

# On Translating Culture:

## Translation Strategies of Cultural Elements in the Novel *The Shadow of the Wind*

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### 【摘要】

本文探討一部西班牙當代小說，《風之影》(*La sombra del viento*)，譯成英文之文化因素與翻譯策略的關係。本論文試圖以文本分析的方式以及功能翻譯理論學派兩位重要之德國理論學家，弗美爾(Vermeer)和諾德(Nord)，仔細比較西班牙原文和英譯文作品。如何鑑別文化因素、採取最適當的翻譯策略，盡可能保留於目標文本，便成為譯者重要的任務之一。

### 【關鍵詞】

翻譯、文化、翻譯策略、《風之影》

### 【Abstract】

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the different translation strategies of cultural elements and cultural references in a contemporary Spanish novel translated from Spanish into English, *The Shadow of the Wind* (*La sombra del viento*), to highlight the importance of cultural elements in translation. Through a detailed textual analysis and based on the notions in translation theory proposed by two outstanding German translation scholars of the German School of functionalist translation theory, Hans J. Vermeer and Christiane Nord, this article attempts to carefully compare the Spanish original and the English translation of the novel. How to identify cultural factors in order to take the most appropriate translation strategy in a particular context has become one of the translator's tasks.

### 【Keywords】

translation, culture, translation strategies, *The Shadow of the Wind*

## 1. Introduction

“No language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture; and no culture can exist which does not have at its centre, the structure of natural language” (Lotman 1978:211-32).

By way of introduction, I would like to explain, first, how important the above observation is to understand translation as a whole. We have to bear in mind that translating is not an isolated process, because the translator is not merely going to write the ideas of the source language (SL) into the target language (TL). As Nida states in *Principles of Correspondence*, “definitions of proper translating are almost as numerous and varied as the persons who have undertaken to discuss the subject” (1964:131). Therefore, the translator is supposed to have a good cultural background, information about the writer he is going to translate and, most of all, a good knowledge of both languages: SL and TL. Culture and the translation of cultural elements are, precisely, the central point of this paper.

I agree with Toury when he points out that “translation is a kind of activity which inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions” (Toury 1978:200). As translators, we are permanently faced with the problem of how to treat the cultural aspects implicit in a source text (ST) and to find the most appropriate technique of successfully conveying these aspects in the target text (TT). The cultural implications for translation may take several forms, ranging from lexical content and syntax to ideologies and ways of life in a given culture. Moreover, the translator has to decide on the importance given to certain cultural elements and to what extent it is necessary or desirable to translate them into the TL, being the proper understanding and rendering of such messages the key to the quality of the TT. Furthermore, the aim of the ST will have implications for translation, as well as the intended readership, for both the ST and the TT.

The purpose of the present paper is to analyze the different translation strategies of cultural elements and references in a contemporary Spanish novel translated from Spanish into English to highlight the importance of cultural elements on translation. I have selected a novel of a very famous Spanish writer, Carlos Ruiz Zafón, whose work *The Shadow of the Wind* (*La sombra del viento*) was first published in 2001 and translated into English by Lucia Graves in 2004. To provide a thorough, detailed

analysis, I have selected some short passages from the English version to point out the cultural awareness in the TT and analyze various translation strategies to examine the cultural aspects in *The Shadow of the Wind*.

## **2. Translation strategies of cultural elements in *The Shadow of the Wind***

As Vermeer stated last century, “language is part of a culture” (1989:222). In this way, cultural aspects and differences between cultures may cause more problems for the translator than do grammatical or syntactic differences between a pair of languages. Translation is, in fact, an interpersonal, intercultural mediating action where a text is involved.

Until the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most of the theoreticians and translation experts considered translation as a linguistic phenomenon. However, since 1970s, a new trend in the field of translation theory was born in Germany: the functional theories of translation. Functional theories moved translation from a mere static, linguistic phenomenon to being considered as an act of intercultural communication. Its pioneer, Hans J. Vermeer, tried to liberate the translation from the confinement of the ST, with the aim to explain the translation activity from the point of view of the TL. For Vermeer, a translational action is determined by its *skopos* (purpose). In other words, each text is produced for a given purpose and should serve this purpose, abiding by coherence and fidelity rules.

The purpose of the translation determines the translation strategies that a translator is going to adopt in order to produce an adequate and fluent TT for the TL readers. In this case, Lucia Graves employs different methods and translation strategies to deal with the cultural elements in *The Shadow of the Wind*, but most of the strategies she adopted respond to Vermeer’s scheme or have a close relation with Vermeer’s colleague —Christiane Nord— theory. Nord, a well-known functionalist scholar, presented in 1991 a more detailed functional model incorporating elements of text analysis, which examines text organization at or above sentence level. Her model, commonly known as *Text Analysis in Translation*, is based “on a functional concept, enabling understanding of the function of the ST features and the selection of translation strategies appropriate to the intended purpose of translation, paying more attention to features of the ST.” (Munday 2008:82).

Translating a text is not merely a question of translating its content and

conveying the linguistic patterns of the ST, but also of translating the culture embodied in the ST and giving the text meaning in the TL. Under this theoretical framework, I am going to focus now on the analysis of different excerpts of *The Shadow of the Wind*, paying special attention to Graves' translation strategies of cultural elements and classifying the different translation strategies using the definitions and methods of translation proposed mainly by Peter Newmark.

### 2.1. Translation of lexical and cultural features related with the SL culture

Lexical and cultural features from the Spanish culture are one of the most difficult cultural aspects to be translated into English. Idioms, cultural references, and lexical terms with different nuances in the SL culture and TL culture are the central points of my analysis in this section.

#### First example

Spanish ST:

«Gustavo Barceló era un viejo colega de mi padre, dueño de una librería cavernosa en la calle Fernando que capitaneaba la flor y nata del gremio de libreros de viejo». (Page 18)

English TT:

“Gustavo Barceló was an old colleague of my father's who now owned a cavernous establishment on Calle Fernando with a commanding position in the city's secondhand-book trade.” (Page 12)<sup>1</sup>

As Nida stated a few decades ago, “A translation of dynamic equivalence aims at complete naturalness of expression, and tries to relate the receptor to modes of behaviour relevant within the context of his own culture; it does not insist that he understand the cultural patterns of the source-language context in order to comprehend the message” (Nida 1964:129). Moreover, in an equivalence-based

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper, I include the page of every excerpt from the Spanish original (Ruiz Zafón, C. (2005), *La sombra del viento*, Barcelona: Editorial Planeta) and the English version (Ruiz Zafón, C. (2005), *The Shadow of the Wind*, Translated by Lucia Graves, London: Penguin Books) quoted in my analysis for further reference.

framework, it is the ST that serves as a guideline for the translator's decisions in the process. In this case, the English TT seeks the same effect of the ST, but there is a translation loss since the words and the ideas in English are not as accurate and expressive as in the Spanish ST. Specifically, there is a translation loss: «la flor y nata» (literally: “the flower and cream”; meaning: “the best”), because this idiom is not rendered in the TT.

#### Second example

Spanish ST:

«Aquella tarde, después de cerrar la tienda, mi padre sugirió que nos acercásemos hasta el café de Els Quatre Gats en la calle Montsió, donde Barceló y sus compinches mantenían una tertulia bibliófila sobre poetas malditos». (Page 19)

English TT:

“That afternoon, after closing the shop, my father suggested that we stroll along to Els Quatre Gats, a café on Calle Montsió, where Barceló and his bibliophile knights of the round table gathered to discuss the finer points of decadent poets.” (Pages 12-13)

In this second example, the translator made explicit in the TT some information the reader cannot find in the ST in a sort of communicative translation, because the ST does not refer to “knights of the round table”, but to «compinches» (literally: “buddies”, “mates”).

#### Third example

Spanish ST:

«Había decidido organizar una cena de cumpleaños e invitar a Barceló, a la Bernarda y a Clara». (Page 63)

English TT:

“I decided to host a birthday party and invite Barceló, Bernarda, and Clara.” (Page 51)

Firstly, there is a cultural adaptation at the beginning of the sentence. The literal

meaning of the Spanish «cena» is “dinner”, but the nuance is that the concepts “birthday” and “dinner” altogether suggests the idea of a “party”: a person or a group meeting and participating in an action, in this case, a birthday celebration. Secondly, there is only a slight difference between «la Bernarda» and “Bernarda”, and it is a cultural one: in the ST definite articles before a name of a person are used in a familiar situation or context. In the English TL this kind of article is never used in that case, adapting it Graves to the TL readers.

#### Fourth example

Spanish ST:

«—De cría lo recordaba todo. Todo. Luego los hijos se hacen mayores y ya no sabes lo que piensan ni lo que sienten. Y así ha de ser, supongo. No le cuente a Nuria lo que le he explicado, ¿eh? Lo dicho aquí que quede entre nosotros. [...] —Yo qué sé. No sé si le quiso de verdad. Estas cosas se quedan en el corazón de cada uno, y ella ahora es una mujer casada. Yo a la edad de usted tuve una novieta [...].» (Pages 89-90)

English TT:

“As a child she’d remember everything. Everything. Then children grow up, and you no longer know what they think or what they feel. And that’s how it should be, I suppose. Don’t tell Nuria what I’ve told you, will you? What’s been said here tonight should go no further.” [...] “Heaven knows. I don’t know whether she really loved him. These things remain locked inside, and now she’s a married woman. When I was your age, I had a girlfriend [...]” (Page 77)

In this example, there is, firstly, a case of cultural transposition. In the ST, an interjection is used to express a sort of enquiry. There is no grammatical connection with the previous sentence. Nevertheless, Graves uses here a typical grammar element in English: the question tag. It is a grammatical structure in which the statement is turned into a question by adding an interrogative fragment at the end. In this case, it is used with the same goal as in the ST: to express emphasis and enquiry. Secondly,

there is another cultural transposition. At the end of the excerpt, there is a replacement in the TT of the ST expression with a TL specific one: the translator uses an idiomatic expression, whose meaning is exactly the same. “Heaven knows” is used when someone replies to a question to say he has no idea. Finally, the meaning of the word “girlfriend” is more formal than the word used in ST, «novieta» (literally: “young girlfriend”; meaning: “a girlfriend under 18 years old” and/or “a way to prove how much that girl means to the speaker”), but easier to understand for TL readers.

#### Fifth example

Spanish ST:

«De niño sentí la llamada del verso y quise ser Sófocles o Virgilio, porque a mí la tragedia y las lenguas muertas me ponen la piel de gallina, pero mi padre, que en gloria esté, era un cazurro [...]». (Page 100)

English TT:

“As a child I felt the call of poetry and wanted to be a Sophocles or a Virgil, because tragedy and dead languages give me the goose pimples. But my father, God rest his soul, was a pigheaded man [...]” (Page 83)

Before the period, Graves employs a communicative translation. A SL idiom, «me ponen la piel de gallina», is rendered by a corresponding TL idiom, “give me the goose pimples”. After the period, there is a cultural transposition: «era un cazurro» should be translated into English as “he was a surly man”. Therefore, it implies also a communicative translation, rendering the English expression smoother than the Spanish one.

#### Sixth example

Spanish ST:

«En su lecho de muerte, mi progenitor me hizo jurar que si no llegaba a calzar el tricornio [...] He leído lo mío y le podría recitar de memoria fragmentos selectos de *La vida es sueño*». (Pages 100-101)

English TT:

“On his deathbed my father made me swear that if I didn’t succeed in wearing the Civil Guard’s three-cornered hat [...] I’ve read a great deal,

and can recite some of the best fragments of *La Divina Commedia* from memory.” (Page 84)

In this example, we can find an example of exegetic translation in the first sentence. The TT expresses and explains additional details that are not explicitly conveyed in the ST: «tricornio» (literally: “three-cornered hat”) is explained through an expansion and explanation in order to make the English readers easy to understand the meaning of that word: “the Civil Guard’s three-cornered hat”. In the second part of the excerpt, there is a case of cultural transplantation and compensation in place, the highest degree of cultural transposition. In the ST, there is a specific item of the source culture: a novel by Pedro Calderón de la Barca: *La vida es sueño*. In other words, what changes here is the signified or referent, not only the signifier or words. Surprisingly, the translator reinvents reality and chooses a novel written by Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia*. Why? Maybe because the latter is probably better known by English readers from all over the world. Moreover, there is a compensation in place: the initial loss in translation at the beginning, because in the ST Carlos Ruiz Zafón writes «de memoria [...]», while in the TT the translator introduces the idea at the end of the sentence, “[...] from memory.” The meaning is exactly the same, but the structure is different.<sup>2</sup>

#### Seventh example

Spanish ST:

«Ni caso le haga a este animal, que a mí me gusta mucho como habla usted. Es como el No-Do, señor doctor». (Page 183)

English TT:

“Pay no attention to this animal. I love the way you speak. It’s like the voice on the newsreel, Dr. Anacleto” (Page 152)

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<sup>2</sup> *The Shadow of the Wind* was first translated into traditional Chinese by Fanyuan (范浚) and published by Yuanshen (圓神) in Taiwan in 2006 (Ruiz Zafón, C. (2006), 《風之影》, 范浚譯, 台北市: 圓神). In the Chinese version, the translator has adopted a different strategy, far away from the cultural transplantation of Lucia Graves, translating literally the name of the Spanish novel, «*La vida es sueño*», into Chinese, 《人生如夢》.



Here, Graves employs a cultural equivalent for the word «No-Do». «No-Do» (the colloquial name for «Noticiarios y Documentales» (“News and Documentaries”) are a state-controlled series of cinema newsreels produced in Spain from 1943 to 1981 and closely associated with the 1939-1975 dictatorship of General Francisco Franco. Obviously, this word does not exist in English. That is the reason why Graves has tried to adapt it to the TL culture, in order to make it comprehensible to the English readers.

#### Eight example

Spanish ST:

«Al llegar a la plaza del Portal de la Paz me detuve a contemplar los muelles junto al embarcadero de las golondrinas». (Page 420)

English TT:

“When I reached the square called Portal de la Paz, I stopped next to the pleasure boats’ dock to gaze at the port.” (Page 353)

In the last example of this section, there is a case of communicative translation, where explanation of «golondrina» (a kind of “yacht” or “pleasure boat”, very common in Spain) is needed. In this sense, the English translator made it explicit in the TT: “pleasure boat”.

## **2.2. Translation of names of scenic spots and historical sites**

Scenic spots and historical sites are one of the important cultural references that appear in this novel. Most of these places refer to Barcelona and Catalonia, the Spanish Autonomous Community where Barcelona is located and where the story takes place. In this section, we will appreciate that, most of the times, Graves retains the SL name in the English TT, maybe with the aim of moving the English readers closer to the Spanish culture, but other times she changes it by an equivalent in the TL culture.

#### First example

Spanish ST:

«Desgranaban los primeros días del verano de 1945 y caminábamos por

[...] la Rambla de Santa Mónica en una guirnalda de cobre líquido».

(Page 7)

English TT:

“It was the early summer of 1945, and we walked through [...] Rambla de Santa Mónica in a wreath of liquid copper.” (Page 3)

Precisely, the first example corresponds to the first strategy I just mentioned in the previous paragraph. The term «Rambla» (literally: “avenue”) is an ostensibly foreign element in the TL and fits what in translation theory has been called “foreignization”, retaining the ST cultural element in the TT.<sup>3</sup>

#### Second example

Spanish ST:

«La enterramos en Montjuïc el día de mi cuarto cumpleaños [...] Mi padre y yo vivíamos en un pequeño piso de la calle Santa Ana, junto a la plaza de la iglesia». (Page 7)

English TT:

“We buried her in Montjuïc on my fourth birthday [...] My father and I lived in a modest apartment on Calle Santa Ana, a stone’s throw from the church square.” (Page 3)

In this case, Graves, again, has opted for maintaining the term such as in the Spanish ST: «Montjuïc». In my opinion, there are two problems: on the one hand, it is one of the first pages of the book, which implies that the reader does not know yet what the book is talking about; on the other hand, an English reader of this novel is not necessarily supposed to know Barcelona as to recognize that it is a cemetery of the city<sup>4</sup>. In the second part of the excerpt, there is an example of both communicative translation and exoticism. “A modest apartment” and “a stone’s throw from the church

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<sup>3</sup> However, the Chinese TT is clearer, in this case, than the English one, providing a communicative translation to the TL readers: 「在聖塔蒙妮卡的蘭巴拉大道上」.

<sup>4</sup> The Chinese version is actually very explicative, using the term 「墓園」 to let the Chinese readers know that «Montjuïc» is a cemetery of Barcelona (「在蒙居克墓園」).

square” are examples of communicative translation. Graves uses an idiom where the Spanish writer uses ordinary language. This addition, though regarded as translation loss, may compensate for a source-language idiom used elsewhere in the Spanish text: compensation in kind. The translator takes more account on the aesthetic value than a “faithful translation”. Furthermore, there is an exoticism in the TT: «Calle» (literally: “street”), because Graves maintains the foreign word instead of translating it into English.

#### Third example

Spanish ST:

«Aquella tarde, después de cerrar la tienda, mi padre sugirió que nos acercásemos hasta el café de Els Quatre Gats en la calle Montsió, donde Barceló y sus compinches mantenían una tertulia bibliófila sobre poetas malditos». (Page 19)

English TT:

“That afternoon, after closing the shop, my father suggested that we stroll along to Els Quatre Gats, a café on Calle Montsió, where Barceló and his bibliophile knights of the round table gathered to discuss the finer points of decadent poets.” (Pages 12-13)

The third example of “foreignization” translating names of historical sites is the use of «Els Quatre Gats» (a proper name) in Catalan (a Romance language, co-official in the Spanish Autonomous Community of Catalonia) and «Calle» (literally: “street”) in Spanish reminds the reader that he is reading the novel of a foreign language and culture. In other words, the reader of the TT is brought as close as possible to the ST through close renderings that transform the translating language<sup>5</sup>.

#### Fourth example

Spanish ST:

«Tú calla, desgraciado, a ver si te pego una leche que te mando a La Rioja». (Page 118)

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<sup>5</sup> Again, the Chinese TT provides a better solution: 「蒙奇歐街上的「四隻貓咖啡館」(Els Quatre Gats)」.

English TT:

“Zip it, bonehead, or I’ll kick you all the way to the Rock of Gibraltar.”  
(Page 97)

Unlike the previous examples, here there is an explicit case of communicative translation and cultural transplantation. The verb “zip” usually refers to close with a zipper. In this case, it is used to show a clearer and expressive idea of the verb “shut up”. Furthermore, there is a cultural transplantation, because «La Rioja» (an Autonomous Community of northern Spain) is replaced by a specific item to the target culture: “Rock of Gibraltar” (a British overseas territory located on the southern end of the Iberian Peninsula). Therefore, Graves substitutes the signified, not just the signifier, to adapt the information to the TL readers.

### 3. Conclusion

In a friendly talk with Christiane Nord at the end of one of her conferences held at National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU) in November 2010, this wise woman told me something that I still remember now: “Whatever its purpose, a translated text is bound to enter the target-culture repertoire and become a part of the culture-specific intertextuality system.” (Nord 2010: personal communication). In other words, a translation is not merely a paper where one can read several sentences, translated from another language, that bear some connection to each other. A translated text is within a cultural system and it is, indeed, part of the target culture. In short, translation, without culture, is not translation.

A variety of different examples have been examined in relation to the cultural implications for translation and translation of cultural elements in the novel *The Shadow of the Wind*. I would like to highlight that the present study has helped me to identify various translation problems related with cultural elements and to analyze different translation strategies to solve them. I have realized, at the same time, that when we think about translation problems, we learn different ways to solve them. It is very important to be conscious that translation is a process, not an isolated task, and the translator has to take different decisions depending on different aspects, such as extension, his own skills, cultural and educational background or time. As translators,

we should try to ensure that content and language present in the SL context is fully acceptable and comprehensible to the TL readership.

From my point of view, the functional approach is coherent and applicable to all text types and all culture pairs, owing to its descriptive nature and practical significance. Moreover, Skopos theory fulfils the requisites of professional practice with regard to responsible, competent translators, thus establishing the groundwork for a new and more positive image of the translating profession, and regards translation essential to service and strengthen a multicultural society.

In conclusion, we should realize, as translators, the importance of cultural elements in translation. Future research, then, should focus on strengthening the relationship between translation and culture. Some people think that everyone with a good knowledge of languages is capable of doing it; other people think that computers and machine translation softwares will translate any kind of text in a near future. I would like to ask them one question: is it so simple to translate a culture? Because it is not possible to forget that a translator has to translate not only sentences, but different aspects of a culture.

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