Teaching Translation from Spanish to English

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Published by University of Ottawa Press

Beeby-Lonsdale, Allison.
Teaching Translation from Spanish to English: Worlds Beyond Words.
University of Ottawa Press, 1996.

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TEACHING UNIT 1. WORDS OUT OF CONTEXT

Objectives

1. To make students aware of the principle that lexical polysemy is solved by textual context.

2. To help students see the difference between dictionary meaning and contextual meaning, understand the limitations of bilingual dictionaries, and learn not to depend blindly on the dictionary (see Delisle, 1980).

Tasks

1. The students are given Task Sheet 1, a sheet of paper divided into three columns. The left-hand column contains a list of words taken from a Spanish text unknown to the students. Individually, as homework, they are asked to fill in the second column with the English entries given in their bilingual dictionaries.

2. In class, the definitions from the different dictionaries are compared.

3. Task Sheet 2, the original text, is distributed. In groups of three or four, the students decide which, if any, of the dictionary definitions are adequate in this context. They will put their final choice in the third column of Task Sheet 1, and defend their decision to the rest of the class.

4. Individually, for homework, the students are asked to translate the words in their verbal context, at the bottom of Task Sheet 2.

Commentary

The meaning of a word for a translator is decided by its general situational and verbal context, by its distribution and collocation. The context makes it possible to neutralize the polysemy of a word in a sentence and discover the meaning of the message. For example, Collins gives seven alternatives for saldo: settlement, payment,
balance, clearance sale, remnant, remainder, leftover. However, in the context of the text below, an appropriate translation is outcome, which was not given as a definition in any of the bilingual dictionaries.

El saldo provisional de los combates en las últimas 24 horas es de 40 muertos y un centenar de heridos. The provisional outcome of the fighting in the last 24 hours is 40 dead and approximately 100 wounded.

TASK SHEET 1. LEXICAL POLYSEMY AND CONTEXT

1. Write in the second column all the definitions you know or can find in dictionaries for the words in the first column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Out of Context</th>
<th>In Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>luchas</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>confesional</td>
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<td>justo</td>
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<td>ocupación</td>
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<td>saldo</td>
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<td>apostadas</td>
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<td>degenerado</td>
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<td>cabo</td>
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<tr>
<td>pueblos</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

TASK SHEET 2. LUCHAS EN EL LÍBANO

1. Read the following text carefully. When was it written? Where was it published? Why was it published?

2. Tell your neighbour what the text is about in English.

3. In groups of three or four, decide (a) which of your definitions are appropriate for the words that are underlined in the text and (b) which is the best definition for the context.

4. Translate the phrases at the end of the text into English.

*El País, el 13 de noviembre de 1985.*

40 muertos en luchas entre musulmanes y cristianos en el sur de Líbano

La batalla confesional entre milicias cristianas y musulmanas anunciada para inmediatamente después de la evacuación israelí de Sidón ha empezado con más de un
mes de retraso, justo antes de una segunda retirada del Ejército de ocupación. El saldo provisional de los combates en las últimas 24 horas es de 40 muertos y un centenar de heridos, según el alcalde de la ciudad, Admed Kalash.

Primero circunscritos a choques entre las Fuerzas Libanesas (milicias cristianas y unificadas), apostadas en los barrios cristianos del este de Sidón, y el Ejército regular, los combates han degenerado rápidamente con la participación al lado de las fuerzas armadas, de milicias musulmanas y de fedayin de la resistencia palestina.

Por otra parte, el Ejército israelí llevó a cabo ayer en una zona colindante su tercera incursión desde su evacuación de Sidón contra pueblos shiíes.

luchas entre musulmanes y cristianos: ____________________________
la batalla confesional: __________________________________________
justo antes de: _________________________________________________
el Ejército de ocupación: _______________________________________
el saldo provisional: _____________________________________________
las fuerzas apostadas en los barrios: _________________________________
los combates han degenerado rápidamente: _________________________
 llevó a cabo: ___________________________________________________
contra pueblos shiíes: ___________________________________________
TEACHING UNIT 2. THE SAME WORD IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

Objective

To make students aware that different languages organize meaning and lexis in different ways (that words may belong to several different semantic fields or lexical sets).

Tasks

1. The students are given Task Sheet 3, containing nine sentences from a novel by Eduardo Mendoza, El año del diluvio (1992). The word correr appears in all of the sentences, in different verbal contexts, with different meanings. In groups, the students are asked to paraphrase the sentences in Spanish, avoiding, if possible, use of the word correr. They are asked to suggest possible translations for each sentence.

2. For homework, they are asked to read the five pages that the Collins Cobuild Dictionary devotes to the word run and try to find it used in the same ways as is correr on Task Sheet 3. They are asked to find two examples of run used in an English text and suggest ways of translating them into Spanish.

Commentary

The distribution and use of correr may overlap with that of to run but their distributions are not equivalent (see Grellet, 1991). Correr cannot always be translated as run. In some cases, the distribution is the same—for example: una mujer corría and a woman ran, or una galería que corría a lo largo de la fachada trasera de la casa and a veranda that ran all along the back of the house. In other cases, they do not coincide—for example, los visillos corridos and the drawn curtains, or su vida corre peligro and his life is in danger.

TASK SHEET 3. EL AÑO DEL DILUVIO

Instructions

1. Paraphrase the following sentences in Spanish, avoiding the use of correr.

2. Suggest possible translations for each sentence.

3. Look up the word run in the Collins Cobuild Dictionary and try to find the word run used in the same contexts as correr in these sentences.

4. Find two examples of run used in an English text. Suggest ways of translating them into Spanish.
Context

All examples are taken from *El año del diluvio* by Eduardo Mendoza (1992). This novel is situated in Catalonia in the years just after the Spanish Civil War. It tells the story of the relationship between Don Agosto, a powerful local landowner, and the mother superior of a nearby convent. Don Agosto lives in a beautiful old house guarded by two huge dogs, León and Negrita. The nun visits him to ask for his help in building a new hospital. He is a Don Juan and she falls in love with him. The plot is not at all predictable, and the ending is quite a surprise!

1. Era el último descendiente de una antigua estirpe de terratenientes... y aunque su edad corría pareja con el siglo, permanecía soltero. (p. 5)

2. Abrió los ojos y vio una mujer que corría por el sendero repitiendo a voces: ¡León! ¡Negrita! ¡Aquí! (p. 7)

3. ... pues apenas iniciada la guerra civil... había corrido a poner su persona y sus bienes al servicio de nuestro invicto caudillo, el generalísimo Franco. (p. 12)

4. Las persianas estaban echadas y los visillos corridos. (p. 14)

5. Seguido de la monja, separó la cortina y salió a una galería que corría a lo largo de la fachada trasera de la casa. (p. 25)

6. En otro lugar, dos mujeres más, una madre y una hija, habían estado a punto de correr la misma suerte, pero habían podido ser salvadas en el último momento. (p. 46)
7. Asistí a la corrida de toros que echaban de cuando en cuando en Bassora. (p. 55)

8. ¿De verdad cree usted que la vida de don Agosto corre peligro?, preguntó la Superiora. (p. 58)

9. Un buen día dejamos de verla, se había ido y no volvió más, pasado el tiempo corrió el rumor de que había muerto de un modo horrible, más no sé. (p. 68)
TEACHING UNIT 3. SEMANTIC FIELDS AND LEXICAL SETS

Objectives

1. To use the concept of semantic fields and lexical sets to help students (a) to appreciate the value that a word has in a given system, and (b) to develop strategies to deal with nonequivalence.

2. To make the students aware of some reformulation problems related to English verbs of speech (\textit{me dijo que era verdad} → \textit{he told me it was true} (S+V+O+O) but \textit{he said to me it was true} (S+V+to+O+O)). One of the lexical sets that is presented is that of verbs of speech. To reinforce this concept, a text is used that includes a large number of verbs of speech. This text is also useful for clearing up problems with reported speech in English.

3. To work on a very common Spanish → English reformulation problem: differences in sentence length and organization.

4. To have students start to think about the importance of typography in transmitting information—in this case, the use of italics.

Tasks

1. The students are given Task Sheet 4, consisting of three lexical sets in English: \textit{speaker}, \textit{traitor}, and \textit{father}. They are asked to comment on differences in meaning between the items in the sets and to think of suitable contexts for each item.

2. They are asked to make up the same lexical sets in Spanish, and comment on the differences between the individual items and the differences between the Spanish and English sets.

3. They are given Task Sheet 5 and asked to make a list of English verbs of speech and order them from general to specific.

4. They are asked to do the same in Spanish and to comment on the differences between the two sets.

5. They are asked to research the rules governing the verbs of speech in English, in particular, the pattern (V+O+O) and (V+to+O+O).

6. Task Sheet 6 is based on a pragmatic text about Kim Philby, the famous double agent. The text is read aloud in class and the students are asked to make notes of the facts that are reported. Together, the class constructs an outline of the facts on the blackboard.

7. The students are asked to comment on the use of italics in the text and to translate it into English, paying particular attention to the register of the vocabulary they choose according to context, sentence length, and grammatical structures related to the verbs of speech.
Commentary

The idea of semantic fields is an oversimplification of how language actually works because a great number of words cannot be classified under any heading. As a concept, however, it can be useful for the translator. Fields are abstract concepts. An example of a semantic field would be *speech*, or *plants*, or *vehicles*. The actual words or expressions that belong to each field are called lexical sets. Lexical sets include general and more specialized words. General words in the lexical set of *verbs of speech* would be *say* and *tell*; more specialized words would be *murmur*, *whisper*, *mumble*, *mutter*. It is easier to find equivalences between general words than between specialized words.

A good introduction to Task Sheet 6 (the text on Philby) is to show on video the episode from the BBC series *Yes, Minister* entitled "One of Us." This will lead to a discussion about famous "moles" in the British Secret Service. Below is a possible outline of the facts that will emerge from the students listening to the text being read. This is a good introductory text because it is pragmatic, the informative function is dominant, and the expressive function is weak. At the same time, the length and complexity of the Spanish sentences make it difficult to translate literally into English. The students are obliged to deverbalize and reformulate. The deverbalization is helped by presenting the text orally.

Here is an outline of facts from the Philby text:

1. Philby died in Moscow yesterday, aged 76.
2. The Soviet Embassy told the FO.
3. The FO told the BBC.
4. The BBC broadcast the news.
5. Philby’s nickname was Kim.
6. He worked for the KGB and MI6.
7. For thirty years he gave British secrets to Moscow.
8. He was made a general of the Soviet Army.
10. He was a student at Cambridge.
11. He was recruited by the KGB at Cambridge.
12. The other recruits were his friends Burgess, MacLean, and Blunt.
13. They are all dead.
14. Burgess and MacLean fled to Moscow in 1951.
15. Philby was suspected in the 1950s.
16. He was responsible for MI6 anti-Soviet operations in the 1940s.
17. He was accused of betraying many British agents.
18. He organized the landing in Albania of a group of anti-communist rebels.
19. They were killed in an ambush.
20. He wrote an autobiography called *My Secret War*.
21. He supported the USSR because the West was weak and corrupt.
22. He opposed the Nazis.
23. He never gave interviews.
24. In March, 1987, he gave an interview to the *Sunday Times*.
25. He was not homesick.
26. The British let him escape to avoid a scandalous trial.
27. He was ill.
28. The Soviet medical care for high-ranking officers was first class.

**TASK SHEET 4. SPEAKER, TRAITOR, FATHER**

1. Comment on any differences in meaning between items in the following sets. In which context would you expect to find them? If you are not familiar with any of the words, look them up in the *Collins Cobuild Dictionary*.

2. List all of the words and expressions you can think of in Spanish for *speaker, traitor*, and *father*. Comment on the differences in meaning between the individual items in each set and differences between the English set and the Spanish set.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>speaker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lecturer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>orator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>public speaker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>speaker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apostate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>back-stabber</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>defector</td>
<td>detector</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>informer</td>
<td>Judas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>double agent</td>
<td>turncoat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**c) father**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>dad</th>
<th>daddy</th>
<th>pa</th>
<th>papa</th>
<th>pop</th>
<th>pater</th>
<th>sire</th>
<th>old man</th>
<th>padre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**TASK SHEET 5. VERBS OF SPEECH**

1. Make a list of all the English verbs you can find that have to do with speech, such as say, suggest, complain, mumble, mutter, murmur, whisper, speak, tell, and so on.

2. Try to group them in sets, starting with the more general ones.

**Verbs of speech**
3. List all the verbs of speech you can think of in Spanish, starting with the more general ones.

Verbos de habla

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

4. Comment on the presence or absence of any semantic gaps in Spanish when compared with English, or vice versa.

________________________________________

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________________________________________

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**TASK SHEET 6. KIM PHILBY**

**Instructions**

1. The story of Kim Philby will be read out loud twice. Take notes of the main points.

2. Now read the text. Five words or expressions in the text are written in italics. Explain the reasons for its use in each case:

   (1) **Kim**  
   (2) **Foreign Office**  
   (3) **guerra fría**  
   (4) **tercer hombre**  
   (5) **Mi guerra secreta**  
   (6) **Sunday Times**

3. As homework, translate the text. Pay particular attention to the context, register, and emotive value of the vocabulary you choose. Be careful with the verbs of speech.

   *El País*, el 7 de noviembre de 1989.

   **Fallece Kim Philby, el famoso doble espía británico que huyó a Moscú en 1963**

Harold Philby, apodado (1) **Kim**, el mundialmente famoso doble espía británico que trabajó en los servicios secretos de su país suministrando información al Kremlin durante tres décadas antes de huir a Moscú en 1963, murió ayer en la capital soviética a la edad de 76 años, reveló anoche la cadena de televisión BBC citando fuentes del ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores británico.
“La Embajada soviética nos ha informado que Philby murió ayer en Moscú,” explicó anoche un portavoz oficial del (2) Foreign Office.

Philby, que fue funcionario del Comité de Seguridad del Estado (KGB) desde su puesto en los servicios de información británicos (MI6) y posteriormente general del Ejército soviético, era el único superviviente de la red de estudiantes de la universidad de Cambridge que reclutó el KGB, integrado por sus amigos Guy Burgess y Donald MacLean y Anthony Blunt, el asesor de la pincoteca de la reina Isabel II. Suministró a Moscú abundante información de secretos militares británicos y norteamericanos durante la época de la (3) guerra fría.

Burgess y MacLean huyeron a la Unión Soviética doce años antes de que Philby lo hiciera, en 1963, y hasta ese año las autoridades británicas desconocían la identidad del famoso (4) tercer hombre, si bien algunas sospechas habían empezado a alimentarse en los años cincuenta. Philby, responsable del departamento de operaciones antisoviéticas del MI6 durante los años cuarenta, fue acusado de traicionar a numerosos agentes británicos durante sus años de servicio. Organizó el desembarco de un grupo de emigrantes rebeldes anticomunistas en Albania, que serían luego asesinados en una emboscada.

En su autobiografía, titulada (5) Mi guerra secreta, escrita en Moscú, justificó su colaboración con la URSS argumentando que las democracias occidentales eran muy débiles y corruptas para combatir el nazismo en los años treinta.

En marzo pasado, el famoso tercer hombre rompió años de silencio sobre su deserción en una entrevista con el (6) Sunday Times en la que confesaba no añorar su patria. En la entrevista afirmaba también que sus superiores le dejaron escapar para evitar así un juicio escandaloso. Philby declaró al dominical londinense que se encontraba enfermo y que estaba recibiendo un tratamiento médico de primera clase como correspondía a su rango de general.
TEACHING UNIT 4. STRATEGIES FOR NONEQUIVALENCE

Objective
To provide examples of nonequivalence at word level and strategies used by translators to overcome the problem (from categories in Baker, 1992: 26–38).

Tasks
The students are asked to study the examples in groups of four and then to find examples in the context of other Spanish words that are difficult to translate into English, explain why, and suggest translation alternatives.

Commentary
The two previous exercises are designed to show the students how languages such as Spanish and English organize their experience of the world differently. This will inevitably lead to nonequivalence at all levels.

1. It is often easier to find an equivalent word at a more general level than at a more specific level (wash → lavar).
2. Simpático has a false friend, sympathetic, and no direct equivalent. Several words are needed in English in order to express all the meanings of simpático.
3. Institutional terms can be translated by cultural substitutes if the text is not an institutional one. An American cultural substitute for el juez del Juzgado de Guardia would probably be Police Court rather than Magistrate’s Court.
4. Cantaor, like simpático, does not have a direct equivalent in English, but in this case it was considered necessary (the text was from the album cover) to paraphrase and break down the different elements that make up the word: flamenco composer and singer (which does not include the element of extemporizing).

TASK SHEET 7. STRATEGIES AT WORD LEVEL

Instructions
The following are some examples of strategies used by professional translators.

1. Translation by a more general word (superordinate).
   SLT: Shampoo the hair with mild WELL A SHAMPOO and lightly towel dry.
   TLT: Lavar el cabello con un champú suave de WELL A y frotar ligeramente con una toalla.

2. Translation by a more neutral, less expressive word.
   SLT: Uno de los asistentes, hombre simpático, de verbo ágil, buen conversador, se hallaba en el uso de la palabra.
   TLT: One of the guests, a nice man, a gifted speaker, and a good conversationalist, was speaking.
3. **Translation by cultural substitution.**

SLT: En el pequeño despacho del *Juzgado de Guardia*, el *juez*, con traje negro un poco desgastado, firme y firme.

TLT: In the small office of the Magistrate’s Court, the J.P., wearing a worn black suit, was signing papers.

4. **Translation using a loan word (plus explanation).**

SLT: Las estelas de “Los Danzantes” en Monte Albán, Oaxaca, fechadas entre 600 y 300 a.C. constituyen en el Nuevo Mundo el más antiguo registro de aconteceres.

TLT: The stelae known as *danzantes* (dancers) at Mount Albán in the Oaxaca Valley constitute the oldest known chronicle (600–300 B.C.) of the New World.

5. **Translation by paraphrase.**

SLT: Su padre es el legendario *cantautor* José Reyes.

TLT: His father is the legendary *flamenco* composer and singer José Reyes.

Make a list of five Spanish words that you feel are particularly difficult to translate into English. Comment on the source of difficulty in each case and suggest possible translations.