Teaching Translation from Spanish to English

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Microstructural and Macrostructural Interdependence

Micro-structural and macrostructural interdependence is the basis of text consumption and production and of translation. There is ample evidence of this interdependence in human action and language. Delisle's (1980) methodology is based on the interpretive theory of translation proposed by Seleskovich, who found evidence of this interdependence in an analysis of the work of simultaneous and consecutive interpreters. This interdependence or interaction is also basic to recent work in semantics, narrative theory, rhetoric, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, cognitive psychology and pragmatics, action theory, philosophy of language, the theory of speech acts, and the social sciences.

The same trend can be seen in modern physics. Fritjof Capra, author of The Tao of Physics, wrote that in subatomic particles “every particle consists of all other particles.” Subatomic particles are not separate entities but interrelated energy patterns in an ongoing dynamic process. These particles do not “contain” one another, but “involve” one another. Several theories (Chew’s S-matrix theory and Bohm’s Holomovement) recognize that consciousness may well be an essential aspect of the universe that will have to be included in future theory of physical phenomena (Capra, 1976: 137, 141).

In the field of human language, it is clear not only that the meaning of the macrostructure depends on the meanings of the microstructures, but that the meanings of the microstructures are determined by the constraints and global meaning of the macrostructure. Any translator worth his or her salt knows this intuitively, and intuitively makes the adjustments required by the global constraints and meaning of the text and context. Nevertheless, it is instructive at least once during an introductory translation course to make a systematic attempt to identify all of these global constraints, from the point of view of both the teacher and the student.
From the teacher's point of view, this effort can be compared to that made when a group of teachers agree on criteria for marking a translation. Of course, these criteria have to be worked out systematically, and even mathematically, so as to give a mark out of 10 for a translation, as is required by the educational system. However, marks are not always given for a translation by adding up half-points or decimals. If a few translations are marked using the criteria systematically and then a more intuitive marking system is used, the results are very similar. This is usually true even when two different teachers correct the same text, one adding up the marks mathematically and the other giving a global grade. For this to be possible, it is necessary to have passed through the analytical stage. For the students, it is also another stage in consciousness raising—consciousness of the problems of translation and of what the teachers are looking for when they correct a translation (which should be very similar to what a translation supervisor or reviser is looking for).

In this chapter, I make a systematic attempt to apply semantic and pragmatic analyses to a Spanish text and to show how the semantic and pragmatic macrostructural constraints influence the morphosyntactic and lexical microstructures.

The influence of the cognitive context on the verbal context—that is, how we understand units of meaning—is confirmed by the interpreting process, in particular by note-taking in consecutive interpreting. As we listen to or read language, we formulate a hypothetical macrostructure, which is confirmed or refuted by the underlying propositions of the text. This macrostructure allows us to understand a text, organize the information in our memory, and retrieve details if they are needed.

T.A. van Dijk began to work out a theory of how semantic and pragmatic constraints work in discourse analysis. This theory is still incomplete. Formal or logical semantics based on artificial languages (such as mathematics and logic) is complicated enough, but any semantic theory based on natural language is far more complex. Semantically speaking, "The meaning of a sequence of propositions is far more than the sum of propositions underlying the sequence. The meaning of sequence as a whole hierarchically orders the respective meaning of its sentences" (van Dijk, 1980: 144). The infinite number of combinations that may make up the context or frame of a sequence of speech acts means that any pragmatic theory has to account not only for the known world but for any possible or imaginary world. Pragmatically speaking, the value of a sequence of speech acts or a global speech act depends on the context. For example, the semantic meaning of the statement "The water's boiling" is "The temperature of the water has reached 100°C." The pragmatic meanings, however, are many: "Make the tea"; "Come for a swim"; "Add some cold water before you put baby in the bath." Although the suggestions made by van Dijk are necessarily incomplete, they do help in discourse analysis, which is the first stage in the translation process, understanding the SLT.

In both producing and understanding language, there is intentional control of lower elements by higher elements, and it is important to distinguish between grammatical laws and cognitive or pragmatic constraints. Cognitive constraints
actually govern how we hear and understand phonetic and lexical information. Our understanding of speech depends on the verbal and cognitive contexts. How our brains process phonetic items depends on the understanding of units of meaning.

Children often misunderstand adult language for this reason and interpret unfamiliar words and syntax as familiar ones. Therefore, instead of singing the traditional Christmas carol as it was written, "We three kings of Orient are," they may sing, "We three kings of orange and tar." Alternatively, they may mistakenly choose a familiar pragmatic context to interpret a proposition, as did the little girl who drew a picture of an airplane when her Sunday-school teacher asked her to draw a picture of "The Flight into Egypt."

Adults find it difficult to make sense of texts from cultures that are very different from their own, even if the language itself presents no difficulty. For example, when reading James Joyce's *Ulysses*, my knowledge of Greco-Christian-British-Irish culture made it possible for me to formulate a hypothesis, or cognitive macrostructure, that allowed me to "make sense" of the words, even if my understanding is inferior to that of a Joyce scholar. My reading efficiency was much reduced when I read *The Interpreters* by Wole Soyinka. My ignorance of "the Nigerian context" impeded the formulation of a satisfactory macrostructure that would allow me to understand the book, even though Soyinka writes in English and his syntax and vocabulary are simpler than those of Joyce in *Ulysses*.

This is confirmed by what we know about the process of interpreting. When we read and translate, we accumulate a series of words and anticipate others in our search for sense units. The larger the unit, the better our understanding. A text is linear only when it is being used for certain functions, such as dictation. Children learn to read letter by letter, then word by word, and then progress to reading with meaning. Translation students, particularly when they are translating into the foreign language, tend to return to infancy and get stuck at the level of the word. This is one reason that pre-translation contextual exercises are so important in training translators. As we read, we formulate a hypothetical macrostructure that is confirmed or refuted by the underlying propositions of the text. This macrostructure allows us to understand a text, organize the information in our memory, and retrieve details when we need them. Cognitive experiments prove how easy it is to remember the details of a story but not a list of unconnected sentences.

**Text Type: Economic Discourse**

The text that has been chosen for analysis is from *Estructura económica internacional* (Tamames, 1980; this is the sixth edition of a work originally published in 1970) and it belongs to the field of textbook economics. The job of the translation teacher can be seen as consciousness raising, making students aware of elements that we do not normally notice when we read and write. These elements may be morphological,
syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, or semiotic. Consciousness of text type is a very valuable skill for trainee translators to develop: "Our ability to recognise texts as instances of a type—exposition, argumentation, instruction—depends on our ability to recognise texts as signs. The way we recognise and respond to these signs is a regularity of language use which transcends boundaries of genre" (Hatim and Mason, 1990: 2).

Establishing criteria to distinguish systematically between different types of discourse is not easy. Fowler (1986) argues that the boundary between literature and nonliterature is an artificial one if the distinction is based on "creative use of language." Many of the features that are said to characterize the former will be found in the latter. McCloskey (1986) used the insights provided by modern literary approaches to text and rhetoric to analyze economic discourse. He highlighted the extensive use of abstract language, metaphor, and construction of fictional worlds that provide information about the belief structure of the discipline. In a later publication, he explored the idea of narrative or storytelling in economics. He suggests that a satisfying story for economists is the "Equilibrium Story" found in microeconomics: Equilibrium is the hero, and the story always ends with the triumph or defeat of Equilibrium (McCloskey, 1988).

Some translation teachers argue in favour of teaching literary translation on the grounds that students have to cope with all possible types of translation problems, and the skills they acquire can then be applied to any other kind of course. However, it does seem an unnecessary effort for students to sweat over Angela Carter when their first professional task will be to translate a computer manual.

Nearly all schools of translation in Europe include economics as one of the specialized branches of translation in which students can take extra-content courses. The Tamames text has been chosen for the following reasons:

1. To develop extralinguistic knowledge of the world—in this case, economic concepts and socio-economic information about the United States.
2. To work on the formal aspect of the different treatment of figures in Spanish and English.
3. To develop an understanding of the difference between standardized and nonstandardized vocabulary.
4. To develop vocabulary. This is a neglected area in current EFL teaching; in specialized texts, very often, the semitechnical vocabulary is the most problematic. As Jan Fisher suggests, "There is a clear need for a new approach to teaching vocabulary, but this should be focused on the ways that semitechnical English is used in economics writing rather than on specific technical vocabulary" (1990: 86).
5. To develop awareness of text types by approaching a genre in which the reader's expectations are very often at variance with the intentions and
persuasive devices used by the author. The reader has to make an effort to “see” the author’s intentions, because they are often camouflaged under the “outmoded official methodology of economics as science” (McCloskey, 1986: 16). This is an exercise that is best done in inversa, when the students are working from their own culture and language.

6. To illustrate how the author’s ideology is expressed in the text. This is particularly interesting with Tamames because the 1980 text can be compared with more recent texts by the same author in which the effect of “the new world order” gives rise to ideological ambiguities.

Estructura económica internacional
Ramón Tamames, Alianza, Madrid.
Primera edición: 1970
Sexta edición: 1980

19. ESTADOS UNIDOS DE AMERICA
19.1. Datos básicos: El “Melting Pot” y el “American Way of Life”.

Con una superficie de 9,4 millones (M en lo sucesivo) de kilómetros cuadrados, EE.UU. tenía a principios de 1980 una población de 222M de habitantes. Al ritmo de crecimiento actual (el 1,7 por 100), se calcula que la población llegará a 300M después del año 2.000.

La proporción de raza negra es de 10,5 por 100, existiendo otras minorías importantes, como los “mexicano-americanos” (unos 7,5 M) los puertoriqueños (unos 3,3M), los indios (0,9M), y otros grupos étnicos y lingüísticos menores todavía en curso de asimilación o que se resistan a ella. El anunciado conjunto de minorías es origen de toda una serie de problemas de racismo y discriminación que afectan—y afectarán—profundamente a la estabilidad de la sociedad norte-americana, todavía muy lejos de la homogeneización que se pretendió con las tesis del “Melting Pot” y del “American Way of Life”.

International Economic Structure
Ramón Tamames, Alianza, Madrid.
First edition: 1970
Sixth edition: 1980
Translation: Allison Beeby

19. THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The United States covers an area of 9.4 million (M) square kilometres and at the beginning of the 1980s had a population of 222M inhabitants. Calculations based on the present growth rate (1.7%) suggest that the population will reach 300M after the year 2000.

Blacks make up 10.5% of the population, and there are other large minority groups, such as Mexican Americans (some 7.5M), Puerto Ricans (some 3.3M), and American Natives (0.9M), along with other smaller ethnic and language groups. All of these groups are still in the process of assimilating or resisting assimilation. This has led to a series of problems of racism and discrimination, which are seriously undermining the stability of American society and will continue to do so. America is still very far from achieving the homogeneous society that was the aim of the Melting Pot and the American Way of Life.
Las tendencias segregacionistas e integracionistas en pugna se mantienen muy vivas. Y lo que es aún más importante, hay nuevos planteamientos por parte de los propios grupos minoritarios, que de ser espectadores pasivos, han pasado a posturas más radicales y reivindicativas de su propia personalidad frente a lo que "desde siempre" se consideró como el núcleo poblacional del país en términos de elite, los WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants—Blancos Anglosajones Protestantes).

Si a esos problemas raciales se agregan los fuertes desequilibrios personales y regionales de renta, podemos explicarnos porqué en EE.UU. se ha desencadenado en nuestro tiempo una crisis de confianza frente a la exaltación tradicional de la democracia y las libertades personales. El pretendido sueño de un país socialmente homogéneo y estable se ha visto dramáticamente sacudido por la violencia, el manejo de la información masiva y el complejo industrial militar.

De forma aparentemente anecdótica, pero que da mucho a reflexionar, podría sintetizarse la situación social y psicológica de EE.UU. desde 1963 para acá en personas. J.F. Kennedy, asesinado en 1963, en circunstancias más que oscuras. El ex presidente Johnson que en 1970, por un temor inconfesable, no se atrevió a hacer las revelaciones que había prometido sobre el complot para aquel asesinato. Un candidato a la presidencia como Robert Kennedy, asesinado en 1968, seguramente como una consecuencia más de la intervención norteamericana en el Oriente Medio en apoyo de Israel. Dos líderes del movimiento negro como eran Malcolm X y Martin Luther King, igualmente

The conflict between segregation and integration is still very much a live issue today. Furthermore, and even more important, the minority groups themselves have adopted new tactics. Instead of being mere passive spectators or candidates for integration, they have taken more radical positions and defend their own identity against those who have always been considered the elite nucleus of the population, the WASPS (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants).

These racial problems, combined with a very unequal distribution of wealth, on both a personal and a regional scale, may explain why America is undergoing a crisis of confidence today. The traditional American values of democracy and individual freedom are themselves in question. The longed-for dream of a socially stable and homogeneous country has been dramatically shaken by violence, manipulation of the mass media, and the military-industrial complex.

A synthesis of the social and psychological history of the United States since 1963 could be made by looking at a few individuals. This may seem anecdotal, but it does give much food for thought. J.F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963 under very shady circumstances. In 1970, Lyndon Johnson, the former president, held back by a dreadful secret fear, did not dare reveal the information he had promised about the plot behind Kennedy's assassination. Robert Kennedy, a presidential candidate, was assassinated in 1968, probably yet another indirect consequence of the American intervention in favour of Israel in the Middle East. Two leaders of the black movement, Malcolm
asesinados en un contexto no aclarado, pero sin duda por su liderazgo de sendos movimientos en pro de los derechos para los negros. Y un presidente como Nixon que violó fronteras, compromisos internacionales y extendió la guerra en el Sudeste Asiático, y que después—en su fase pacifista—cayó a causa del escándalo “Watergate”.

19.2. La raíces del crecimiento económico de EE.UU.

Volviendo ahora a los datos económicos de base, registremos que el PNB anual de EE.UU. a nivel de julio 1978 se estimaba en 2,094,900M de dólares, lo que representa casi la mitad del total Producto Social de los países del OCDE, un tercio del total del mundo. En ese mismo año, el PIB per capita se estimó en 8,670 dólares con salarios promedios en la industria (en 1978) de 250 dólares (semanal) y de 32 dólares (diario) en la agricultura, en la que sólo trabaja el 3 por 100 de la población activa.

Se trata pues de la fuerza de trabajo mejor retribuida del mundo, cuyos Sindicatos (AFL-CIO) han perdido todas sus aspiraciones de transformar el sistema, para integrarse plenamente en él, con la simple aspiración de obtener no una mejor calidad de vida sino, fundamentalmente, una mejor cantidad de bienes materiales.

Estados Unidos es un país de altas concentraciones en todos los aspectos. En términos de urbanización, las grandes áreas metropolitanas de las Costas Este y Oeste y de los Grandes Lagos alcanzan 16M de habitantes (Nueva York), 7M (Chicago y Los Angeles), 5M (Detroit), y las de más de tres millones son cinco.

X and Martin Luther King, were also assassinated. Again, the reasons were not made public, but the motive was, without doubt, their leadership in the struggle for black rights. President Nixon violated frontiers and international agreements and escalated the war in South East Asia. Later, in his pacifist phase, he was brought down by the Watergate scandal.

19.2. The Roots of Economic Growth in the United States

To return to basic macro-economic information, in July 1978, the GNP of the United States was calculated at $2,094,900M. This represents nearly half the total social product of the OECD countries, a third of the world total. In the same year, GDP per capita was estimated at $8,670, with average wages of $250 a week in industry and $32 a day in agriculture. Only 3% of the working population is employed in agriculture.

Thus, the American work force is the best paid in the world. Their trade unions (AFL-CIO) have abandoned any dreams of transforming the system and have opted for full integration. They aspire simply to accumulate more material goods rather than to achieve a better quality of life.

From every point of view, the United States is a country of extremes, of high concentrations. In terms of urban development, the huge metropolitan areas of the east and west coasts and the Great Lakes are heavily populated: 16M (New York), 7M (Chicago and Los Angeles), 5M (Detroit), and five cities with more than 3M.
Incluso se concibe ya la configuración de verdaderas megalópolis, como San-San (desde San Diego a San Francisco, a lo largo de un amplio segmento de la costa de California), Chipitts (desde Chicago a Pittsburg, en la región de los Grandes Lagos) y Boswash (desde Boston a Washington, en la Costa Este). Esas grandes concentraciones urbanas, a la par que permiten un alto nivel de vida y un intenso desarrollo cultural, generan un sinfín de problemas, típicos de la sociedad “postindustrial”: la contaminación atmosférica y de las aguas, la deshumanización de la vida en los centros urbanos, el crimen en proporciones alarmantes, el consumo masivo de drogas, etc.

El crecimiento económico de los EE.UU. ha sido el resultado de un avance progresivo hacia el Oeste, desde los 13 Estados iniciales (las antiguas 13 colonias). Esa conquista de la Vieja Frontera se hizo en buena parte a base de una población nutrida por una inmigración masiva procedente de Europa (unos 40 millones de inmigrantes entre 1860 y 1939).

También será preciso recordar los fuertes impulsos que en el sistema productivo tuvieron las inversiones masivas de capital, igualmente procedente de Europa, así como la incidencia expansiva en la economía de los sucesivos conflictos bélicos (primera y segunda guerras mundiales, guerra de Corea y guerra de Indochina).

Alejado del teatro de las operaciones bélicas por dos grandes océanos, EE.UU. fue en la segunda guerra mundial un seguro “arsenal de las Democracias”. Así, en tanto que la segunda guerra mundial redujo el potencial industrial de la URSS en casi 2/3, en EE.UU. dobló la capacidad de producción en poco más de cuatro años.

Indeed, the formation is already envisaged of megacities, such as San-San (from San Diego to San Francisco along a wide stretch of the Californian coast), Chipitts (from Chicago to Pittsburgh on the banks of the Great Lakes) and Boswash (from Boston to Washington on the east coast). Although these huge concentrations of urban development permit a high standard of living and intensive cultural development, they generate countless problems typical of post-industrial societies: air and water pollution, degradation of the inner cities, crime on an alarming scale, the massive consumption of drugs, etc.

The economic growth of the United States is the result of a continuous movement toward the West from the 13 founder states (the original 13 colonies). The conquest of the West was undertaken largely by a population fed by massive immigration from Europe (some 40M immigrants between 1860 and 1939).

Moreover, it should not be forgotten that the system of production was boosted by massive capital investment, once again from Europe, and that economic expansion was favoured by a succession of wars (the First and Second World Wars, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War).

During the Second World War, the United States was separated from the fighting zone by two enormous oceans and was a safe arsenal for the Allies. Therefore, whereas the industrial potential of the Soviet Union was reduced by nearly two thirds in the Second World War, the production capacity of the United States was doubled in a little over four years.
TRANSLATION-ORIENTED ANALYSIS OF A TEXT

The part of Tamames's book that has been chosen for analysis is the introduction to the section on the United States. It is a text that has been translated (not into English, but into Portuguese and Russian). It introduces information about a country in which the B language is spoken (extends encyclopedic knowledge). It is a good example of a multifunctional text in that both the informative and the operative functions are dominant (Reiss and Vermeer, 1984). It provides interesting examples of specialized and nonspecialized (standardized and nonstandardized) vocabulary and syntax and presents formal typographic difficulties. Furthermore, macrostructural-microstructural interdependence is illustrated in the way the pragmatic context and the semantic topic affect the selection, distribution, and coherence of information and the linguistic medium (vocabulary and syntax).

PRAGMATIC CONTEXT—COGNITIVE SETS

Dimensions of Language User (Author)

a) The author is Ramón Tamames, born in Madrid in 1933.

b) His idiolect is unmarked.

c) There is no evidence of any marked regional dialect.

d) The class dialect is standard, middle-class, educated Spanish.


f) His knowledge of the topic is broad. He has spent a great part of his life writing, teaching, and doing research from his chair of economic structure at the Universidad Autónoma in Madrid. He was elected to Congress in 1977–82 and 1986–89. He participated in writing the 1978 Spanish Constitution. He has also served as an economic consultant for the United Nations in Latin America and for the Spanish government in Spain and on missions abroad.

g) His belief structure is quite intrusive in most of his work. He started out as a member of the Spanish communist party, but has since changed allegiances several times. Although he is not an “orthodox” Marxist, he does believe in the progress of history and is obstinately optimistic about the future of mankind. He has been the director of El Anuario del País for some years, and in his editorial for the 1987 edition he made clear his position on a number of issues: anti-NATO, against American troops in Spain, in favour of a special relationship between Latin America and the European Community, and concerned with improving north-south relationships in general. The assumptions upon which his belief structure is based were expressed in the preface to the 1970 edition of the book. The dark clouds of the past are being swept away: “Incluso en los lugares más remotos . . . está germinando
la simiente de la rebeldía contra el atraso . . . Pero la meta está clara, y el enemigo común, por doquier, se halla identificado . . . el imperialismo, el dominio colonial” (Tamames, 1980: 13).

His wishes are also made quite clear:

Estamos en una época en la que se vislumbra como próximo, lo que tal vez ha de ser el definitivo despertar de la humanidad, el final de su larga Prehistoria de luchas y contiendas. (Tamames, 1980: 3)

Ojalá que en 1992 nos demos cuenta al final de que todos los hispanohablantes de ambos hemisferios somos por igual ciudadanos de un mismo mundo. (Tamames, 1987: 63)

h) What were Tamames’s intentions in writing *Estructura económica internacional*? The title suggests an objective, scientific, academic textbook, but the author states in the introduction that he does not want the book to be a useless exercise in erudition and he intends to follow up on the subjects treated in it. This particular book is very important for him:

A fin y al cabo, algunos libros se acaban por convertirse en una especia de hijos; no sólo se procrean, sino que además es preciso continuar ocupándose de ellos—si se aspira a que su crecimiento sea un proceso de continuo enriquecimiento cultural que sirva al fin propio de cualquier labor científica: ayudar a mostrar el camino de la verdad. (Tamames, 1980: 7)

Tamames obviously believes in the need for macrostructures in action theory. In *El Anuario del País*, he argues for the importance of a global vision: “Debemos plantearnos una visión perspectiva, esto es, hemos de intentar vislumbrar a donde vamos desde este presente en que vivimos” (Tamames, 1987: 63). *Estructura económica internacional* can be classified as a global speech act in which the purpose is to give people a macrostructure with which to interpret the world and act accordingly.

**The World (Context) in which the Text Is Interpreted**

The context has changed considerably since the first edition of this book was written. In 1970, most of the students in university today were not born, Spain had not yet begun the transition from dictatorship to democracy, and the PCE (Partido Comunista Español) was still illegal. However, many people in Spain looked to the PCE as a motor of change and felt that it would have an important role to play in Spain after the death of Franco, as indeed it did. In 1992, the PCE is hopelessly shrunk and fragmented, with no support abroad after the collapse of the Warsaw Pact.

Tamames did make changes in the book between 1970 and 1980. There are additional sections on population, food, the energy crisis, and multinationals. There are some changes in the section on the great powers after journeys he made.
to the Far East, the United States, and the Soviet Union between 1970 and 1978. Nevertheless, the section we are concerned with is almost identical and the illocutionary intention is the same: to identify the enemy—the United States.

**The Readers**

Probably, Tamames’s first objective was to reach university students. In the introduction, he recognizes his debt to his own students at the Universidad Autónoma in Madrid. In the 1970s, *Estructura económica internacional* was used as a textbook in Spain and Latin America. The Portuguese translation was published in 1979 and was used in universities in Portugal and Brazil. The book was also successful and influential among a wider public in Spain in the 1970s, as his latest book, *Un nuevo orden mundial* (Tamames, 1991), is today.

In *Estructura económica internacional*, Tamames writes as a teacher; therefore, the writer-reader relationship is asymmetrical. It is a formal teacher-student social relationship in which the writer has information (the power) that the reader needs.

**Purpose of the Translation**

Although this book has been translated and widely read, it is difficult to think of a reason for translating it in 1992 that is not purely academic. It could, for instance, be translated for a historian who was writing a biography of Tamames. For this analysis, we will imagine a purely fictitious context that would maintain a functional equivalence with the original: a Cuban publishing house sending textbooks to English-speaking parts of Africa.

**Semantic Content (Topic)**

The topics given by the author in the title and headings give an idea of the topic, but, as we shall see, pragmatic constraints govern the actual selection of information. Thus, a book with the same headings by a different author—say, Milton Friedman, or John Kenneth Galbraith—would have a very different content. The structure we are given is the following:

a) Book title: *Estructura económica internacional*. The very fact that he writes *estructura* in singular is a pragmatic choice that illustrates his point of view, which is that we are moving toward a world government because of the total interdependence of the whole of the globe with its parts.

b) Chapter 5: *Las grandes potencias económicas* (the United States, the Soviet Union, Japan, and China)

c) Section 1: *Estados Unidos de América*

d) Subsection 1: *Datos básicos. El "Melting Pot" y el "American Way of Life"*

e) Subsection 2: *Las raíces del crecimiento económico de EE.UU.*
PRAGMATIC AND SEMANTIC SELECTION OF INFORMATION

The selection of information in a text is decided by pragmatic and semantic coherence (van Dijk, 1980: 112). Pragmatic coherence is based on what is related to or relevant for the point of view, purpose, or function of the text. Irrelevant, known, or predictable information is deleted. For example, in a detective novel, the description of the town where the story takes place may be minimal or deleted if it is not crucial to the development of the plot, whereas in a travel guide it is essential.

Semantic coherence is based on the interrelatedness of information and its relatedness to the topic or referential identity of the macrostructure. Within the theme of relatedness, coherence is maintained if the information belongs to the same level—that is, if each text or macrostructure has an upper boundary of generalization and a lower boundary of particularization (van Dijk, 1980). In the words of Dr. Johnson (1755: xii), “In all pointed sentences some degree of accuracy must be sacrificed to conciseness.” For example, Dick Francis enchants the readers of his detective novels by giving them inside information about the professions of his heroes: steeplechaser, insurance agent, merchant banker, gem merchant. He makes these professions come alive, but his readers would soon lose patience if he overstepped the lower boundary of information by giving too much detailed information of this kind, which would detract from the main purpose of the “whodunnit.”

In the Tamames text, pragmatic constraints are of great importance in the selection of information. Semantic coherence is sometimes sacrificed for pragmatic coherence.

Subsection 1: Datos básicos

Paragraph 1 begins with two sentences that establish the size of the land and the population. The third sentence breaks the population down into different minority groups. This leads into the last sentence, which is obviously the topic sentence and fulfils the pragmatic function of introducing us to the enemy. The United States is an unstable country of racism and discrimination, where minorities have to accept the dominant culture and where the Melting Pot and the American Way of Life are myths with no reflection in reality.

Paragraph 2 develops the idea that the minorities are resisting the tyranny of the dominant culture. The enemy is further identified—the WASPs.

Paragraph 3 develops the theme of instability, which is aggravated by unequal distribution of wealth but still focusses on the problem of racism. The image is of a violent society manipulated by the mass media and the military-industrial complex.

Paragraph 4 breaks the boundaries of particularization set by the text, because here pragmatic coherence dominates semantic coherence. The paragraph is made up of a list of references to individuals who are supposed to represent the violence and corruption of American society. All of the events and individuals would have
been familiar to university students in the 1970s but they are not so familiar to the present generation. Furthermore, the list is written in a kind of shorthand with incomplete sentences, which emphasizes the abnormality of the sequence. It provides an excellent opportunity for a brief discussion in class on the history of the United States in the last thirty years and to fill in the gaps and give the students a macrostructure with which to make sense of the paragraph. The topic of the entire section could be that the United States is a social and psychological mess.

Subsection 2: Las raíces del crecimiento económico de los EE.UU.

Paragraph 1 begins by admitting that the previous section was not strictly macroeconomic information. This paragraph does provide economic information: the United States is the wealthiest country in the world, and its workers are the best paid.

Paragraph 2, however, shows how these workers have been corrupted and their trade unions have sold out to the system. They have no “higher” aspirations, no concern for a better quality of life, but only materialistic greed for more consumer goods.

Paragraph 3 lists the large cities but does not mention the vast areas of unspoiled nature and flourishing agriculture.

Paragraph 4 states that the result of this urbanization is an endless list of problems: pollution, crime, drugs, and so on.

Paragraphs 5 and 6 explain that economic growth in the United States is the result of external factors. The conquest of the West was undertaken by European immigrants, and the economic boom of the twentieth century was due to European investment and a series of wars. The Second World War favoured the United States, while it crippled the Soviet Union.

Tamames’s selection of information is pragmatically coherent but not always semantically coherent. No space is given to geographic elements such as latitude, altitude, rain, or raw materials, although in the section on the Soviet Union, the point is made that this country is far less fortunate than the United States with regard to climate. Tamames does not mention the Protestant work ethic or the American workaholic who cannot believe that Europeans have such long holidays. In the section on Japan, he pays credit to the exceptional working qualities of the Japanese people but he does not mention the fact that 50 percent of the university students in California are of Asian descent. Pollution is mentioned as a problem only in relation to the United States.

Pragmatic and Semantic Distribution of Information

According to van Dijk (1980: 223), the distribution of information in a text depends on four main factors, the first two of which are semantic; the second two, pragmatic. The fact sequence has two dimensions: time and space. The normal time
sequence is chronological. The normal space sequence is from the whole to the part, from the general to the particular. Cognitive reasons may alter the normal order of the fact sequence due to the order of observation, perception, or understanding of the fact sequence. The communicative context normally requires a progression from known information—that is, what is known by the writer and the reader—to new information in a sentence: topic → comment, old → new. Pragmatic constraints, due to the writer’s intentions, the purpose of the global speech act, may alter the topic → comment order.

The study of these four factors in the Tamames text shows that, in general, the normal ordering of information is maintained. There are three exceptions:

1. The time sequence is altered in section 2, paragraph 2, sentence 2. The new attitude of minority groups is described before their old one. The reason for this is pragmatic, to stress the importance of this change of attitude, “Y lo que es aún más importante.” The alteration of the topic-comment sequence to produce emphasis is more common in argumentative Spanish texts than in English.15

2. Although the sequences are maintained within the sentences, the whole of section 1, paragraph 4 violates the norm of whole to part. Tamames disarms his readers by admitting that his examples might seem anecdotal, but what he does is to give micro-examples in the place of a macrostructure. He presents a list of assassinations and scoundrels upon which to base his macropicture of the United States. The fact that he has descended from the whole to the parts is emphasized by the way he begins the second section: “Volviendo ahora a los datos económicos de base.”

3. Section 2, paragraph 4, sentence 1 alters the time sequence (the relation of the present economic growth to the conquest of the West), but only in order to maintain the topic → comment sequence, because the previous paragraphs are about contemporary American economic growth.

Thus, it could be argued that the writer’s intention is to produce the impression of an objective, “scientific” text. The unmarked ordering reinforces this impression and masks the persuasive, emotional, argumentative nature of the text.

Syntactic Consequences

In the preceding section, we saw how the normal distribution of information in the sentence was maintained, giving the impression of a scientific, objective economic textbook (field). This impression is maintained in the syntax used. The persuasive, pragmatic force of the text is based almost entirely on the selection of information and, as we shall see in the next section, the selection of vocabulary.

15. See appendix, section 9, “Sentences and Punctuation.”
Because the distribution of information in the sentences is normal or "logical," textual cohesion is largely semantic, and connectors are used sparingly. They are not essential from the point of view of either meaning or style. Here is a list of the few connectors used in the text and those used in the English translation proposed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Furthermore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Igualmente</td>
<td>Again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pero</td>
<td>But</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lo que</td>
<td>This</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En ese mismo año</td>
<td>In the same year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pues</td>
<td>Thus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incluso</td>
<td>Although</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A la par que</td>
<td>Also</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>También</td>
<td>Moreover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Igualmente</td>
<td>Once again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Así</td>
<td>Therefore</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The syntactic differences between the SLT and the TLT described below are typical of academic economic discourse (field) in Spanish and English.

The structure of the Spanish sentences is complex and the author uses subordinate clauses that in English would be connected by conjunctions or put into another sentence. The Spanish sentences are longer than the English ones, so there are 26 in Spanish and 34 in English.

Most of the sentences are complete. The verbs are exhaustively analyzable in terms of the transitivity system and the agents realized (Masón, 1990: 16). The only part of the text where this does not apply is section 1, paragraph 4, which begins, "De forma aparentemente anecdótica," followed by the list of individuals. This is also the part of the text that breaks the distribution of information norms by moving part -> whole. Agents are systematically omitted and the verbs are not complete. Incomplete sentences of this kind are more acceptable in formal Spanish prose than in English. The translator has to decide whether to maintain the incomplete sentences in English, which would make this section even more shocking, or to complete the verb and perhaps give greater authority to the "anecdote." For example:

J.F. Kennedy, asesinado en 1963 en circunstancias más que oscuras.
J.F. Kennedy, assassinated in 1963 in very shady circumstances.

or

J.F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963 in very shady circumstances.
There is a low level of redundancy, and parentheses are used frequently.

There are no examples of imperatives, interrogatives, or exclamations. The preterite and the present are the tenses most commonly used in the Spanish and can be translated into the past simple and the present simple in English. Here is a brief breakdown of some of the features of the verbs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26 sentences</td>
<td>34 sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 incomplete sentences</td>
<td>24 passive clauses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 impersonal se clauses</td>
<td>32 active clauses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 active clauses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both tenor and field influence the style used, which, on the whole, is impersonal, typical of objective, scientific, academic writing.

The presence of the author is unobtrusive. He never uses the first-person singular.

The reader participation is implicit rather than explicit, except on two occasions, when the first-person plural is used.

Thus, syntactically, the translation problems are not acute in this text. The persuasive, pragmatic force of the text is almost entirely based on the selection and distribution of information and vocabulary.

**Lexical Consequences**

**Standardized Language**

Newmark (1981) makes a distinction between standardized and nonstandardized language. Standardized language is defined as having only one correct equivalent and falls into Newmark's category of the "science" of translation. For example, OCDE can only be translated as OECD. Nonstandardized language has more than one correct equivalent and falls into the category of the "art" of translation. Certain fields of discourse contain no, or very little, standardized language. The field of economics-textbook discourse, for example, contains a high proportion of standardized language.

Names of countries are normally standardized, but there are some debatable cases; for example, the English press is beginning to use "the Netherlands" instead of "Holland." If the Tamames text were more recent, there would, of course, be a problem with "USSR," which is now without a satisfactory name. *The Economist*
Style Guide (Butler, 1991) suggests using "the former Soviet Union" or "the ex-Soviet Union" on first mention and then dropping the "former" or "ex-.

Most Spanish texts use norteamericano for citizen of the United States, whereas the unmarked americano is associated with people from Latin America. The Economist Style Guide states that it is usually all right to talk about the inhabitants of the United States as "Americans," but to bear in mind that the term also applies to everyone from Canada to Cape Horn.

The case of norteamERICANOS de RAZA NEGRA is more complicated. A few years ago, "black" was perfectly acceptable, and the change from "nigger" to "Negro" to "coloured" to "black" fits in perfectly with Tamames's little history lesson that includes the Kennedys, Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X. Both black leaders provided inspiration for the "black is beautiful" movement.

It is currently difficult to advise how to refer to Americans whose ancestors came from Africa; preferred usage appears to be no longer blacks but there is no agreed alternative. Avoid giving offence. This should be your first concern. But also avoid mealy-mouthed euphemisms and terms that have not generally caught on despite promotion by pressure groups. If and when it becomes plain that American blacks no longer wish to be called black, as some years ago it became plain that they no longer wished to be called coloured, then call them African-Americans (or whatever). Till then they are blacks. (Butler, 1991: 27)

English Erasmus exchange students from Wolverhampton University (1991–92) were very unhappy about the idea of using "black" in the English context and were therefore unwilling to use it in the American context.

Other cases of standardized language are statistics; names and titles of people, dates, wars; common acronyms: PNB → GNP, PIB → GDP, ODE → OECD; transcription of English expressions: WASPs, Watergate, AFL/CIO (American Federation of Labor/Congress of Industrial Organizations); and standardized economic expressions: nivel de vida → standard of living, as opposed to nonstandardized calidad de vida ⇒ quality of life.

Specific Translation Problems for Spanish Students

Capital letters: The main problem here is to remember to use capital letters for nationalities and countries used adjectively—for example, mexicano-americano → Mexican Americans.

Articles: The definite article is obligatory in English for EEUU. → the USA, URSS → the USSR. It is not used for titles when the name of the person is given: el presidente Johnson → President Johnson.

Numbers: The main difference between Spanish and English is the inverted use of the comma and the period: thousands: period → comma: 2.094.900 ⇒ 2,094,900;
decimals: comma → period: 9,4 millones → 9.4 million. When dealing with numbers, students may forget that adjectives in English are never plural: 9.4 millions kilometres. They may also have problems with prepositions: 9,4M de kilómetros cuadrados → 9.4M square kilometres; 222M de habitantes → 222M inhabitants; 2M de dólares → 2M dollars. Another common mistake is to retain the article in percentages: un 10,5 por 100 → 10.5%.

Nonstandardized Language

If the pragmatic purpose of the text (to identify the enemy) is seen in the selection and distribution of information, it could also be argued that the tenor (formal, impersonal style) of the text reinforces the pragmatic purpose indirectly by presenting the information in an objective, unobtrusive style. However, the choice of vocabulary reflects the pragmatic purpose much more directly. This is particularly true in the first section.

Even the choice of a seemingly neutral word like asimilación is significant. Integración suggests a two-way process, while asimilación is one-way: immigrants have to adapt to the WASP culture. At the 1987 congress in Toledo on the relationship among Jews, Muslims, and Christians previous to 1492, Barkai, from Tel Aviv, pointed out the difference between these two words and concluded, “Sólo se produce simbiosis cultural (the Melting Pot?) cuando existe una completa integración” (El País, 20 Apr. 1987).

A study of the vocabulary used shows that the enemy is being described. Naturally, given the topic, there is much referential, denotational, standardized language, but there is also a surprising amount of nonstandardized language with a strongly emotional connotational impact. The first section included this set of strongly emotive vocabulary:

- tendencias... en pugna... viva
- los fuertes desequilibrios
- crisis de confianza
- exaltación tradicional
- el pretendido sueño
- dramáticamente sacudida
- violencia
- asesinado (three times)
- complot
- asesinato
- circunstancias oscuras
- un temor inconfesable
- un contexto no aclarado
- violó
- escándalo
Students might be tempted to "neutralize" this vocabulary if they look only at the text and not at the context—that is, if they take into account only the formal, "scientific," impersonal structure of the text and the semantic topic. The pragmatic context is essential to make sense of these words and understand why they are being used here. The macrostructure explains the microstructure and vice versa. One of Tamames's pragmatic intentions in writing this book is to identify the enemy. He does so very successfully.

**The Semiotic Dimension of a Text**

In the semantic and pragmatic analysis of Tamames's 1980 text introducing the United States, we saw how the main intention was to identify the enemy and how this was achieved by the selection of information and some of the nonstandardized vocabulary. At the same time, this rather atavistic aim was disguised by the complex, sophisticated, specialized language of economics. Specialized language can be used to mask the real intention of a text, hiding it behind jargon, professorial authority, and the structure, syntax, and orientation of a scientific text, which is presumed to be "objective."

As was pointed out in chapter 5, signs, semiotic units, and texts are processed not by empty brains but by individuals who have already formed a world view based on their own experience. The search for meaning is a process of intertextualization as the semiotic units in the text interact with each individual's categories and prototypes. Furthermore, each individual shares the common prototypes or myths of his or her culture, to a greater or lesser extent. This is illustrated by a pre-translation exercise for the Tamames text, using the list of emotive, nonstandardized vocabulary given in the previous section. Students are given the list of words and asked to imagine a context in which they could use these words to write a text (such as an article, a story, or a letter). They are then asked to write their text in English, translating the words according to the context they have chosen. Their texts would enliven the pages of the most sensationalist newspaper: "Murder in the Jet Set," "Shame and Scandal in the Family." It is possible to see differences in the contexts chosen by students of different nationalities. Spanish, Algerian, Italian, and French students sometimes set the scene in the United States, but English and German students rarely do. For French students, the scandal often takes place in the Middle East, whereas Spanish students often situate it in Latin America.

George Orwell, in his essay "Politics and the English Language," provided the example of

some comfortable English professor defending Russian totalitarianism. He cannot say right out, "I believe in killing off your opponents when you can get good results by doing so." Probably, therefore, he will say something like this. "While freely conceding that the Soviet regime exhibits certain features which the humanitarian may be inclined to deplore, we must, I think, agree that a certain curtailment of the right to political opposition is an unavoidable
concomitant to transitional periods, and the rigours which the Russian people have been called upon to undergo have been amply justified in the sphere of concrete achievement." (Orwell, 1984: 362)

Hatim and Mason (1990: 101) qualify the subordinate clause "While freely conceding that the Soviet regime exhibits certain features which the humanitarian may be inclined to deplore" as an example of a thesis cited to be opposed.

The title of Tamames's 1980 introduction to the United States is another example of a thesis cited to be opposed: Datos básicos. El "Melting Pot" y el "American Way of Life." These two clichés (metaphors, signs), "the Melting Pot" and "the American Way of Life," can be interpreted in many different ways—that is, they have multiple significants. As signs, they have an endless capacity for commutability. Originally, certainly, they had positive connotations, and they probably still maintain these in many cultures. "The Melting Pot" suggested a country in which all races were welcome and integrated, and all contributed to construct a richer, more vigorous society. "The American Way of Life" suggested material comfort, but also a society of equal opportunity, in which every child had the chance to become president of the nation or of the Coca-Cola Company. Tamames introduces the United States by these two signs, but the rest of the text is dedicated to proving that in no way has the American dream been achieved.

There is considerable confusion over the value of different semiotic entities within a culture. Spanish students vary widely in their interpretation of the "American Way of Life," although they all associate it to some extent with McDonald's. However, some are horrified at the unhealthiness of the hamburgers sold at McDonald's; some would like to throw a stone through the window of that "imperialistic establishment"; some would like to eat at McDonald's, but only if they were sure they were not going to meet anyone they knew; some adore everything about the McDonald's experience. This intracultural confusion increases in an intercultural situation.

Even in the 1990s, Spanish students tend to associate the two signs ("the Melting Pot" and "the American Way of Life") with more negative connotations than do students from other European countries (class discussions, Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, 1992). Anti-American feeling still lives in Spain; therefore, it is much easier for Spanish students to interact with the original intertextuality of Tamames's text. Nevertheless, in the last few years it has become increasingly difficult for all students to capture the ideological viewpoint of authors of texts. This is due to the ideological vacuum produced by recent events in the world, which has shaken the foundations of our social semiotic systems or cultural myths.

**The Need for Semiotic Analysis in a New World Order**

It is becoming increasingly difficult to predict the position of a writer. Our expectations are not always fulfilled even with authors who are quite familiar. This is true
with Tamames. His position in 1970 (and 1980) was easy to identify because it was based on well-established European communist or socialist myths. His position now is much more complex, as we shall see when we look at an extract from his book *Un nuevo orden mundial*. Tamames is far from being an isolated example.

For this reason, pre-translation exercises that emphasize the semiotic dimension of the text are particularly useful. In order to understand the whole communicative intention of a discourse, it is necessary to consider not only the pragmatic action but also the semiotic dimension, which regulates the interaction between the different elements of the discourse as signs. This interaction takes place, on the one hand, between signs within the text and, on the other hand, between the sender and the receiver of the signs. The semiotic dimension propels and controls communication.


This analysis is based on Charles Pierce's semiotic approach described in chapter 5. Pierce breaks down the sign into three parts: whatever initiates identification of the sign; the object of the sign; and the interpretant, or the effect the sign is meant to relay.

In translating, a semiotic entity can be a word, a phrase, a sentence, or an entire text. Two texts have been chosen for analysis according to a simplified version of Pierce's three categories. The first text is the introduction to the United States from Tamames (1980), which has already been studied in considerable detail. The second is in Tamames's book *Un nuevo orden mundial* (1991), the introduction to the United States in the section "Los Poderes del Norte" and titled "Crónica de un declive no irrecuperable."


What initiates the sign is an economics textbook written for university students in Spain and Latin America. The style is typically academic, objective, and scientific, both in the distribution of information within the sentence and in its impersonality. Neither the presence of the author nor the participation of the reader is explicit. The level of redundancy is low and there are many examples of parenthesis. There are no imperatives, interrogatives, or exclamations. The vocabulary is, on the whole, denotative, factual, frequently related to size, numbers, amounts, and percentages. However, the pragmatically driven selection of information and the use of emotionally charged, nonstandardized vocabulary provide the intertextual references that make the text interact with the discourse of Marxist propaganda.

The object of the sign is the United States: territory, population, economic, and social situation from the beginning of the nineteenth century to 1970.

The interpretant is to identify the United States as the enemy. There is no need to go into further detail here, as the text was fully discussed in the previous section.
Tamames (1991): Crónica de un declive no irrecuperable: EE.UU., desde Bretton Woods a la Guerra del Golfo

What initiates the sign is a text from a book written for a wider public than was the earlier university textbook, although it shares many of the same characteristics. The differences are as follows: the presence of the author is often explicit; he expresses his own opinions and does not rest on the authority of Marxist discourse; sentences and paragraphs are shorter and the print is larger; it is easier to read—there are fewer details, numbers, and statistics—but much of the language is still denotative, technical, typical of the specialized language of economics. The nonstandardized vocabulary of the text reflects uncertainty:

un declive no irrecuperable
toda una serie de incertidumbres
toda una serie de problemas
ya no es el dueño y señor de otro tiempo
esa tendencia de declive global
se debaten mil problemas
la inquietud
no tuvo más remedio
tienen pánico
ve con impotencia
un acicate y una inquietud permanentes
motivo de preocupación

Once again, the object of the sign is the United States: its social and economic position from the end of the Second World War to the Gulf War.

The interpretant could be expressed as uncertainty about the future of the United States. The title, _Un declive no irrecuperable_, is significant; the syntactic double negative has semiotic meaning. Tamames is by nature optimistic; he has not totally abandoned his belief in "the progress of history," although he can no longer believe that "the dawn is red." Therefore, the United States is not in _un declive irrecuperable_, but neither is it in _un declive recuperable_. If the translator is not aware of the semiotic dimension, it would be very easy to iron out that double negative to avoid _not without hope of recovery_. English students translating this text usually simplify it to _with hope of recovery_. The intertextuality of this text can be recognized only in interaction with articles and books written after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

In 1970 and 1980, Tamames was certain who the enemy was and whose side he was on, but in 1991 he is not so sure. The title of this book, _Un nuevo orden mundial_, also expresses this uncertainty, which he stresses in the prologue:

¿De qué nuevo mundo se trata? El anterior, bipolar, eso parece claro, está feneciendo ante nuestros ojos. El nuevo, ¿será unipolar, o compartido? ¿Habrá la hegemonía autoritaria de unos pocos con un criterio autogratificante, o vamos a un mundo solidario? Esos son algunos de los interrogantes
a los cuales pretendo responder al referirme a un nuevo orden. Así, con artículo indefinido, como indefinida está su configuración.

It is very difficult to define Tamames’s position today. On occasion, he appears to be an ecologist who has caught some of Margaret Thatcher’s obsessions. In this book he offers an ecological-economic alternative (Eco-Eco). In 1992, he wrote an article about the Treaty of Maastricht for the Anuario El País, in which he attacked the Spanish government for its inward-looking, falsely social system of protectionism:

por medio de toda clase de dispositivos de asistencia al paro (en vez de estimular el empleo), de creación de ocupación ficticia, prebendaria y electorera en las administraciones públicas, de cubrir sine die los números rojos de las empresas públicas que no tienen ninguna posibilidad racional de supervivencia, etc., etc. (emphasis added)

In the 1991 text, the selection of information about the United States is still critical, but the novelty is that the criticism is all from American sources, such as Time magazine and The International Herald Tribune. Tamames concludes the section by saying,

Todo lo dicho no supone, porque sería necio, anunciar otra vez más, una catástrofe económica en EE.UU.; porque el país tiene portentosas capacidades de recuperación. . . . Tampoco hay en las palabras anteriores ningún anti-americanismo. El diagnóstico más duro sobre la realidad lo hacen los propios estadounidenses: Grunwald, Chomsky, Cronkite, etc.

He even suggests that the Americans may reinvent capitalism: “sencillamente porque no es eficiente.”

**Semiotic Analysis in Translating Irony**

Recognizing irony in one’s own language is not always easy. When Jonathan Swift wrote *A Modest Proposal* to shock England into awareness of the suffering caused by the potato famine in Ireland, he used irony, writing as though the Irish were not really human, and even suggested recipes for cooking Irish babies as a solution to the problem. Some English readers, taking him seriously, were horrified.

As I mentioned in the introduction, in a pre-translation exercise on *Un hombre providencial* by Haro Tecglen, only about half the Spanish students recognized the irony, and none of the foreign-exchange students (English, German, and French) recognized it at all. The recognition of irony (and humour) in a foreign language involves awareness of the many different referential, ideological networks (intertextuality) that make up the world view of the speakers of that language at a particular time in history. The translator needs to be aware of the semiotic dimension of the SLT, the signification of all the signs that make up the full interpretant of the text. Without knowledge of the ideological networks in the SL and TL cultures, the translator cannot identify intertextuality and carry out the cultural transfer necessary to translate irony. This is very clearly illustrated by *Un hombre providencial*. 
EL PAÍS, domingo 24 de noviembre de 1991

INTERNACIONAL

ANÁLISIS

Un hombre providencial

Eduardo Haro Tecglen

De 13 candidatos para sustituir a Javier Pérez de Cuéllar en la Secretaría General de las Naciones Unidas, cuatro eran europeos, y nueve de lo que aún llamamos Tercer Mundo: puede que por mucho tiempo, porque es una denominación con tal suavidad semántica, tal calidad de eufemismo, que será difícil encontrar otra mejor.

Desde el principio, en la Conferencia de Bandung, donde se redactó una carta del nuevo enciclopedismo que correspondía a la época (1955), se descubrió que entre sus políticos, pensadores y poetas aparecían unos características hombres de buena voluntad, templados, con amplias ilusiones, reducidas a la modestia de la práctica posible de cabalgar entre las distintas civilizaciones internas y externas. Eran hombres dúctiles, razonables y útiles, de donde podían salir excelentes Secretarios Generales para las Naciones Unidas. Pérez de Cuéllar ha llevado su servicio al cargo con tal abnegación que ha sido capaz de gastar sus últimos tiempos permitiendo que las Naciones Unidas realizaran una terrible guerra, sin dejar de utilizar para ella la terminología pacifista; un poco pudoroso ante el ultimátum del Consejo de Seguridad, capaz de viajar a los centros más comprometidos para explicar que no tenían más salida que la aceptación de las condiciones y, por tanto, investido del manto del negociador, del intermediario. Convenía creerle, y se creyó. Gracias a él, las Naciones Unidas han aparecido justicieras al fin.

El puesto justo

El egipcio Butros Ghali tiene las condiciones que le califican como providencial para la sustitución, teniendo en cuenta que no siempre la voluntad humana encuentra por sí sola el hombre ideal para el puesto justo. Árabe pero cristiano, oportunamente casado con una judía; egipcio pero de civilización francesa; político de un país y de una época que produjo la primera reconciliación árabe con Israel, y que ha trabajado siempre en ese sentido. Con 70 años que quizá no le estimulen para apurar su mandato (cinco años) si, antes, llega a coronar una obra sustancial, pero que le dan el vigor, la experiencia y el sentido común que se necesitan para ayudar al establecimiento del nuevo orden del presidente Bush; que ya comenzó desde el momento en que su país, del que es vice-primer ministro, envió soldados a esa guerra frente a un caudillo árabe que pretendía alzar el islam en contra del buen sentido; incluso en contra de Israel, con el cual es eterno negociador favorito. Su puesto de vice-primer ministro, y los que ha desempeñado en su carrera, no le han obligado a tomar posiciones demasiado visibles y personales. Su con-
dicción de hombre de Occidente no sólo no le compromete ante los gobiernos árabes, sino que le hacen especialmente útil como creador de puentes; no tener ni un solo voto en contra en la primera votación del Consejo de Seguridad, y sólo cuatro abstenciones de países tímidos, le califica especialmente. Va a tener en contra a los integristas musulmanes, a las organizaciones extremistas y quizá a partes populares que se consideran irredentas. Pero son grupos con poco porvenir en un tiempo próximo. A extinguir.

Sobre este hombre de confianza podrán ahora transferirse algunas de las formas de presión y negociación que está realizando directamente Estados Unidos a través de Baker para que se extienda la Conferencia de Madrid y, bajo su manto funcionen las conversaciones bilaterales o multilaterales que lleguen a apurar todas las consecuencias de las nuevas relaciones de fuerzas en la amplia zona en disputa, hasta llegar a un posible equilibrio de grupos, naciones y fronteras.

En ello se incluye una reducción de las posibilidades palestinas: hay que considerar que los palestinos perdieron la guerra con Irak. Arafat sabía que razones de seguridad para Israel había tras esa guerra, más allá del casus belli de Kuwait, del asunto del petróleo y de la inverosimilitud de la bomba atómica iraquí.

El reconocimiento de los derechos nacionales de los palestinos decidido el jueves por el Partido Laborista va en esta misma corriente; en la de la sonrisa de la paz y la posibilidad de la negociación. Sobre todo, la ocasión de abrir un frente en la acalorada política interna, donde Shamir no va a poder resistir mucho tiempo entre la presión de los norteamericanos y de las comunidades israelíes en Estados Unidos y la intemperancia de sus ultras y sus partidos religiosos. Parece que todo está percutiendo en la opinión pública de Israel: van creciendo los partidarios de una negociación con resultado ventajoso, puesto que ahora las fuerzas reales y políticas son favorables a la continuidad extenuante de un estado permanente de vigilía y ansiedad. No quiero decir que los laboristas fueran a ganar hoy unas elecciones, pero sí que representan esa nueva voluntad que parece corresponder a la tranquilidad que puede darles tener teóricamente enfrente a un hombre como el egipcio Ghali, tan dúctil y tan eficaz para la política de Estados Unidos en la zona.

A semiotic analysis of this article using Pierce’s (1931–58) categories shows that the author’s purpose is to present Butros Ghali as a providential tool for American interests. What initiates the sign is an elegantly written newspaper article that occupied a full page of the international section of El País on 24 November 1991 and was classified as Análisis. The sentences are very long, between 50 and 100 words. There are many examples of subordination. The text shows aspects of abstract language (for example, a great number of adverbial and adjectival phrases, connotational vocabulary with multiple meanings, metaphor, personification, verbal agents not realized).
The object of the sign, the man sent by providence, is Butros Ghali, newly elected Secretary General of the United Nations.

The interpretant is the opposite of what is indicated in the title. *Un hombre providencial* is another example of a thesis presented to be refuted: Butros Ghali is a man for all seasons, whose varied past allows him to see every side of an argument, a perfect Secretary General of the United Nations. Do not be fooled. Butros Ghali, like Perez de Cuéllar, his predecessor, is providential only for the United States.

Unlike the two Tamames texts, this one is deliberately ironic. Taken in isolation, each word used to describe Butros Ghali is positive. The irony becomes evident through the cumulative effect of the exaggerated praise. The United States is still the bully, but it is clever enough to hide its fists of iron in velvet gloves, and Butros Ghali is a velvet glove. He is therefore a traitor to the Third World.

There are many linguistic clues to the irony. We will consider a few of these linguistic clues, and why the non-native Spanish speakers did not recognize the irony at all.

*Clues to Irony*

The *use* of “tal” in the text:

... lo que aún llamamos Tercer Mundo: puede por mucho tiempo, porque es una denominación con *tal* suavidad semántica, *tal* calidad de eufemismo, que será difícil encontrar otra mejor.

The *juxtaposition* of conflicting qualities. The successors of Bandung, men such as Pérez de Cuéllar and Butros Ghali, are depicted as both quixotic heroes and pragmatic politicians:

... unos característicos *hombres de buena voluntad*, templados, con amplias ilusiones, reducidas a la modestia de lo práctico posible, cabalgar entre las distintas civilizaciones. ... Eran hombres *ductiles*, *razonables* y *útiles* de donde podían salir excelentes Secretarios Generales para las Naciones Unidas.

The *connotational force* of much of the vocabulary conflicts with the superficial message of the text. For example, the use of *justicieras* instead of *justas* evokes all kinds of connotations related to *pistoleros* who take the law into their own hands:

... ha llevado su servicio al cargo con *tal* abnegación. ... Gracias a él, las Naciones Unidas han aparecido *justicieras* al fin.

The word *providencial* also has conflicting connotational meanings. German students translating this text avoid using the word “providential,” perhaps for the reason that Katerina Reiss (in a lecture at the First International Congress of Translation, Barcelona, 1992) gave for a German translator’s avoidance of the word “providence” in Camilo Jose Cela’s *Pascual Duarte*. The translator substituted “luck” for “providence” in the phrase, “No obstante, y si la Providencia dispone que...”
Reiss assumed that in this case the translator had avoided the use of “providence” because of its associations with or (intertextual reference to) Hitler’s discourse.

Many of the Spanish students also avoided the word “providential” in the title of *Un hombre providencial* and looked for a paraphrase. Their suggestions included “the right man for the job,” “the ideal candidate,” “the perfect candidate.” In fact, Haro Tecglen is a proclaimed atheist and the title is the first clue to the irony in the text. The English students did not avoid “providential,” perhaps because the religious, messianic connotations are not so strong in English. “A gift from God” would reinforce the irony more effectively.

... tiene las condiciones que le califican como providencial para la sustitución, teniendo en cuenta que no siempre la voluntad humana encuentra por sí sola el hombre ideal para el puesto justo. Árabe pero cristiano, oportunamente casado con una judía; egipcio pero de civilización francesa.

*Why the Irony Was Difficult to Recognize*

The article was difficult because it was unexpected, unpredictable. All of the other articles published in the Spanish press on the occasion of the election of Butros Ghali took the same position as Angeles Espinosa:

El nuevo secretario general de la ONU cuenta con su prestigio en el Tercer Mundo y la simpatía occidental para emprender la renovación que todos esperan de la organización. (“Perfil: Butros Ghali,” *El País*, 5 Jan. 1992)

Like Tamames, Haro Tecglen wanted to change the world. He was the assistant editor of *Triunfo*, the magazine that played such an important role in Spain in the last years of Franco and during the transition. According to Juan Cruz, Haro Tecglen wrote much of the magazine:

En España era difícil hablar de España. En cierto modo, *Triunfo*, exiliada, obligada, como dice Escurra, a referirse al exterior para hallar allí la metáfora de lo que ocurría dentro. Para hacerlo, en seguida contó con la presencia polivalente de Eduardo Haro Tecglen, que unas veces era Pablo Berben—cuando escribía temas científicos—, otras era Haro propiamente dicho—cada vez que no se prodigaba demasiado—y en otras ocasiones resolvía convertirse en el comentarista de política internacional Juan Aldebarán. Después, pasado el tiempo, fue Pozuelo, donde inauguró la ironía que ahora le hace uno de los columnistas más prestigiosos de España.¹⁶

*Triunfo* ceased publication in 1982, and its disappearance coincided with what Haro Tecglen defined as “la llegada de la vida práctica a lo que antes estaba ocupado por

la utopía."\(^{17}\) He now writes a daily column, “Visto/Oído,” on the penultimate page of El País. A few extracts from this column illustrate the ideological crisis that is a part of the new world order.

**Miedo al miedo, 2 February 1992.**

Me costará trabajo admitir que el mal es decisivo en la especie humana. Seguiré creyendo que la sociedad está mal hecha. ¿Está más pasado de moda Rousseau que Nietzsche? Ser escéptico, o desalentado, es grave: pero ¿cómo son los que tienen creencias firmes, los seguros de sí mismos, de su patria, de su sangre, su fe, su dinero!

**Los jesuitas, 8 December 1991.**

Me asombro de mí mismo cuando me veo creyendo que los jesuitas son una de las últimas reservas del pobre, del desvalido, del explotado. ¿Quién me iba a decir que sólo habría este clavo ardiente al que pudiera agarrarse un ateo al terminar el siglo XX!

**Medios Seres, 19 January 1992.**

Lamento haber creído con Lévi-Strauss o con Toynbee que lo suyo era tan bueno como lo nuestro y podían vivir sólo con ello: no es verdad, la punta de lanza de la calidad de vida está entre nosotros, y la base ha quedado inmóvil en África, en Asia, en América.

**Querida democracia, 12 December 1992.**

Es la nueva democracia. Todo viene del nuevo orden. Veo pasar, en el prodigioso televisor, la reconversión de la democracia universal. Yo no soy reconvertible. Ni quiero. Me daría vergüenza, si no, protestar cuando Castro mate a sus nuevos condenados.

There are at least three reasons why non-Spanish exchange students found the irony more difficult to recognize than did Spanish students. The first is obviously linguistic. There was much unfamiliar vocabulary for them (even some of the Spanish students did not know *irredentas*). They did not pick up syntactic clues of irony, such as the repeated use of *tal*: “tal suavidad semántica,” “tal calidad de eufemismo,” “tal abnegación.” The second reason is that freedom of the press was a much more recent phenomenon in Spain than it was in the other European countries represented in the class. Although Franco was already dead when most of the students learned to read, it is still perhaps more necessary to read between the lines in the Spanish press. The third reason is definitely semiotic. This article was written after the Gulf War, when feelings were still running high. In certain quarters in Spain, there was a considerable amount of anti-American feeling. Although Spain was one of the “Allies,” there were no signs of the jingoism that appeared in some sectors of the British and American media.

\(^{17}\) Quoted in ibid.
One of the questions in the pre-translation exercise referred to networks of extralinguistic references. The most evident network here is related to the crisis in the Middle East. A close study of each of these references as semiotic entities would probably reveal very different associations for Spanish readers from those for English, German, or Danish readers. After the Gulf War, a group of exchange students produced the associations in the second column. Those in the third column are the ones used by Haro Tecglen in this article. Even if Spanish readers did not share these associations, many would recognize them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>References</th>
<th>English Associations</th>
<th>Haro Tecglen’s Associations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United Nations</td>
<td>useful</td>
<td>suspect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security Council</td>
<td>reliable</td>
<td>manipulated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gulf War</td>
<td>justifiable</td>
<td>wicked</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kuwait/Iraq</td>
<td>victims/bullies</td>
<td>bullies/victims</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arabs/French</td>
<td>unreliable/reliable</td>
<td>victims/bullies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremists</td>
<td>dangerous</td>
<td>heroes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLO/Israel</td>
<td>dangerous/victims</td>
<td>victims/bullies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East/West</td>
<td>unreliable/reliable</td>
<td>victims/bullies</td>
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<tr>
<td>North/South</td>
<td>reliable/unreliable</td>
<td>bullies/victims</td>
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Despite, or perhaps because of, the difficulties presented by this text, it proved an extremely fruitful subject for study. Once again, the presence of exchange students provoked a very educational debate in the classroom. Some of the Spanish students, stimulated by the challenge of the task, produced excellent translations that transmitted the interpretant of *Un hombre providencial* much more successfully than those of the English speakers. The English students tried to “fix” the hyperbole and smooth out the contrasts to suit their interpretation of the original, and in some cases their translations made no sense. Some of the students were hard to convince; one German student resisted to the end. All of the students profited from the experience.

The full analysis of a text for translation purposes involves many theoretical principles that are essential for correct development of the translation process. Professional translators do not sit down and undertake this kind of analysis before attempting to translate; an understanding of the underlying principles behind the analysis is a part of their translator competence. Trainee translators cannot be expected to understand these principles and put them into practice after a few lectures on translation theory. The aim of the translation teacher is to delimit these
principles and present them systematically and actively so that the students can fully apprehend them and practise using them in the translation process. A fuller definition of the teaching objectives and a method for achieving them is the subject of the next chapter.