submit, cannot be indifferent to the more general social stakes and consequences of his professional actions – and these consequences arise mainly from the global metarepresentations of meaning meant that the interlocutors end up producing on the basis of the mediator's utterances: It is *that* that they will agree or disagree on, like or dislike, embrace, accept, tolerate or outright reject, and they will do so on different intellectual ideological and emotive grounds. As far as non-mediated communication is concerned, García Landa is right: Understanding what I am saying, after all, is... understanding what I am saying. If I am irrelevant, or awkward, or uncouth, or simply stupid, that's my and my interlocutor's, problem. There is no one in the middle to help us achieve what we cannot achieve on our own. As initiator of this act of speech, for instance, I assume full responsibility for what I want to

³Halverson (2000) asserts that translation is, precisely, a prototypical category with necessarily fuzzy edges. I think that my distinction between translation proper -as the central concept generalised from practice- and interlingual mediation as the variegated, even contradictory, practical realisation of the activity solves the basic theoretical problem.

say or hide, and how and when to say it. And you, as a reader, assume full responsibility for cooperating with me. Our success is in nobody's hands but our own.

But the moment responsibility for your understanding me relevantly is not yours alone but a professional mediator's, and the moment making myself relevantly understood by you is no longer my exclusive responsibility but also that of a professional mediator, then you and I are both entitled to demand of him his best professional effort. We are entitled to expect that he understand the reasons behind my initiating this speech act (and not only what I am officially trying to say in it) better than you – and maybe even than I, and that he communicate more effectively than I – even if the specific rule of the specific game is to convey nothing but meaning as officially meant (which happens only in the most rarefied, severely institutionalized social settings). And it is also his responsibility to understand the reasons why you choose to participate in this speech act better than I – or maybe than you yourself. That is what turns a “mere” translator into a fully-fledged mediator: his ability to understand *beyond* meanings officially meant (regardless of what he actually *does* with that understanding). A general theory of mediation of necessity must explain that the role of the mediator is, precisely, modulating -or, if you prefer, manipulating- meanings as officially meant so as to help communication overcome all manner of hermeneutic and pragmatic barriers in order to serve its metacommunicative purpose. For that very reason, a general theory of interlingual mediation cannot limit itself to explaining the reproduction and comprehension of meaning as officially meant – it must take a decisive step further and speak of the re-induction of metarepresented meaning within the larger framework of relevance theory and make room for all the adjustments that meta-communicatively successful communication entails.

VI. The overall importance of qualitative effects

The basic limitation of relevance theory in its original formulation (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995), I submit, is that it takes contextual effects to be merely cognitive, i.e. changes in the individual's beliefs (which become strengthened, weakened, or altogether altered). Yet, the end effects of comprehension on an individual are always emotive, or qualitative, and have to do more with the phenomenal aspects of beliefs (i.e. to “what it is like” to entertain them) than with their ideational, propositional or notional

aspect. If we incorporate this, then relevance theory neatly explains aesthetic and other qualitative effects, even without going into their physical and social nature (a vastly unexplored realm). This is what Pilkington (2000) has tried to do, contributing the last stone that I needed to finish my theoretical building as it presently stands.

VII. To translate is, indeed, to speak in order to re-say what has been said in another language – but this is not enough

To re-say what has been said is, after all, to manage to have an interlocutor understand the ideational meaning as meant by a speaker. Except that translators and interpreters seldom limit themselves to such thing. There is a gap between translation as a theoretical construct and what translators and interpreters actually do. Who is at fault, the theoretical construct or practitioners? The basic problem with the different theoretical approaches before García Landa is that they are not grounded in a suitable theory of speech. What is missing is a theory of speech production and comprehension as a perceptual process setting in motion all the subsequent cognitive and emotional aftermath. With it, also missing is a satisfactory definition of sense and/or meaning. And with it, a definition of translation that is both theoretically and practically apt. If we limit ourselves to looking at translation as a relationship between oral or written texts, or as a text-production and comprehension activity (which it is *also*), we are leaving out both main pillars supporting speech communication: The minds of the parties to the act of communication and, more specifically, the historically and situationally conditioned intention to do by saying and the historically and situationally conditioned intention to do by understanding that gives rise to it in the first place. Reiss and Vermeer and other functionalists, though without disregarding them, fail to incorporate explicitly these two extremes that precede and follow speech production and comprehension. This, I think, prevents them from producing a definition that is at the same time sufficiently precise and general. As they stand, functionalist approaches show themselves incapable of distinguishing translation from all other forms of interlingual mediation. This is, I believe, their theoretical Achilles' heel. To sum up, then, the approaches by Nida, Gutt, Lvovskaya, the Parisians and García Landa (to translate is to reproduce sense/propositional content) are too restrictive, while that of Reiss and Vermeer (to translate is to offer an information offer about another information offer) – too wide,

and Osimo's (to translate is to produce a "mental metatext" out of a "mental prototext") – too vague to define with sufficient generality and precision not so much what is to "translate," but what translators are called upon to do as professional interlingual mediators.

VIII. The object of speech perception

What is, then, the object of a speech perception understood as a complex perceptual space? By automatically applying your hermeneutic package on the basis of the principles of relevance you perceive a communicative intention behind the signs you are processing. You may like or dislike the message, and maybe the message you get is not the one I wished to convey to you, but you (think that you) know that these letters, words and clauses are not just a string of linguistic signs, because -rightly or wrongly- what your social perceptual apparatus has you perceive is, precisely, a communicative intention and a message. *This* is what you really perceive consciously. And this is why you are taking the trouble of reading this piece. As I have pointed out, your brain transforms this natural, purely optical perception into an intentional message. The object of a speech perceptual space then, is what the other person wishes to say – the ideational meaning he is trying to convey. (Let me repeat that that is not the only object an interlocutor perceives, but everything else is beyond speech perception proper.)

And there is, as we have seen, one more thing: the effects of comprehension. What really counts for the individual in everyday communication is, in the end, what it "feels like" to have understood: the *qualitative* meta-effects of the cognitive effects of comprehension – which, when produced by speech itself, rather than by the paralinguistic or kinetic configuration of an utterance, are but a sheer emotive resonance of ideational comprehension. How are we going to judge interpretation or translation "independently" of the qualitative effects a) pursued and b) actually achieved by the author, and c) pursued and d) actually achieved by the translator?

IX. Similarity, isotopy, equivalence and representation

My contention would be that what a literary or documentary translator -as opposed to, say, an adapter or a "localizer" of a pragmatic text- would normally seek to achieve is to *represent* a text in the target language and culture. In that respect, I cannot but agree

with Goodman (as quoted by Ross 1981) that similarity is totally irrelevant to representation. In order to represent a three-dimensional image in perspective, for instance, the artist must distort it; this distortion is, precisely, what makes it look *real*. Something analogous happens when a translator seeks to represent a foreign work in a new linguistic and cultural medium. As Goodman stresses, the goal of a literary (or, add I, documentary) translation that is meant to represent the work in the target language and culture is maximal preservation of what the original *exemplifies* -whether a sonnet or a death certificate- as well as of what it says.

In order to help the reader relevantly to understand a literary or documentary (or even pragmatic) text as such, the translator cannot in the end but distort certain semantic or even propositional details. In order to maintain functionality, that is, similarity must defer to equivalence. Except that equivalence has also been traditionally understood as a one-tier proposition (semantic, lexical, metric, effectual, etc.). If an apt correspondence between meaning meant and understood is pursued globally, then equivalence itself must defer to a package representation, in which well-nigh nothing may end up being similar or strictly equivalent in the end. The same applies to isotopy: any statistical and other analyses of what becomes what in parallel or translated texts or corpora must always bear in mind that intertextual isotopy, synonymy and isonymy, important as they indeed are for different pedagogical or professional purposes, are secondary with respect to the metacommunicatively relevant identity of meaning pursued -and achieved- in each case.

X. The status of formal equivalence

Whatever they may mean as specimens of a given language, then, whatever the semantic representation they may give rise to, those words that the interlocutor makes out on the basis of the contrasts on the page or the noises on the tape are nothing but the circumstantial evidence of the speaker's or writer's direct intended sense (what he means to say "officially", as opposed to indirect intended sense, for instance, allegorical). All too often, as I mentioned, the explicit or implicit assumption is that if those and no other are the words the speaker chose, he did it for a relevant reason (which sometimes may indeed be *relatively* true), thereby consciously or unconsciously weighting and rejecting each and every possible alternative (a somewhat more

problematic proposition). A translator or interpreter (except that the latter has so little time to do it!) cannot but bear in mind that a host of conscious and unconscious, objective and subjective factors need have intervened between the speaker's intention to communicate and the ideational meaning he meant to convey, and then between his verbalizing it and the translator's understanding of such verbalization. The most relevant for the mediator is, of course, the intention behind the words: Not what they, the words, mean, but what he who uttered or wrote them meant by them – the kind of subjective perception to which such words gave objective, perceptible material form (which explains why practitioners feel authorized, nay, duty-bound to correct all sorts of inaccuracies or infelicities in even the most authoritative texts). This direct intended sense by the speaker is what the normal interlocutor normally perceives, and this is what the competent translator ought, in principle, to give him: Metarepresentations are *in principle* (but not invariably) the interlocutor's business (even though the mediator may orient them or wish to).

Needless to point out, there is no objective way a mediator -or, for that matter, any interlocutor- can systematically verify that his understanding of, say, God's or Shakespeare's word is what the Almighty or the Bard themselves meant him to understand. Inside the isolated brain of an interlocutor, meaning meant can only be perceived as meaning understood, i.e. in many cases it can but be attributed. Be that as it may, the translator's raw material is not so much the linguistic chain as his own understanding of the meaning meant behind it. This direct intended sense is, again, what he normally -but, as we have seen, not necessarily- would strive to convey – with or without total or partial regard to any or all formal features of the original or translated utterances. Regardless of its empirical verifiability, it can still be asserted that in order for mediation to have succeeded, the mediator must have managed relevantly to convey the meaning as originally meant so that it will be relevantly understood by his interlocutor(s) – i.e. to help achieve between specific human beings in a specific social situation metacommunicatively relevant identity, i.e. sameness of ideational meaning plus an adequate correlation between intended and achieved contextual effects. Most exegetic, aesthetic and evaluative discussions will centre, precisely, on whether either of these two conditions has been met.

XI. Relevant identity – translation as mediation

In its prototypical, ideal sense, translation is, thus, but the initiation of a second speech act in order to produce the same ideational meaning: A translator would ideally strive to -and succeed at- producing a second perception of meaning as officially meant. This, however, is seldom possible, necessary or advisable. The differences in time and place, personal and historic experience, knowledge and culture, ability, interests and sensitivity, and, generally, in all manner of pre-comprehension schemes and passing theories -i.e. in the hermeneutic and emotive package, combined with perceived relevance- mean that any new groups of interlocutors will approach any oral or written utterance -whether original or translated- with different expectations, ability and willingness to understand (which, again, is the reason behind the many “updates” of certain texts for new generations of readers).

Let us also remember that speech comprehension and the qualitative or cognitive effects of such comprehension are different things, as are immediate, spontaneous speech comprehension and the different metarepresentations it may give rise to: In principle, direct intended sense comprehension is always possible, but the metarepresentations based upon it and the effects both of speech comprehension and of the metarepresentations it gives rise to tend to vary enormously. The confusion of these ontologically different processes has led to no mean amount of confusion among translation scholars and practitioners. Once the inevitable and often crucial “side effects” of spontaneous speech comprehension are brought into the picture, once we take stock of the inescapable asymmetry between, on the one hand, ability and meaning to mean and, on the other, ability and disposition to understand, then translation is more relevantly seen not as an end in itself, but as the main tool of interlingual mediation, whose purpose is to achieve metacommunicatively relevant identity of meaning across the language barrier.

In actual practice, translation is always mediation and it is, therefore, more practical to equate them, which is what most modern approaches do, since it is what all professional translators must do all the time, whatever their conscious or unconscious theoretical outlook: A translator who can only “translate” will end up starving or living out of something else.

I have defined relevant identity as the symbiosis of a) the necessary degree of sameness between ideational meaning originally meant and finally understood, and b) an adequate correlation between the mediator's intentions and the contextual effects of comprehension on his interlocutors – between different, not necessarily overlapping metarepresentations based on the perception of the same object, which in our case is always the same social object: meaning meant. Different “texts” being different objects, it stands to reason that there can be no identity at that level: readers of a translation perceive the *same* social object, meaning meant, in *different* formal guises. The relationship obtaining between these different forms, as different tokens of the same type, is no longer of identity but of equivalence, similarity, analogy or whatnot. Chesterman (1996) refers to this second, subsidiary look at translation as a comparison of tokens. The confusion has beset practitioners and theoreticians well nigh since the invention of writing and for a perfectly understandable reason.

The great difference between the translator and the original writer does not lie so much in that he, the translator, has to imitate, say, Shakespeare's form or strive for any kind of comparable effect (nobody forces him to), but in that he must re-verbalize Shakespeare's meaning: His *Hamlet* must be the same as Shakespeare's, and act the same way, and utter the same thoughts and give vent to the same feelings, and kill the same characters for the same reasons. Whatever the translator's poetical prowess, any deviations from *that* will be mistranslations (however justified on extra-translational grounds). Because translators have at least intuitively realized that, and despite the fact that most of us do not have access to the original, we all have read *Crime and Punishment* -and not just anybody's: Dostoevski's- if re-written by someone else. Otherwise, how could we talk and argue about it?

XII. A new definition of equivalence and adequateness

In her most incisive article devoted to the concept of equivalence in translation studies, Halverson has the following to say:

“[T]here are three main components to [a definition of equivalence]: a pair between which the relationship exists, a concept of likeness/sameness/similarity/equality, and a set of qualities... The first, the specification of the entities between which the relationship pertains, is by no

means unproblematic. Establishment of such a relationship requires that the two entities involved be, in some way, comparable... The second component of the concept, the idea of likeness/sameness/similarity/equality, is also potentially problematic, though here the problem is of a slightly different nature. In fact, there are actually two specific aspects to the problem of sameness for the purposes of it: its nature and its degree... Sameness is a scalar concept... If two (or more) entities can be compared, and if sameness is defined as the presence of a specific quality, then for many qualities it may be shown that different entities possess those qualities in varying degrees. The third component of the concept of equivalence which can be, and has been, the focus of conceptual debate is the quality in terms of which the sameness is defined” (1997:209-210).

I think that this is an excellent statement of the problem. And I also think that García Landa’s model lays the ground for a satisfactory definition of translational equivalence: Whatever the nature or degree of formal similarity between them, a reverbalization (in the case of translation, in another language) can be said to be **equivalent** to its respective original or to another reverbalization if it helps ensure ideational-meaning identity with similar processing effort (a necessary relevance-based addition that will make room for degrees of equivalence). Now, as we have seen, such meaning identity in and of itself is neither sufficient nor necessary for mediation to be adequate. My development of García Landa’s model, I submit, allows us to develop the concept of translational equivalence into that of mediational adequateness: Equivalence becomes adequate only if it helps bring about the intended metarepresentations and qualitative side effects produced on the basis of speech comprehension (the contextual effects intended by the mediator, themselves subject to analysis and criticism): A reverbalization (in the case of interlingual mediation, in another language) is said to be adequate if it helps ensure metacommunicatively relevant ideational identity. The corollary is that a reverbalization may be more or less equivalent to an original one or than another reverbalization, but it can also be more or less adequate than either. This, in turn, allows us to perceive Nida’s dictum about dynamic equivalence and his definition of the closest natural equivalent first with regard to content and then with regard to form in a new light: Ideational identity plus, whenever possible, if possible at all, equivalent or otherwise comparable contextual effects (i.e. ideational and formal adequateness): cognitive -under the guise of metarepresentations- and qualitative – what

it feels like to have understood. Unless there is ideational identity (or, less rigorously, sameness of propositional content) there is *no* translation, whatever the effects. Non-translation, however, is not synonymous with bad mediation: In their quest for relevant communication, translators *qua* mediators often resort to not translating. A glaring case in point is that of the myriad translations/adaptations of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* for children, in which the vitriolic social satire is turned into merry pranks with two out of four travels end completely discarded. Nobody in their right mind would take a mediator to task for having omitted those chunks of ideational meaning that do not help **relevant** identity between what Swift meant his contemporary adult readers to understand and what contemporary children can healthily understand and enjoy.

What counts in each case as relevant identity depends solely on the meta-communicative purposes of the parties to the double speech act and is determined by the mediator (be it on his own, or in consultation with the parties, or saddled with a specific brief). Those who cannot see it fool themselves: obedience -even the blindest or dumbest, the most timorous or selfless- is but one of freedom's guises. The first thing to be weighted when it comes to judge a mediator or a specific act of mediation is, thus, how aptly relevant identity has been identified. Only then does it make sense to go about assessing the specific hermeneutic and heuristic moves. Since such relevant identity is never exactly the same for the different parties, the mediator, as a function of the metacommunicative purposes and consequences of his mediation and on the basis of his loyalty, decides what criteria to follow.

The most important corollary is that the mediator is interested in the relationship between "texts" and "utterances" only instrumentally. His actual concern is the relationship between sense as intended and as understood - i.e. what the interlocutors achieve by means of those "texts" and "utterances" as produced and understood by specific people in specific situations. The second most important corollary is that there is no *necessary* relationship between original and translated texts - which explains the exasperating conceptual and practical elusiveness of textual "equivalence". Such formal (semantic or other) equivalence, similarity, resemblance or coincidence between the formal attributes of original and translation is but one (if the most frequent and apparent) *consequence* of the mediator's quest for relevant identity between mental representations. This insight, I submit, throws new light on the dictum that a translator

does not find equivalences, but creates them. Not quite: a translator finds textual ways of achieving relevant identity between meaning as intended and as understood; these ways may or may not coincide totally, partially or at all with the ways resorted to by the original speaker in his original text. When they do, then some kind of textual “equivalence” will certainly be found. Since very often they do not, it is not altogether productive to look for shared textual attributes as if texts were artefacts in a vacuum. There is, therefore, no need to discard the concept or the term – all that is required is to be aware that it is an ancillary, incidental (if statistically rife) phenomenon that may be present or absent.

So the relationship between the mediator’s text or utterance and the original may be extremely varied. We can call it, indeed, “coherence”, as *skopos* theorists do, but I do not think it is clear enough. Such relationship is better defined, I think, as adequacy: The text or utterance, or segment thereof, is adequate if and only if its comprehension by an interlocutor (whether intended or not) allows it to be relevantly identical to sense as originally intended. Since such identity is always *ad hoc* and a function of the parties’ motivations, resistance, sensitivity and heuristic and hermeneutic ability (coupled to all situational factors and the systems gravitating upon them), even though the notion itself does not change, its practical realization is always different... a bit like happiness. Such adequacy, moreover, is a matter of degree: speech acts initiated by a mediator in a specific situation can be more adequate or less - the more adequate, the better his mediation.

An interlingual mediator’s specific job, I insist, is no longer to understand sense (any genuinely interested interlocutor has such a task). Nor is it to reverbalize it in another language (for that, all is needed is a “translator”). Nor is it to achieve, as monolingual mediators (lawyers, ambassadors, amicable brokers), relevant identity between sense intended and understood. Of course, an interlingual mediator has to do all those things *as well*, but his specific job is to achieve such identity by initiating a new act of speech in a different language (or dialect).

The *skopos* of an act of mediation is, therefore, invariably the same: to determine and achieve the highest degree of relevant identity between intended and comprehended sense in a specific situation. Or, put in other terms, to have the interlocutor understand what, in the mediator’s professional judgment and insofar as objectively possible and

deontologically acceptable, it is necessary, convenient or advisable that he understand in the way that it is necessary, convenient or advisable that he understand it.

In the practice of his profession, the interlingual mediator often stumbles against his lack of social power, due both to his clients' mistrust and to his own theoretical insecurity. These limitations -typical of a young profession that has not yet succeeded in establishing itself and lacks an underlying generally known, acknowledged, assimilated, aptly applied theory- impede his exercising his deontologically responsible freedom. Our great battle is to overcome these two interdependent hurdles. It is too late for practitioners of my generation, I'm afraid: It is now up to our professional offspring to carry the day, but they too will find it impossible unless they are solidly equipped with an apt theoretical outlook.

This is why students must be *taught to mediate* and not simply to "translate" or to "interpret." This requires that they be endowed with the necessary theoretical wherewithal for competent practice, beginning with an analysis of the metacommunicative framework, the circumstances in which speech is produced and understood, and what comprehension is all about - and not only of speech, but, above all, of the speaker's intentions from the standpoint of one's own interlocutors' interests and resistance. A thorough analysis of comprehension as *metarepresentation* is, I submit indispensable. These elements must be in their young hands *before anything else*. A scientific theory of interlingual mediation cannot come as an afterthought. One cannot be taught first to swim and then to float.

XIII. A mediator's deontologically accountable freedom

A professional mediator (whether interlingual or not) is normally pulled by four centrifugal forces. For starters, nowhere is it written that a mediator ought necessarily to be the speaker's *alter ego*: He can also be the interlocutor's - or the commissioner's. Being an *alter ego* means adopting the relevant motivations and intentions, speaking from the perspective of whoever means to mean or from that of whoever takes the trouble to understand - i.e. adopting as relevance criteria the metacommunicative interests of either or, in the case of interlingual mediation, as a general rule, a compromise between them. As we can see, this does not have so far any necessary consequences for the "fidelity" to the original utterance or text. Loyalty toward the

speaker's motivations and intentions may well advise or demand departing from an original's meaning. And, obviously, so can loyalty to the interlocutor or the commissioner. But, above all, there is the profession itself, to which, as any other professional, a mediator owes supreme loyalty. The profession, through its specific deontology, represents the more general interests of society. In the vast or narrow scene in which he is called upon to act, there is no "x" telling the mediator where to stand once and for all. Between the speaker, the mediator's interlocutor, the interest (more often than not less than enlightened) of the commissioner who pays him, and the deontological norms of the profession there is, always, a space within which a mediator is to exercise his deontologically accountable freedom – even if he does not wish to exercise it or is afraid of exercising it. These four points (that can be conflated into three whenever the commissioner is either the speaker or the interlocutor) delimit such freedom. To transgress them is, by definition, to act unethically or, at best, incompetently.

It is the mediator who decides, each time, what counts as relevant identity between meaning as meant by the speaker and as understood by his interlocutor in the second speech act. It is true that sometimes -many fewer than so many believe- the commissioner requests or demands a certain kind of mediation, but it is always up to the mediator to accept or reject this imposition or, often, at least to make his own expert opinion prevail – not any more or less than a physician, a lawyer, an architect, or any other socially acknowledged professional.

A special paragraph must be devoted to the mediator who acts on his own initiative, as has traditionally been the case of the translation of literary, philosophic or religious texts. When a mediator translates *because he damn well pleases*, of course, he has total freedom to translate *as he damn well pleases*. Nobody forces or asks the translator to adapt or fail to adapt, to manipulate his text more or less⁴. But let it be clear that, in these instances, there is no real professional exercise or, therefore, professional deontology: The mediator's ethics is precisely that – ethics pure and simple. The very

⁴Even though, often, the editor ends up imposing his own criterion, it is still a fact that the non-proletarianised literary translator enjoys much more freedom than his mercenary colleagues. This is, I submit, the reason that literary translation theoreticians have basically refused to step across the boundaries of antiseptic description.

fact of translating may be considered heretical in itself (as was the case with Luther); where is the heretic's deontology? In such cases, the mediator translates out of his own motivation and intentions, freely -sometimes even arbitrarily- choosing what counts as relevant identity of meaning. As always, of course, one thing is to choose the kind of relevant identity and a very different one to be able to achieve it.

XIV. The constitutive rule of interlingual mediation

The constitutive rule of interlingual mediation can be reduced to the following dictum: Initiating a new act of speech in a new language (and, *a fortiori*, a new situation) so that -in the mediator's judgment, based on his assessment of the metacommunicative purposes of communication- **the intended interlocutor will understand a) what it behoves him to understand b) in the way that it behoves him to understand it.** Interlingual mediation can be, thus, at the same time more, less and something other than translation proper.

Translational equivalence, as, for that matter, any other kinds of correspondence, similarity or analogy between an original and its "translation" will be a consequence of the translator's work rather than its condition. And this is why the concept has been as difficult to define as elusive to detect. What counts, in the end, is not what people "say" to each other, but the relationship between what a speaker means to communicate and what an interlocutor understands. Can this relationship be empirically proven? Not really: I cannot be sure that you have managed to understand all of my meaning meant exactly as I mean you to understand it – nor can you, but that is a problem of communication that translation merely makes more visible, and that both direct communication and translation are normally able to surmount most handsomely, otherwise there would be no universal science.

XV. Conclusion

So here I am, my unknown reader, writing this piece on translation theory to you. This imposes upon me the social responsibility not only to guess at your intellectual capability and your sensitivity, but, more importantly, at your actual interest, your willingness, your conscious and unconscious disposition to take the trouble to understand what I have to say. But the buck starts elsewhere: What do I intend to

achieve by it... what's in it for me? I have several purposes guiding this written act of speech I have initiated; some of them escape me altogether: they are unconscious. Maybe a sagacious reader might manage to glean them, but I cannot – not while they are unconscious. In any event, I cannot even give an elementary order to my fingers unless I have in my mind something that I want “transferred” to your head. As I write, I do have a general idea of what I mean you to understand in the end, but this piece has not been rehearsed: I write as I speak, linearly – even if every now and then I retrace my steps. What I want transferred is the vector of the simultaneous “flashing” or activation of certain pieces of knowledge of the world and the linguistic means that I have somehow stored in my long-term memory. What I intend to say comes to my awareness in sudden flashes roughly equivalent to a clause.

This is -again, roughly- the way you are now understanding me: Every clause or so produces in your own mind a sudden “click” in which the relevant chunks of your own knowledge of the world and your representation of the linguistic means I am using “react” with the stimulus you are processing and, lo and behold, you add a new chunk of meaning understood. The fact that I use my means and you simply need to represent them is crucial to the translator or interpreter: one does not actually need to speak the language one is translating from.

What I intend you to understand, however, is not a linear series of clauses but my theory of communication and, based upon it, my theory of interlingual communication. This theory is sort of jumbled in my mind. In order to make it accessible to you, I have to articulate it linearly (speech leaves me no alternative). The theory, in other words, is a complex series of metarepresentations that, in order to verbalize, I cannot but reduce to a linear series of propositions, itself linearly parsed and articulated in linguistic signs. I am socially responsible for choosing an apt way of “unwinding” it, which in turn depends on my intellectual ability and sensitivity, but, more importantly, on my actual interest, my willingness, my conscious and unconscious disposition to take the trouble to have you understand what I have to say and my assessment of your ability, sensitivity, willingness and conscious and unconscious disposition to understand me.

The means I choose are only partially mine. The English language, as I know it and activate it as I write, offers and denies me certain possibilities, which I strive respectively to exploit and palliate. But all that has happened in my mind. You would

not have a clue if I did not now turn it into a semiotic stimulus accessible to your natural perceptual system. By the time you are able to perceive and process it lots of time will have elapsed and things happened over which neither you nor I have any control. One of the possible things that may have happened is translation.

What would count as our mutual success at communicating with each other (mind you, mutual success, both yours and mine)? Simply put that, as a result of having processed chunk by chunk my units of verbalization -or those of my translator!- the theory that I had jumbled in my mind be now jumbled in yours. You do not need to agree to it or even like it, but unless it is jumbled in your mind, you have not understood it -*it*, not something “similar” or “analogous” to it- and, therefore, me.

This was our first crucial insight: Communication succeeds when the speaker’s representation of his meaning meant is the same as his interlocutor’s. Since we mostly act as interlocutors, the statement is more usefully reversed: communication succeeds when the interlocutor’s representation of meaning meant is the same as the speaker’s.

Now, if the success of communication lies in a certain coincidence, correspondence or sameness of mental representations, the means whereby this is achieved are but instrumental, ancillary, inconsequential in themselves: People are not really interested in understanding each other’s words, but what they intend to communicate through them (often as a means to understanding much more, of course).

This is a good part of the story, but not all. If it were, Seleskovitch’s theory would be the answer to all our problems.

For starters, and for the nth time, this interest in understanding is a function of the metacommunicative purposes they pursue at the time. People are not simply after communicating representations of meaning reducible to propositions amenable to linear verbalization. They are after producing or experiencing certain contextual effects, both cognitive and emotive or qualitative. They are after achieving changes in the (their) world – directly, by influencing their own or their interlocutor’s actions, or indirectly, by changing their interlocutor’s or their own models of the world. This, let me stress, goes both for the speaker and the interlocutor. I, for one, do not read Dickens to learn what he has to “say” to me: I want to be told an “interesting” story that will produce a “pleasant” emotive effect. I want to be “thrilled,” “moved,” “amused,” “entertained” and, indeed, “educated;” and the cognitive and emotive effects will change with each

act of comprehension - otherwise there would be no point in re-reading. For an interlocutor, meaning to understand on his own terms and for his own purposes (which, indeed, often means understanding the speaker in his own terms) is the name of the game. Or is it different with you now, my unknown friend?

What do you intend by understanding me, what's in it for you? If you are a theoretician, some useful insights that will help you buttress, deepen, develop or even destabilize your own concepts (and if you are too attached to them, you will not take kindly to my possible destabilization). If you are a practitioner, you would mainly expect new light that might help you improve your performance. If you are a student, you probably hope to find a miraculous panacea to all your troubles: a simple receipt to translate or interpret to your teachers' satisfaction (that of the actually paying clients can wait). Your "satisfaction" upon reading this piece will be a function of the way it fulfils your expectations - which, needless to say, may change as reading proceeds or, most certainly, in further acts of reading.

The effect of these mumblings will thus depend on both their cognitive usefulness to you and the ease, comfort and, indeed, pleasure that the trouble of processing may demand - themselves a function of your own capabilities, sensitivity, interests and disposition. But what if you are not the intended addressee of these mumblings, but an intermediary whose task it is to convey them to him? What, moreover, if you were to convey them to him in a different language? Would you strive simply to understand them clause by clause in order clause by clause to reverbalise them and be done with it? Would you just try and chop it up in manageable "units of translation" and carry it drudgingly over the linguistic fence? Or would you make an effort yourself to metarepresent this theory and do your best to have your new interlocutors understand it? Would you not take stock of the plusses and minuses of my verbalization, my repetitiveness, my infelicities of expression, my contradictions of thought and then decide whether, given the commissioner's (say, this very journal) purpose and your intended readership's willingness, interests and ability, rendering more or less verbatim all these musings was the most effective way of achieving such a correspondence between my (presumed) intended mental representation and the mental representation now (presumably) emerged in your interlocutor's mind as a result of what you "said"?

This is what, I submit, you would do unless there were good reasons not to. This, in other words, would be your default position if you were simply and genuinely interested in optimising -and not merely enabling- communication between original speaker and the new intended interlocutors.

Maybe re-saying what the author/speaker meant to say as opposed to what he actually said will not be the most effective means of achieving such optimum correspondence (in legal mediation mistakes in an original are not normally corrected in translation; a jury, as a case in point, will want to become aware even of the most trivial hesitations by the accused or a witness). Maybe saying what he actually said rather than what he meant to say or do by saying is outright inadvisable (the originally innocent joke becomes inane or, worse, offensive). Maybe you ought to be more or less explicit: add, omit, or even say something completely different (for instance, if you want to “translate” an ad in a way that will actually help sell the product to the new audience). Regardless of whether you may have a chance to consult with any of the actors (and not only the speaker), all these decisions will ultimately be yours and yours alone: You cannot help exercise your deontologically responsible freedom and be held accountable for it – exactly as any other true professional, whether physician, architect, engineer or lawyer.

This is, to many, a terrible revelation: Freedom is the most frightening thing. If the author, the original, the “words” you processed, are not divine, who is going to help you tell right from evil? No Great Inquisitor to enlighten poor Ivan Karamazov when it comes to interlingual mediation.

Because, if what counts in the end is not a relationship, similarity, analogy or equivalence between texts, but an empirically unverifiable correspondence between different mental representations achieved on the basis (and not simply as a result) of having processed such oral or written texts, “translational equivalence” is not the condition but the consequence of translational activity. If, by (presumably) willing to achieve cognitive effects *W* in order (presumably) to produce emotive effects *X*, the speaker has (presumably) intended to say *Y* and has actually managed to say *Z*, the basic question is not what the original actually says. Nor what the original speaker actually means to say by that which he has said. Nor what the original speaker actually means to do by actually meaning to say what he has actually said. Nor what the client who has

hired me intends to achieve by my translating this text (which may well be *V*). It is rather, what, under the circumstances, on the basis of my answers to those four questions above, counts as the best possible course of action. What, under the specific circumstances, can or should I say that will help achieve optimum communication given the specific metacommunicative purposes in hand? In order to be “useful”, then, a translation need not be faithful – or, rather, it need not be a “translation” at all. At every step, it behoves a mediator to decide whether to “translate” or to do something more, less or different. If it behoves him to have his interlocutor feel (something akin to) *W* by actually understanding (something akin to) *X* by meaning to say (something akin to) *Y* by saying (something akin to) *Z*, which in the target language will be *Z_J*, then chances are that there will be myriad similarities between *Z* and *Z_J*, but that is sheer statistical coincidence.

Since, more often than not, *W*, *X*, and *Y* need not -or cannot- be fully matched in the mind of the interlocutor, more often than not *Z* and *Z_J* will evince disturbing, heretical, even scandalous discrepancies that will push some theoreticians into discarding altogether the notion of equivalence – disturbing, heretical and scandalous to the prudish adorers of false idols (in our case, those of the sanctity of the original and the fearful submission of the translator or interpreter to it). It is but the history of mankind and the development of knowledge and science. As a part of such development, this theory eagerly awaits those who will find its weaknesses, no matter how disturbed and scandalized I may be at the new heretics: As García Landa taught me, ideas do not belong to those who have had them in the first place, but to those who can put them to profitable (and, hopefully, ethical) use and, eventually, improve upon them. Your turn, my friend!

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