The Relations of Style and Ideology in Translation: A case study of Harriet de Onís

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0. Introduction

This paper sets out to present questions of style in translation and possible ideological motivations, drawing on a much wider study of Latin American writing in English that has been a major project for me over recent years, *Style and Ideology in Translation: Latin American Writing In English* (Munday 2007). It may therefore serve as an introduction to the type of issues I discuss there, which encompass the 'discursive presence' (Hermans 1996) and 'voice' of the translator, and how the translator operates and makes choices in the overarching social, cultural, political and ideological macro-context in which he/she lives and operates. The cases examined in the wider study include Harriet de Onís, the translators of García Márquez, Gregory Rabassa, political ideology in translation, style in audiovisual translation and translation and identity, including contemporary hybrid texts from Latinos living in the United States. This paper will give examples from one of those cases, Harriet de Onís, a pioneer translator into English in middle part of the twentieth century.

1. The investigation of *translational stylistics*

The type of questions that I sought to investigate included the following:

- what is style and does it vary from translator to translator? How are the distinctive characteristics of an individual translator realized in the text?
- what happens when one translator translates various authors? Is there a standardization towards the translator's idiolectal preferences, reducing the variety found in the source language authors?
- what happens when one author is translated by many translators? Is the author's voice fragmented according to each translator's style?
- how far is translation style affected and realized by ideological factors?

As well as being located within the well-established branch of descriptive translation studies (Toury 1995), the investigation belongs to the realm of what Kirsten Malmkjaer (2003: 39) terms translational stylistics, which is «concerned to explain why, given the source text, the translation has been shaped in such a way that it comes to mean what it does». It is a comparison of stylistic choices in a wide corpus of source text-target text pairs that share linguistic, geographical and temporal co-ordinates: Spanish/Portuguese > English, Latin America and the mid-late twentieth century.

Translational stylistics draws on work from within monolingual stylistics, most notably Leech and Short's Style in Fiction (1981), that examines the linguistic function of (mainly but not exclusively literary) texts. It is the word choice that is crucial here. At each point, the author, can select between multiple options and that selection tends to be motivated, consciously or unconsciously, by the underlying functional meaning that is being conveyed. This is not only the overarching meaning potential of language in the systemic functional model but also the specific wording of the representation of ideas-experience that is both (cognitively) «semanticized» and (verbally) «grammaticalized» (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004: 452). Choice is also central to many definitions of style, such as that given in the glossary to Nida and Taber's The Theory and Practice of

Translation, a definition which in many respects remains quite durable (Nida and Taber 1969: 207):

> Style: the patterning of choices made by a particular author within the resources and limitations of the language and literary genre in which he [sic] is working.

This definition focuses on the *patterning* of choices: this ties in with the interest in stylistics in classifying patterns of language rather than one-off occurrences. It also takes into account major genre constraints: that is, language varies according to the variables of context of the communicative event (*cf.* Swales 1990, Bhatia 1993). Nida and Taber concentrate on literary language (which in their case encompasses the translation of the Bible), but there is no reason for style analysis to be so restricted —Swales and Bhatia examine genre in professional and academic settings, for instance. Style can also be investigated from several perspectives, comprising as it does «the linguistic habits of a particular writer […] genre, period, school» (Leech and Short 1981: 10-11). Hence it may be related to the individual (say the style of García Márquez), the type of writing (magical realist novels), time period (middle-late twentieth century) or group of writers (e.g., Latin American boom writers). However, of most interest for us is the individual focus on style, paramount in the work of critics such as Bakhtin (1981: 276):

> Any utterance —oral or written, primary or secondary, and in any sphere of communication— is individual and therefore can reflect the individuality of the speaker (or writer); that is, it possesses individual style.

Whereas the author has a virtually free rein, the translator is of course, as Malmkjaer emphasizes, to a great extent tied by the source text. Even a very free translation is evaluated by reference to the source from which it has been adapted. On the other hand, no two translations are likely to be so close that they are lexically identical. Given this scenario, where might the individuality and variation in translator style lie? My wider study looked at the areas of narrative point of view, most particularly what Uspensky (1973) terms «phraseological point of view». For Uspensky, these are mainly strategies employed in naming characters and in speech representation which reflect evaluation on the part of the narrator. We extend these strategies, using Sinclair's (1991) «idiom principle» of language and Hoey's (2005) concept of «lexical priming», to include the generally preferred or prominent phraseologies of a writer or translator. Lexical priming refers to the probabilistic and preferred groupings of words into collocations, colligations and semantic associations, which, Hoey emphasizes, are often domain- and genre-specific (e.g. 'in winter'…). However, the real interest for us here is the claim that it forms part of our «knowledge base» and also that «everybody's language is unique, because all our lexical items are inevitably primed differently as a result of different encounters, spoken and written» (Hoey 2005: 211). This suggests that we all choose wordings based on our previous encounters with the word-forms and our perceptions and knowledge as to the communicative appropriateness of the various possibilities.

These wordings may be conscious or unconscious. That is, we are each likely to have stylistic preferences that stand out in some way in our writing even if we are not immediately aware of them. These may manifest themselves (see Leech and Short 1981: 48-49) in statistical deviance (i.e., a departure from the linguistic norm for that genre), psychological prominence (features that are noted or recognized by the reader because they are unusual) or foregrounding («artistically motivated deviation»). Stylistic deviance from a norm, and indeed lexical priming, needs to be measured against a control sample. Thus, the probabilistic basis of Hoey's analysis relies on access to data from a representative electronic corpus, in his case mainly from the well-known British

National Corpus (BNC), which comprises around 110 million words of mainly British English texts published in the 1980s and early 1990s. A range of genres is covered, with fiction and newspapers being particularly prominent. Our own investigation made use of the same database for English, but the BNC is crucially limited geographically (US English is not featured strongly) and temporally (the earlier part of the twentieth century is underrepresented); for lesser-used lexis, general searches may also provide relatively few (and in same cases 0) hits and/or disperse themselves across unrelated genres. In such cases, and allowing for the inevitable limitations and imprecisions of the tool, we have used Google searches as a broad comparison. Space and focus prevent us from evaluating and discussing the overall approach here, but individual examples in the next section will help to show its usefulness in those instances.[1]

2. The link between lexicogrammatical choices and ideology

A key question is what kind of link there is between the lexical/syntactic choices and the ideological context. For Halliday (e.g. 1978), for example, as for critical discourse analysts such as Fairclough (e.g. 2001), it is the sociocultural context or location of power which to a large extent determines the lexicogrammatical choices. But this relation must be non-deterministic otherwise the same choice would always be made in the same context (*cf.* van Dijk 1998, 2006). The answer to the question depends greatly on the definition of *ideology*. In our study, we did not limit it to a negative political Napoleonic or Marxian use but adopted a wider perspective of ideology as «a pervasive, unconscious worldview» (Wales 1989: 229) and drew on the multidisciplinary theory of Teun van Dijk (1998) which joins cognition, society and discourse. We see these wider definitions and theories as being useful for the ideological analysis of style precisely because they embrace a cognitive view and accept that the influence of ideology is both conscious and unconscious: so, while the translator certainly takes decisions at every point in the translational process (*cf.* Levý 1967), the textual realization of these decisions occurs through lexicogrammatical selection that may be explicit (*cf.* van Dijk 1998: 272) but which will often be automatic. We contend that it is always 'ideological' in the sense that the lexical priming of the individual expresses and is influenced by the beliefs that are «the basis of the social representations shared by members of a group» (van Dijk 1998: 8) and by the social and educational backgrounds of the individual (*cf.* Hoey 2005: 181-2).

3. Harriet de Onís: a case study

Applied to translation, where are these ideological choices most evident? The remainder of this paper will comprise a specific case study, using samples of the work of a major early translator of Latin American literature, Harriet de Onís (1895-1969). She was born Harriet Wishnieff in New York City, the daughter of Russian Jewish émigrés but she grew up in rural Illinois before returning to New York City to read English at Barnard women's College in New York (Balch 1998). She learned Spanish after the First World War when she worked as a Spanish book importer and seems to have picked up Portuguese later and mainly through reading (ibid.: 48). Her husband was Spanish academic Federico de Onís, head of Spanish at Columbia University, who encouraged her as she became the leading translator of Latin American writing for the prestigious publisher Alfred Knopf whose New-York based company was the leading outlet and

supporter of Latin American literature from the 1940s onwards. The books Onís translated included the work of many of the leading new novelists of the mid twentieth century, for example the Cuban Alejo Carpentier and the Brazilian Jorge Amado, as well as major sociological or historical volumes, such as Fernando Ortiz's writing on Cuba, Germán Arciniegas's histories of the new world and Gilberto Freyre's work on the social history of Brazil. In addition, Onís played a very important role as a 'scout' for new talent and as a reader for potential projects for Knopf. In this way, Onís actively operated as the major conduit for the dissemination of Latin American literature in English in the United States and worldwide (Donoso 1982).

Of her many translations, I looked closely at the following, listed in chronological order according to the date of publication of the translation:

- Guzmán, Martín Luis (1930). *The Eagle and the Serpent* (translation of *El águila y la serpiente*).
- Güiraldes, Ricardo (1935). *Don Segundo Sombra*.
- Ortiz, Fernando (1947). *Cuban Counterpoint* (translation of *Contrapunto Cubano*).
- Carpentier, Alejo (1956). *The Lost Steps* (translation of *Los pasos perdidos*).
- Carpentier, Alejo (1957). *The Kingdom of This World* (translation of *El reino de este mundo*).
- Parra, Teresa de la (1959). *Mama Blanca's Souvenirs* (translation of *Las memorias de Mamá Blanca*).
- Freyre, Gilberto (1963). *The Mansions and the Shanties: The Making of Modern Brazil* (translation of *Casa grande e senzala*).
- Guimarães Rosa, João (1963). *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands* (translation of *Grande Sertão: Veredas*).

Though only a sample (just under twenty percent) of her output, it includes examples of the various genres she worked on: fiction of very different types (the early regional classics by Güiraldes and de la Parra, and modern, experimental novels of Carpentier and Guimarães Rosa), non-fiction (the sociological histories of Ortiz and Freyre) and fictionalized biography (Guzmán). It also samples her translations from each decades in which she was active. Close study of her work suggests that her technique was perhaps at its finest in her translations of the novels of the Cuban Alejo Carpentier, the most prominent Latin American novelist of the post-war era and a direct precursor and influence on the boom novelists. Onís's translations of Carpentier's major novels provide the bulk of the illustrative examples given in the next section.

4. Prominent stylistic features of Onís's translations of Carpentier

Here, I shall consider three of the most prominent (in the sense of psychologically salient) stylistic characteristics of Onís's translations. These are: (1) condensed pre-modifiers; (2) variety of verbs/process forms; (3) prosodic elements.

4.1. *Condensed pre-modifiers*

There is a clear predilection for pre-modifying descriptive epithets, often hyphenated, of which the following is just a sample:

retratos de monjas profesas coronadas de flores (*LS ST* 45)[2]

pictures of *flower-crowned*[3] nuns (*LS TT* 39)

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[2] LS = The Lost Steps.

[3] In these and later examples, all bold emphases are added to clarify the analysis.

páginas amarillas, picadas de insectos (*LS ST* 123)

yellow, *worm-holed* pages (*LS TT* 109)

el pasadizo abovedado de ramas (*LS ST* 267)

the *branch-arched* passage (*LS TT* 238)

la noche arbolada de las cumbres (*KW ST* 109)[4]

the *tree-dense* night of the mountains (*KW TT* 120)

un mundo ya sin caminos (*LS ST* 123)

a *pathless* world (*LS TT* 109)

viejos terciopelos mordidos por los hongos (*LS ST* 130)

old *mildewed* velvets (*LS TT* 116).

The most striking example here is *branch-arched*, of which there are no examples at all in the BNC and only one, unhyphenated, example in the whole of Google —*branch arched starry skies*. Although *pasadizo abovedado de ramas* itself is an original collocation in the ST, the interesting stylistic point is that Onís's creative solution fits into a very clear pattern of a hyphenated or compound pre-modifier that translates an adjective + *de* + noun phrase from the Spanish. This is thus a complex syntactic as much as a lexical choice.

The *tree-dense night* example shows a similar pattern. *Tree-dense* is an extremely unusual compound, with just two examples discovered in Google: «tree-dense Hillside Street», from estate agent's description of a property[5], and «tree-dense hills» from a modern romantic short story.[6] Of the other pre-modifiers, *mildewed velvets* appears 52 times in Google (compared to 0 in the BNC and 1 in the Leeds internet corpus), showing that it seems to be an uncommon but not an original collocation. Most interestingly, it appears in the American nineteenth-century writer Nathaniel Hawthorne's horror story *Old Esther Dudley* from 1839[7]. The 475 instances of *pathless world* in Google include one from a poem about nature by the nineteenth century Canadian poet Pauline Johnson[8]. While these are merely individual quoted examples, it is noteworthy that they should occur in North American writing from the nineteenth century. It would be too much to claim that Onís has deliberately taken these collocations from these specific texts since there is no specific evidence for this. However, it would not be wildly fanciful to begin to hypothesize that such texts, or similar ones, may have been part of Onís's reading, her educational and ideological background and may therefore have contributed to her lexical primings. In this way, the intertextuality they represent would be subliminal. Such potential intertextuality is a fascinating area and warrants deeper and more subtle investigation in future studies.

4.2. *Variety of verbs/process forms*

As well as the syntactic structures noted in the previous section, the most noticeable feature of Onís's translations is the formal and very rich lexis. The following is a sample of verb/process forms that are all much more formal in the target text:

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[4] KW = The Kingdom of This World.

[5] *www.rentslicer.com/view-listing.html?id=550815*.

[6] Kim Edwards «Aristotle's Lantern», in Zoetrope 6.1 (2002), http://www.all-story.com/issues.cgi?action=show_story&story_id=134.

[7] «The figure of the aged woman in the most gorgeous of her mildewed velvets and brocades», *www.worldwideschool.org/library/books/lit/fantasy/TwiceToldTales/chap16.html*.

[8] «O! pathless world of seeming!», from *Shadow River* by Pauline Johnson, *www.gutenberg.org/files/5625/5625.txt*.

los peristilos habitados por las cabras (*LS ST* 156)

the peristyles where the goats *drowse* (*LS TT* 140)

el aire removido por una hélice (*LS ST* 234)

air *churned* by a propeller (*LS TT* 208)

me quita toda fuerza moral (*LS ST* 258)

sapped my moral strength (*LS TT* 231)

me hace mirar atrás (*LS ST* 228)

whirled me *round* (*LS TT* 203)

buscando la resquemante verdad a través de palabras (*LS ST* 273)

winnowing the bitter truth from words (*LS TT* 243)

amargado por sus meditaciones (*KW ST* 48)

weary of *chewing the bitter cud* of his reflections (*KW TT* 52)

These TT verbs are active material processes that are translated by more formal, more metaphorical and more dynamic verbs in the TT in a strategy of lexical enrichment even if this means a distancing from the ST lexical structure as in «the peristyles where goats *drowse*» (instead of 'inhabited by goats') and *whirled me round* (rather than 'makes me look behind'). In all these examples, the relatively common ST word is translated by a less common but more idiomatic TT idiomatic phrase. Thus, *winnowing the bitter truth* is used rather than 'seeking' for *buscando la resquemante verdad* and *chewing the bitter cud*, rather than 'embittered', translates *amargado*. Corpus examples of the latter again reinforce the image of Onís's style as based on well-established and formal genres; instances include Washington Irving's *The Alhambra* (1832)[9].

4.3. *Prosodic elements*

Onís's work combines reinforces the idiom and collocation levels with poetic rhythm, especially of descriptions of the landscape or of natural phenomena. All three examples below introduce alliteration absent in the ST:

los riscosos perfiles de Morne Ridge (*KW ST* 43)

the *rocky ridges* of Morne Ridge (*KW TT* 47)

la constante presencia del aguacero (*KW ST* 43)

the *pervading presence* of the rain (*KW TT* 47)

El mar era verdecido por extrañas fosforencias (*KW ST* 63)

The sea *glowed green* with strange phosphorescence (*KW TT* 69)

It is worth pointing out that none of the cases of alliteration is at all original: a Google search found 48,100 instances of *rocky ridges*, 11,900 of *pervading presence* and 16,300 of *glowed green*. Intuitively or deliberately, Onís is thus introducing into her TTs what is another fixed formula or common priming, based on phonological or aural principles. One further possibility, therefore, worthy of greater investigation, is that English generally favours such phonologically-based structures and that Onís's choices are in fact part of an overall strategy of stylistic domestication. This would fit with what Venuti (1995) has described as being the characteristic of much Anglo-American translation, even if in these cases it is less aggressive and is expressed through sound.

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[9] «He sought the astrologer, who still remained shut up in his hermitage, chewing the bitter cud of resentment», Washington Irving (1832) *The Alhambra*, *etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/i/irving/washington/i72a/part22.html*.

However, there are some more aggressive instances of ideological intervention by Onís, which we shall describe in the next section.

5. Ideological intervention

In this section the ideological intervention is expressed through specific lexical choices which, we claim, reveal the translator's underlying beliefs. In particular, these relate to: (5.1) religious terminology or idioms that are not present in the STs; (5.2) added evaluative elements that impose a stereotypical view of certain characters and situations; and (5.3) editing and framing that affect the text at a higher level.

5.1. *Religious veneer*

The veneer of evaluation based on Christian terminology appears incongruous in *The Lost Steps* where one of the central ideas is the value of the forest people's civilization: an uprising in the main city sets an Austrian conductor on edge, «imprecando contra los agitados» (*LS ST* 60), «*breathing fire and brimstone* against the malcontents» (*LS TT* 52), a phrase associated with the Apocalypse and perhaps justified here since it appears as part of the detailed allegorical vision of glory and hell at sunset. On other occasions, the African *mandinga* (*LS ST* 99) is domesticated simply as *devil* (*LS TT* 86) and the three-plumed serpent gods of the Amerindians, «una triada» in the ST (*LS ST* 270), are referred to in Christian terms as «the great *trinity*» (*LS TT* 241). Although some voodoo words in *The Kingdom of this World* are maintained, it is also true that examples of Christian terminology run through Onís's translations. In Güiraldes's *Don Segundo Sombra*, for instance, the young narrator is described by the people of the village as *un perdidito* ('a little lost boy') which becomes immeasurably stronger and more sinister in the translation:

> Decía la gente que era un perdidito. (Güiraldes 1926: 17)
>
> The decent people called me *a limb of Satan* (Güiraldes 1935: 11).

Finally, religious terminology is even adopted for a political context in the translation of Teresa de la Parra's *Mama Blanca's Souvenirs*. The pro-European Choncho writes off the prospects of the youthful Venezuela of the late nineteenth century with a phrase which Onís renders as the Biblical «beyond hope of *redemption*»:

> país perdido ya para la civilización, sin esperanza de remedio alguno (Parra 1929/45: 91)
>
> a country beyond hope of *redemption* (Parra 1959: 59)

5.2. *Ideologically-motivated stereotypes*

In *The Lost Steps* there are also a number of instances where the stylistic choices imply an ideological filter in the translation since they imply judgement based on stereotypical images. Thus, there is the narrator's stereotypical addition of *shrewd* to classify Rosario's peasant way of thinking («*shrewd* peasant logic» *LS TT* 228, «la campesina lógica» *LS ST* 203) and the interpretative addition of *gracefully* in the ironic description of his wife Ruth as she awaits his return, («standing mournfully and *gracefully*» *LS ST* 215, «irguiendo una silueta plañidera» *LS TT* 243). In the TT a politically left-wing group possesses «*extremist* tendencies» (*LS TT* 47) rather than 'advanced tendency' («la tendencia avanzada» *LS ST* 54) and a tribe in the forest are described as «*savage* Indians» rather than 'fierce' (*LS TT* 264, for «indios bravíos» *LS ST* 235). These last two involve the naming and evaluation of an Other, in one case political, in the other racial: *savage Indian* is a phrase used by Europeans from the beginning of the conquest of the Americas.

A final example is especially striking. It is to be found in Onís's translation of a seminal book on the sociology and history of Cuba, Fernando Ortiz's *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and sugar* (1947). The example discusses the psychological and cultural impact on the slaves who had been transported from Africa to the Caribbean:

> Los negros trajeron con sus cuerpos sus espíritus, pero no sus instituciones, ni su instrumentario. Llegaron arrancados, heridos y trozados como las cañas en el ingenio […] Se traspasaron de una cultura a otra más potente, como los indios. (Ortiz 1940/63: 102)

> The Negroes brought with their bodies their souls, but not their institutions nor their implements. […] They arrived deracinated, wounded, shattered, like the cane of the fields […] They were transferred from their own to another more advanced culture, like that of the Indians. (Ortiz 1947: 101-2)

The choice of *Negroes* for the Spanish *negros* corresponds to a common usage in 1940s United States to refer to African Americans. However, the choice of *souls* rather than 'spirits' to translate *espíritus* suggests the prism of a Western religious terminology. More importantly, the choice of «more *advanced* culture» for «[cultura] más potente», instead of 'another more *powerful* [culture]', reveals an attitude of superiority from the translator. Onís's choice seems to view the Africans as belonging to a single, standardized culture whatever their origins and the Europeans as being able to subject them because their culture is inherently more advanced (not just powerful).

5.3. *Intervention through editing*

The main focus of this paper has been to give examples of the interaction between stylistic choice and the ideological beliefs of the translator. However, it should not be forgotten that some of the most evident ideological shifts occur on the whole text and paratextual level. In Onís's translations, macro-level editing decisions sometimes have severe consequences. This happened to Onís's first translation, of Martín Luis Guzmán's *The Eagle and the Serpent* (1930), a semi-fictionalized narrative depicting Pancho Villa's exploits during the Mexican Revolution of 1910. When published, the translation was barely two-thirds the length of the ST and had entire sections omitted, including the very first chapters. Similarly, Gilberto Freyre's *Casa grande e senzala* 1933), a sociological study that appeared in English as *The Mansions and the Shanties: The Making of Modern Brazil* (1963), was drastically shortened in translation, apparently at the instigation of the publisher (Balch 1998: 51). In the case of Güiraldes's *Don Segundo Sombra*, editor Waldo Frank even claims to have rewritten the translation because it was too «bland» (Rostagno 1997: 18). More detailed analysis and discussion is provided in Munday (2007).

Concluding remarks

We must not ignore Harriet de Onís's position as a groundbreaking translator who brought to international attention some of the leading Latin American writers and historians of the mid twentieth century. Because she was often the first translator to be working on these writers, there was a limited corpus of prior translations on which she could base her efforts and there were few immediate contemporaries translating similar works. The analysis in this paper (and indeed even in the wider study) is based on only a selection of her huge translation output. Nevertheless, the sample findings in this paper will hopefully have served to indicate some of the ways in which the prominent stylistic characteristics of a translator reflect an underlying ideology. This ideology, as a set of beliefs and a «world view», in turn is likely to have been formed through education and other socio-cultural exposures that have at the same time constructed the translator's

own lexical primings, expressed consciously and unconsciously in the lexicogrammatical selections in the target text. Some of these may seem rather inoffensive (e.g., the prosodic, alliterative patterns suggesting a general domesticating strategy); others, such as the religious vocabulary and the occasional blatant evaluation of sensitive topics («extremist tendencies» and «advanced society») are more sinister. Uncovering such shifts in translation is justification enough for further work in translational stylistics.

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