A typology of translation solutions for Spanish-English

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Abstract: A six-category typology is presented with examples for translations between Spanish and English. The principles underlying the typology are explained, as are some of the ways it can be used in class.

When students are first taught to translate, they usually benefit from a list of the different ways in which translation problems can be solved. The best of these lists have clear names for the different kinds of solutions ("solution types") and offer more than two items: theories of "domesticating" versus "foreignizing" or "dynamic equivalence" versus "formal correspondence" are fine for debates between theorists, but trainee translators need a more practical bag of tricks.

There are many typologies available. The most widespread is probably the one by Vinay and Darbelnet (1958/1972), adapted for Spanish-English translation in Vázquez-Ayora (1977). In my study of these and other typologies (Pym 2016) and various tests with them in class (Pym and Torres-Simón 2015, Pym 2017), I have found that the categories are quite hard for students to understand, that they leave quite a few things out, and that they are not always applicable to other language pairs.

Here I am thus proposing a slightly modified typology, giving examples for translations between Spanish and English. I hope translation teachers and students will help improve the typology, perhaps by adapting these few pages to examples for other language pairs.

The typology

The typology presented out here has one default category: "Cruise mode" translating. To understand this, think of an airplane cruising at altitude: all goes well until there is a "bump", attention is required, and something needs to be done.[1] To handle instances of "bump mode" in translating, we identify six main solution types (the middle column in Table 1 below) that can be used for *conscious* problem-solving. The six types are more or less in the tradition of Vinay and Darbelnet (1958/72), going from simple to complex, from low-effort to high-effort, from close-to-the-text to greater translatorial intervention. Here we use initial capitals for the names of the types in order to indicate their status as technical terms.

Copying Words: "Transcription" in the broadest sense, where items from one language are brought across to another. This may be on the phonetic level (e.g. Sp. "fútbol"), morphology (e.g. Sp. "balompié," literally "ball-foot") or script (e.g. "McDonald's" in all languages, alongside Rus. Макдоналдс or Ar. ماكدونالدز, f for example).

[1] Our usage of the term "bump" comes from Brian Mossop (1995): "In normal mode, people who have mastered some skill simply 'see', instantly, how to proceed. In bump mode, however, principles have to be applied." Similar usages can be found in Archer (1986), Robinson (2003), Leppihalme (1997), Chesterman (2016: 182).

Copying Structure: Syntactic or compositional structures are brought across from one language into another and are *marked as being foreign*. Syntactic or compositional structures are brought across from one language into another, as in "Open mouth and lend voice to tongue" (from the television series *Spartacus*), where Latin syntactic and metaphorical structures are used in English. Copying Structure can be seen more clearly in the importing of verse forms or popular song formats. These solutions are called Calque in Vinay and Darbelnet.

Perspective Change: An object is seen from a different point of view, as in a hotel being "Completo" (Full) in Spanish and has "No Vacancies" in English. This is Modulation in Vinay and Darbelnet. Here the category is extended to include changes in footing (e.g. between the formal and informal second person), non-obligatory switches between passive and active structures (e.g. "se me rompió la mandíbula" might be rendered as "they broke my jaw").

Changes in perspective also concern identifiers of the speaker's position, as the giving of a rival name to the one object that does not thereby change position in time or place (e.g. the use of "Gerona" for "Girona," indicating which side of history, you are seeing it from).

Density Change: There is a marked change in the amount of information available in a given textual space. Translators can reduce textual density by using solutions that spread information over a greater textual space, using Explicitation, Generalization, and Multiple Translation, as when the one word "Generalitat" is translated as the six words "*Generalitat*, the Catalan regional government". Using the inverse solutions can increase density.

The splitting and joining of sentences can also count as Density Change, since governance and subordination increase cognitive load. When one sentence is split into two, the syntactic density is reduced and the meaning usually easier to process. "The dog that bit me as I came home is black" is technically denser than "A black dog bit me. I was coming home at the time". A nice example can be found in Spanish passports, where the sentence beginning "El estado español se reserve la propiedad…" becomes three sentences in the English translation (my thanks to Kevin Costello for pointing this out). Since Spanish sentences are often longer than English sentences, the translator can cut them up. This makes the information easier to process and thus reduces the semantic density.

A further kind of Density Change is when a value is rendered in a different position in the text and in a different way. Translator's notes and prefaces can be seen as forms of Density Change, since they take the information and spread it out over a lot more words than are in the start text.

Cultural Correspondence: Different elements in different cultures are presented as carrying out similar functions, as in the case of corresponding idioms such as "Give him an inch and he will take a mile" rendered "Le da un dedo y se coge el codo" or culture-specific items (currency units, measures, etc.). This broadly covers what Vinay and Darbelnet termed *Équivalence* and Adaptation. It applies to all instances where the corresponding referents are held to be in *different* special or temporal locations, as opposed to cases where the same referent is given different expressions but remains in the one location. So the choice between "Gerona" and "Girona" is Perspective Change, since the referent city is presumed to remain in the *same* place even while the politics

vary, whereas "cricket" rendered as "baseball" to express the common value "popular summer sport" is Cultural Correspondence, since the two referents are held to be operative in *different* cultural locations.

Text Tailoring: This is when semantic or performative material in the start text is deleted, updated, or added to on the levels of both form and content, as when *whole scenes* are deleted from a film, *whole paragraphs* are censored in a novel, dates and places are *corrected*, or an instruction manual is *updated* by the translator.

Text tailoring thus applies to *major* additions or deletions of actual content, not to the minor linguistic adjustments that are part and parcel of cruise-mode translating. This category does not, for example, include the words or passages inserted to explain what foreign expression means (that would be Density Change) or the removal of references because they are already well-known in the target culture (that would again be Density Change, actually Implicitation).

An example would be the translation into Spanish of guidelines for working with court interpreters (JDCD 2017). Since the translation is intended to help court officials in Spain, references to Australian laws and the problems of Indigenous languages are omitted – those aspects are of little use to the intended user of the document.

A table

Scarcely original in themselves, these categories are at least of a number that can be adjusted to suite pedagogical needs. For maximum simplification, there can be just three categories: Copying, Expression Change, Material Change (in the left-hand column in Table1). For more focused work, there are open-ended lists of sub-types (as in the right-hand column, plus the more detailed columns that could be added to the right of that).

Table 1. A typology of translation solution types (cf. Pym 2016: 220)

Cruise mode (normal use of language skills, reference resources, parallel texts, intuition – anything prior to bump mode – so no special solutions are needed)		
Copying	Copying Words	Copying sounds Copying morphology Copying script …
	Copying Structure	Copying prosodic features Copying fixed phrases Copying text structure …
Expression Change	Perspective Change	Changing sentence focus Changing semantic focus Changing voice Renaming an object …
	Density Change	Generalization / Specification Explicitation / Implicitation Multiple Translation… Joining sentences Cutting sentences Re-paragraphing… New place in text (notes, paratexts) …
	Cultural Correspondence	Corresponding idioms Corresponding units of measurement, currency, etc. Relocation of culture-specific referents …
Material Change	Text Tailoring	Correction / censorship / updating Omission of material Addition of material …

What are the reasons for this typology?

The typology is based on the following principles:

The names for the types are as common as possible: Given the difficulty students have in remembering the differences between terms like Transposition, Modulation, and Adaptation (see Pym and Torres-Simón 2015), I have used words that are as transparent as possible, even at the expense of inexactitude ("Copying Words," for example, is very forced when it has to cover various parts of words as well as ideograms – "copying language" would be more accurate but the students tend to find it too vague, applicable to whole paragraphs or pages, or suggestive of dictation exercises).

The solutions only concern translators' transformations of text: The typology does not deal with peripheral activities like finding information; it does not cover skills that can be mastered by non-translators, such as writing well; it does not purport to describe the thought processes used to reach a particular solution.

The typology concerns situations where a significant choice is to be made: It does not deal with the application of obligatory rules or fixed terminology.

It concerns more than one language pair: The typology has not been derived from a comparison of languages, although it draws on many that have.

It does not prescribe when particular solutions should be used: In principle, all solution types can be used to solve all problems, with the range limited in each particular case by the degree of effort required and the relative risk of communicative failure.

It accepts conceptual overlaps: The typology recognizes that the one textual product can embody more than one solution type. For example, Text Tailoring will normally bring about some kind of Density Change, although Density Change in itself need not necessarily involve Text Tailoring (since Explicitation, for example, theoretically does not add actual content).

Its purpose is purely pedagogical: The typology should be judged successful when trainee translators and interpreters are able to grasp the terms and use them to extend or refine their previous conception of the translator's task.

It is open-ended: The degree of detail can be modified in accordance with the pedagogical purpose at hand.

How to use this typology in class

There are no rules for what can or should happen in the translation class. Teachers should just experiment, to find what works best for each particular group. For many classes, though, the worst thing you can do is to give students a table of names-for-things and get them to memorize it. The students will have forgotten it in two weeks' time, and the names are not important anyway. The whole point of these classes should be to make students aware of the *range* of things that can be done, and to encourage them to be creative.

Here are some ideas for classes:

- Warm-up activity: Get students to volunteer translations for a list of problematic names and phrases. When different students come up with different solutions, get them to discuss which are the best ones. Hopefully they will find they need some names to describe the things they are discussing.

- Category-to-text identification: When you present a category, give some examples but then ask students to suggest as many further examples as possible. They should soon be discussing the limits of the categories.

- Text-to-category identification: Ask students to go over translations they have done previously and to identify the solutions they used. They will soon find that this is much harder than the category-to-text activity. They will quickly find instances where the one solution embodies several solution types (which is fine).

- Compare human and machine translations: When they check the solution types used in machine translations, students should find that the ones at the top and bottom of the table tend not to be used (although neural machine translation sometimes does head in these directions). Those might then be the areas in which they should seek future work as translators.

- Compare student and professional translation of literary texts: If you select the professional literary translators well, you should find that they are using a far wider range of solutions than most students feel they are allowed. This should encourage students to take risks.

- Get students to improve the model: Especially after they have tried text-to-category identification, students will probably be able to propose improved categories for the solution types. Rather than apply translation theory, they can help produce it.

The very basic list of solution types can be explained, applied and perhaps improved in a two-hour class with bright students at Masters level. But if you have a lot of time and a serious interest in training professional translators (hopefully with some bright students), a two-hour class could be devoted to each one of the main solution types, with applications to appropriate sample texts.

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