

LITERARY TRANSLATION AND THE PARALLAX GAP. REFLECTIONS ON A PILOT QUESTIONNAIRE^{1 2}

Fruela Fernández

University of Granada

Dolores Herrador & Leticia Sánchez Balsalobre (Translation)

Abstract

Historically, social research has alternated between conceptual opposites that social constructionism tries to reconcile. By analyzing the issues raised and responses given to a pilot questionnaire completed by literary translators, this article discusses approaches that could be applied to sociological research in literary translation. Special emphasis is placed on the undefined nature of literary translators as a group and on the usefulness of the 'parallax gap' concept (Slavoj Žižek) as a dialectical, interdisciplinary method of analysis.

Resumen

La investigación social se ha movido históricamente entre oposiciones conceptuales que el construccionismo sociológico intenta superar. Mediante el análisis de las respuestas y los problemas planteados por un cuestionario piloto dirigido a traductores de literatura, se tratan una serie de planteamientos aplicables a la investigación sociológica de la traducción literaria. Se hace especial hincapié en la indefinición como grupo de los traductores literarios y se plantea la utilidad del concepto "brecha de paralaje" (Slavoj Žižek) como método de análisis interdisciplinar y dialéctico.

Keywords

Literary translation; Professional translation; Questionnaires; Parallax Gap; Sociology of translation.

Palabras clave

Traducción literaria. Traducción profesional. Cuestionarios. Brecha de paralaje. Sociología de la traducción.

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1. Introduction: conceptual opposites in social research

Traditionally, social research has dealt with pairs of opposite concepts defining their field of work and conditioning their approach: material vs. ideal, objective vs. subjective, collective vs. individual (*cf.* Rubinstein 1981: 10–88; Corcuff 1995: 11–22). Even if dependence from those *paired concepts* (Bendix & Berger 1959) appears to be an obstacle for understanding complex phenomenon such as social ones, the research carried out in this field is continuously besieged by the subtle presence of those dichotomies.

One of the most complex and influent discussion is still the one confronting ‘actors’ and ‘observers’, as the distinction between participants in a precise social situation and the researchers analysing them. This opposition has become widely used under the anthropological definition *emics* vs. *etics*, suggested by Pike (1954) and subsequently reinterpreted by Marvin Harris (1964, 1979). Even if the couple *emics–etics* is still quite controversial, since it raises in turn new questions (*cf.* the debate developed in Headland, Pike & Harris 1990), it seems to clearly refer to a basic concern of social research: the problems raised by the different approaches to the sociological ‘object’ of actors and researchers and the eventual inaccuracies or confusions derived from such difference. This consideration is already present on the pioneer work of Émile Durkheim, who opted for a materialistic philosophy of the history: ‘Nous croyons féconde cette idée que la vie sociale doit s’expliquer, non par la conception que s’en font ceux qui y participent, mais par des causes profondes qui échappent à la conscience [...]’ (Durkheim 1897: 250). For instance, the concept of ‘epistemological rupture’ defended by Pierre Bourdieu emanates from his own interpretation of the tradition of Durkheim and Marcel Mauss: in human sciences, researchers must keep their methods under a constant surveillance, since in these disciplines ‘the separation between everyday opinion and scientific discourse is more blurred than elsewhere’ (Bourdieu, Chamboredon & Passeron 1975: 13). Opposite to this tradition of separation, there are those researchers and thinkers who do not mistrust the participants’ opinion, but focus more precisely on their incitement; from this approach, the intellectual or researcher would no longer be the discoverer of something ‘escaping conscience’, but would instead become the person in charge of fighting against the ‘system of power’ that intercepts the speech of the participants and prevent it from being heard:

[Traditionally] the intellectual spoke the truth to those who had yet to see it, in the name of those who were forbidden to speak the truth: he was conscience, consciousness, and eloquence. In the most recent upheaval [of May 68] the intellectual discovered that the masses no longer need him to gain knowledge: they know perfectly well, without illusion; they know far better than he and they are certainly capable of expressing themselves. (Foucault 1972: 25)

Probably, these dichotomies never appear to be radical in any modern system of research: the team of Pierre Bourdieu, for instance, carried out one of the works with a higher impact in the field of “expression” of the participants, *La Misère du Monde*, which focused on the analysed subjects by giving them the floor in order to know their complex economic and social situations. The different heritages and intellectual influences, as well as the subtle presence of assumed concepts, require, in any case, a constant surveillance towards separations that could obscure the approach of the work. Therefore, a constructivist approach, such as in the present research, starts from the premise that it is essential to establish channels of communication between the external point of view of the researcher and the ways actors perceive and live what they do while they are acting (Corcuff 1995: 15); such approach also requires “sociological reflexivity”

(cf. Bourdieu 2001: 167-220), that is to say, the researcher analysing his own relation with the studied object.

In this sense, the current research also pleads for the notion of “parallax gap” developed by Slavoj Žižek (2005). Technically, parallax is the apparent displacement of an (astronomic) object due to a change in the position from which it is observed; applied to political and social research, parallax allows to refer to the change of perception of the different facts that conform the collective “reality”. Nevertheless, Žižek –following Katarani (2001)– introduces an important nuance in this reapplication: the difference of the social parallax cannot be considered subjective or contingent, but epistemological and, therefore, ontological, since a change in the approach of the research transforms the object; from a different perspective, Bachelard had already stated that the scientific fact *is constructed*. According to Žižek’s approach, the most productive critical analysis would be, in short, the dialectical, the one located exactly in the “gap” between the different parallaxes; that is to say, an analysis that does not relay on the different opposites between perspectives (such as the dichotomy participant-observer) but from the interstice between them (cf. Žižek 2005: 25–29).

2. Analysis of a pilot questionnaire: the problem as a possibility

2.1 Aims of the research and methodological aspects

Aiming specifically at establishing the “channels of communication” between the researcher and the actors in order to define the “gap” of work and provide new perspectives to a research in process about literary translation in Spain (Fernández 2007, 2008), a questionnaire was addressed to translators of literature. The questionnaire would be used as a means of contrast between the research approach developed up to then and the opinions of the participants about the professional-cultural sphere where they developed their activity. The questionnaire was pre-tested between May and June 2008; due to space reasons, the pilot questionnaire cannot be provided in this article, but methodological issues will be briefly detailed before analysing some interesting aspects related to the answers of the participants.

First of all, it was essential to clearly specify the objectives of the survey in order to avoid specification errors (Cea d’Ancona 2004: 36); this requires, in turn, to define the concepts allowing the analysis of the construct being researched (Cea d’Ancona 2004: 192–193). In this case, as in the previous researches carried out, we aimed at understanding the “evaluation” of translation and of the professionals of translation within the Spanish literary system (in Spanish, since it is the language gathering the highest number of professionals). Therefore, following different combinations, we opted for concepts which are easy to understand and commonly used, such as “importance granted”, “remuneration”, “acknowledgment of the professional task”, “respect of professional rights” and “public visibility”.

Secondly, we raise the issue of the length of the questionnaire, since the number of answers would largely depend on it: on the one hand, we have to bear in mind that many of the possible respondents are freelance professional and in some cases, with a precarious working situation (cf. Macías Sistiaga & Fernández-Cid 2003), who would not probably want to devote too much time to answering a questionnaire; on the other hand, the tradition in social research backs up an approach based on brevity, by stating that “the quality of a scale [...] cannot be measured by the number of items” (Morales Vallejo 2000: 68), and by warning about the possible *respondent burden* (Sharp & Frankel 1983): the level of inconvenience suffered by respondents when the test is too long, a fact that can indirectly affect reliability. In this sense, we can for instance observe that 62% of the surveys carried out between 1964 and 1973 included 10 items (Bidnick 1975) or that, subsequently, the preference for a number of items between 20 and 40 (Nunnally 1978: 605) has been consolidated. Finally, we also took into account the already established *Total Design Method* of Dillman (2000), which suggests the simplicity of the questionnaire, the appeal to the interest for the respondent –making reference to issues which are important for him/her– and the easiness to answer. Therefore, we tried to use an easy-to-use number of items

(15), with a majority of closed questions, measured according to the Likert scale, which makes both the answer and the correction easier. Besides, we also included two broader questions, permitting to collect varied information in relation with the line of research already started; even if the data obtained from those questions raised more problems of systematisation, their interest lies in the fact that they provide a “qualitative openness” (Ortí 1992) that, sometimes, can offer research possibilities, as we will lately discuss.

Finally, we had to select the sample to be used in order to evaluate the pilot questionnaire; in this process, although the expert’s opinion might be useful, it is essential to appeal to subjects being part of the studied population (Cea d’Ancona 2004: 37). The number of cases does not need to be too high (groups of less than 100 persons are normally used) and the selection, for the objectives of the analysis, does not have to be random, even if in this case we chose to maintain the random character of the sample. After consulting the files of the main associations of book translators (ACEtt, ACEC and ASETRAD), we selected, in alphabetical order, 200 persons fulfilling the following criteria: to have Spanish as target language (since working conditions vary between the different official languages), to be specialised in literary-humanistic translation and to have a contact e-mail address (something more and more common, but not always the case). In this sense, it is important to take into account the coverage of the sampling framework (Cea d’Ancona 2004: 41): given that all the available lists are and will always be restrictive, we must consider to what extent this fact could affect the selection of subjects. Regarding this research, it is important to observe that all the subjects of the pre-test were affiliated to a translators association, which implies a professional or semi-professional will and an awareness of their rights and of the working situation therein: since there is no official professional association of translators, the membership of an association is not a prior condition, but a choice; therefore, it becomes an important variable. However, this awareness related to their working conditions could benefit the objectives of this research, since we are working with people whose opinion is more base in experience. In any case, in order to further develop the survey in the future, it would be appropriate to extend the sampling framework to other lists and files, for avoiding a possible non-coverage default (Cea d’Ancona 2004: 105–115).

2.2 Participation as a potential working indicator

We sent 200 questionnaires and received 84 fulfilled, even if only 78 out of them were finally valid. Besides, 10 potential respondents (5% of the total number) did not receive the questionnaire, due to a wrong or inactive e-mail account. We must also add the fact that 12 respondents (6% of the total number) stated that they had abandoned the professional practice of translation; 9 of them apologised for not fulfilling their questionnaires by saying so in their e-mails, while 3 indicated it in the fulfilled questionnaire and those questionnaires were thus not valid. Taking these numbers into account, the final percentage of answers was 42% (39% if we deduct the invalid ones). Even if this figure cannot be considered completely satisfactory, it gets more value if we compare it to previous researches, like those financed by the ACEtt association during the last decades: the survey carried out in 1996 and addressed only to the members of this association (Macías Sistiaga, Fernández–Cid & Martín Caño 1997) had a percentage of answers of 40% approximately, while the one carried out in 2002 by the same team and with a similar sampling framework (Macías Sistiaga & Fernández–Cid 2003) had only 18%. It seems convenient to mention the explanation provided by the researchers hired by ACEtt regarding the decrease in participation:

The reduction of the participation percentage [...] is worrying considering that it is a group characterised, as it has been observed, by working conditions in which fragmentation, uncertainty and a beforehand weakness in contractual negotiation predominate. The influence of the context or the framework, in this case referred to the working-productive world, helps us to explain those conditions: instead of promoting more participatory and claiming positions, they lead to signs of discouragement and lack implication in collective issues. (Macías Sistiaga & Fernández–Cid 2003: 5–6)

This apathic approach, the frequent public protests from the associations of translators (*cf.* Azancot 2003; Rodríguez Marcos 2006; Collera 2007) and the already mentioned percentage of persons -not too high, but noticeable- who stated to have abandoned professional translation for economical reasons, depicts a professional sphere which is clearly connected with the description made by Albert Hirschman (1970) about entities and societies in crisis, where the actors are oscillating between the *exit* and the *voice* options, that is to say, between *quitting* the entity and *denouncing* the current situation. It seems evident that the interaction of those attitudes reveals itself a “critical” situation regarding the professional practice of translation, since, in general, only a kind of erroneous or unbalanced functioning area tends to show those tendencies so clearly.

2.3 *The problems of answering and the formation of concepts*

As a rule, a pilot questionnaire is not used with statistical purposes, but analytical ones (Cea d’Ancona 2004: 37), since it allows to be more precise in the questions and concepts applied. In this case, the contributions arising from this analysis were not only plural, but they also revealed some issues that could be valuable in creating concepts for future work.

Generally, the respondents barely expressed problems concerning the main part of the questionnaire, corresponding to closed questions: two persons considered that some specific questions needed to be more precise; three of them stated that the questionnaire seemed too general, and that this characteristic implied a difficulty in answering to the questions; on the contrary, 5 other respondents affirmed that the brevity of the questionnaire made it easier to be answered and was also encouraging to do so.

On the contrary, a high number of the respondents had any kind of problem in answering the two open questions of the questionnaire: in the first one, they were asked –according to their experience- to mention publishing companies in which the treatment with the translator was positive or negative; in the second one, they were asked –once again according to their experience- to mention literary critics who pay attention to the translated books they analysed, in comparison to those who do not.

The high amount of comments made by the respondents to these questions would not only be useful for clarifying those items, but also, as we will detail in following sections, it favours the revision of some concepts; from an reflexive epistemological approach, considering the scientific analysis as the passage “from a less true to a more true knowledge” (Bourdieu, Chamboredon & Passeron 1975: 20), this correction would even open new aspects for the research: every scientific knowledge is always “an approximated, that is to say, rectified knowledge” (Bachelard *apud* Bourdieu, Chamboredon & Passeron 1975: 8).

2.3.1. *The relation with publishing companies: “the grey area”*

The question about publishing companies had a high answering rate, since 68 out of 78 respondents (87.18%) mentioned publishing companies that could fit into one of the two categories. However, 35 respondents affirmed to have had problems in answering this question in a clear way, and mentioned some relevant issues.

First of all, some respondents directly or indirectly revealed that it was difficult to define as “positive” or “negative” their relation with publishing companies, due to the fact that the aspects related to their working activity (deadlines, information, remuneration) vary considerably from a publishing company to another and even within the same enterprise; a publishing company could be positively evaluated in one of those issues while being negatively rated for the others:

[...] the relation with publishers is hard to evaluate as a whole, without specifying if we are talking about the performance of their obligations related to rights, information, treatment, attention, prompt payments, etc. (Subject 68)

The division between positive/negative relation of translators and publishing companies is too categorical. The relation can be positive in some aspects, even if they pay less than others, etc. (Subject 51)

Some publishing companies are wonderful, but remuneration is always low, others are wonderful and remuneration is appropriate but they do never inform you about copyright payments, etc. (Subject 76)

Therefore, subject 47 talks about “publishing companies with a positive evaluation except in remuneration”, subject 38 mentions publishing companies that “pay less, but have a good treatment”, compared to others that “pay more, but treat worse”; subject 32 shows some “small” publishing companies that are positive in “time, attention...”, but “not in remuneration”; subject 57 mentions some publishing companies with a “negative” relation and specifies the reasons of his/her choice: “(remuneration, disinformation)”, “(terrible remuneration)”, “(disinformation)”, etc.; subject 61 does the same thing and mentions a publishing company with “derisory prices”, even if “the professional and personal relation with the editor is good”. Subject 53 gives a very representative image of the situation when he/she affirms that there is a “grey area” between positive and negative aspects where all literary publishing companies can be included.

Besides, an important aspect linked to this difficulty in evaluating the relation with the publisher is the impression that publishing companies, against any kind of deontology, treat every translator differently, or even the same translator can be treated differently in different moments:

We should also mention that the same publishing company can treat each translator differently (emolument, attention...). (Subject 36)

Probably, there are publishers that treat really well a translator and have a bad relation with another one. This represents an obstacle if we want to express correctly which publishing companies respect translators’ rights or treat them properly. The main problem is the lack of a common action; publishing companies are those having the last word. In this situation, some translators often capitulate and accept unacceptable attitudes. (Subject 29)

Companies usually have variable parameters and a same publishing company can show contradictory behaviours towards the same translator. [...] I’ve been practicing the profession for many years and some of them I have been fighting for translators’ rights and I do not think that anyone can be demonised or sanctified. (Subject 37)

The treatment received by the translator from each publishing company will often depend on the specific person with which the work is agreed. It is quite common that the employee of the publishing company tries to keep his/her translation team if he/she changes to a different company. (Subject 40)

In this scenario of non-fulfilment and unequal treatment, there is still a problem appearing to be fundamental: the remuneration, which is always inappropriate for the task and prevents from making a larger evaluation of publishing companies. For example, subject 56 stated that he/she could not mention cases because “due to the bad remuneration, I have worked for very few commercial publishing companies”. In general, the translator, as the weakest element in price negotiation, is facing a situation where choices are very limited:

In order to go into the remuneration issue in depth, we have to stress that prices stagnate for years, and publishers do not even deign to add the CPI (Consumer Price Index) percentage that is calculated every year. (Subject 9)

For publishing companies, the translator is often the lowest of the low; that is to say, any reduction in the book’s budget affects the translation above all [...]. (Subject 21)

I have observed that if someone accepts what they are offering, publishing companies do not improve such conditions with time. It is the translator who has to ask for more. (Subject 45)

[...] there is such an ancient habit of badly paying translators that it seems difficult to change that deeply rooted behaviour. (Subject 38)

In my opinion, the main problem of translating for publishers is that this is one of the few working spheres in which *it is the client who fixes the price*, and not the provider. It seems obvious that, as in any other professional field, when it is the client who fixes the price, he will always do it downwards. (Subject 64)

Furthermore, it is observed that prices are worsening in general terms, since in the last decades two new problems have arisen: the payment per characters and the duplicity of prices. The first of these issues has become widespread among the majority of publishing companies and refers to an important change in the price system. Traditionally, the price was fixed per page; each page contains 30 lines approximately with 70 characters each, even if this space is not always full (for example: texts with dialogues, poems, etc.). Nowadays, publishers commonly calculate the total number of characters of a text and divide it by 2100, that is to say, by the number of characters that would have an “ideal” page being completely full; this way, they reduce the payment received for translating texts with spaces, like poetry, theatre, novels with many dialogues, books of aphorisms, etc. According to a recent research, this system can reduce the translator’s earning in almost 20% (Milla & Pino 2006):

I observe that during the last 10 years, the professional situation of the literary translator has improved in terms of his/her rights as author of the translation. Nevertheless, other aspects got worst, such as remuneration, for instance, mainly due to the spread of the use of the automatic word count as a means of payment [...] (Subject 9)

[...] the average translator has won rights and visibility: he/she is now better known and more respected. That being said, in my opinion there is a point in which the situation is worst than before: the translator earns, in average, less than before (even if it seems difficult to believe). Honestly, the publishers’ strategy of character count is really miserable. (Subject 17)

The great problem concerns payments. Given the current system of count by template, we end up earning around 8 or 9 euros per page; if we consider the difficulties (and the hours) required for many texts, normally your numbers don’t add up [...] (Subject 24)

Besides, the occurrence of duplicity of rates seems to be considered as a negative element, as it affects two groups which, due to different reasons, are not fully integrated among the translators: beginners and non professional translators, who combine translation with other jobs. Due to the various professional situations of both groups and to the ignorance of the working conditions, these groups may accept much lower rates than it is usual. And this implies, as well, a prejudice affecting all the professionals of the field. This business trend, consisting of turning to the most disadvantaged sectors of the market in order to obtain lower rates and/or worse working conditions, is a constant practice in any professional market in a situation of crisis; it may be observed that, for instance, in April 2009, in a very different professional field, in the Spanish shipyard “La Naval”, in Sestao (Basque Country), workers called strikes to protest against the outsourcing of immigrants with lower wages and the situation was only solved by signing a new collective agreement forcing the company to keep equal wages (El País, 2009):

Young translators work for miserable rates. There is a dualism which didn’t exist before. (Subject 25)

[...] there are many small publishing companies, with a varied catalogue (self-help, hardboiled crime fiction, romance novel, science fiction, etc.), which pay shameful wages and take advantage of people who is just starting (I know cases of people earning 4 euros per page, that's an insult!). (Subject 34)

[...] the amounts I've earned are very small, totally out of proportion if we take into account the time I've needed to make each translation; so, if I hadn't had other jobs meanwhile, it would have been very hard for me to make ends meet. In my case, translation has been an "extra income" (really hard, to be honest). (Subject 17)

[...] few translators live exclusively on translation, and for this reason those who have another job don't need what they earn as translators to live. (Subject 38)

The problems are very different for veteran and new translators and, even more if we compare "professionals" and "academicians" (university teacher or so) who complete their salary or work for improving their CV or just for pleasure. (Subject 54)

The latest problem arising from the relationship with publishers is associated with the Intellectual Property Law (IPL), passed on November 1987, and with the entry into force of the Consolidated Text of the IPL in 1996; pursuant to the IPL, the translator becomes the author and proprietary of his/her translation, and this implies, among other questions (Murillo 2007), that he/she is granted the collection of royalties and the rights of assignment (reissue of a work by a publisher other than the one who paid for the translation). The last surveys financed by ACETt (Macías Sistiaga & Fernández-Cid 2003: 74-78) showed a common lack of compliance with the IPL, together with the misinformation offered to translators by the publishers; according to the comments of the respondents, the situation remains the same:

The improvement of the translators' situation is due to a single factor: the IPL. Its implementation still leaves much to be desired and the general treatment received by translators is still pitiful, except in rare and honourable cases on both sides. (Subject 7)

I also observe that it is not a common practice that publishers allow translators to revise the translation tests, and they usually don't send information concerning the collection of royalties either. Furthermore, publishers don't usually communicate the transfers of translations to other publishing companies either. (Subject 9)

The observance of professional rights has improved importantly in terms of non remuneration-related aspects, but royalties, for instance, are not properly collected yet. There are obscure reissues which one knows through Cedro [the Spanish Center of Reprographic Rights] and not through the publishing company, or even reissues you never get to know, and the same for assignments, they are also obscure. (Subject 25)

Publishing companies still draw up agreements which don't comply with the IPL. Many publishing companies don't send the annual settlement. The translator loses control of the text after its delivery and doesn't have the opportunity to accept or refuse the changes made by proofreaders or publishers. (Subject 41)

In conclusion, the considerations suggested by the survey group concerning this first open question, about the relation with publishing companies, defines a complex, unclear and, in general, negative scene, in which the main actors do not even know what to expect; their opinion cannot be global, as they make part of a fragmented, unstable and very unbalanced market. Moreover, their professional situation is not similar to the situation of other so-called "independent" or "intellectual" professions. Instead, it is much closer to the situation of other non-qualified workers: a recent survey of the CEATL at European level (Fock, de Haan & Lhotóva 2009:69), reveals that the gross income of literary translators is lower than industrial workers'; in many countries, it does not even reach two thirds of an industrial wage. The

translator could be thus defined as a “proletarized worker”: the “specific feature distinguishing translators nowadays [...] is their individual condition of expendable, interchangeable workers” (Martínez-Lage & Sánchez Lizarralde 1997: 13); this condition is strongly linked to a much wider global market where the focus is set on the “contingency” of the worker and his/her need –almost his/her obligation– of being adaptable to the fluctuating conditions (Sennett 1998; Bauman 2005). Taking into account all these considerations, we can deduce that any research on this field must consider the fluctuant, fuzzy nature of the professional situation of the literary translator, and the great difficulty faced by these professionals when it comes to establishing indicative parameters in the market.

2.3.3. *The function of criticism and the awareness of the literary system*

The second open question included in the questionnaire referred to literary critics and reviewers; the respondents were asked to mention those who, according to their experience, give (or not) importance to the translation they analyse. Once again, the answers showed the difficulties around the concept proposed, even though their character is different to the one observed in the first open question. Firstly, we can observe a relatively low percentage of response, as only 34 out of the 78 respondents (43.59%) gave an answer. The key information is obtained through the breakdown by categories, which shows a peculiar difference: among the translators who stated that translation was their main activity, the percentage of response is reduced until becoming almost irrelevant, i. e. only 14 out of 54 participants (25.93%) answered this question; on the other hand, among the group, quite smaller, of respondents who combine translation with other professional activities, this rate increased notably, with 20 out of 24 subjects (83.33%) answering. Although we must consider this difference as a provisional element, due to the probationary character of the questionnaire, it could suggest an important line of work: a very different awareness between professional and non-professional translators in terms of literary criticism and its importance for the literary system.

In general, professionals who give their opinion about this issue usually address the critics’ ignorance or lack of interest, i. e. they question the convenience itself and the *technical* possibility of a translation being judged by them:

[...] they are not technically prepared for a field like this one; most of the critics mistake good choices or defaults of the author for good choices or defaults of the translator, and vice versa. (Subject 37)

[...] most of the critics only mention the name of the translator but do not make a critic of the translation itself, and whenever they make a comment about it, it’s usually a negative one, almost never positive. (Subject 39)

[...] the judgement on the quality is usually summarized, either in a few lines, though this is very rare, or in a couple of adjectives, which happens most of times. (Subject 47)

Mentions to translators are usually brief and general, when they exist, more or less like “by the way, translation is not bad/is very bad”. It is not common to make a rigorous or a thorough analysis. (Subject 53)

The question is not applicable. 1. the large majority [of the critics] lack of the knowledge required on the source language. 2. if they have this knowledge, it is virtually impossible they have been able to completely compare both texts. (Subject 55)

I’ve never read an intelligent comment from a critic on this topic, undoubtedly because they ignore the original texts. (Subject 59)

The second major issue is the importance of the relationship between literary critics and the *visibility* they can give to a translation. The answers of the survey group concerning these issues do coincide this time, notwithstanding the difference in number; however, a certain disparity

can again be noticed: whilst the professionals mentioning this problem underline that the visibility of translators could improve their working conditions, non-professional respondents insist on the role of the critic as reading mediator or advisor, i. e. an agent who influences the evaluation of the translated work:

In my opinion, the problem of translation is [...] the ignorance of the mainstream, who does not consider the translator as a professional whose work must be recognized and properly remunerated, and this favours the publishers [...]. Furthermore, and due to all the considerations made before, there is a poor acknowledgement of the translator's work, not only by the media (which only mention bad translations), but also by the publishers (who many times don't even include his/her name in the catalogues). (Subject 38)

[...] although the association of literary translators, ACEtt, carries out permanent and persevering efforts in order to boost the translators' visibility in the society, good results have not been achieved yet, specially in the cultural press, where literary critics keep omitting the translator's name in their book reviews and, of course, almost never applaud the translator's work, whereas they have no qualms when it comes to revile it. (Subject 9)

During the last 10 years, the literary translator's situation has slightly improved in terms of visibility and rights, but not in terms of remuneration and public acknowledgment. It is true that our struggle has been and keeps on giving some fruits, but we still bump into the impassable wall of the literary criticism and the media of this country, which still don't recognize the work of the translators in favour of the spreading of books. (Subject 12)

Very few critics pay attention to the importance and/or the quality of the translation. Generally, they're experts in the field of the work they review. Most of them ignore the translator and the translation, specially the usual "stars" of the Books section, who think they "know" everything and, besides, condition the reading demand. (Subject 22)

The attention paid to the literary translation by the literary critic is strongly linked to the activity of the critic as translator himself. Mentions are made, if any, in the case of acclaimed translators or new versions of the classics (Proust, Flaubert, Dickens, etc.). (Subject 10)

The ignorance of the literary critics –who are, more and more frequently, "recycled" journalists- about other languages and foreign literatures prevent them from understanding the efforts required by a translation and, more importantly, the importance of a *good* translation. Literatures also depend on translations. (Subject 24)

The publishing wheel in Spain is focused on economic performance only. And all the actors implied are subject to this aspect, from publishers to readers. Critics, who should be the bridge between both parties, act in a contradictory way and only contribute to worsen this situation. In the end, the translator in Spain has got used to assume that if critics don't make bad comments on him/her translation in a review, then it's a good review. The fact of not being mentioned is a positive aspect, which reveals a lot about our own vision in Spain. (Subject 29)

Both publishers and critics are subject to the fluctuations of the industry and are more conditioned by the market than by their own ethic and aesthetic criteria. (Subject 37)

Despite the provisional character of these distinctions between groups, we must consider with a certain degree of certainty that the differences underlined for this second question suggest useful precisions for our research: on the one hand, we can identify a marked lack of interest of the professional translator towards the work of the literary critic, which is considered, in any case, of bad quality; on the other hand, we can clearly observe that non professional translators appear to be much more interested in this activity, as they seem to consider it relevant as an element inside the literary system (not so much for the quality level but because of the degree of

importance within the system of literary legitimization). Since the criticism constitutes one of the main forms of literary domination (Casanova 1999: 172) and translation is the great reputation institution within the international system (Casanova 1999: 198), these differences existing in the interaction zone could constitute the framework of a useful research approach.

3. Conclusions: the dialectical rapprochement and the possibilities of research

In his/her mail of response, one of the respondents included a sentence that could define the importance of interaction: “You don’t even realize the sad situation of the sector until you think about it”. The “emergence” of a different awareness on the task itself is an important aim of this research: during the survey, the subjects are faced with doubts about their own work and consider them in a new light; their reactions are also useful for the researcher’s own approach, which will be questioned and modified after this process.

The problems mentioned in the pilot questionnaire underline the need of a “channel of communication” between the researcher and the subjects in the analysed field. In order to evaluate the questionnaire, both open questions could be considered, in an early stage, as problematic or wrongly formulated, as both of them are, in different ways, deemed too complex by the respondents. Nevertheless, from a constructivist and dialectical approach, these needs of definition are a *framework* to develop the research. The initial aim of these questions was to find *data*: individuals and companies corresponding to specific work parameters; however, questionnaires did not satisfy this first objective, but they showed something different: a *situation*, a more complex field which implies different working needs from those proposed in first place. We did not obtain what we were searching from the beginning, i. e. a more or less precise list of publishing companies characterized by their “positive” or “negative” treatment, or a group of critics with a variety of attitudes towards translated literature. Instead, we found other intuitions which open up a different line of work. Although it should be insisted on the provisional and non-transferable character of a pilot questionnaire, the abundance of data obtained and their relation to previous researches shows interesting axis for the future research: firstly, we observed that the respondents are aware about their problems in a sector, the publishing field, mainly characterized by confusion, lack of definition and multiplicity of treatments, which implies a greater difficulty of personal orientation; secondly, a kind of polarized feeling about the sector is perceived, mainly between the oppositions “beginner”-“veteran” and “professional”-“non professional”; and finally, it seems possible to consider a different attitude between sub-groups towards literary criticism, visibility and the literary system. These features seem to delimit a professional field marked by individualisation and sectioning, i. e. a field where workers have few reference frameworks beyond the personal ones, and where group identities are not created by the common will/activity of its members, but by their imposed working conditions.

This perception matched with previous research, which pointed out the difficulty of studying the translators’ condition due to its “soft” (*molle*) position and their “ambivalent”, “ambiguous” and “indefinite” working situation (Heinich 1984). Furthermore, the difficulty of the translation sector to be defined as a profession due to “a deficient socialization of the professionals” and “a bad-defined common identity” (Monzó 2006: 173) has also been pointed out; the ambiguity goes to the point of considering the convenience of talking about *several translation professions*, since a translator in one field or category usually ignore the conditions of other translators (Gouadec 2007: xiii-xiv). As it has already been pointed out by other empirical studies (Kalinowski 2002; Sela-Sheffy 2005, 2008), translators (specially literary translators) try to overcome this lack of common identity by creating personal images based on “sacrifice”, “eccentricity” or “artistic skills”; the oppositions observed within the profession (such as, for example, the ones in this analysis: beginner vs. veteran, professional vs. non professional) can be *annulated* –when the translator aims at creating a common image to strengthen the working unity of the group- or *exploited* –when the translator tries to give a personal image that can increase his/her personal capital and *distinguish* him/her from others.

Besides, these difficulties of specification are linked to the worries showed by some of the respondents (n. 7, 9, 22 and 26) about the professional encroachment and the need of associativism. Nevertheless, this is a particularly complex issue: the proposal of regulating the professional access to translation throughout some kind of rules or requirements (Gouadec 2007: 252-257) has arisen an important debate and the European Services Directive has also recommended European governments to eliminate or to soften the compulsory membership of a professional association required for the practice of many independent professions (Editorial 2008). Beyond the ambiguous character of the proposal, it makes clear, once again, the difficulty of this professional group to find its own social definition and, at the same time, the will of a part of them to produce some kind of collective identity through representative institutions.

Following the thread of this lack of definition, we must make reference to a relevant precision made by Žižek (1989: 230–232) as a critic to Adorno (1970) which refers once again to the problem of paired concepts mentioned at the beginning. According to Adorno, an adequate definition of modern “Society” is impossible; whenever we try to do so, a series of opposite determination excluding each other arise: on the one hand, the society as an organic whole which includes individuals (“organicism”); on the other hand, the society as a link between atomized individuals (“individualism”). Nevertheless, in a dialectical rapprochement, this contradiction acts as an answer: the antagonism revealed by the concept of *Society* functions as its own definition –that is to say, the object of study is defined through the feature which seemed to make impossible the access to it. So, the disagreements set out from the pilot questionnaire are, in the end, those revealing the particular character of the analysed group: the difficulty found when trying to define the group of literary translators not only constitutes one of its main features as an object of study, but also underlines, once again, the fuzzy character of human categories (*cf.* Wittgenstein 1953: 66–71; Rosch 1978; Lakoff 1987) and the epistemological attention that must be paid to them in any social research.

These considerations allow us to see the usefulness of the channels of communication between observer and actors in a different way; it is not only a matter of data or knowledge, but, most of all, of a readjustment of approaches and, therefore, of the possibility of building the sociological object more precisely. This worry refers, again, to the concept of reflexivity and, in particular, to the essential precaution towards the “scholastic bias” (Bourdieu 2004: 22), i. e. towards the risk that the researcher, while approaching the subjects, ends up making “researcher’s questions”, questions which can only be formulated *from outside*, and which will then make communication with actors more difficult; in the case of the pilot questionnaire analysed, we could consider that open questions, as far as they function like “researcher’s question” in some way, led the respondents to suggest different answers to those expected, covering a wider framework, and hence revealing some unexpected tensions which were not foreseen. In short, that is the reason why this constructivist, dialectical work system could only be approached from the defence of the research process as “corrected mistake” (Bachelard); “misrecognition” also proves as an important part of research: the initial failure allows a different access to the object and so to overcome previous deficiencies (*cf.* Žižek 1989: 63-66).

Finally, it must be said that some of the contrary features put forward by the questionnaire allow us to analyse more precisely one of the main concepts set out in the introduction: the parallax-gap (Žižek 2005). The empirical considerations confirm the interest of an eventual rapprochement to literary translation which, instead of merely taking into account one approach to the field, it considers the multiple oppositions (parallax) which made up the field of study and which, hence, include changeable presences in different aspects: literary translation as an essential cultural element for universal literature and, at the same time, inevitably subject to geopolitical and economic conditions (Heilbron 1999); source of reputation for the authors and, however, traditionally considered a secondary activity; fundamental in terms of publishing market, but based on an insecure and proletarianized profession. The consideration of this gap made up by all the parallax seems to be the perfect starting point for the research, following a sociological approach which, in the construction of its object of study, allows us to avoid, as far as it is possible, the negative effects of conceptual oppositions.

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