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Style in, and of, Translation

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Geoffrey H. Leech and Michael N. Short ([1981] 2007) describe two traditional views of style: a monist perspective, according to which the elaboration of form inevitably brings an elaboration of meaning, and a dualist perspective, whereby manner and matter, or expression and content, are independent from each other. The dualist perspective has often been adopted to discuss style in translation, for example by Kirsten Malmkjær (2003, 2004) and Jean Boase-Beier (2006). Malmkjær distinguishes “stylistic analysis” from the “study of style.” The latter involves the “consistent and statistically significant regularity of occurrence in text of certain items and structures, or types of items and structures, among those offered by the language as a whole” and can be done without any considerations of meaning. Stylistic analysis, on the other hand, is concerned with the semantics of a text and involves a first stage, the study of *how* a text means what it does, and can involve a second stage, the study of *why* the text is shaped in its particular way given certain extralinguistic factors that restrict the writer’s freedom of choice (Malmkjær 2003, 38).

Boase-Beier argues that literary texts are read differently from non-literary texts because the emphasis is not only on the content but also on the form of expression. She distinguishes between a primary meaning, determined by lexis or syntax, and a second-order meaning, or “weakly implied meaning,” where choice can be exercised by the author/translator (2006, 52). Weakly implied meanings place the burden of meaning-making on the reader or translator. Boase-Beier proposes the use of “translator’s meaning” for the extended meaning which goes beyond what can be assigned to the text or passage on the basis of semantics (2006, 47). Boase-Beier suggests that translating primary meanings requires background cultural and linguistic knowledge, while weakly implied meanings require a particular stylistic sensitivity (2006, 37).

Leech and Short ([1981] 2007) argue that the dualist approach has the advantage of allowing us to easily define the object of analysis by leaving sense aside and focusing on stylistic variants with different stylistic values. However, this approach implies that it is possible to write in a neutral style. How can we judge what is the “default choice”? Is it possible to have “no style”? Even if some linguistic choices could be described as “unmarked” and “neutral,” the choice of such a form instead of others is still a linguistic choice, and as such can be fruitfully examined in stylistics ([1981] 2007, 20).

According to Leech and Short ([1981] 2007, 21), the monists’ perspective on style denies the possibility of paraphrase and translation, understood as the expression of the same content in different words. This, however, assumes a very naive understanding of translation as equivalence. The monist perspective, in any case, also assumes a rather rigid understanding of meaning, which has been replaced in most stylistic work by the more nuanced understanding of meaning espoused by pluralistic views of style, whereby various strands of meaning are distinguished according to the functions performed by language (e.g., ideational, interpersonal, and textual, in Michael A. K. Halliday’s (1971) model). According to this model, the language system is a network of interrelated options, deriving from all the various functions of language, which define, as a whole, the resources for what the speaker wants to say. Halliday stresses that

{ex}all types of option, from whatever function they are derived, are meaningful
 . . . and if we attempt to separate meaning from choice we are turning a valuable

distinction (between linguistic functions) into an arbitrary dichotomy (between “meaningful” and “meaningless” choices). (1971, 338){/ex}

Halliday shows that style can reside in linguistic choices such as transitivity patterns, traditionally considered to belong to the realm of content and “primary meanings,” and to the rules and principles of grammar about which, according to Boase-Beier, we have no choice. Leech and Short ([1981] 2007, 28) object that, when Halliday claims that all choices, even those dictated by subject matter, are part of style, he fails to discriminate between choices that are a matter of register variation and those that are a matter of fact. Leech and Short stress the importance (and convenience, from the analyst’s point of view) of recognizing a difference between language itself and the world beyond language that is projected through it. In other words, they insist on the distinction between the referential function of language (what brings about changes in the fictional world) and those aspects of language that have to do with stylistic variations.

Leech and Short’s model may seem the one that could be most easily applied to the study of translations, since it allows us to distinguish between what is carried over from the source text (the fictional world) and what involves variations when transferred into another language, where, according to that model, style resides. However, in translation, sometimes the fictional world itself is changed, and these changes can arguably still be considered as stylistic choices. This is illustrated in the example below taken from Peter Bush’s English translation of a Spanish text by Juan Carlos Onetti:

{disp}

Example 7.1

Source Text: Cualquier noche de aquellas en que tomamos mate y conversamos . . . (1943)¹

Target Text: Any of those nights when we drank tea and chatted . . . (1991){/disp}

Here the word “mate” is translated as “tea.” The two words “mate” and “tea” are not terms referring to the same underlying reality but references to different things, both of which exist side by side in the fictional (and real) world. *Mate* is a hot herbal infusion popular in some South American countries. Unlike tea, it is drunk from a gourd using a metal straw, and the gourd is typically shared and passed around among a group of *mate* drinkers. Tea and *mate* also have different connotations concerning class and social status. It would be difficult to explain this shift as a stylistic variation in Leech and Short’s model, or as belonging to second-order meanings in Boase-Beier’s model. If we look at the potential motivations for the use of “tea” instead of the culture-specific *mate*, we can speculate that they do not reside in the “primary” meaning of the word, but in the sense of domesticity and camaraderie conveyed by the ritual, which is part of what Boase-Beier would call its “implied meaning.” Interestingly, however, the choice is exercised not at the level of “weakly implied meanings” but at the level of “primary” meanings, which are changed not for lack of cultural knowledge, but out of stylistic sensitivity.

Changes in the fictional world, such as the one in the example above, are generally restricted to very particular instances and do not affect the capacity of the text to function as an accurate representation of the fictional world presented in the source text. However, when they are frequent and consistent throughout the text, they may become prominent stylistic features that reveal something about the translator’s approach.

The other side of the coin is presented by cases where culture-specific items are retained in translation, where the “form” is identical as is the “referential” meaning, but where there are changes at the ideational, interpersonal, or textual level that have a stylistic impact on the text. This is illustrated below with an example in which Bush keeps the Catalan word *riera* in the translation

of a Spanish text by Juan Goytisolo. Here, the fictional world remains the same, but there is a change in the point of view, whereby the fictional world is presented as more distant from the reader of the translation than from the reader of the source text.

{disp}

Example 7.2

Source Text: . . . se extravió al salir de la estación en el camino de la riera y llegó a casa turbada . . . (1985)

Target Text: . . . she left the station on the way to the *riera* and reached home flushed . . . (1989){/disp}

It seems, then, that the distinction between variable elements (stylistics) and invariable elements (fictional world) is not always useful when describing translations. It is still possible, however, taking a pluralist view of style, to describe the stylistic effects that translators' choices – whether they involve changes in the fictional world or not – might have on the interpersonal, ideational, and textual functions of the overall text, as in the work of Jeremy Munday (2008) and my own work (Saldanha 2011a, 2011b, 2011c), described below.

{a}Translations and Translators as Stylistic Domains{/a}

“Style” is a relational term: we talk about “the style of X,” where “X” is some extralinguistic factor (a particular writer, genre, period, school of writing, and so on): what Leech and Short call the stylistic domain ([1981] 2007, 11). Traditionally, in discussions of literary translation, the stylistic domain has been restricted to the source text. Scholars have often discussed the style of a particular literary work, or a particular author, and how translators have dealt with it, but in these discussions “style” remains a characteristic of the source text. In other words, the “original” is the only legitimate domain of style. This is a corollary of the view of translation as a derivative rather than creative activity, the implication being that

{ex}a translator cannot have, indeed should not have, a style of his or her own, the translator's task being simply to reproduce as closely as possible the style of the original. (Baker 2000, 244){/ex}

This traditional approach to style in translation could be described as source-text oriented.

Mona Baker's work (2000) and my own (Saldanha 2011c), among others, have attempted to legitimize translations and translators as stylistic domains in their own right, arguing for the recognition of the translator's style as a matter of literary interest. Here, I describe this approach as target-text oriented; however, source and target orientation should not be seen as a clear-cut dichotomy but a continuum, with work by, for example, Boase-Beier (2006), Malmkjær (2003, 2004) and Munday (2008) situated in between the two ends of the continuum.

A typical example of a source-text approach in translation studies is found in Tim Parks ([1998] 2007), who explains his goal in the following terms:

{ex}The idea that inspires the following chapters is that by looking at original and translation side by side and identifying those areas where translation turned out to be *problematic*, we can achieve a better appreciation of the *original's qualities and complexities*, and likewise of that *phenomenon* we call translation. ([1998] 2007, 13; emphasis added)²{/ex}

This statement has several implications: studying style in translation involves looking at problems; the original is interesting because of its qualities and complexities; translation is interesting as a phenomenon. Parks looks at problems of style in six translations of English modernists into Italian, and in each case he concludes that it is precisely in those places where the translators have failed that the key stylistic value of the source text lies; the translator's failure to re-create the source text's style is a foregone conclusion. For example, D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* seeks to escape a classical "housedness" in language, by drawing attention to the linguistic medium, and, according to Parks,

{ex}it is this element of Lawrence's text which is lost and for the most part inevitably, in an Italian that seems all too at home with itself and the conventional patterns of mind it enshrines. ([1998] 2007, 46){/ex}

The evaluation is always made in terms of how much is lost: "Loss in translation was a loss of philosophical complexity in Lawrence. Loss with Joyce was much more to do with a loss of reading experience, a loss of intimate apprehension . . ." ([1998] 2007, 107).

The work of Boase-Beier is also close to the source-text-oriented end of the continuum. Boase-Beier focuses on "the style of the source text as perceived by the translator and how it is conveyed or changed or to what extent it is or can be preserved in translation" (2006, 5). However, her view is not as narrowly source-oriented as Parks's in that she recognizes the stylistic value of the target text. In fact, she claims that because a translation multiplies the voices in the text, and therefore the cognitive contexts in which to understand the text, the effects can be more rewarding and the translation will be a "more literary text than an untranslated text" (2006, 148). Although Boase-Beier places the responsibility for the style of the translated text firmly in the translator's hands, this is still a result of the process of *re-creation* of the meaning and style of the *source text*. Boase-Beier claims that "even in the case of apparently free translators . . . the style of the translation is defined by its relation to the source text" (2006, 66).

Malmkjær proposes to define the term translation stylistics as the study of "why, *given the source text*, the translation has been shaped in such a way that it comes to mean what it does" (2003, 39). Malmkjær, like Boase-Beier, is concerned with style as reflection of a subjective interpretation of the world that explains the choices made by the writer and translator. However, Malmkjær's methodology brings her closer to the target end of the continuum because she performs a writer-oriented analysis and is more interested in what translations tell us about the translators themselves and the context in which they work than in what they tell us about ways of interpreting the source text.

At the target-oriented end of the continuum, Baker (2000) and I (Saldanha 2011c), rather than seeing style as a way of *responding* to the source text, propose to find stylistic idiosyncrasies that remain consistent across several translations by one translator *despite* differences among their source texts. In other words, we could say that Malmkjær and Boase-Beier are concerned with the style of the *text* (translation style), and Baker and I with the style of the *translator*. Baker was the first to suggest that there was a need to investigate whether stylistic patterns could be attributed to translators, and several scholars have taken up Baker's challenge since then (see, among others, Kamenická 2008; Pekkanen 2007; Winters 2004, 2007, and 2009). Munday's work (2008) is also concerned with translator style, but brings together both source- and target-oriented approaches

When the focus is on the reproduction of source-text style, translation style is seen purely as the effect of choices determined by a subjective reading of the text. As a result, as I have argued (Saldanha 2011c, 28), we may observe moments of literary artistry, but we lack the consistency

and distinctiveness that is at the heart of any theory of style as a personal rather than a textual attribute. The concept of translator style is crucial for the recognition of translation as a literary activity. Leech and Short point out that the goal of literary stylistics is to gain some insight into the writer's art: "we should scarcely find the style of Henry James worth studying unless we assumed it could tell us something about James as a literary artist" ([1981] 2007, 11). Accordingly, unless we consider translators literary artists, we will scarcely find their work worth studying (Saldanha 2011b, 237).

Malmkjær explains that in stylistic studies oriented towards the text or the reader, a translation may be treated in the same way as a non-translated text, but this is not the case in writer-oriented textual analysis. When the focus is on the text or the readers, what matters is what the text is like and its effect on the reader; when the focus is on the writer, what matters is "*why* a writer may have chosen to shape the text in a particular way" (Malmkjær 2004, 14). Even though Malmkjær's analysis is writer-oriented in the sense that she looks for explanations in the translator's agency, her main concern is with style as a textual attribute. According to Malmkjær, the key difference in explaining stylistic traits in originals and translation lies in the fact that

{ex}[o]nce the inevitable intertextuality of texts and text processing has been duly acknowledged . . . we may treat the creative writer as a free agent writing from the depths of their heart, mind or imagination about whatever phenomena they consider appropriate . . . [but] a translator, however creative, commits to a willing suspension of freedom to invent, so to speak, and to creating a text that stands to its source text in a relationship of direct mediation as opposed to being subject to more general intertextual influences. (Malmkjær 2004, 15){/ex}

At the heart of the concept of translator style is the belief that, even if translators commit to a willing suspension of freedom to invent, they have a personal and textual history that is bound to impact on their translational activity in ways that go beyond their role as readers.

{a}Methodological Implications{/a}

We can identify three main challenges involved in investigating style in translated texts: prominence, motivation, and attributability.³ Prominence refers to the fact that stylistic features are those that distinguish a particular text or set of texts from other texts. Motivation is a term used to describe two different aspects of style, one intra-textual and the other extra-textual. Intra-textual motivation is related to the notion of "foregrounding" (Leech and Short [1981] 2007, 39) or "literary relevance," which holds that for a prominent feature of style to achieve literary relevance it has to form a coherent pattern of choice, together with other features of style, and impact on the meaning of the text as a whole (Halliday 1971). Extra-textual motivation refers to what those features tell us about the author/translator or the context in which the translation was produced. Attributability refers to the problem of attributing a particular stylistic trait to the translator as opposed to the author/source text (or vice versa), or to linguistic constraints.

Source-text-oriented stylistic analysis generally relies on a close comparison of source and target texts to provide answers to research questions. Because this form of analysis tends to focus on one specific text at a time, demonstrating prominence does not generally present serious problems. Source-text-oriented approaches tend to assume that any relevant stylistic traits in the translation are reproducing, or attempting to reproduce, corresponding stylistic features in the source text, so attributability and intra-textual motivation are not generally an issue either. According to Malmkjær, while

{ex}[t]he standard way in stylistic analysis of opening the door to an argument for deliberate choice is to search for patterns which strike the analyst as particularly clearly relatable to what they may conceive of as the “total meaning” of the text . . . In *translational stylistic analysis*, the search has to be for patterns in the relationships between the translation and the original text. (2004, 19–20){/ex}

However, not all the answers are to be found in the source text; the researcher also needs to take into account other parameters that crucially affect translations: the mediator’s interpretation of the original; the purpose of the mediation – bearing in mind that the purpose the translation is intended to serve may differ from that of the original; and the audience for the translation (Malmkjær 2004, 16).

Boase-Beier (2006) explains translators’ motivations within a cognitive-stylistic framework, which sees style as an expression of cognitive states and world-views. Central to Boase-Beier’s view is the fact that translators are first of all readers, and as such will re-create the style of the source text based on their own interpretation of that text. The reader/translator will assume a motivation behind that choice and will attribute it to the inferred author. The author’s actual intention is irrelevant; readers generally cannot know the author’s intentions, although that does not prevent them from ascribing such intentions (Boase-Beier 2006, 34). What Boase-Beier calls the “inferred author” is a figure constructed by the reader, to which the reader attributes motivations and a world-view, on the basis of the style of the text (*ibid.* 2006, 38). The translator will then make his or her choices, and re-create the meaning and style of the source text, based on such assumptions.

The problem with focusing on style as a personal attribute in relation to translations, as suggested by Malmkjær (2004, 14) in her discussion of writer-oriented stylistic analysis, and as I have argued as well (Saldanha 2011c, 26), is that a fairly general definition of style such as the following – “a style X is the sum of linguistic features associated with texts or textual samples defined by some set of contextual parameters, Y” (Leech 2008, 55) – can be applied to the style of a translated text but not to translator style, because a translator’s style is not the sum of linguistic features associated with the texts translated by a certain translator. Likewise, it cannot be applied to authorial style in relation to the author’s work in translation. This is why attributability is a significant challenge when dealing with translator style.

In exploring the methodological implications of studying translator style (Saldanha 2011c), I have proposed a list of essential requirements that need to be in place before we can attribute certain stylistic features to an individual translator. Translator style is thus defined as a way of translating that

{bl}

- is felt to be recognizable across a range of translations by the same translator,
- distinguishes the translator’s work from that of others,
- constitutes a coherent pattern of choice,
- is “motivated,” in the sense that the choices have a discernible function or functions, and
- cannot be explained purely with reference to the author or source-text style, or as the result of linguistic constraints. (Saldanha 2011c, 31){/bl}

The first two requirements have to do with prominence; the third and fourth with (intra-textual) motivation, and the last one with attributability. Prominence is basically a matter of frequencies, and a corpus-based approach tends to facilitate the identification of regular features across texts and the comparison with a suitable reference corpus, such as translations by other translators. Parallel corpora also facilitate the process of filtering variables such as source-text style and linguistic constraints. Baker (2000), Munday (2008), Winters (2004, 2007, 2009), and I (Saldanha 2011a, 2011b) all adopt a corpus-based methodology, although the corpora used and compared are different in each case. Baker compares two corpora of translations by two different translators, and does not have access to source texts. In order to look at style from both source- and target-text perspectives, Munday looks at several translations by the same translators, and at the work of one author translated by different translators. Munday also uses general language corpora to provide a relative norm of comparison. I have also compared the work of two translators using parallel corpora, and resorted to a parallel corpus including translations by several translators as a reference corpus (Saldanha 2008, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c). Access to source texts is generally a requirement in order to attribute stylistic features to the translator, and in the best scenario the researcher can compare two translations of the same text by different translators, carried out more or less in the same period and without knowledge of one another; this is the case in Winters (2004, 2007, 2009).

When dealing with motivation, the first challenge we encounter, as noted by Mason (2000, 17), is how to attribute a stylistic feature to a particular text producer when we do not have access to his or her thought processes. In this sense, the analyst is in a similar position to that of the reader/translator in Boase-Beier's model, but in this case resorting to an "inferred" author/translator does not solve the problem, because the actual intention *is* irrelevant. There is a strong tradition of discourse analysis in these areas that does enable researchers to posit links between the results of close stylistic analysis and the social and ideological environment with a reasonable degree of confidence, however, when more could be done by integrating (where possible) other methods such as interviews (see, for example, Saldanha 2008, 2011a, 2011b), ethnographies, and think-aloud protocols, to mention just a few.

Even if we were able to access thought processes, the motivation for some elements of style could arguably be found at a subconscious level. The branch of stylistics called stylometry looks for objective, quantifiable methods of identifying the style of a text, and defines "style" as "the measurable patterns which may be unique to an author" (Holmes 1994, 87). At its heart lies the assumption that there is an unconscious aspect of style, which cannot be consciously manipulated but which possesses features that are quantifiable and may be distinctive (Holmes 1998, 11). These habitual aspects of composition are more distinctly manifested at the minor syntactic level, such as the use of function words and average sentence length, and it is at this level that stylistic options would manifest themselves.

It is important to note that the concept of consciousness is very difficult to pin down. Even if we could agree on a definition of consciousness, it would still not be feasible to determine with a reasonable degree of accuracy to what degree a certain linguistic behavior is or is not conscious. Besides, we cannot assume that if something is generally not a conscious choice for some writers, it will not be a conscious choice for translators either. Decisions that are taken intuitively by authors may be deliberated upon by translators, who constantly evaluate their writing for signs of linguistic interference. Elsewhere I have offered an example of a linguistic feature generally assumed to be used subconsciously, the use of the optional "that" after reporting verbs, which is described as a deliberate decision by one translator (Saldanha 2011c, 43).

Translation presents an interesting problem to stylometry. Because patterns of linguistic habits may not be obviously prominent for readers, we could hypothesize that they will not be consistently reproduced in translation. Besides, if those patterns are truly beyond the writer's artistic control, they can be expected to differentiate not only writers but also translators. However,

“translatorship” remains a largely untapped area of research in stylometry (see, however, Burrows 2002; Farringdon 1996; Rybicki 2012).

Although linguistic habits have been shown to distinguish the work of one writer from that of others, whether they have literary relevance or not is a rather contentious issue. We saw above that Malmkjær deliberately excludes the stylometrist’s sense of style from literary stylistics. A similar position is taken by Basil Hatim and Ian Mason (1990, 10), who define style as “the result of motivated choices made by text producers” and distinguish it from “idiolect, the unconscious linguistic habits of an individual language user.” On the other hand, Baker describes translator style as a “kind of thumb-print” (2000, 245) and is particularly concerned with “subtle, unobtrusive linguistic habits which are largely beyond the conscious control of the writer and which we, as receivers, register mostly subliminally” (2000, 246).⁴ In her study, Baker compares features such as sentence length, type token ratio, and reporting structures with the verb SAY in the work of two translators, Peter Clark and Peter Bush. Linguistic habits are also part and parcel of translator style according to Munday, who aims to reveal the linguistic “fingerprint” of an individual translator or translations, which he describes as “these linguistic elements, conscious or subconscious on the part of the translator, obvious or concealed, [that] are the result of the translator’s ‘idiolect’” (2008, 7). Although he is interested in linguistic “fingerprints,” Munday does not focus on the kind of patterns at the lower syntactic level that have proved more useful in revealing the habitual aspects of composition in forensic stylistics. Instead, his concern with establishing a link between stylistic choices at the micro-level and in the macro-contexts of ideology and the work of cultural production leads him to pay closer attention to those linguistic features that can more easily be explained as meaningful choices (such as syntactic calquing, syntactic amplification, creative or idiomatic collocations). An important point regarding the literary relevance of linguistic habits is made by Hugh Craig, who remarks that

{ex}[t]here is an odd asymmetry in the notion that frequencies of linguistic features can classify style and yet cannot play a part in describing it. . . . After all, how much confidence can we have in an ascription, if the linguistic mechanism behind the results remains a mystery? (1999, 104){/ex}

Craig argues that one of the reasons why authorial attribution and descriptive stylistics have been pursued separately is that the leap from frequencies to meaning is a risky one. This is a risk taken by Baker (2000). She describes Clark’s translations as “less challenging linguistically” (2000, 259) than translations by Peter Bush: Clark tends towards explicitation and uses a less diversified vocabulary and shorter sentences. Baker suggests that Clark’s tendency to simplify and make meaning more explicit, if such a tendency could be demonstrated, might be due to the fact that he has lived most of his life in the Middle East and has acquired the habit of accommodating his language to the needs of non-native speakers (2000, 259).

As I have argued elsewhere (Saldanha 2011c), the explanations themselves are not a requirement for us to speak of style in translation, but it is at the level of extra-textual explanations that the more interesting aspects of style may be revealed. Here is where the goal of literary stylistics is realized, because we find out something new about the artists themselves. Research along these lines in translation studies is still in its infancy but it is nevertheless promising. I have suggested (Saldanha 2008, 2011a, 2011b), for example, that the concept of audience design (Bell 1984; Mason 2000) can be used to explain some aspects of translator style and demonstrates how certain stylistic patterns can reveal translators’ different conceptualizations of their readerships and of their role as intercultural mediators.

{xr}SEE ALSO CHAPTER 1 (BAKER), CHAPTER 5 (MUNDAY), CHAPTER 6 (SAPIRO), CHAPTER 8 (SHREVE AND LACRUZ), CHAPTER 24 (GRUTMAN AND VAN BOLDEREN), CHAPTER 25 (BRIAN BAER), CHAPTER 32 (CONNOR), CHAPTER 34 (HEIM){/xr}

{x}Notes{/x}

- 1 All examples are taken from a corpus compiled by the author and held in electronic format, therefore no page numbers are available. For further details about the corpus compilation and interrogation processes, see Saldanha 2005.
- 2 Interestingly, this statement was rephrased in the second edition of the work, “problematic” became “particularly difficult” and “literature” was added as another phenomenon to be appreciated.
- 3 See Mason 2000, 17, for a discussion of representativeness and motivation in the context of investigating audience design in translation. What Mason refers to as representativeness is closely related to what I call here prominence.
- 4 Coulthard (2004) criticizes the metaphor of fingerprinting as misleading in relation to authorship attribution, because the value of a physical fingerprint is that every instance is identical and exhaustive, whereas any linguistic sample contains only partial information about the writer’s idiolect.

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