

# Some pragmatic, form, and content difficulties in the field of translation

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## 0. *Introduction*

Most people will argue that translation is always possible since languages have sufficient resources at their disposal to express whatever has been previously said in another language. Untranslatability can only be understood in a limited sense. Indeed, at times it seems quite laborious or almost impossible to transfer ideas or images or names of objects from one language into another. What this means is that equivalence may only be partial or approximate. For this reason, authors write about “translation difficulties” (Wilss 1982:158 and ff.). Cross-cultural communication through languages occurs all the time and is for the most part successful. Sufficient shared experience exists even between users of languages which are culturally remote from each other to make translation possible<sup>1</sup>.

In the translation of texts from one language into another, hard words and intricate passages have to be frequently confronted by the translator. The sources of non-equivalence are quite varied, although these could be subsumed under two main headings: 1) difficulties stemming from linguistic issues and b) problems rooted in external or extralinguistic factors. For reasons of space, this paper only focuses on the study of some aspects of dialectal variation, form, content, and wordplay. Translation difficulties could be tackled from different angles. However, the approach taken here is mainly practical. This is a data-oriented paper with an instructional value.

## 1. *Pragmatic variation*

Stylistic, chronological, and social variation is briefly considered in this section. Translation involving these linguistic subfields is often extremely complex. Careful translators make painstaking efforts to adequately render such characteristics into the target language, although sometimes it is almost impossible to reproduce such variation satisfactorily.

<sup>1</sup> My friend and colleague Peter Lavery read an earlier version of the manuscript and provided very useful comments. Rabadán (1991: 109-173) contains an informative and detailed chapter devoted to non-equivalence in translation. Several examples in this paper have been taken from her study.

### 1.1. *Stylistic variation*

Here I refer to those linguistic differences which become apparent when one compares a standard language with its corresponding non-standard speechways; in other words, what I have in mind is the translation of deviations from what would be admitted to be the correct form of expression. These marginal speechways may occur in written texts when an author wishes to portray the background of certain characters linguistically. For instance, Bud Koperning in John Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer* reveals his low social background and his rural upbringing through his standard speech. In his Spanish version, J. Robles Piquer (see Dos Passos 1984:53) makes this character speak like an illiterate villager:

Será, digo yo, porque aún no l'he cogío el tino a la ciudá. Yo nací de una granja y ayí m'he criado.

Translators often opt for the utilization of the standard language in Spanish and the addition of explanatory notes or they prefer to use the standard language accompanied by formulas such as "dijo en dialecto" and "respondió con su acento rural".

Nicanor Ancochea, the translator of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883), leaves such dialectal idiosyncracies untranslated. Thus, when an old seaman expresses himself in the local speech of Stevenson's native Scotland: "A pleasant sittiated grog-shop" and "That head up there for to watch ships off. What you mought call me? You mought call me captain" (Stevenson 1992:4), the Spanish translator writes: "Agradable el lugar de la posada" and "Ese montecillo que se ve ahí me servirá para ver los barcos que zarpan. ¿Cómo tenéis que llamarme? Decidme capitán" (Stevenson 1969:16), where no traits of dialectal features are present. Of course, in any translation of George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, this procedure would not be acceptable, since the dialect of the protagonist is one of the main ingredients of the play. She is initially a Cockney speaker who improves her speech to become a user of standard English by the end of the play. In *Pygmalion*, the translation from the source language to the target language could not overlook this fact.

In Spanish, this dialectal coloring of speech is noticeable in Forges' stories with their typical Iberian flavor, as may be seen in the monolog "1/4 y mitá del gabinete imágen; sí, porque por sesapils no será; sacto". Or in another monolog in which the same old character uses her dog as protection against AIDS: "Me vi acercal un momento al pueblo; si aparece el virus feroz, me le pegas unos mordiscos".

Connotative shades of meaning sometimes implied through the pronunciation of words are also lost in the translation of the phrase "Watch your step, will ya?" from the comic book *The Uncanny X-Men*, rendered into Spanish *Patrulla X* as "Tened cuidado ¿Queréis?". In addition to the poor translation of the tag question as "¿Queréis?", this word does not suggest the colloquial value of the English "will ya". In another comic book series entitled *Excalibur*, the translator ventures to express speech articulated carelessly with some success. Thus, "Don't chu hurt my

Kortnee!” is interpreted as “¿Deza a mi Cutny” and “Stay there Kortnee ... until I cum bak for you” as “Gedate Cutny i ... vovedé pod dí!”. The translator of *Excalibur* considers those linguistic traits sufficiently important to transfer them into the target language, whereas the translator of *Uncanny X-Men* does not transfer such parallel features into Spanish<sup>2</sup>.

## 1.2. Chronological and social variation

Temporal dialects reflect language change through time. It is difficult to equate the same two diachronic stages in two different languages. Many scholars and theoreticians have advocated the non-equivalence criterion in diachronic translation, although attempts have been made to interpret old words into the corresponding target language of the period in question. However, the prevailing tendency is to render old foreign texts into contemporary Spanish for practical reasons involving the effort and knowledge required in the translation, the time needed, and money involved. Thus, the Spanish versions of *Beowulf* are written in present-day standard Spanish. Likewise, the various versions of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* normally appear in modern Spanish. As an example, let us adduce two lines of Shakespeare's Sonnet (no. 135, see Shakespeare 1962:1113):

Wilt thou, whose will is large and spacious,  
Not once vouchsafe to hide my will in thine?

translated by Carmen Pérez Romero (see Shakespeare 1987) as

¿No querrá tu querer que es amplio y espacioso,  
dejar que mi querer en el tuyo esconda?

The lack of archaic flavor and aesthetic effect may be regretted by the reader in this type of translation. This flavor could somehow be maintained through the inclusion of some Spanish archaisms such as the use of “vuestro” and “vos”<sup>3</sup> as polite singular forms.

The study of language communities reveals that social groups speak differently and that the speech of individuals varies in accordance with one's profession, age, sex, and social class. The speechways or registers of those social groups are at times invoked for depicting characters in literary works. A good illustration of this is the linguistic portrayal of Holden Caulfield, the young protagonist, in J.D. Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951). Teenagers undergo peer group pressure and speak a special type of speech. Holden Caulfield cannot speak like an adult and uses teenage slang (see Salinger 1967:56):

<sup>2</sup> A number of ideas in this paper originated in a Ph.D. course on translation taught by me in the Fall of 1989 at the University of Deusto, Bilbao. My deepest appreciation goes to Donna Fernández Nogueira, Imanol Goienaga Petrolanda, Adela Ibáñez Pérez, Isabel Parrondo, and M. Eugenia Arribas, whose research papers were valuable for some of the data presented here.

<sup>3</sup> For an interesting paper about various views in the history of translation in favor or against keeping the chronological distance between the original text and the translation, see Hernández (1943).

And then I yelled at the top of my goddam voice  
 'Sleep tight, ya morons!' I'll bet I woke up every  
 bastard on the whole floor. Then I got the hell out.

Carmen Criado (see Salinger 1978:60) translates this passage as follows: "Y grité a pleno pulmón: '¡Qué durmáis bien tarados!'. Apuesto a que desperté hasta el último cabrón del piso. Luego me fui". Although the translator does not take into consideration sound features such as *ya* in "ya morons" (probably transferable as 'taraos'), the use of 'cabrón' adequately conveys in Spanish the type of teenage talk spoken by the American protagonist. Social variation can be easily and reasonably transferred if the translator has a good knowledge of the source and the target languages, in addition to a honest desire for excellence and attentiveness to details despite the time factor involved.

## 2. *Linguistic variation*

This section covers a number of difficulties involving form, meaning, and word play. Form and content are central to any linguistic study. In the domain of translation, inequivalence in form and content are the subject of serious headaches for the translator.

### 2.1. *Form as a substantive element of the message*

When form is an important part of the message, translation is difficult. A semantic interpretation of a text might easily be carried out, but if the signifier acquires semantic relevance, it is often impossible to find an equivalent expression. Scores of examples of this type occur in the ambit of advertising, in nursery rhymes, and in tongue twisters. Thus, the advertising slogans "Para cuando tú vas yo VOLVO" (put out by the Volvo automobile manufacturers) and "The Loan Arranger and Pronto!" (divulged by Lloyds Bank for a campaign of low interest loans, based on the Lone Ranger and Tonto, two movie characters) are virtually impossible to translate into other languages in that the sound features, here essential for the message, cannot be kept in the target language. García Yebra (1983:145) confessed that he was incapable of translating into Spanish a Portuguese poem by Cassiano Ricardo entitled *Serenata sintética*: "Rua torta/lua morta/tua porta". In this poem, phonetic form is everything. The expressions are evocative: a small town with winding streets, a fading moon and a hint of an amorous affair suggested in the words your door. The meaning here is achieved through rhyme and rhythm.

Some easier formal hurdles are solvable, if not with a high degree of accuracy, at least in an acceptable way. Thus, in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, one encounters nursery rhymes which deliberately caricature popular songs. Such is the case in (see Carroll 1970:98-99):

Twinkle, twinkle, little bat.  
 How I wonder what you are at!  
 Up above the world you fly  
 like a tea-tray in the sky.

The above lines are a parody of the famous poem “Twinkle, twinkle, little star” by Jane Taylor, which, in Carroll’s version, turns into a sarcastic attack against Bartholomew Price, a professor of mathematics, nicknamed “The Bat”. Jaime de Ojeda’s Spanish version reads (1989:120):

Brilla, luce, ratita alada.  
 ¿En qué estás tan atareada?  
 Por encima del universo vuelas  
 como una bandeja de teteras.

Ojeda translates “bat” as “ratita alada” for rhythmical reasons.

“Murciélago”, the Spanish equivalent of “bat”, would be hard to fit in this context for the same poetic reasons. With Ojeda’s choice of words the Spanish version preserves the meaning and maintains the same rhythmical pattern (AABB) as in the original English verse-lines.

Formal difficulties are also noticeable in certain songs where, in addition to reproducing the rhyme, the translator must be as faithful as possible to the content, retaining, if not an identical number of syllables, at least a similar number in such a way that a degree of synchrony may exist between the music and the words. The rendering into Spanish of the famous DO RE MI, the song in the movie *The Sound of Music* (i.e., ‘*Música y lágrimas*’) is a good example of the point under discussion. The first seven verse-lines in the song begin with the seven sounds corresponding to the tones of the diatonic scale, sounds which are practically kept identical in the target language. These formal strictures have forced the translator into altering the semantic equivalence in several verse-lines:

Doe a deer a female deer  
 ray a drop of golden rain  
 me a name I call myself  
 far a long long way to run  
 sew a needle pulling thread  
 la a note to follow sew  
 tea a drink with jam and bread

Don es trato de varón  
 res selvático animal  
 mi denota posesión  
 far es lejos en inglés  
 sol ardiente esfera es  
 la al nombre es anterior  
 sí asentimiento es.

Despite the fact that no semantic correspondence exists in many of the verse-lines, the translator virtually achieves a similar communicative purpose as that intended in the source language.

The Spanish text exudes the same flavor as the original nursery rhyme and includes several comparable traits such as easy rhymes, a parallel wordplay, and the kind of semantic imagery found in children’s stories. The vivid description of nature is retained, although some features portraying family life in the original are lost.

With regard to the translation of exclamations and inarticulate sounds, plentiful in comic strips and comic books, a certain degree of variation is observable. In a scene in the *Charlie Brown* series, Charlie Brown invites his girlfriend to an armwrestling match and is defeated by his female companion. "Wham!" the noise made by the protagonist's hand hitting the table is translated into Spanish as "¡Pam!". In *Asterix*, originally a French cartoon, the sound symbolizing quick motion or the throwing of an arrow "Tishoo!" is rendered as "chiiiii!", scratching oneself "scratch! scratch!" as "gratt! gratt!", and the noise of dancing and music "Zing! Boom! Zing!" as "¡Zim! ¡Boom! ¡Zim!". Notice the irregular and careless use of exclamation marks.

Sometimes onomatopoeic sounds are left untranslated, as in an episode in *Excalibur*, where a human sound in a fight "whowf!" is maintained with identical letters in the Spanish version "¡whowf!". Other exclamations left untranslated are "whunnguh!", "slash!", "sszwapp!" and "Nyuk-Nyuk-Nyuk", representing a human sound in a fight, the noise of a moving object in mid-air, and the howls of a monster, respectively. In Spanish comic books, the letter *w* hardly ever occurs in onomatopoeic forms and the sequences *sl-* and *sb-* are not that common either. In the *Mortadelo y Filemón* series, one comes upon sounds such as "¡Nieek!", "¡Hioc!" and "¡Nioc!", where, unlike the earlier English example "Nyuk", the letter *y* is not present for the simple reason that in Spanish this letter cannot occur between a consonant and a vowel. The non-transference of some exclamations is not always due to the carelessness of the translator. Indeed, at times these exclamations are part of the drawing and not part of the balloon to be filled in by the translator. Two cases in point mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph are "slash!" and "sszwapp!": these were part of the drawing and consequently had to remain unmodified for the reasons just stated. Common exclamations in Spanish are "¡croc!", "¡zas!", "¡ptaf!" for hand blows, "¡kras!" and "¡cras!" for loud and smashing sounds, and "¡grrr!", "bzzzz" and "brrrrrr" for the sounds made by a bear, bees, and a motorcycle, respectively. The relationship between exclamatory sounds and graphemes has barely been touched upon here; however there is no doubt in my mind that a systematic study of exclamations in English and Spanish could be the subject of fruitful research in the future. It is quite obvious that comic books would be an important source for data-collection in such an investigation (cf. Fernández 1990).

## 2.2. Content as a problem area for the translator

It is through words that speakers of languages classify and represent their knowledge of the world. Words are normally polysemous and this polysemy is the cause of much lack of interlinguistic equivalence. This inequivalence is sometimes mindboggling and the root of serious problems for the translator. One finds myriads of words with a multiplicity of senses, homonymy, paronymy, wordplay, and words with partial semantic overlap in the target language. All these semantic complexities and rhetorical figures rise up as hurdles for the translator.

Potentially polysemous lexical items may be employed in such a way that the content narrows their possible senses to one. In this case the translator faces no major problem. If one reads "I took a shower" or "The drops of this fountain of joy", it is to be expected that only careless and beginning students could interpret these phrases as "Me di un chubasco" and "Las pizcas de esta fuente de alegría", since the contexts disambiguate "shower" and "drops" and reduce their possible meanings to "ducha" and "gotas", respectively<sup>4</sup>. However, in printed texts, such atrocious errors are not uncommon. In the Santurce-Portsmouth ferry, the restaurant menu read "Excelentes ensaladas con vendajes deliciosos", with an illogical combination of words which is due to the mistaken translation of the English line "Excellent salads with delicious dressings", in which "dressings" ('aliños') is wrongly interpreted as 'vendajes'. These blunders may be the result of an insufficient knowledge of the target language, but in the case of advanced students and some professional translators these errors are attributable to simple carelessness, thoughtless reliance on dictionary entries, or a certain inability to look for the logic and coherence of words within a phrase, a paragraph, a chapter, and even a whole book (see Santoyo 1989 for careless errors made by professional translators).

*Homonymy* occurs when one signifier refers to several signifieds. An example of the use of homonymy with a view to creating intentional ambiguity is found in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. A dormouse in a conversation with Alice relates the story of three sisters who lived in a well (Carroll 1970:102):

"But they were in the well", Alice said to the Dormouse.

"Of course they were" said the Dormouse, "well in".

The reply bewildered Alice due to the ambiguity of "well"; this word has the values "pozo" and "bien" in Spanish. As no word with those two senses exists in Spanish, Ojeda, the translator, opts for a different semantic solution (Carroll 1989:124):

"Pero, ¿es que estaban dentro del pozo!", insistió Alicia dirigiéndose al Lirón.

"Pues claro que estaban dentro, ¡ y bien en el centro!".

Incapable of interpreting into Spanish the ambiguity resulting from the English term "well", the translator resorts to a rhyme play between "dentro" and "centro", which suffices to justify the subsequent bewilderment and confusion shown by Alice.

In Spanish, certain examples of intentional ambiguity are practically untranslatable. A Spanish magazine contains an advertisement put out by British Airways, a well-known airline company, which reads: "Norteamérica, USA el

<sup>4</sup> Illogical examples of this type are numerous. Several Spanish students translated "I held a nail near the magnet in order to test its power. It still had enough power to attract the nail" as "Puse una uña cerca del imán para comprobar su poder. Todavía tenía fuerza suficiente para atraer la uña", where the presence of "magnet" in English should automatically exclude the option 'uña' in Spanish in favor of 'clavo'.

mejor camino”, where USA has a double meaning, i.e., ‘use’ and ‘United States of America’. No English word can reproduce this ambiguity.

*Homophony* occurs when the spelling and meaning of words are different, even if their phonetic realization is the same. Homophonous terms or expressions are the source of linguistic ambiguity and may emerge as serious obstacles for the translator. In *Alice in Wonderland*, an intriguing case of homophony surfaces between, on the one hand, the noun “tortoise” [tɔtɔs] and, on the other, the verb and the object pronoun “taught us” [tɔtɔs]. Let us examine the conversation between the Mock Turtle and Alice, where this ambiguity occurs (Carroll 1970: 127):

“Why did you call him Tortoise, if he wasn’t one?” Alice asked.

“We called him Tortoise because he taught us”, said the Mock Turtle angrily.

Ojeda, the Spanish translator, solved this difficulty with the help of an imaginative change which disregards the homophony in the original text (Carroll 1989:150):

“Y ¿por qué le llamaban Galápagos, si no lo era?”, preguntó Alicia.

“Lo llamábamos Galápagos”, replicó muy molesta la Tortuga Artificial, “por las muchas conchas que tenía”.

Those changes are sufficient to make the dialog flow naturally without disconcerting or confounding the Spanish reader. The choice of the word “galápagos” allows for the presence of two synonyms for this kind of chelonian or reptile, the same as the two found in the English text, i.e., “turtle” and “tortoise”.

In Spanish, the pun and the cohesiveness of the passage are discernible in the meaning of the last line “por las muchas conchas que tenía”, which the reader necessarily associates with the Spanish idiom “tener más conchas que un galápagos”, i.e., ‘to be reserved or to be a sly one’.

Another example of homophony appears in an advertisement issued by RENFE, an acronym for the Spanish National Railway Company. The ad published in *El Correo Español*, a Bilbao newspaper, during the Christmas season, included the same slogan in two different ways: “Entren bien en los 90 / En tren vienen los 90. It is quite obvious that this example is not translatable into other languages.

*Paronymy* is a figure of speech in which two or more words have similar signifiers but different signifieds. The Mock Turtle in *Alice in Wonderland* makes use of this device for his own amusement and that of the reader, even if such a stylistic device turns into a gruesome nightmare for the translator. Through this procedure the Mock Turtle ridicules the titles of various courses studied at school. This loquacious character humorously associates the regular course titles in the first column with the jocular paronymous words in the second column (Carroll 1970:129-130):



Addition	Ambition
Multiplication	Uglification
Geography	Seography
Latin	Laughing

In this particular case, Ojeda, the translator, uses the resources available in the Spanish language in an attempt to produce the same linguistic effects perceptible in the English text (Carroll:1989:152-153):

Sumar	Fumar
Multiplicación	Feificación
Geografía	Mareografía
Latín	Patín

Ojeda complains that the members of his family were unable to appreciate the end-result of his arduous and laborious search for paronymous equivalences in his Spanish translation. Due to this lack of appreciation and in order to impress on future readers his painstaking efforts, he decided to leave a record of the original English forms in a note.

Another instance of paronymy, this time masterfully translated by Ojeda, is observable in a conversation between the Mock Turtle and Alice (Carroll 1970: 137):

"If a fish came to me and told me he was going on a journey, I should say: With what porpoise?"

"Don't you mean 'purpose'?", said Alice.

The snag here lies in the almost identical pronunciation of "porpoise" [pɔpɔs] ('marsopa') and "purpose" [pɔpɔs] ('finalidad, fin'). Ojeda's Spanish version reads (Carroll 1989: 162):

"Como que si se me acercase un pez y me dijera que se iba de viaje, lo primero que le preguntaría sería: ¿y con qué delfín?"

"¿No querrá usted decir 'con qué fin'?", inquirió Alicia.

Since, in Spanish, the inclusion of "marsopa" and "propósito o fin" is not possible if the paronymous effect present in the original is to be retained, the translator replaces "marsopa" by "delfín", which may indeed combine quite appropriately with the word "fin", a similar sounding form, in the sense of aim or purpose. The choice of words in the Spanish translation seems even more felicitous if we bring to mind the fact that certain species of porpoises and dolphins resemble each other and are at times called by either name indiscriminately.

Paronymy is also obvious in the advertising slogan "El que sabe SABA" and "Nacido para grabar". In the first example, paronymy is apparent in "sabe, SABA":

SABA is the name of a company that manufactures electrical appliances such as television sets, VCRs, radios, and recorders. In the second example, paronymy occurs through the association of the form “grabar” and the contextually implicit word “ganar”. Before this second slogan was altered by Sony to “grabar”, it had been used by the Renault automobile manufacturers in the phrase “Nacido para ganar”. This phrase was in turn taken from the title of a movie. It cannot be denied that the paronymous words in these slogans are virtually impossible to render into English.

### 2.3. *Play on Words*

A number of difficulties analyzed before could be easily subsumed under this section on wordplay. However, here I refer to recently created non-equivalence entailing homonymy and acronymy, and to a type of non-equivalence in which cultural factors also figure to a certain degree. The examples discussed below are taken from an anonymous hand-out circulated around a United States college campus by a university professor with a special interest in journalistic writing. In this hand-out entitled *For All Born Before 1945*, the anonymous author played humorously with words which had been invented or had acquired new senses in the last fifty years. Out of the various sentences adduced here, several are not transferable into Spanish unless the semantic translation is somewhat abandoned with a view to retaining the original wordplay in the target language.

- a) *Bunnies* were small rabbits and *rabbits* were not Volkswagons [sic].
- b) GRASS was mowed, COKE was a cold drink, and POT was something you cooked in.

The problem arising in sentence a) is that, despite the fact that “bunny” could be interpreted as “conejita” (‘small rabbit’) with the same double meaning as in the original, no Volkswagen or Seat car model exists in Spain with the name “conejita”. An available solution is the use of a Volkswagen or Seat car model name such as “escarabajo, panda, or Ibiza”, with the accompanying logical changes brought about by the choice of a different car model name. The resulting text would be: “Había osos llamados panda y los panda no eran coches Seat”. Another solution consists in the keeping of the word “conejita”, which necessarily forces us to break the example into two separate thoughts with the following result “Las conejitas eran conejos pequeños y no chicas ligeras de cascos, y los pandas no eran coches Seat”.

In case b), the most serious obstacle rests on the word POT, since the ambiguity in GRASS and COKE are perfectly translatable into Spanish. In English, POT refers to both a kitchen utensil and marihuana, a double meaning not transferable into Spanish. An interpretation without an exact semantic correspondence but with parallel verbal wit entails the use of the word “chocolate”, which allows for an ambiguity involving drugs and food. Hence, a viable Spanish

rendering of b) is “La HIERBA se segaba, la COCA era una bebida refrescante y el CHOCOLATE era algo que se comía”.

In this same hand-out, sentences harder to translate or almost untranslatable are:

- a) AIDS were helpers in the principal's office.
- b) *Hardware* meant hardware and software wasn't even a word.
- c) We thought *fast food* was what you ate during Lent.
- d) ERA was a period of time.

In a) and b), the snags appear in the double meanings of AIDS (i.e., helpers and an acronym for Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome) and “hardware” (i.e., hardware store and the physical components of a computer). In Spanish, no functional equivalents with those double meanings are available. A possible solution consists in a semantic modification in Spanish of the original English phrases, a modification which could ensure preservation of the wordplay in the target language: “SIDA no era una sigla, sino una palabra formada por una conjunción y un verbo” and “*Hardware* significaba ferretería en inglés y software ni siquiera era una palabra”.

The ambiguities in *fast food* (i.e., scarce and light food eaten during a time of fasting and rapidly prepared and served food) and ERA (e.i., an acronym for Equal Rights Amendment and a period of time) are practically impossible to render into Spanish with the same functional equivalents. It strikes me that a way-out of this pitfall, although not totally satisfactory, is the non-translation of the ambiguous words in the text and an accompanying explanatory note on the verbal ingenuity intended by the English author, ingenuity which cannot be carried over into the Spanish text. The impoverished rendition of these two examples is as follows: “Pensabamos que *fast food* era lo que se comía en Cuaresma” and “ERA significaba un periodo de tiempo”. The notes for these two sentences could be something like this, 1) “El autor juega con el sentido equívoco de *fast food* que es intransferible al castellano. En inglés, *fast food* tiene tanto el valor antiguo de ‘comida de ayunas’ como el más reciente de ‘comida rápida’” and 2) “ERA significa periodo de tiempo y más recientemente es también la sigla de la ley o enmienda sobre la igualdad de las mujeres, doble sentido que no es traducible al castellano”.

In brief, the wordplay problems examined here are solved by either forcing or abandoning the functionally equivalent semantic interpretation of the phrases with double meanings or by keeping the foreign word or expression in the translation with a note clarifying the nature of the untransferability of the item in question into the target language.

### *Closing remarks*

We could have covered extralinguistic translation factors such as cultural voids (e.g., how the word “train” is rendered into a primitive language, or the

word<sup>5</sup> “Halloween” into Spanish, or “capote” and “muleta” into English), the translation of proper names, frequently dependent on a variety of non-linguistic factors, including a pre-established tradition (“Queen Elizabeth II = La reina Isabel II”, “El rey Juan Carlos = King Juan Carlos”, “Baker Street = Baker Street”), and the translation of movies (cf. “The Cure = Charlot en el balneario”, “Huckleberry Finn = Las aventuras de Huckleberry Finn”, or “Hiroshima, mon amour = Hiroshima, mon amour”)<sup>6</sup>. The discussion of such topics would lengthen this paper unnecessarily.

In summary, this paper focused on pragmatic and linguistic features of translation. Through an instructional, practical, and data oriented approach, this study sought to show a number of difficulties regarding stylistic and social variation as well as translation problems concerning form, meaning and wordplay. In addition, this study discussed translation problems and provided solutions by close comparison of the source language and the target language. It is hoped that the presentation and the data analyzed here can make students, teachers, and translators more aware of the complex issues that this field opens up before us and can serve as a guide and as a stimulus to find new and creative ways of solving translation difficulties.

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<sup>5</sup> Hatim and Mason (1990:106) mention an example of a semiotic entity translation. The entity under discussion is *al Tawaaf*, which is a religious ceremony well-known in the Islamic World. The first text in English reads: “The Iranian pilgrims began their demonstration during *al Tawaaf*, preventing other pilgrims from leaving or entering the shrine”. The functional equivalent for *al Tawaaf* is “circumambulation”. If this term is not self-sufficient, the translator must seek to explicate it by means of expansion or paraphrase. Culturally, *al Tawaaf* involves walking round the *Kaaba* (the Black Rock) in the pilgrimage to Mecca which every Muslim must carry out at least once in his lifetime. *Al Tawaaf* is a religious ceremony and it would be sacrilegious to violate it by engaging in political activities such as political demonstrations. The second text which is reader-centered includes elements which help to define important features of the semiotic sign or functional void under discussion: “The Iranian pilgrims began their demonstration during the sacrosanct ceremony of walking around the Black Rock in Mecca, preventing other pilgrims from leaving or entering the shrine”.

<sup>6</sup> For a paper on the translation of proper names in comic books, see Fernández and Pereira (1989, Vol. 2:189-193).

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