

ANALYSIS AND METHODOLOGY

Translation and Context

Unit Two dealt with the notion of "code" with reference to our checklist for analysing context (see Unit One). In the present unit we will be looking at how the five features of context (participants, setting, content, code, key) relate to each other communicatively. But first we need to say a little more about what we have called "key".

- Analysing key

In discourse, as in music, key (i.e. the overall tone of a piece) is generally associated with affect (feeling, or mood, or emotion): it is the communicative "tone" or "tone-colour" intended by the producer and perceived by the receiver. As such, it is significant, and therefore bears meaning which the translator needs to analyse as part of the context. She may (or may not, as we shall see) need to convey the context; but without an impeccable understanding of it he cannot even begin to translate.

Persuasiveness, flattery, irony, aggressiveness, gaiety, sadness, mockery (which we shall be looking at in more detail elsewhere in this course) are instances of key. Their markers in lexis and, grammar colour the discourse in which they occur and contribute to its effect. Persuasion, for instance, might be marked lexically by the use of verbs such as "encourage", "induce" or "convince", or "bring round" and grammatically by the use of modals ("should / ought to") or hypothetical clauses ("if I were you I'd..."), among other things. Naturally, it is not the (denotative) meaning of the markers themselves which produces the communicative effect, but their combination within a text -- their cumulative impact, so to speak. The following text from the prologue to Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* illustrates how syntactic features contribute to the communicative effect collectively rather than individually:

Main Street is the climax of civilization. That this Ford car might stand in front of the Bon Ton Store, Hannibal invaded Rome and Erasmus wrote in Oxford cloisters. What Ole Jenson the grocer says to Ezra Stowbody the banker is the new law for London, Prague, and the unprofitable isles of the sea; whatsoever Ezra does not know and sanction, that thing is heresy, worthless for knowing and wicked to consider.

Here, the contextual key is given by the long list of ill-assorted proper nouns and the repeated use of inappropriately archaic and formal English. While lexis and grammar belong in themselves to what we have called "code", the facts that appertain specifically to "key" are, firstly, that the proper nouns are ill-assorted and lumped together in an enumeration, and secondly, that the archaic style is used repeatedly (the syntax of That ... the Bon Ton Store; "the isles of the sea). In short, just as we regarded "code" as language according to user(s), so we need to regard "key" or "register" as it is often called with reference to specific social groups, as language according to use, i.e. to purpose and to effect.

- Appreciating context

It is one thing to take texts apart, and another to put them back together in a meaningful way. Analysis of the kind which we have been discussing is all very well, but it would be sterile if it did not increase our understanding of the material we are dealing with and prepare us for reproducing its every aspect, if necessary, in a different language. To achieve this understanding, we now have to move on from analysis to appreciation.

Return to the passage from Main Street quoted above. In principle, two things are possible here. Either Sinclair Lewis is writing to be taken at face value, or he is writing ironically. If he is writing at face value, it follows that he is expecting the reader to accept his assertions. With a reasonable knowledge of the world, is it possible to accept his assertions? Does the entire history of civilization build up to a Ford standing in front of a Main Street haberdashery? Do the great cities of the world set their sights by the judgments of a Main Street grocer? Is the determination of all moral values the apanage of a Main Street banker? Whoever would swallow such far-fetched claims? Only an inhabitant of Main Street, of course! Sinclair Lewis implies as much himself a few lines further on:

Such is our comfortable tradition and sure faith. Would he not betray himself an alien cynic who should otherwise portray Main Street, or distress the citizens by speculating whether there may not be other faiths?

This is not an explicit avowal of irony ("saying one thing, meaning another"), but it can be read as such once the other contextual features have been examined. A quick run through the checklist will produce data looking something like this:

Participants: S. Lewis, U.S. satirical novelist (1885-1951, Nobel Prize 1930), and his educated middleclass readership. [Find out about author and readership by consulting any good reference book or the web.]

Setting: small town America as portrayed in a famous book published in 1920, [Same source of information.]

Content: a single (false) proposition - summed up in the first sentence - is subsequently expanded upon by examples which are largely irrelevant in real-world terms.

Code: complex syntax, formal style with Biblical or epic overtones.

Key: the text is marked by incongruity: proper names not belonging together yet aligned in a list, an inflated style inappropriate to the text's setting and content. The aim is to create humorous effects based on the yoking together of the sublime and the ridiculous.

This information allows us to draw conclusions about context. When the text is taken together with what we know about the author's generally satirical attitudes, about life in small-town America, about the world in general, and about the lexical and grammatical features of code and key, i.e. when the text is appreciated in its context (or understood in its communication situation), the predominance of irony is plain enough and all that remains to be done is to translate it, if needs be. But that's another story!

Self-study exercise

Read the following extracts, analyse their contextual features using the checklist technique, paying particular attention to key, and then appreciate which aspects of the context are predominant, i.e. most significant from the viewpoint of the text's potential translator, Check your work with the key provided in the Key Appendix at the back of this course book.

DO NOT SEND IT IN FOR CORRECTION

How could he have thought so evil of the world when succour was at hand all the time? And now he had reached the summit. Ah, Yvonne, sweetheart, forgive me! Strong hands lifted him. Opening his eyes, he looked down, expecting to see, below him, the magnificent jungle, the heights, Pico de Orizabe, Malinche, Gofre de Perote, like those peaks of his life conquered one after another before this greatest ascent of all had been successfully, if unconventionally, completed. But there was nothing there: no peaks, no life, no climb. Nor was this summit a summit exactly: it had no substance, no firm base. It was crumbling too, whatever it was, collapsing, while he was falling, falling into the volcano, he must have climbed it after all, though now there was this noise of foisting lava in his ears, horribly, it was in eruption, yet no, it wasn't the volcano, the world itself was bursting, bursting into black spouts of villages catapulted into space, with himself falling through it all, through the inconceivable pandemonium of a million tanks, through the blazing of ten million burning bodies, falling into a forest, falling....

Suddenly he screamed, and it was as though this scream were being tossed from one tree to another, as its echoes returned, then, as though the trees themselves were crowding nearer, huddled together, closing over him, pitying...

Somebody threw a dead dog after him down the ravine.

Malcolm Lowry, *Under the Volcano*

Advanced Translation

Votre compagnie est née avec l'Etat moderne: abattre les féodalités, rassembler les forces vives, donner aux créateurs le moyen d'inventer et de projeter les richesses de l'esprit, épouser le temps présent, et percevoir son contenu d'avenir, bref, affirmer haut et fort la grandeur de notre pays, telle fut la pensée de votre fondateur, le Cardinal de Richelieu. Chaque époque a ses tâches, mais l'ambition reste la même: servir la France en tant que nation certes, mais aussi en tant que vecteur de civilisation, source de pensée universelle. En 1635, il fallait édifier un Etat, en 1945 reconstruire une nation déchirée, meurtrie. Aujourd'hui on luttera pour que la France accède aux dimensions que requiert la prodigieuse révolution scientifique et technique qui, en un siècle, a transformé les rapports de puissance entre les groupes sociaux, les forces économiques et les sociétés politiques... Jusqu'à la relation de la planète et de l'espace, de l'homme et de son moi.

Je traiterai devant vous d'un sujet qui apparaîtra bien réduit auprès de ces réalités et des perspectives qu'elles ouvrent: du langage. Un sujet réduit? Je n'en suis pas si sûr. Qu'est-il de plus important que ce qui touche aux structures de l'être? Votre compagnie a été instituée pour rendre la langue française -- je cite -- "non seulement élégante, mais capable de traiter tous les arts et toutes les sciences."

Je me pose cette question: qu'en est-il, après trois cent cinquante ans? Notre langue peut-elle encore traduire les apports de la science, définir les signes, désigner les objets hier encore inconnus, que dis-je, non-existants? Quant à l'élégance, même s'il faut faire la part du temps et se garder de rejeter les nouveaux bonheurs d'expression, quant à l'élégance, est-elle encore un "beau souci"?

Allocution prononcée le 12 décembre 1985 par François Mitterrand, Président de la République, à l'occasion du 350e anniversaire de l'Institut de France.

TRANSLATION STRATEGIES

Cultural reference

- Quotations

A quotation is a piece of language inserted in a text, usually for illustrative purposes, taken from another text, repeated verbatim (although often edited), usually set apart from the rest of the text by means of punctuation or typographical conventions, and usually acknowledged. A quotation is usually taken from another work by another author, but there is nothing to prevent a writer from quoting himself and even another part of the current work. A quotation may, of course, be taken from another language (including the language into which the translator is operating).

Where an authorized or established translation already exists, the usual and proper procedure is to reproduce the corresponding part of that translation with an acknowledgement. (Honour among translators!)

Where such a translation is known to exist but is not readily available, as, for example, in the case of a speech made before the General Assembly of the United Nations twenty years ago, the translator should proceed as follows:

In most cases, the translator will keep the quotation marks (or italics, or indentation, or whatever) and translate, giving a slightly more literal rendering than for the rest of the text, precisely in order to respect the quoter's intention of reproducing, not producing, a piece of writing. Where the quotation has been edited (this is usually indicated by the presence of dots), this may entail making structural modifications. Such changes should be kept to the absolute minimum and should be clearly indicated by the use of brackets, suspension points and so on.

Occasionally, the nature of the text (official speech, Act of Parliament or so on) will be such that the translator will prefer not to take it on himself to translate the quotation and will remove the quotation marks and present his translation in indirect speech.

One special case is that of foreign-language quotations. Where a third language which is neither the source language nor the target language is used for a quotation, no translation is generally made. When, for example, T.S. Eliot quotes from Dante in *The Waste Land*, his French translator simply transcribes the Italian. Where the quotation is already in the target language, the translator has nothing to do, other than reproduce the quote, check that it has been accurately transcribed, and indicate (where this is not obvious from the attribution of the quotation) that the original was in English / French.

A translator is responsible for the accuracy of quotations. Where verification is possible and mistakes are found in quotations, they should be rectified.

- Cultural terms and allusions

Cultural terms. These pose translation problems because they evoke aspects of the culture of the source language which do not exist in the culture of the target language, "Brass-rubbing", "tea-cosy", "Boxing Day", "first footing" not to mention the cricket terms "googly" and "square leg", all pose problems for translation into French. Zinc, bougnat, étrennes, crise de foie, lavoir might raise analogous difficulties for translation into English.

There is a range of strategies for dealing with such cases:

(i) Where it is felt that the reader can be expected to be familiar with the term, it may be simply transcribed. An example might be the word "pub" in English. There is a reasonably good chance that an averagely literate French-speaking reader will be familiar with the reality of the British pub, even though there is no real equivalent in France (the spurious Parisian imitations do not count, of course). A translator must be sensitive to the needs and capacity of his readership. While a translation should at all times aspire to clarity (in the sense that the reader is placed, as nearly as possible, in the same situation as the source-language reader), there is no merit in a translator's underestimating his reader's intelligence or general knowledge.

(ii) An equivalent term may be sought in the target language. This will almost inevitably lead to inaccuracy or loss of meaning, and the practice is losing favour as people become more familiar with other cultures. Is "caretaker" or "janitor" really a satisfactory translation of concierge? Does collège secondaire privé adequately convey the reality of a British public school? How important is it to keep an element of "local colour"? How important, conversely, to avoid peppering a text with foreign words, which may be irritating for the reader?

(iii) One way of the problems posed by (i) and (ii) above is the explanatory note, usually placed at the foot of the page. This procedure should be regarded as a last resort, not least because footnotes are tiring for the reader, who may well skip them. In any case, they should be kept as short as possible.

(iv) A gloss may be substituted for the term, e.g. "covered playground" for préau.

(v) A gloss may be tacked on to the original term, e.g. "the fifth arrondissement or administrative district". This doubling-up of meaning is known as a translation couplet. Like the gloss used alone, the couplet is very useful in informative texts, but is too intrusive in literary texts, for which one of the procedures in (i) to (iii) above will be preferred.

Cultural allusions. These are references to characters from novels, proverbs, well-known quotations, social customs and so on. Allusions are by definition incomplete and, usually, unacknowledged and unmarked (unlike quotations). This means that the first problem may be, quite simply, that of identifying them. The English translator of the following phrase from a *Le Monde* article on the writer Patrick White:

Très peu pour lui, les prières sur l'Acropole ou les visites de musées..

will need to know (or find out) that *La Prière sur l'Acropole* is a celebration of ancient Greece written by Ernest Renan. At a less exalted level, the *Libération* headline *Federer redore son gazon* presupposes knowledge of the expression *redorer son blason*.

The procedures for dealing with cultural allusions, once they are identified, are much the same as those set out above for cultural terms, with the following differences:

(i) A gloss may have to be expanded to include a phrase such as "in the words of De Gaulle" or *comme disait Zarathustra*.

(ii) The allusion may have to be dropped, often because an adequate explanation would be disproportionately long. In such cases, just the idea is translated. In the above-cited example from *Le Monde*, the best translation solution might be to drop the allusion to the work by Renan and replace it with something like "the worship of ancient Greece".

Word play

Plays on words are one of the more entertaining challenges of translation. They should be rendered where possible:

Beer was the main constituent of his constituents.
La bière était la boisson d'élection de ses électeurs.

An alternative is to replace the original play on words by another, where the precise sense is less important than the fact of the pun. Thus, Wilde's comedy *The Importance of Being Earnest* has a celebrated translation as *L'Importance d'être Constant*, the eponymous hero having being debaptized in the translation process.

Obviously, there are cases where the play on words simply cannot be rendered and may have to be abandoned. This course may or may not be preferred to the use of an explanatory note, subject to the reservations expressed earlier. Explanations of jokes are often particularly unamusing.

- Use of foreign words

By "foreign words", we mean third-language words, as explained earlier. Often such words have been naturalized or semi-naturalized in the two languages, having become part of the common stock of international culture. Examples are words such as "samovar", "corrida" or "vendetta". Such words can often be simply transcribed, as can words which have become international through media exposure, e.g. "ayatollah" or "glasnost".

There are cases in which such third-language terms are more common in one language than in the other. The Latin expression *inter alla* is more frequently used in English than in French (which makes *do with entre autres*). *A fortiori* is not used in English whereas *a priori* is.

Translators should be prepared to find words from their own language being used bizarrely in the other tongue. The word "spleen" is still used in French in its old sense of "melancholy", whereas in English its primary meaning has become something nearer to "spitefulness". Conversely, the French reader may be surprised to come upon "double entendre" in an English text. What is meant is "double meaning", for which the normal term in modern French is *double sens*. In such cases, the word should probably be kept, but explained in a footnote.

Self-study exercise

Identify the cultural references in the following text, then translate it. Check your work afterwards with the key given in the Key at the back of this course book.

DO NOT SEND IT IN FOR CORRECTION.

Un bonheur ne vient jamais seul. En 1958, en passant par Alger, la France avait trouvé un état et, par Stockholm, où se disputait la Coupe du monde, une équipe de football. L'année suivante – tout s'enchaînait dans la restauration, - elle retrouve un cinéma. Depuis longtemps, on n'avait pas vu à Cannes un aussi beau quarté tricolore : Hiroshima mon amour, les Cousins, Orfeu Negro, et les Quatre Cents Coups. La nouvelle vague était lancée.

Cette métaphore océanographique avait d'abord été utilisée par Françoise Giroud pour désigner la tranche d'âge dix-huit-trente ans sur laquelle elle avait fait une grande enquête par le truchement de l'Express. L'expression était commode et fit florès ; on l'employa finalement pour parler du jeune cinéma français, en y amalgamant des réalisateurs qui bien souvent n'avaient rien d'autre à partager que l'expérience d'un premier film. Des spécialistes réservèrent l'expression à Claude Chabrol, François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Eric Rohmer, Jacques Rivette et une poignée d'autres, auxquels on associait deux ou trois prédécesseurs, comme Roger Vadim, Alexandre Astruc ou Alain Resnais.

Ces réalisateurs se défendaient du reste d'appartenir à une école et faisaient mine de refuser l'estampille « nouvelle vague », mais elle avait une efficacité publicitaire indiscutable : à l'étranger, en particulier, le label NV devint un bon instrument de promotion. Au reste, qu'y avait-il de neuf et de commun dans ce grand arrivage qu'on annonçait?

D'abord, ces godelureaux étaient de vrais fous de cinéma. La plupart avaient fait leurs armes comme critiques, dans Arts ou, aux côtés du maître à filmer André Bazin, dans les Cahiers du cinéma. Avant leur premier film, ils avaient entrepris de déchirer à pleines dents le cinéma de papa, cette pellicule de « qualité française » dont Truffaut et ses copains dénonçaient les principes inéluctables : inspiration littéraire, scénarios et dialogues bien troussés, mots d'auteur, le tout interprété par les stars inévitables et tourné à gros prix. Dans ce cinéma, la caméra n'était qu'au service de -du roman, du théâtre, des idées, des répliques qui font mouche, - elle n'était pas libre.

Le Monde

_ Texts to send in for correction:

Text 1

Orléans soigne son environnement

Un jour, le maire d'Orléans décide de faire de la politique. Pas la politicienne, la vraie. Celle qui s'occupe de la cité, qui écoute les habitants, les rend plus responsables, plus inventifs, et même plus solidaires. Bref, une folie. Mais une folie réalisable à croire Serge Grouard, élu aux dernières municipales sous l'étiquette UMP, qui vient d'engager sa ville dans un grand projet: appliquer au niveau local les principes définis au Sommet de la Terre de Rio de Janeiro, en 1992.

Engagement pharaonique pour un maire qui entend « rendre [à ses administrés] ce qui leur appartient: la gestion de leur vie, de leurs envies et de leur ville ». Depuis un an, aidée par le cabinet EtikPresse, spécialisé dans l'application du développement durable, la ville s'y colle. Tout y passe : éclairage, ordures, qualité de l'eau, renouvellement du parc des voitures administratives, recyclage des photocopies, économies d'énergie...

Pour cela, la ville vient de signer - première en France - une charte où les clauses environnementales et sociales sont inscrites dans les critères d'attributions des marchés publics.

Dans le même temps, des centaines de réunions publiques sont tenues par les élus pour sensibiliser les Orléanais au développement durable (ici gentiment appelé Dédé), à la nécessité de prendre la parole et de s'initier aux joies de la démocratie participative. Ce premier weekend de juin sera officiellement lancé Forum 21, instance de concertation réunissant associations, responsables municipaux et acteurs économiques. Deux jours placés sous le signe du commerce équitable - dix-sept centrales d'achat et des commerçants de la ville vendront ces produits - et du microcrédit. Ce n'est qu'un début qui augure de longues années de travail. « Nous connaissons des échecs, des déceptions, des retards », assure le maire, que ces « longs efforts » n'effraient pas. Parce qu'à ses yeux c'est la seule façon de faire que l'avenir ne soit plus « ce qui va arriver, mais ce que nous allons en décider ».

Véronique Brocard, in Télérama

Text 2

As Minister for Germany in 1947 I travelled to Berlin, but my arrival lacked the dignity associated with a dominant power. As the aeroplane taxied down the runway, the Germans were drawn up ready to receive me, including a band to play music of welcome. I was burning with zeal to revive the stricken country, so that when the plane came to a stop, I could not wait to get on with the job. The doors opened, but there were no stairs for me to descend. In those days the exit from a plane was nearer the ground, so it did not require an Olympic jump to make a safe landing. But as I launched myself forwards, I met the steps coming up: my glasses were knocked off, my forehead bruised and cut, the Germans were astonished, the music petered out. Somehow the Marshal of the Royal Airforce, Sir Sholto Douglas, later Lord Douglas of Kirtleside, was able to salute this sorry sight with impeccable gravity.'

This same impeccable gravity in the face of an extraordinary mishap may be a very British trait. Some years after the Berlin incident, I occupied the honourable position of Chairman of the National Bank of Ireland, with its headquarters in Broad Street. Emerging one day on my way to lunch, I saw a bus a few yards ahead and gathering speed. Still priding myself on my fitness - a constant delusion - I raced after it, and grabbed the rail. By this time it was travelling fairly fast, too fast for me to mount it, though I hung on gamely. There came the inevitable moment when my legs were swept from under me: I was compelled to relax my grasp and lay like a stranded whale in front of the Bank of England. At that moment the Governor chose to emerge. There can be no accepted formula whereby the Governor of the Bank greets the Chairman of one of the clearing banks, lying flat on the road with the traffic passing all round him. His manner could be described as one of non-committal courtesy. Eventually I caught up with the elusive bus, by now stuck in the traffic: neither the conductor nor the passengers reacted as if anything unusual had occurred.