CONCEPT OF CONSTRAINED TRANSLATION. NON-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVES OF TRANSLATION

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Abstract

The procedures involved in the translation of texts have been widely studied from a linguistic point of view.

However, when translation is required not only of written texts alone, but of texts in association with other communication media (image, music, oral sources, etc.), the translator's task is complicated and at the same time constrained by the latter.

We introduce in this paper the concept of constrained translation from the point of view of communication theory (as defined by the terminology of Nida "dynamic translation") ; we also deal with the existence of more than one communication channel, the factors of source culture, target culture, "noise", and the role of the translator in this complex process.

In this paper we have tried to synthesize the work of non-linguistic aspects of translation which we have been engaged in collectively for four years.

We have studied the communication process and the task which the translator must accomplish when the text is influenced by the concurrence of other communication systems or elements such as image, music, etc.

To achieve this we have relied particularly on our teaching experience in the translation of film scripts, drama, advertisements, lyrics, comic strip dialogues, etc. We have centered essentially on :

- ♦ a description of the communication process in the translation of different types of texts, including the comparison of the signals which form part of the source language message and the target language translation,
- ♦ the different "noise-producing" circumstances in this translation process,
- ♦ the concept of constrained translation, as proposed by Christopher Titford[1], in which the text is only one of the components of the message or when it constitutes only an intermediate stage for a speech read aloud or dramatized,
- ♦ the different degrees of constraint found in the translation of different types of messages.

Traditionally, translation has been studied as a branch of applied linguistics ; from this perspective, the major problem of translation consists of finding words in a target language which render the meanings stated in the source language.

This unilateral linguistic focus prevents us from taking into account aspects of the translation process beyond this limited scope, those aspects which are characteristic of translation as a communication process and also those which depend on the relation of the linguistic message to other messages conveyed by non-linguistic systems. As early as 1964, Nida dedicated chapter six of his book *Toward a Science of Translating*[2] to the study of translation from the perspectives of information and communication theories,

plus d'autonomie à l'apprenant on peut gager que son apprentissage en sera moins artificiel et certainement plus motivé.

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emphasizing important concepts for the translator such as "noise", "redundancy", and "communication load", formerly defined by Shannon and Weaver in 1948 in their work *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*[3].

We regard the basic process of translation as a communicative act as follows :

Figure 1
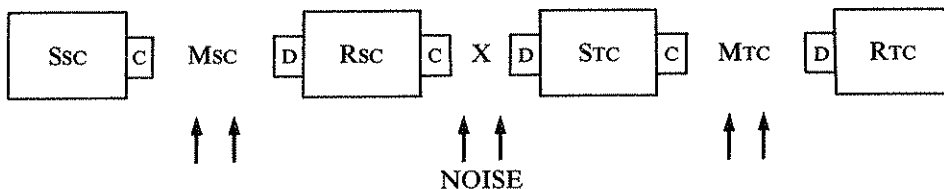
where
S_{SC} = source in the source culture (author)
S_{TC} = source in the target culture (translator)
R_{SC} = receptor in the source culture (translator)
R_{TC} = receptor in the target culture (reader)
M_{SC} = message coded in the source culture (text alone)
M_{TC} = message coded in the target culture (text alone)
C = encoder
D = decoder
X = translation
from which we can observe that the translator acts as a decoder of the source language as well as an encoder of the target language, as a receptor of the message in the source culture as well as a source of the message in the target culture. From this point of view M_{SC} and M_{TC} will have to keep a "dynamic equivalence relation" according to Nida's terminology, in which the relation between the message and the response which is evoked in the receptor of each culture should be the same.

Another somewhat more complicated translation process would occur when M_{TC} is substituted by an equivalent message in the target language which, unlike the first situation we have mentioned, does not use written language as a medium but rather oral language (M_{TC}). The diagram would be as represented in Figure 2 :

Figure 2
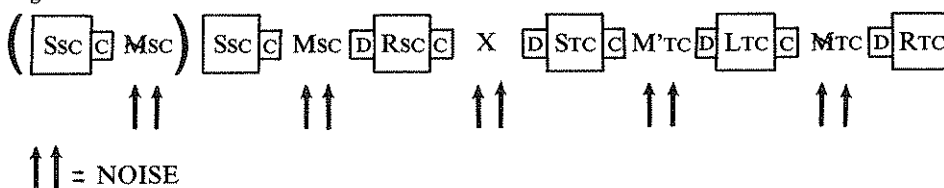
where M'_{TC} would stand for the text to be read aloud and L_{TC} would stand for the reader. Normally, M_{SC} would only stand for the transcription of a previous message in oral form (M_{SC}). It is relevant for the translator to know whether his translated text is going to be read aloud or silently, since the stylistic norms to be followed would be different in each case.

A further complication in the translation process occurs when the text is dramatized (M_{TC}). The most characteristic situation is that of the theater, where we find several kinds of problems as mentioned by S.S.C. Chau[4]. First of all, the M_{SC} (written) work alone fails to provide us with a true or complete vision of the original work which

can only be fully conceived by means of the theatrical performance. But it becomes difficult to define this "original work" since each performance has its own individual characteristics, even when the author is also the director. If we set aside this preliminary process and we begin with the script, M_{SC}, the major problem is that the final form of the message in the target culture — the theatrical performance — is shaped by all members who participate in the performance, from the director to the actors who interpret the work in their own light. For this reason the number of intermediate steps from the M_{TC} as a translated text to the performance in the target culture M_{TC} may be considerable. In a simplified form, it would be as shown in Figure 3 :
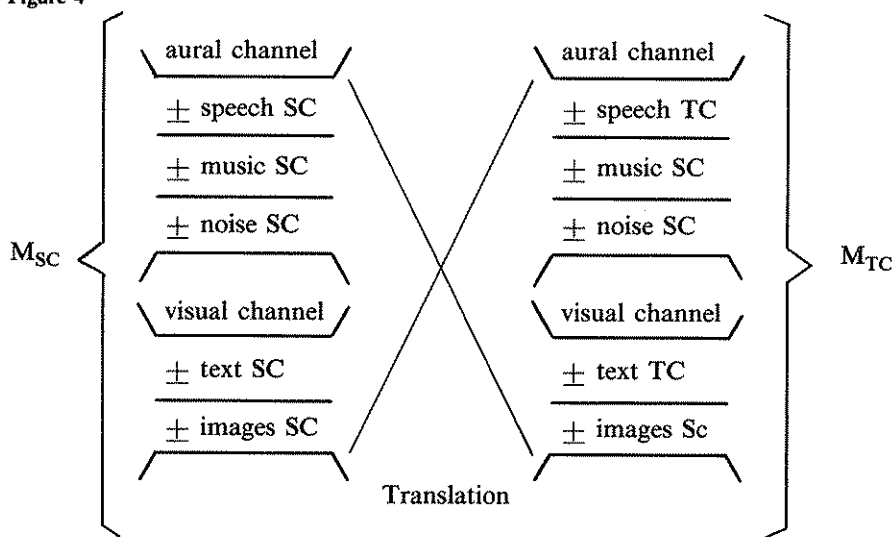
Figure 3
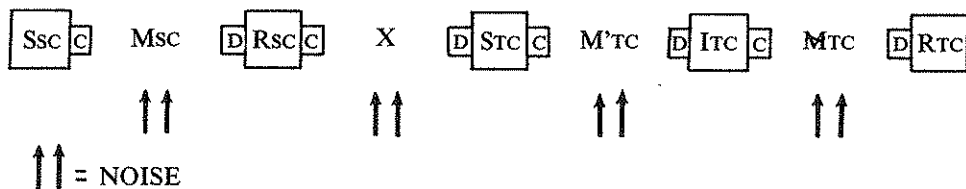
where I_{TC} will stand for all those who intervene in the *mise en scène* of the translated text.

For certain types of translation, a new focus seems necessary in addition to the linguistic and communicative ones, e.g. a semiological focus which allows us to consider the message to be composed not only of the linguistic system, but also of other non-linguistic systems which, though not specific objects of the translation process, must be considered by the translator.

The non-verbal messages will be transmitted through the visual channel (iconic signals) or through the aural channel (music, noise). Experiments have also been carried out in relation to the olfactory channel, although for the purposes of this paper we have chosen to consider only by aural and visual channels.

Figure 4

This figure shows both messages M_{SC} and M_{TC} with both channels functioning in an extensive range of possibilities and media. Normally, the more common combinations are as follows :
speech
text
text/images (advertisement, comic strip)
text/music (song)
speech/images (film, television)
speech/images/music/noise (film)
speech/text/images/music/noise (subtitled film)

The images will occur principally as
♦ an isolated image (poster)
♦ a succession of static images (comic strip)
♦ a succession of images in movement (film)

The images will also reflect different degrees of "iconicity", i.e. reproduction of reality : from the drawing to the photograph, from the black and white image to the multicolored one, from the abstract to the figurative.

The media can be formed by several components. Thus, in comic strips we find narration and dialogue ; in songs we have the human voice plus musical instruments and in film we can find text, image and subtitles.

Nor is the separation between the different media so precise. Iconic and conventional signs interact in a dialectical way. One of them may assume the function of the other. For example, writing — a conventional system — may possess an iconic value in a comic strip.

We must emphasize that both in the source and target culture messages, music, noise and image (which may also include text) unmistakably reveal themselves as belonging to the source culture. That is to say, the translator can only translate the text or speech (sometimes not even completely) while all the other media of the message remain untouched. This fact is a source of noise because of the bicultural nature of the message.

The relation which exists between information transmitted at a given moment through the different media and channels ranges from totally identical to totally complementary, or, in some cases, to having no relation whatsoever.

All these possibilities offer us different degrees of noise and redundancy in communication.

From the aforementioned we derive a fundamental concept involved in this type of message : *synchrony*[5]. We must understand this synchrony as the agreement between signals emitted for the purpose of communicating the same message. There are, however, various types of synchrony :
synchrony of time : agreement in time of different signals which communicate a unit of information,
spatial synchrony : the signal occupy neither more nor less space than that which corresponds to them,
content synchrony : the meanings transmitted by different signals contradict neither each other the whole message,
phonetic synchrony : synchrony of sound signals of spoken dialogue with the visible speech movements on the screen,
character synchrony : the harmony between the image of the character and his or her voice and words.

We must emphasize the fact that different acts of communication are characterized by the relative communication importance of the different channels and media involved. For example, film relies mainly on image for its narrative capacity and dialogue plays a complementary role, whereas in drama dialogue has a greater communicative impact. Figure 5 attempts to represent both cases.
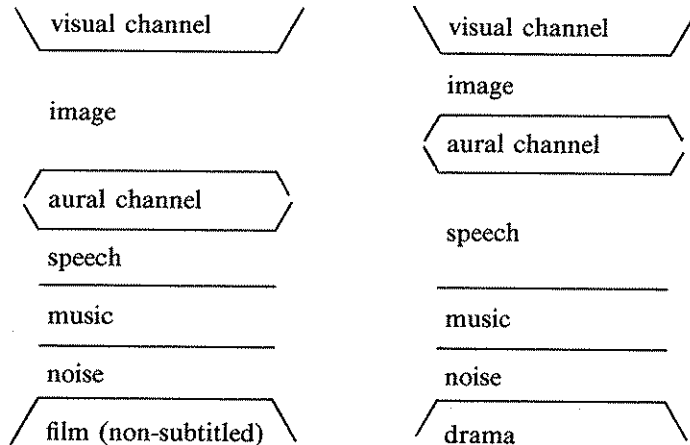

Figure 5

Relation between information transmitted by different channels for the purpose of conveying the same message

Although the channels or media may vary, we must consider the message to be a whole created as a result of the concurrence of different signals. This does not imply, however, that the sum of signals would transmit the sum of the meanings.

In communication we can receive and transmit information simultaneously through all the different sensory channels, although the most commonly used are the visual and aural.

Signals consisting of the same type of system will necessarily have to be transmitted by different channels ; such is the case of reading a text and listening to its oral translation, where the two activities can be carried out simultaneously because they do not share the same channel. Nevertheless, simultaneous interpretation, for example, shares the same channel as the original speech, making simultaneous perception of the two messages impossible and converting the original speech into "noise".

Relation between information transmitted by different media

Nevertheless, we can receive information by different media at the same time and through the same sensory channel if they are organized sufficiently in a different way, as Jeanne Martinet mentions in her book *Clefs pour la sémiologie*[6]. For example, narrative text, drawing and dialogue through the visual channel in the comic strip ; subtitles and image through the visual channel and music, noise and dialogue through the aural channel in film.

Translation as an intercultural process

The different languages of M_{SC} and M_{TC} (L_{SC} and L_{TC}) are nothing more than a manifestation — although the most outstanding — of the fact that the communicative act in translation occurs between two different cultures (SC and TC). This fact implies

that the noise produced in the act of communicating by means of translation proceeds not only from the use of two different languages but also from the cultural differences existing between the source and the receptor. These differences cause a "drawing out" of the receptor channel, which in turn calls for a more explicit message or the adaptation of the message by the translator, as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6
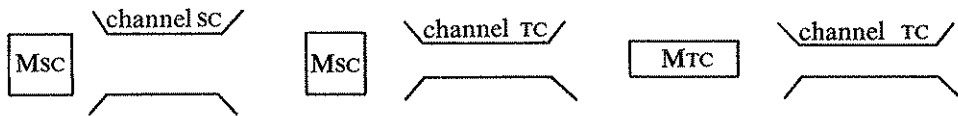
Although these procedures are carried out with relative ease in the non-constrained or ordinary translation of a text in prose, whether literary or not, in constrained translation the translator's task is complicated by the existence of different channels and media.

Noise produced by the duplication of information
a) Information transmitted by several media through the same channel which is not organized in a sufficiently different way.

This is the case of speech SL and speech TL in Figure 7 representing M_{TC} in on-sight or simultaneous translation of films, where we observe that speech, music and noise will indeed be sufficiently organized.

The speech sounds of one dialogue will be superimposed on the other, although speech TC will not be modified.
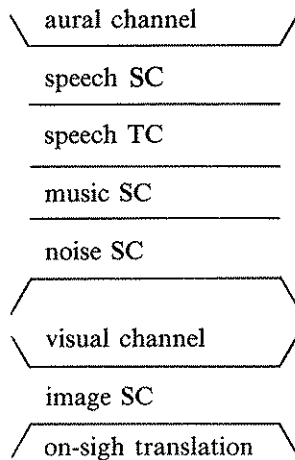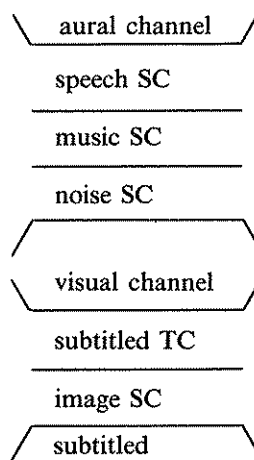
Figure 7

Figure 8

In Figure 8, which shows M_{TC} for film subtitles, we notice the noise produced by the concurrence in the same channel of subtitle TC and image SC and, in addition, the subtitles superimposed in this situation produce a deformation of part of the original image, which is hidden by them.

b) Information belonging to the same system but transmitted by different channels.

In Figure 8 subtitles reflect this situation of noise created by the presence of verbal signals in the aural channel in the form of speech SL and verbal signals in the visual channel in the form of subtitles TL.

Noise produced by the coexistence of different cultural systems

This is illustrated by the appearance on the screen of scenes of Moscow with actors speaking Spanish, or by the assignation in the dubbing of film of varieties of language peculiar to Spain to characters whom the image reveals as non-Spanish, as shown in Figure 9.
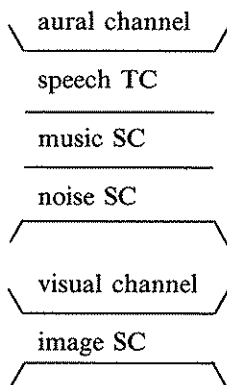
Noise due to dischrony

We have already referred to the different types of synchrony which may exist between different types of signals. In the event of absence of synchrony, noise is produced. For example, a subtitle which does not correspond to the image on the screen will produce noise in the decoding of the message.

Constrained translation

Unlike non-constrained translation, in which, in both SL and TL, the written language system is not accompanied by other systems and where the message occupies only the visual channel, we will find two types of circumstances which will condition our

Figure 9

```
        \  aural channel  /
         _____/

           speech TC
          _____

           music SC
          _____

           noise SC
         /_____\
        /                 \

        \  visual channel /
         _____/

           image SC
         /_____\
        /                 \
```

translation of the text. These circumstances will remove the condition of freedom which allows us, in isolated written prose, to approach the highest degree of dynamic equivalence in our translated text.

These two circumstances are as follows :

a) the existence of various systems of communication,

b) in some cases, the change from the visual channel for the text in the SL to the aural channel for the reading or reciting of the message in the TL (adaptation of the message to the norms of oral language).

We can also consider the limitation which poetic language imposes on translation (rhyme, metrics...), although we believe that this goes beyond the purpose of this paper.

a) Various systems of communication

When the message is composed of other systems in addition to the linguistic one, the translated text should maintain content synchrony with the other message components, whether these be image, music or any other. By this we do not suggest that the different parts of the message should mean the same thing but rather they should not contradict one another unless this has been the intention of the original ; in the same way the level of redundancy for the text as a whole, as a result of adequate cultural adaptation, must allow the same facility of decoding as for the message in the SL.

On the one hand, we cannot translate the text without understanding how the other communicative elements add to or modify the meaning ; and, on the other hand, the non-linguistic elements of the message not only constitute part of the meaning but also, on occasions, impose their own laws and conditions on the text. If the text does not adjust to these conditions it will not fulfill its communicative function in the whole nor will it allow the other systems to do so. We must remember that, as previously indicated, the translator can only work with the text and all the necessary adjustments must be made in relation to the text.

In the second place, the non-linguistic systems of communication and the text must fulfill the conditions of synchrony as described. If our text goes beyond the different limits imposed by the conditions of synchrony, extreme "noise" may be produced which may cause either a failure in the communication act or, at the very least, additional difficulty in the act of decoding.

b) Change from the text through the visual channel to speech through the aural channel

The norms of oral language impose a new limitation on the translated text which will be removed from its natural environment, the printed word. This will be the case with all texts whose final destiny is that of being read aloud, recited, or sung.

If we assign degrees of constraint to different types of communication acts depending on their non-compliance with the conditions of what we have called non-constrained translation, we can establish the range as shown in the following table.
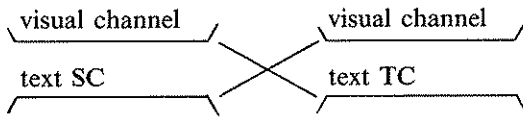
This table is quite simplified, although the themes involved have been studied by us in greater depth in various articles[7]. We should not mistake the evaluation of the difficulty of the translation of the text, although these may on occasion be related.

Table 1 : Degrees of Constraint

| | Content synchrony | | Spatial synchrony | Synchrony of time | Phonetic synchrony | Spoken language | Degree of constraint |
	Music	Image					
Prose	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Advertisement	—	Single/static (X)	X	—	—	—	1-2
Comic	—	Series/static X	X	—	—	—	2
Song	X	—	X	X	—	X	4
Subtitles	(X)	Series/ dynamic X	X	X	—	—	3-4
Dubbing	(X)	Series/ dynamic X	—	X	X	X	4-5

Different types of constrained translation processes

TEXT

| visual channel | visual channel | M_{SC} | M_{TC} |
| text SC | text TC | | |

ADVERTISEMENT

visual channel	visual channel		
image SC	image SC	M_{SC}	M_{TC}
text SC	text TC		

COMIC

visual channel	visual channel		
image SC	image SC	M_{SC}	M_{TC}
text SC	text TC		

SONG

aural channel	aural channel		
speech SC	speech TC	M_{SC} M_{SC} M'$_{TC}$ M_{TC}	
instruments SC	instruments SC		

DUBBING
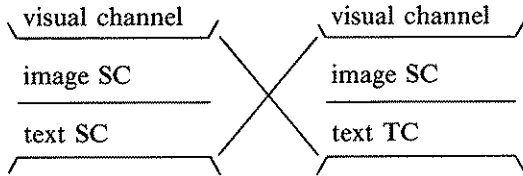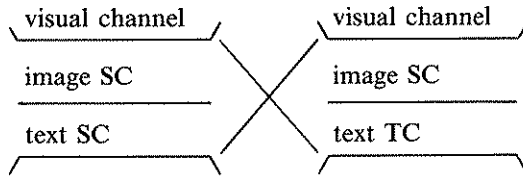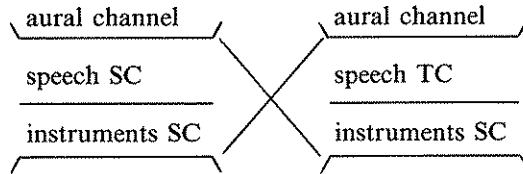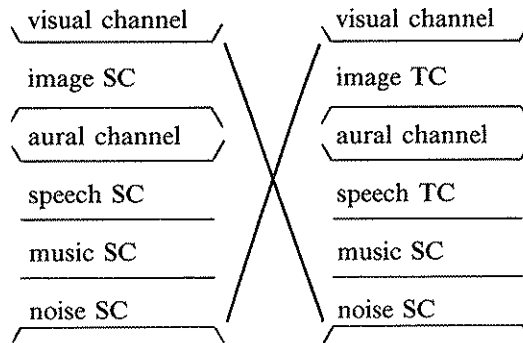
visual channel	visual channel		
image SC	image TC		
aural channel	aural channel	M_{SC} M_{SC} M'$_{TC}$ M_{TC}	
speech SC	speech TC		
music SC	music SC		
noise SC	noise SC		

The original dramatic interpretation of the text is lost.

SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETATION OF FILMS

visual channel   visual channel

image SC   image SC

                   aural chann 1

                   speech TC $M_{SC} \rightarrow (M_{Sc}) \rightarrow M_{TC}$

aural channel   speech SC

speech SC   music SC

music SC   noise SC

noise SC
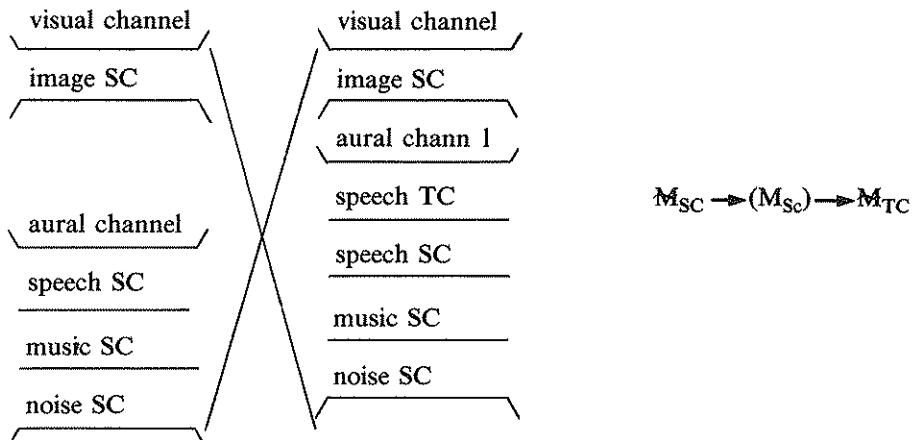
All dramatic effect is lost and character dischrony is produced.

SUBTITLES

visual channel   visual channel

image SC (1)   image SC (2)

                   subtitle TC

aural channel   aural channel $M_{SC} \rightarrow M_{SC} \rightarrow M'_{TC}$

speech SC   speech SC

music SC   music SC

noise SC   noise SC
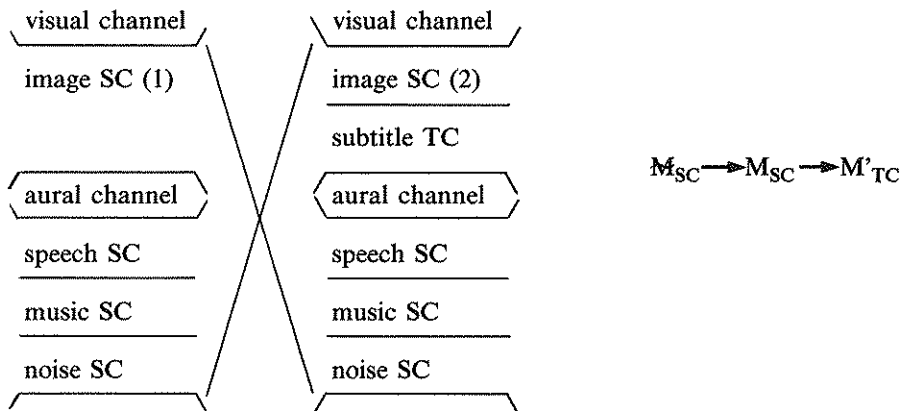
Subtitles do not have dramatization. Due to the shift from the oral word to the written text (M_{SC} to M_{TC}) a good deal of the active function of the spectator for the encoding of a parallel message is lost (see Nida, *op. cit.*, p. 123).

Image SC (1) changes to image SC (2) because of the addition of superimposed subtitles.

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THE GENERAL BILINGUAL DICTIONARY AS A WORKING TOOL IN *THÈME*

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Abstract

Because of his lack of native-speaker intuition for the target language, the *thème* translator requires of the general bilingual dictionary much more explicit lexical information than does his *version* counterpart. On the basis of a study of lexical errors made by *thème* translation students, we examine the weaknesses of the general bilingual dictionary for *thème*, and relate these to either a non-observance of lexicographic principles, or to a lack of such principles. Finally, we propose three teaching strategies to help *thème* translation students deal with the general bilingual dictionary.

1. INTRODUCTION

Almost every translator, it seems, possesses a collection of favorite lexical gaffs committed as a result of naive reliance on a general bilingual dictionary (GBD). Student translators are particularly prone to being led astray by the GBD, as evidenced by the frequent wail, "But I found it in the dictionary !", all too familair to their teachers. The beginning student's faith in the GBD generally changes to apprehension rather quickly, however, as he discovers — principally through trial and error — that this working tool cannot be trusted blindly. Apprehension about the GBD is especially strong for translation into the non-native language, or *thème* (as opposed to translation into the native language, or *version*)[1]. The reason is the *thème* translator's lack of native-speaker intuition regarding the GBD's proposed target language (TL) equivalents — that intuition which allows his *version* counterpart 1) to make the semantic and stylistic judgements needed in accepting or rejecting a TL equivalent, or in choosing from among several equivalents proposed, and 2) to properly combine the TL item, once correctly selected, with other items in context. The GBD's mandate in *thème* is thus much more extensive than in *version* : as well as giving the TL equivalent(s) for a source language (SL) item, it must provide explicitly much of the information about the TL item(s) known intuitively to a native TL speaker. This mandate, judging from the frequent complaints voiced by translators, seems to be inconsistently fulfilled by the GBD — despite, of course, its many benefits (it is certainly one of the translator's most often used, and valuable, tools).

In this paper, we propose an analysis of typical GBD weaknesses with regard to translation into the non-native language. Our analysis is based on a study of lexical errors made by francophone students (School of Translators and Interpreters, University of Ottawa) when translating from French into English. Lexical errors were used as the starting point for the analysis as they indicate problem words for the translator, and are thus the words he will need help with most from his GBD. Over a two-year period, translated texts were collected from the three French-English *thème* courses offered at the School. For each course, seven texts per year were selected at random, yielding 42 different texts with an average length of 230 words. All texts were non-technical in the sense that they were intended for the general, educated public. For each lexical error