Revisiting the Unit of Translation from the Hermeneutical Perspective

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Abstract: This paper attempts to show that the *unit of translation*, even though it has long been used by both translators and theorists, is not a very fruitful concept when it comes to describing the translation process. The way in which it has been defined up to now is either too restrictive to be valid or too broad to be manageable. It will appear that it is much more productive to consider translation from a hermeneutic point of view on the basis of both the *working unit of translation* (the portion of source text which is being processed at a particular time) and the complexity of the factors involved in the process. The notion of *hermeneutic halo* will be proposed as a useful tool in this context. Combined with the *working unit of translation*, it helps describe the translation process and is a means of accounting for the great variety of translations a single original can lead to.

Keywords: Hermeneutic Halo, Translational Hermeneutics, Subjectivity in Translation, Translation Process, Working Unit of Translation

1 Introduction

In the *Handbook of Translation Studies*, Michel Ballard expressed the view that "Professional translators instinctively think in terms of *translation units* when they want to assess or describe their work and it proves to be equally necessary and useful to theoreticians when they want to analyse the translator's work" (Ballard 2010: 437). The concept, however, is still unclear since no single definition has been accepted so far. In this article, I would first like to demonstrate that the concept of *unit of translation* poses a problem because it is either

so limited as to be of no use or it is so complex that it becomes impractical.[1] I will then suggest that it could advantageously be replaced by the concept of a *hermeneutic halo* which, when combined with the notion of the *working unit of translation* (the portion of source text being dealt with at a particular time – often mistakenly equated with the *unit of translation*), is a useful tool not only to describe the dynamics of the translation process and account for the personal choices of the translator, but also to explain the need for re-translation.[2]

First I will look briefly at different points of view concerning the unit of translation and then I will adopt a hermeneutical perspective in order to suggest replacing this often inadequate or unwieldy notion by the more intuitive concept of the *hermeneutic halo*. Using some concrete examples, I will show that the hermeneutic halo is a good means of describing how translators process the working unit because it encapsulates the interpretation of the text as a whole and includes all the factors which have an impact on the way each sentence or smaller unit is dealt with.

2 Definitions to date

The translation unit is a concept frequently used in the context of translation didactics and criticism because it offers a basis for comparison between the original and the translated text. It is also used by some theorists to refer to text segments in the translation process. In *Translation Terminology*, Jean Delisle, Hannelore Lee-Jahnke, and Monique Cormier propose two definitions. First, they describe the translation unit as "A text segment consisting of a single word, a phrase, a whole sentence, or even more than one sentence, which a translator treats as a single cognitive unit in establishing equivalence" (Delisle / Lee-Jahnke / Cormier 1999: 194). They add two notes: "The segmentation of larger text elements facilitates idiomatic translation and serves as a significant step not only in the text analysis procedures carried out by human translators, but also by translation memory and machine translation systems" (Delisle / Lee-

[1] I would like to thank Lance Hewson, who read and commented on an earlier version of this article.

[2] This article expands on concepts first suggested in my articles "The Translation Process and its Creative Facets in a Hermeneutic Perspective" (Fontanet 2017) and "L'unité de traduction: une construction?" (Fontanet 2018).

Jahnke / Cormier 1999: 194). Moreover, "The same text segment may be divided into units of different size depending on the strategies, procedures, and intention adopted by the individual translator" (Delisle / Lee-Jahnke / Cormier 1999: 194).

Their second definition of the translation unit refers to "A single element in the source text or a group of elements that are linked by semantic or formal features and which translators interpret as a single entity in association with their situational knowledge" (Delisle / Lee-Jahnke / Cormier 1999: 194). To this they add the following note: "The elements that constitute the translation unit may form a sequence within a phrase or may be dispersed throughout the text (transphraseological unit). These elements can take on their own semantic value in the framework of the text" (Delisle / Lee-Jahnke / Cormier 1999: 194-195).

I agree that the term is convenient to refer to limited textual units when discussing and comparing passages of translated texts, either with one another or with the original. However, I find it more misleading than useful when discussing the translation process, since translators take into account much more than just the original segment when producing a corresponding expression, phrase, sentence, or paragraph. Most translation scholars agree that the unit of translation (hereafter UT) comprises more elements than a single word. While some equate it with the *working unit of translation* (hereafter WU), others rely on much more complex definitions. In the following subsections, I will summarise the key definitions.

2.1 The Narrow Conception

Various definitions have been given since Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet first defined the UT in 1958. The more restrictive definitions equate it with a very brief segment of the source text corresponding to the WU – the small portion of text processed by the translator at a particular time. According to them, the UT is "the smallest segment of utterance whose signs are linked in such a way that they should not be translated individually" (Vinay / Darbelnet 1995: 21). They postulate that "The units of translation are lexicological units within which lexical elements are grouped together to form a single element of thought" (Vinay / Darbelnet 1995: 21). They do not actually distinguish between units of thought, lexicological units, and translation units, because they consider that all express the same reality from a different point

of view. Their definition obviously relies on linguistic criteria and their use of the deontic modal 'should' reveals that they consider the UT as a tool that the translator must use.

Taking a slightly different perspective, Daniel Gouadec gives a straightforward semantic and syntactic definition of the UT, namely "the smallest part of an utterance which is sufficient to express a full element of the described situation", and which thus corresponds to "a 'verbal group', i.e. very often a sentence"[3] (Gouadec 1974: 18, my translation). Probably thinking that his explanation is self-explanatory, he does not clarify how the translator processes the unit. Mark Shuttleworth and Moira Cowie set out to summarise the main lines of thought concerning the UT in their *Dictionary of Translation Studies*. They define it as "A term used to refer to the linguistic level at which ST is recodified in TL" (Shuttleworth / Cowie 1997: 192). Referring to Leonid Barkhudarov, they explain that in his opinion, the UT is the smallest translatable segment, its parts taken individually being "untranslatable", because "no equivalents can be established for them in TT" (Shuttleworth / Cowie 1997: 192). Invoking Barkhudarov, they add that, according to him,

> If a translator uses larger translation units than is necessary to convey the basic meaning of ST this will lead to a FREE TRANSLATION being produced; similarly, translating at lower level than necessary will result in a LITERAL TRANSLATION. (Shuttleworth / Cowie 1997: 192)

They do not give more details, but seem to imply that translating at the precise level of the UT is what is recommended. No criterion is mentioned, but it is probably the sentence, as both a syntactic and semantic unit, that delineates the UT. Peter Newmark, like many of the early translation scholars, considers that the "sentence is a natural unit of translation" (Newmark 1988: 65). He nonetheless expresses doubts:

[3] The original French is: "L'unité de traduction est unité de situation: c'est la plus petite partie de l'énoncé qui suffit à évoquer un élément complet de la situation décrite. Il s'agit du groupe verbal. […] (le groupe verbal correspond en mainte circonstance à une phrase)."

> All lengths of language can, at different moments and also simultaneously, be used as units of translation in the course of the translation activity […]. To me the unit of translation is a sliding scale, responding according to other varying factors, and (still) ultimately a little unsatisfactory. (Newmark 1988: 66-67)

He suggests that no strict UT can be objectively defined and his dissatisfaction may come from the fact that the definitions given do not clearly indicate the purpose of the concept. Many of the definitions corresponding to a narrow view of the UT seem to concentrate on the technical need to be able to deal with it. Only Barkhudarov adopts a different perspective and notes that the size of the unit has an impact on the nature of the translation, but he seems to exclude that a larger unit may be beneficial for the form of the target text, as if form were only active at the micro level.

The major problem with the narrow view of the UT is that it is mainly defined from a linguistic perspective and uses syntactic criteria to set its limits, even though it is obvious that no sentence is ever translated without reference to the surrounding sentences. Most of the authors fail to distinguish between UT and WU – or rather, fail to consider that some wider element should be taken into consideration to account for the translation process. My own experience is that when translators deal with a WU, they usually rely on elements that appear elsewhere in the text as well.[4] The fact that they produce a target working unit (hereafter TWU) on the basis of a source working unit (hereafter SWU) does not mean that they do not include other textual or extralinguistic elements in the translation process. If translators merely rely on the SWU (this is the case when one uses a translation memory without revising the segments presented in matching pairs), they may end up by simply ignoring other parts of the text which will normally have an impact on either style or content.

2.2 Broader Conceptions

[4] Some of the following ideas were developed in my PhD thesis (see Fontanet 2012: 297-304).

Some authors have implicitly discussed the size of the UT. Antoine Berman, for example, did not specifically address the question, but obviously worked with a very broad notion of the UT when claiming that a literary translator should have read all the works an author had produced and all of the existing translations in the target language before starting to translate one of the author's works. From this perspective, the UT covers a very wide corpus of texts. A great many translation scholars have a very wide conception of the UT, either because they extend it to cover a paragraph, a chapter, a whole text or some wider entity, or else because they include disparate elements in it, giving it thereby a non-continuous nature. In their *Dictionary of Translation Studies*, Shuttleworth and Cowie mention that Barkhudarov (1993) "raises the problem of whether units of translation should be elements of linguistic form or content" (192). They stress that "Barkhudarov (1969) argues that the entire text can sometimes serve as the unit of translation, although in practice [he] limits this to the case of poetry, while "Koller (1992) restricts this possibility to poetry and advertising" **(**192).

An interesting discussion of the subject is provided by Rosa Rabadȧn, who goes back to the *texteme*, as defined by Even-Zohar and Toury, to express the view that

> Conceived as a functional-linguistic unit, [it] goes beyond the linear grammatical boundaries to engage macrotextual parameters which account for the nonstructural features in text organisation. Yet, there is some sort of discontinuity in this conception, as it is evident that any linguistic unit participating in a text is bound to carry a textual function. (Rabadȧn 1991: 41)

Michel Ballard put forward another point of view. He reproached Vinay and Darbelnet for failing to integrate their concept of UT "within a theory or at least a comprehensive vision of translation" and of "foster[ing] the idea that one can isolate translation units from the source text" insofar as the UT had its origin in the source text, was apprehended by the translator's brain, and saw its fulfilment in the corresponding part of the target text" (Ballard 2003: 75).[5] His point of view is that the UT is both an operational framework where the translator is active

[5] This is my translation of Ballard's French.

and a basis of observation to study translation[6] (Ballard 2003: 73). His definition is interesting and personal, but quite difficult to grasp and hardly possible to use, so it would seem, since the UT is situated somewhere between two languages and has no physical existence.

Ballard's UT thus corresponds to a process. He stresses that the SWU is not the only factor contributing to the shape of the TWU:

> For instance, one knows that there is a certain probability that a passive form in an English text will not be preserved in its French translation or that a locative prepositional phrase will be translated by a relative clause, but in the end it depends very much on context and on the translator's options, his response to norms, and his own creativity. (Ballard 2010: 438)

Ballard, who believed that subjectivity should be part the UT (see Ballard 2006: 125), describes the translation process as a three-stage operation: the construction of the meaning, the production of equivalences and the new writing of a text (see Ballard 2006: 126).

Coming now to Christiane Nord, it is interesting to note that in her review of the different definitions of UT she mentions pragmatic approaches associated with "larger units like 'the complex semantic-pragmatic values of the text-type'" (Nord 1997: 69). Commenting on training strategies, she points out that even though "the largest translation units possible" (Nord 1997: 69) would seem the best, the larger they are, the less manageable they become for the translator. Indeed, she asks the question: "How does one actually set about translating 'the text' (apart from mini-texts like titles or road signs) or even 'the culture'?" (Nord 1997: 69). Having reviewed several approaches, she remarks that they all "see the translation unit, regardless of its size, as a 'horizontal' segment in the chronological sequence of linguistic elements" (Nord 1997: 70). She then makes plain her own view, namely

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[6] This is my translation of Ballard's French. "L'unité de traduction est à la fois un cadre opératoire où se situe l'action du traducteur et une base d'observation pour l'étude de la traduction."

> That a functionalist approach can also deal with 'vertical' units (…). In this view, the text is seen as a hyper-unit comprising functional units that are not rank-bound, with each unit manifested in various linguistic or non-linguistic elements that can occur at any level anywhere in the text. (Nord 1997: 69)

According to her, passages which are not juxtaposed may still belong to the same unit. To better define the notion of "vertical unit", she writes:

> A functional unit is thus the sum of text elements or features that are intended (or interpreted as being intended) to serve the same communicative function or sub-function. If we connect these elements, we get chains or networks which, from a bird's eye view, give the impression of vertical units (Nord 1997: 70)

For Nord, it is worthwhile analysing functional rather than structural units because this allows one to see the text "as a complex construction in which all parts cooperate to obtain certain global purposes" and "it is indeed the *text* that is translated" (Nord 1997: 72). She is aware, however, that "we do have smaller, more operable units to work on in the translation process" (Nord 1997: 72). Besides, she considers that

> The concepts of the translation problem and the functional translation unit can also be used to define translation errors. They can also help in the evaluation of 'good' translations as being relatively 'functional' or 'adequate to the purpose'. (Nord 1997: 72)

Nord mentions as well that in "hermeneutic approaches 'the holistic effect of the text-composition' becomes a translation unit and in psycholinguistic approaches the translation unit is determined 'intuitively' by the translator's individual translation proficiency" (Nord 1997: 69). A more extreme view is given by Susan Bassnett, who states that "a literary text is made up of a complex set of systems existing in a dialectical relationship with other sets outside its boundaries" (Bassnett 2014: 89). Bassnett and André Lefevere go so far as to express the view that "neither the word, nor the text, but the culture becomes the operational 'unit' of translation"

(Bassnett / Lefevere 1990: 8). Along the same lines, Jeremy Munday considers that "The translation of advertising is a clear example of the application of cross-cultural analysis to everyday life. It really could be said that the unit of translation is not just the text, but the culture" (Munday 2004: 209). Finally, Bernd Stefanink and Ionana Bălăcescu give an overview which permits us to appreciate that the tendency is to have an increasingly wide and complex conception of the UT:

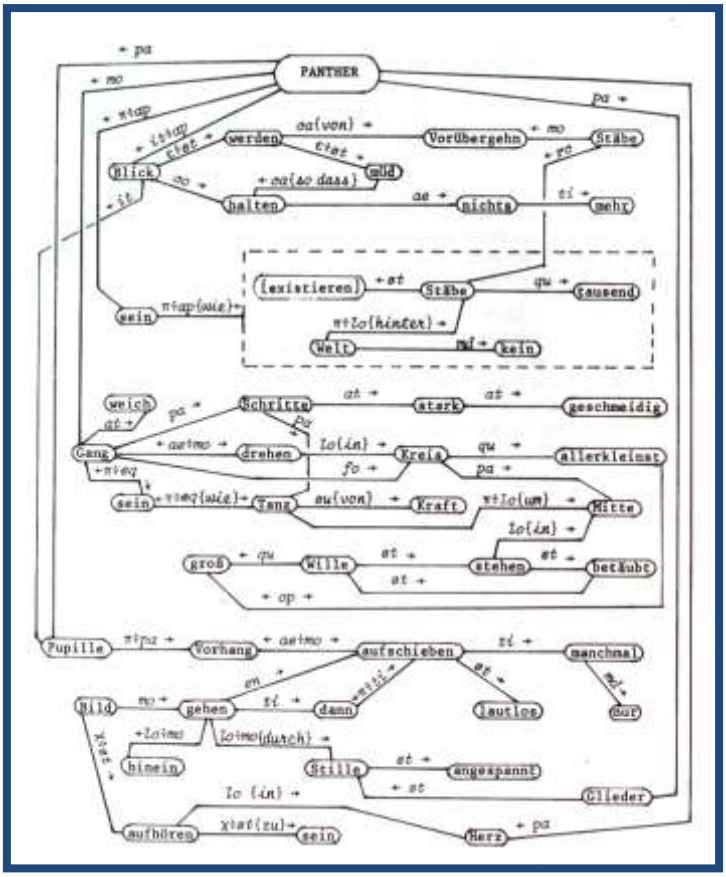
> We observe a development starting with an **atomistic** view (which was trying to find the meaning by dissecting the words into their minimal units of signification), and moving more and more towards a **holistic** approach. This holistic approach is one of the fundamentals of translational hermeneutics. (Stefanink and Bălăcescu 2016: 31)

As Nord indicates, the bigger the UT, the more adequate the translation should be (because it is based on more elements), the less manageable it becomes (because no translator can keep a large number of words or pages in his or her active memory). It can thus be said that the broader view encapsulates a fundamental paradox. Moreover, as shown above, Nord argues in favour of a UT made up of discontinuous fragments from the source text that share a common function. This implies that a UT limited to the WU is not sufficient to account for translation choices. It would require using a second, wider unit in parallel. WUs should thus be clearly distinguished from UTs. It seems obvious, at least, that translators concentrate on the former, dealing with them in turn, but that their choices are also influenced by their general notion of the original (based on preconceptions and on the parts of the original that have already been read, or else WUs which have been translated up to that point).

The wider UT should correspond to the portion of text(s) that has an impact on the translation of the WU. Now, within a single text, the different words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs combine their effects to produce a global effect. As François Rastier indicates, every text, be it a poem, a scientific paper or an instruction notice, is grasped as a whole (see (Rastier 2006: 42). Any one part has an impact on all the other parts and every sentence has some link with the previous or the following one. Thus the translator cannot but refer to this global dimension at all times – even if he or she is unaware of doing so. This would require that the UT include every single part of the original text.

In a poem or other type of literary text, some images can echo each other from a great distance. In a novel, for example, the names of the characters, their sociolects and idiolects should not vary from one chapter to the next. However, it would be erroneous to consider that only literary texts contain semantic or syntactic echoes. Consistency of terminology and vocabulary is an important feature of any text. Even a user's notice (or a scientific paper) must use the same terms to refer to the same elements: if there are two synonyms to designate a tool, it is necessary to choose the same one from the first to the last page in order to avoid any misunderstanding. One could even consider that when dealing with documents whose general format must meet some compulsory standard, the unit of translation will encompass the agreed standard format and be broader than the text.

Robert de Beaugrande, in *Toward a Semiotic Theory of Literary Translating*, designed a mind map[7] (Figure 1) of the poem "The Panther" by Rilke in order to describe how the translator of the poem had reproduced the observed relations. This map reveals clearly that none of the elements of the poem can be dealt without reference to the whole.



[7] He refers to this map as "configurations of concepts and relations" (Beaugrande 1980: 30).

Figure 1: model of Rilke's poem "Der Panther"[8]. (Source: de Beaugrande 1980: 31)

De Beaugrande's map clearly shows that elements of the first stanza reappear in the last one and that all elements are in fact intertwined. Every translator probably has his or her own more or less developed mapping of the text while translating. In my opinion, the UT should not, however, only include every part of the source text which has been taken into account while translating the SWUs, but should also include the TWUs (i.e. the segments which have already been translated). Indeed, when translators go through the text, they concentrate on each WU in turn, but keep in mind both the previous segments of the original text they have already gone through and the previous segments they have already tentatively produced.

To illustrate the fact that choices made to translate previous segments have an impact on the translation of the following ones, let us look at the beginning of James Garner Finn's politically correct parody of the Little Red Riding Hood story.

> There once was a young person named Red Riding Hood who lived with her mother on the edge of a large wood. One day her mother asked her to take a basket of fresh fruit and mineral water to her grandmother's house – not because this was womyn's work, mind you, but because the deed was generous and helped engender a feeling of community. Furthermore, her grandmother was not sick but was in full physical and mental health and was fully capable of **taking care of herself as a mature adult**. […]
>
> On her way to Grandma's house, Red Riding Hood was accosted by a Wolf, who asked her what was in her basket. She replied, "Some healthful snacks for my grandmother, who is certainly capable of **taking care of herself as a mature adult**. (Finn 1994: 1, my emphasis)

In order to reproduce and point out the irony of the pseudo-conventional expression (in bold), the translator must use the same words twice (the meaning and form must be similar).

[8] De Beaugrande gives the following keys: ae: affected entity; ap: apperception of; at: attribute of; ca: cause of; co: containment of; fo: form of; it: instrument of; lo: location of; md: modality of; mo: motion of; pa: part of; qu: quantity of; re: recurrence of; st: state of; su: substance of; ti: time of; eq: equivalent to; ε: entry; π: proximity; χ: exit; en: enablement of; op: opposed to.

Therefore, in this case, one must conclude that the formulation of a previous TWU in the target text is one of the key elements of the translation of the SWU containing the second occurrence. The decision taken for the first TWU has a direct impact on the solution found for the next ones.

An echo can be extremely varied in nature. It can be a simple repetition, the expansion of a metaphor, a motive, or a structural element. In the following passage taken from Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, the main character undertakes to explain to his friend Jim, a runaway slave, that it is normal that French people speak French.

> "Looky here, **Jim**; does a cat talk like we do?"
> "No, a cat don't."
> "**Well**, does a cow?"
> "No, a cow don't, nuther."
> "Does a cat talk like a cow, or a cow talk like a cat?"
> "No, dey don't."
> "It's natural and right for 'em to talk different from each other, ain't it?"
> "Course."
> "**And** ain't it natural and right for a cat and a cow to talk different from US?"
> "Why, mos' sholy it is."
> "**Well, then**, why ain't it natural and right for a FRENCHMAN to talk different from us? You answer me that." (Twain 2002: 82, my emphases)

Directly after Huck's attempted demonstration, Jim echoes it, reproducing the same structure in his questioning and revealing thus the fallacy of Huck's analogy (comparing the feature of the nationality with that of the species):

> "Is a cat a man, Huck?"
> "No."
> "Well, den, dey ain't no sense in a cat talkin' like a man. Is a cow a man? – er is a cow a cat?"
> "No, she ain't either of them."
> "Well, den, she ain't got no business to talk like either one er the yuther of 'em. Is a Frenchman a man?"

"Yes."

"WELL, den! Dad blame it, why doan' he TALK like a man? You answer me DAT!"

I see it warn't no use wasting words – you can't learn a nigger to argue. So I quit.

(Twain 2002: 82-83)

In order to grasp Jim's victory over Huck, one must see that he reproduces the latter's rhetorical canvas. He may be wrong, but he is smart and quick at learning the tools Huck uses to construct his argument. In order to restore the effect, the translator must refer to both the previous SWUs and TWUs.

Even though I do not entirely share Ballard's point of view, I think that he very aptly introduced the notion that the TWU must be taken into consideration. The UT should not be solely associated with the original; it should have a bi-textual dimension. Some translators read or skim through the whole text before they start translating it. As I indicated, this means that they may take into account elements of content or formal aspects that they have found in the other parts of the text while translating each SWU. Translators who actually do not read the whole text may initially start by considering only the first SWU while producing the first TWU, but as soon as they tackle the second one, they will remember at least some elements of the first SWU as well as some elements of the first TWU. All the previous SWUs translated and all the TWUs produced will therefore influence them afterwards (consciously or not). Therefore, even if they start producing their first draft without having encompassed a global view of the text, this is no longer the case when they reach the end of their translation. Moreover, translators generally revise their own work. Many of the changes they make originate from the fact that they have discovered the text in its entirety by then. It would thus be difficult to postulate that there is independent processing for each WU.

Let us imagine a translator tackling a nine-sentence text. If he or she has not read the whole text beforehand, the translation of the first working unit will be based on the first SWU. When the second WU is translated, the translator will try to reproduce what seems to be the essence of the second SWU in the second TWU, but will be conditioned by both the first SWU and the first TWU, as both have been memorised. Figure 2 illustrates the processing of the first

two working units without previous reading of the original[9]. The translator focusses on the blue WUs. The green WUs are the ones which he or she still has more or less in mind when translating another SWU. At first, there is none, but the further he or she gets into the text, the more WUs are kept in mind (in a form which may vary). When translating the last WU of the text, all the SWUs and TWUs are kept in mind.

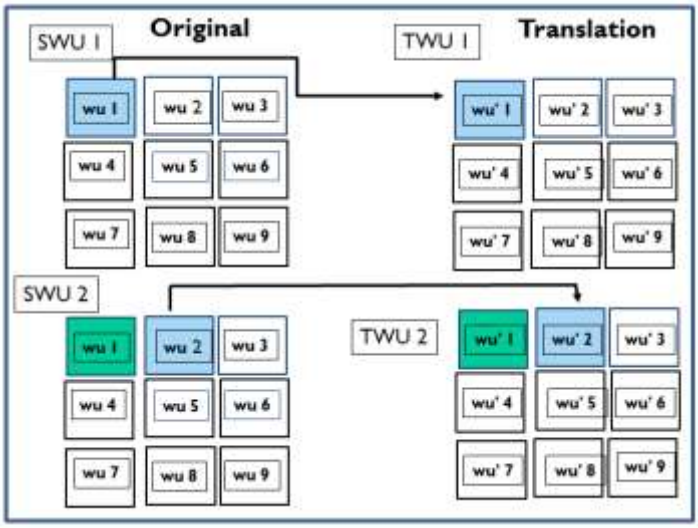


Figure 2: Processing of the first working unit (above) and the second one (below) without previous reading of the original. The translator focusses on the blue WUs, but keeps in mind the green ones. (Source: Fontanet 2018: 59).

Figure 3 illustrates the processing of the first two working units with previous reading of the original. The translator focusses on the blue WUs. The green WUs are the ones which he or she still has more or less in mind when translating another SWU. At first he or she has more or less all the SWUs but no TWU in mind, but the further he or she gets into the text, the more TWUs will accumulate in their memory (in a form which may vary). When translating the last WU of the text, they more or less have all the SWUs and all the TWUs in mind.

[9] Figures 2, 3 and 4 describe the way a translator deals with textual and non-textual elements. They are based on my self-observation, my observation of students' work, and discussions I had with fellow translators.

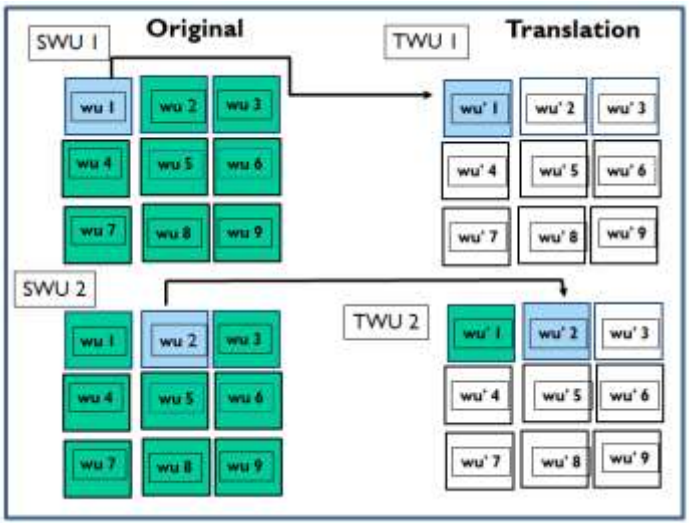


Figure 3: Processing of the first working unit (above) and the second one (below) with previous reading of the original. The translator focusses on the blue WUs, but keeps in mind the green ones. (Source: Fontanet 2018: 60)

Figure 4 illustrates – and shows the utility of – the self-revision process. The translator focusses on the blue WUs. The green WUs are the ones which he or she still has more or less in mind when revising another SWU. From the start, the translator has more or less all the SWUs and all the TWUs in mind, which means that any inconsistency or discrepancy between two or more WUs will show. If the translator revises his or her own text without comparing again every pair of WUs, he or she will focus subsequently on every TWU while keeping all the other SWUs and all the other TWUs in mind.

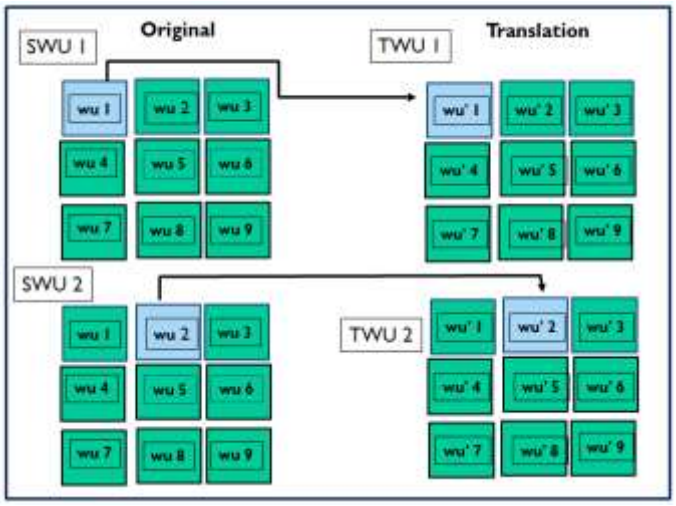


Figure 4: Processing of the first working unit (above) and the second one (below) during the revision process (systematic revision involving a new comparison of every pair of corresponding SWUs and TWUs). The translator focusses on the blue WUs, but keeps in mind the green ones. (Source: Fontanet 2018: 61).

Clearly, it appears that translators refer to wider and wider portions of both the original and the target text while progressing in their task. Both the already translated original sentences and the sentences produced during the process belong to the elements that need to be kept in mind in order to produce a consistent text and a worthy echo of the original. The textual referent is thus dynamic and ever-growing. During the revision process, the textual referent, which comprises all the elements of both the original and the translation, is the same for every WU.

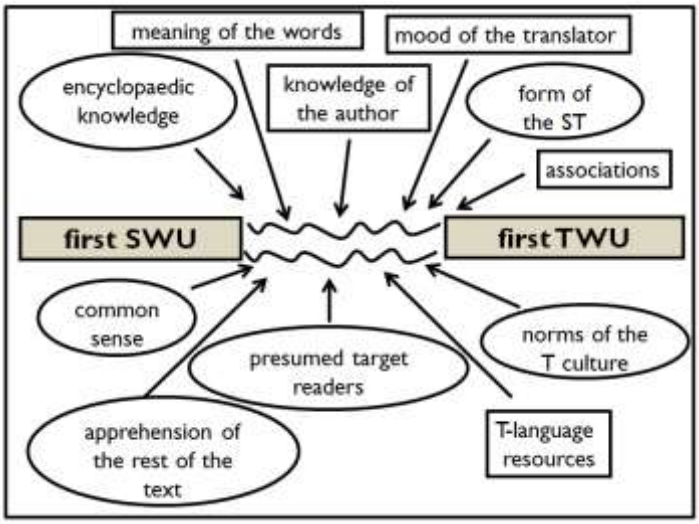
However, translators do not restrict themselves to the original and their own text. As Bassnett, Lefevere and other scholars point out, their choices are made on a very wide basis. At the very least, they consider other texts as well. If the UT encompasses all the textual elements that are activated in the translators' minds when they are at work, it should be defined so as to integrate other texts by the same author and their translations (as Berman advocates), and other texts when there are implicit or intertextual elements. The following extract from T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* shows the extent of his allusions to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (Act I, sc. 2, 390-392). The translator may wish to use a published translation of the play to reproduce the effect.

A rat **crept** softly through the vegetation
Dragging its slimy belly **on the bank**
While I was fishing in the dull canal
On a winter evening round behind the gashouse
Musing upon **the king my brother's wreck**
And on **the king my father's death** before him. (Eliot 1986: 58, my emphasis)

Sitting **on a bank**,
Weeping again **the king my father's wreck**,
This music **crept** by me upon the waters (Shakespeare 1997: 37, my emphasis)

Indeed, when translating *The Waste Land* – a poem that is a web of references and semi-quotations – translators must refer to the known translations of a wide variety of texts[10]. In the parodic tale of James Finn Garner discussed previously, the intertextual dimension is a fundamental aspect of the story: the readers must constantly grasp the reference to the traditional fairy tale of Little Red Riding Hood while being aware of the convoluted features of politically correct style**.** Pragmatic texts are not dissimilar in this respect. If, for example, a law is quoted which has been translated, the translator must refer to the official translation. One should be allowed to integrate into the UT all the encyclopedic knowledge necessary to translate the text, as Bassnett and Lefevere propose (including in the case of advertisements, as we saw Munday suggesting earlier), and that would accordingly expand it quite dramatically. But would it be enough?

Considering that, logically, the UT should encompass all the elements a translator takes into account while dealing with a WU, one could be tempted to propose that the unit of translation (UT) comprises the working unit of the source text (SWU) combined with all the elements that resonate with it. Many factors contribute to the translation process. Figure 5 illustrates some of them.



[10] *The Waste Land* is famous for its intertextual nature. Referring to "*Explicit intertextuality"*, Rob Pope (2014) writes: "we might cite T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* with its annotated references to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* […]. (Pope 2014: 246).

Figure 5: Some of the factors involved in the translator's choice for the first working unit.

In my view, a whole network of elements, including meaning, formal effects, and associations, should be comprised in the UT, so much so that the concept of "unit" does not seem adequate. A unit is part of a whole. If the UT is the whole itself and the various units are not discrete elements, the terminology is at fault. A *unit* is defined by the OED thus: "Each of the (smallest) separate individuals or groups into which a complex whole may be analysed". If so, then the term UT is misleading, because it presupposes that an addition of the different units produces some kind of global homogeneous entity: the various UTs should be discrete and homogeneous elements of a greater entity, which is impossible to define.

The text can, however, be easily segmented into working units. Instead of using two different units (the UT and the WU), as considered above, one should integrate some other entity around the WU to describe the translation process. In addition to the objection concerning terminology, moreover, the concept of a wide UT is open to criticism because, as Nord mentions, no one could expect a translator to remember the whole text while dealing with the various WUs. What is at work is a substratum, a subjective condensation, a web of fragments of the whole text – all that has struck the translator. These could be the main semantic axis, the general tone, information, associations, certain encyclopedic notions which have been activated while reading or translating other WUs, and so on.

Translators keep a general idea of the text in the background of their mind (a sort of personal mind-map of all the elements that contribute to the translation) which orients and supports their choices at the micro level. If there are intertextual or implicit effects, and if encyclopedic elements are necessary to understand the meaning (as is usually the case), their mind-map includes elements that are situated outside the text. If we wish to express all the factors involved, we must look for a dynamic dimension: indeed, the only element that (normally) never changes is the source text (or the sum of all SWUs). The SWU may change in size depending on the identity of the translator or the time at which he or she sets to work, but it can be considered a stable element. To go back to Figure 5, the only stable factor is the "form of the ST". Obviously, most of the other factors are quite different for two different translators – and can even be so to a certain degree for the same translator at two different dates. And this is because his or her common sense, as well as the presumptive target readers and expressive resources in the target language, may have changed after a period of time. The same holds true for his or her encyclopedic knowledge, since it can evidently fluctuate. Moreover, the meaning

of some of the words of the target language may also change as that language evolves with time, just as the translator's interpretation of the ST can change after a while. While a somewhat obsolescent language is generally not considered a problem in the original because the readers are aware of when it was written, it may be problematic in a translation, because if the vocabulary used is outdated, it no longer offers "the shortest way" to the original. This dynamic nature of the various factors accounts for the fact that works must be translated over and over again; it accounts for the fact that a same text leads to different translations when given to different translators and moreover explains why the same person might not produce the same translation at different moments in time and circumstance. The dimension chosen to replace the UT should be flexible so as to reflect the subjectivity of the interpretation of the original and the wide spectrum of possibilities that obtains when one is drafting out the translation. As de Beaugrande suggests, it seems hard to pinpoint what the original means *objectively*: "It is indeed difficult to distinguish between the original 'meaning' of a text and the cognitive representation of the meaning in the mind of the persons involved with the text (the author, the translator and the reader of the translation)" (Beaugrande 1980: 24).

Along the same lines, Stefanink and Bălăcescu stress that "There is no such thing as *the* perfect translation of the source text. There are only subjective tentative versions corresponding to the mental *representations of the meaning in the translator's mind* at a certain moment" (Stefanink / Bălăcescu 2016: 37). In my view, many translations are acceptable, as long as everything the readers find in them is motivated by what the translator has found in the original (be it at the level of content or at the formal level).[11] Translators do rely on the original to produce their work, of course, but variable elements such as context, general knowledge (including that of intertexts), emotions, and common sense all play a role in the process – they are always at work while reading (and grasping) a text – and such elements should therefore be taken into consideration. I would accordingly suggest that the notion of unit be retained only to

[11] In a previous article, I defined a translation as follows: "Une traduction est un texte rédigé dans une langue, compte tenu des normes propres à celle ci, qui tire l'intégralité de sa substance et, au besoin, de son essence formelle d'un texte premier, rédigé dans une autre langue, qu'il a pour objet de représenter, de remplacer ou d'éclairer" (Fontanet, 2007: 201). In my English translation: "A text that is written in a language and that takes into account that language's norms, whose whole substance – and in some cases formal essence – derives from a previous text written in another language, with a view to replacing, representing or shedding light on this previous text."

designate the working unit and, when it comes to refer to the factors contributing to the translation process, I propose moreover that it be associated with something more adequate so as to reflect the complexity of that process.

3 The Hermeneutic Dimension

Hermeneutics offers a convincing framework if one wishes to express what the UT is supposed to account for. Hermeneutic theories postulate that translators cannot avoid going from the original to their translation and back again. Nor can they avoid navigating between the microtextual and the macrotextual level. Gregory Shreve and Bruce Diamond, in their article "Cognitive neurosciences and cognitive translation studies", confirm the validity of that approach. They write:

> During translation the translator appears (from the empirical evidence) to work on discrete "chunks" of textual material. A specific and specifiable (via eye tracking and keystroke logging technologies) segment of source text appears to be focused on by the translator and its meaning extracted. That meaning is then "transferred" into a target language production, a target segment taken to be a re-expression of the message of the originating segment. Bypassing all of the possible problems with this didactic definition of translation units, the point to be made is that the translation unit is a smaller and more focused object of study than the entire text. It could be a sentence, a clause, a phrase, a collocation or even a single word. (Shreve / Diamond 2016: 150)

I would like to propose that the notion of UT be replaced by the concept of a hermeneutic halo to refer to the wide spectrum of factors involved in the processing of WUs. The hermeneutic halo incorporates the various factors involved in translators' choices, including their skills (writing skills), cognitive abilities (knowledge of the source and target languages, of the author and of the subject matter, as well as encyclopedic knowledge) and prejudices (including conceptions of the target readers' abilities, norms and culture, and any given bias).

While being to some extent based on, and fully compatible with the well-known notion of the hermeneutic circle, the hermeneutic halo is a distinctive entity. We could consider that the hermeneutical halo illustrates and yet also takes further the two main principles of the hermeneutic circle in the field of translation. First, it shows how the translator constantly enacts the move from personal experience and knowledge to textual perception: the various aspects of that personal input are clearly evident as among the factors contributing to the translation process. Second, it shows how the translator navigates between the micro and the macro level in order to obtain a full understanding of a text, insofar as the 'apprehension of the rest of the text' has a direct impact on the way each new working unit of translation is dealt with.

The translator's preconceptions may be illustrated by the following example. When asked to translate a short text about stress management, which I took from Anne Hunt's *Holistic Lifestyle*, some of my students made an interesting choice: they chose the feminine form to translate the word "roommate",[12] probably revealing some preconception about who is likely to be "chatty":

> Be more assertive. Don't take a backseat in your own life. Deal with problems head on, doing your best to anticipate and prevent them. If you've got an exam to study for and **your chatty roommate** just got home, say up front that you only have five minutes to talk. (Hunt 2010: 15)

The choice of the feminine in French (*ta collocataire*) has no impact on the general meaning of the text, but may encourage or maintain a vision of women as being very talkative. While translators focus on the SWU, the hermeneutic halo spontaneously begins to operate, activating cognitive, associative, emotional and deductive processes. The interaction between the SWU and the hermeneutic halo produces more or less elaborate germs of solutions, so to speak, solutions which depend on the difficulty and novelty of the task, of course, these 'germs' being intimations of solutions which will ultimately lead to the final translation choice. The production of a target TWU marks the provisional interpretation of the corresponding STU. Its genesis is both the cause and the consequence of the translator's general interpretation of the

[12] There is no gender neutral form in French to translate "*your* roommate".

text. It is hermeneutical in the sense that it relies on a dialectical interaction between the translator's personal experience and knowledge on the one hand, and, on the other, the original text. The interpretation of the text is a gradual process, which is complete (or at least reaches a temporary end) when the translation is finished. This dialectic, or hermeneutic interaction, may take place without translators actually noticing it. They may plod laboriously on their way, oscillating between the SWU and its corresponding TWU, and desperately look for more inspiration, or instantly find a solution in the target language.

But translation memories, which function without any hermeneutic halo, are trapped in considerations of the SWU alone. Like any translator who would only concentrate on the TWU, they run the risk of missing a link and introducing an inconsistency or a mistake. Because it includes personal aspects and emotions, the hermeneutic halo is partly subjective. Translators' emotions help them focus on key elements of the SWU. Moreover, they can be a measuring tool for the efficiency of a translation solution and contribute to appraising the quality of the WU produced. To illustrate the hermeneutic halo, I intend to use a model of the translation process that I proposed in a previous article. The halo would comprise both the resource pool and the hermeneutic filter.

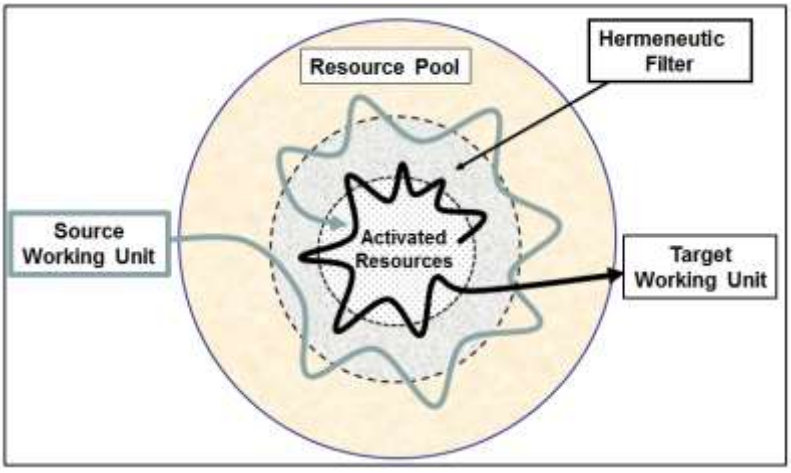


Figure 6: The translating process from a hermeneutic perspective. (Source: Fontanet 2017: 230)

For a given text, the WUs may differ in extension, depending on translators' habits and tendencies. Some may prefer to deal with rather short WUs and others with longer ones. Of course, the original text is the same for all translators.

4 Conclusion

Earlier scholars tended to confuse the translation unit with the unit of text being dealt with (WU). Later came the idea that the UT should not refer to the portion of text which is being processed at a particular time, but to the whole text and its intertextual ramifications. But while it seems useful to refer to working units of translation in both the source and the target texts while describing the translation process, the identification of the textual basis that is actually referred to is problematic. It is indeed possible to define a source working unit and a target working unit, but the various factors which contribute to the shift from the former to the latter cannot easily be encompassed in any form of "unit" because they are not all contained within the source text. A better way of integrating the various factors involved in the translation process is to refer to a hermeneutic halo resonating with the WUs. Each translation would be the result of the interaction between the WU and the hermeneutic halo, which embodies the evolutionary, complex and rich dimension of the translation process. The hermeneutic halo does not explain everything, but it at least explicitly indicates that the translation process is neither solely rational nor linear: it is a diffused, interactive occasion in which different types of dynamic processes (deductive, associative, emotional, imitative, and intuitive) combine with one another.

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