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Kafka and Borges: A Case of Plagiarism in Translation

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Abstract

By now, it is common knowledge among many Spanish literary translators that the translation of Franz Kafka's *Die Verwandlung* signed by Jorge Luis Borges was an act of plagiarism. However, this translation has not been assessed (as to my knowledge). In this article, I will critique that translation using Lance Hewson's model of translation criticism, since the plagiarism itself has been proved by other scholars.

In his book, *An Approach to Translation Criticism*, Lance Hewson shows the advantages and disadvantages of some models of translation criticism and proceeds to propose his own model. He discusses the models of Leuven-Zwart, Cees Koster, Amin Paul Frank, Katharina Reiss, and Antoine Berman among others. Then, he proposes a series of steps to carry out a critique of a literary translation. The first is to collect all possible and relevant information about the source text (ST), the author, and the translator. This first step is then divided into six parts:

1. It is necessary to obtain basic information on the ST, from its publication to the available editions. If possible, the reviewer should consult the edition used by the translator. Relevant information about the author and other works, if applicable, should also be included.
2. Consider whether this is the first time this ST has been translated, what other languages it has been translated into, and what reception it has had (e.g. is the translation in question completely new or is it based on a previous translation? If the latter, what was the reception of that other translation?).
3. If possible, the reviewer should obtain relevant information about the translator. As Antoine Berman (73-4 *apud* Hewson 25) has stated, it is important to know the translator's linguistic and cultural background, as well as his or her other translations and publications.
4. Interpretations are not only derived from the ST, but also from the surrounding context. This includes paratextual and peritextual elements of the ST and previous translations (i.e. the front and back covers, the introduction, bibliography, editors' notes, translators' introductory or footnotes, and so on). The analysis of the translation begins by building a picture of the framework that metaphorically surrounds both the ST and the TT.
5. If a critical apparatus exists, says Hewson, it can be of great help to the translation critic in constructing his or her framework of analysis. Reviews of early translations can be of great use, as can any text that gives an account of the reception of the ST or of previous translations. Theoretically, it is possible to determine the place of the work in the culture of departure as well as in the culture of arrival in order to create possible strategies of interpretation.
6. The last aspect of information gathering is related to an overview of the macrostructure of the texts. A first analysis will allow the reviewer to point out possible future discrepancies between the ST and the TT that may not be perceptible at the micro level. This analysis may include whether the work has been divided into chapters, as well as the structure of chapters and paragraphs, for example (Hewson).

The second step in the methodology is to develop a critical framework. The third step is the analysis at the *micro* and *meso* levels. Analysis at the macro level constitutes the fourth step. The macrostructural level is a postulate constructed by the critic; it is a projection of the results obtained in the analysis of the previous levels (micro and meso). At this stage, it is already possible to elaborate a hypothesis about the type of translation this is by analysing the various effects that have been recorded previously and assigning one of the four possible translation categories to the work: “divergent similarity”, “relative divergence”, “radical divergence” or “adaptation”. From this it must be determined whether it is an “adequate interpretation” or a “false interpretation”. For the fifth step, Hewson discusses the selection of a corpus. The verification (or refutation) of the hypothesis constitutes the sixth step in the form of conclusions.

I have chosen Hewson’s model to analyse the first of the three parts into which the text of Franz Kafka’s *Die Verwandlung* is divided, in a translation that Borges claimed as his own, under the title *La metamorfosis* (The Metamorphosis). Thus, the first step in such a model is to provide sufficient information about the author, the work, and the translator to establish a context for the critique. Due to the enormous number of interpretations and studies on this work by Kafka, I will limit myself to present the essential data to give priority to the analysis of the first part of the story.

Franz Kafka (1883–1924) wrote *Die Verwandlung* (known in Spanish as *La metamorfosis*) at the end of 1912 and was published in 1915. This story is about how Gregor Samsa faces an absurd fate when he wakes up one morning to discover he has been transformed into a “giant insect”. Gregor seems to have isolated himself from his family even before his physical transformation; his family, for their part, seem quite comfortable in allowing Gregor to support them all financially. While he works all the time, his sister takes violin lessons, his mother does not seem to do much, and his father sits in an armchair reading the newspaper. It is only when Gregor turns into an insect that they must take care of themselves again and, once more, they have to exclude Gregor. Gregor dies because of the abuse and neglect from his family. This story appears as a constant theme in Kafka’s work: the conflicts in the relationship between children and parents (particularly between the son and the father). This theme is present in his story “Das Urteil” (“The Trial”) of 1912 and in his *Brief an den Vater* (Letter to his Father) published in 1919, among other texts. Parallel to the theme of filial conflicts, the theme of power is also present. Kafka wrote from various angles about the individual in the face of power (the power of the family, of the state, of bosses, etc.).

Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) was one of the most important authors of the twentieth century in the Spanish language. His collections of short stories, essays and poems have been recognized as masterpieces by many critics, scholars, and readers around the world. His work as a literary translator, however, has not produced the same consensus. Borges published a Spanish translation of *Die Verwandlung* in 1945 and, for a long time, it was thought that he had made that translation and that it had been the first Spanish translation of that story. In the following, I will show that none of these assertions are true and then I will analyse the translation at the micro and meso levels proposed by Hewson. My thesis is that it is a translation that presents a pompous style in Spanish (absent in the German text), which eliminates important subtleties and creates exaggerations, unnecessary ambiguities or dramatic situations that do not appear in Kafka’s text. Furthermore, the Spanish register in the translation clearly belongs to a Spanish, not a Latin American translator. The consequences of those decisions (lexical, semantic, etc.) taken by the translator have affected the reception, exegesis, ponderation, and analysis of Kafka’s work in Spanish-speaking countries since – at least – 1945. As Cristina Pestaña states, the repercussions of Borges’s “translation” of what is probably the

most widely read story by one of the most widely read authors of the twentieth century are not few:

Certainly, Borges's translation is one of the best-known Spanish versions of Franz Kafka's work, both because of its antiquity and, above all, because of the figure Jorge Luis Borges represents within Hispanic literature. So, it is not difficult to understand that this translation has been considered by many later translators of this work, whether Spanish or American, as a 'guide-text' on which to rely for the development of their own translations into Spanish of *Die Verwandlung*.

(Pestaña)¹

Borges spoke on many occasions about Kafka and about his translation of *Die Verwandlung*. In an interview with Osvaldo Ferrari, the latter asks him: "Since this journey through France begins, then, Borges, and since it begins with Kafka as well, I would like us to talk about him. I don't know if you already have an idea about how you are going to present the subject there; naturally, you have written about Kafka many times...", to which Borges replies:

Yes, but I will do my best not to plagiarize myself (he laughs), since it is better to plagiarize others and not to plagiarize oneself. In any case, that is what I have always done, I prefer to plagiarize others [...] Kafka would become the great classic writer of this, our tormented century. And possibly he will be read in the future, and it will not be well known that he wrote at the beginning of the 20th century, that he was a contemporary of expressionism, that he was a contemporary of the First World War. All that can be forgotten: his work could be anonymous, and perhaps, in time, it will deserve to be so. That's the most a work can hope for, isn't it? Well, and that can be achieved by few books [...] Kafka's work is already part of the memory of humanity.

(Borges & Ferrari, Diálogos)

It is significant that the subject of plagiarism causes the Argentine author to laugh and then argue that the context of the Czech writer's work could be forgotten and even be anonymous. This disdain for plagiarism, possibly shielded by the fact that Borges knew himself to be a very important writer, is usually shared by many of his readers and scholars who have, in effect, attributed characteristics to this anonymous translation of *Die Verwandlung* that it does not have; they have celebrated it, or used it, as an example of a good translation, only because it had Borges's signature. The Argentinian's conclusion: "Kafka's work is already part of the memory of humanity" seems flattering, but it also shows a desire to see Kafka's work free of his authorship, as it happened with the author of the translation of *Die Verwandlung* that Borges passed off as his own for decades. It is also relevant that when talking about "his" translations, Borges mentions Leonor Acevedo, his mother, frequently:

Did I like translating poetry more than Kafka or Faulkner? Yes, much more. I translated Kafka and Faulkner because I was committed to doing so, not for pleasure. Translating a story from one language to another does not produce great satisfaction. Regarding prose translations, I remember an interesting case. My mother translated a book by D. H. Lawrence entitled *The Woman Who Rode Away* as *La mujer que se fue a caballo*, which is longer than in English but I think it is correct.

¹ All translations in this article have been made by me unless it is indicated otherwise.

(Borges, Problemas de la traducción)

Something similar happens in a conversation between Borges and Ernesto Sabato:

Sabato: “By the way, Borges, I remember something that caught my attention some time ago in your translation of Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*...”

Borges: (*Melancholic*) Well, my mother did it... I helped her.

Sabato: But it’s in her name. Besides, what I want to tell you is that I found two phrases that made me laugh because they were Borgesian, or so they seemed to me.
(Borges & Sabato, Diálogos)

It is difficult to know what Borges meant when he said that the translation of *Orlando* by Virginia Woolf was made by his mother, as it is tempting to think that this statement is a joke. On the other hand, Sabato finds “Borgesian” traits in that translation in an attempt to legitimize Borges as the author of that translation and to celebrate it. In his *Autobiographical Essay*, as in several interviews, Borges gives an account of the fundamental role his mother played not only in his work as a literary translator, since she was the one who made the translations that he signed as his own, but also as the one who fostered his literary career:

I inherited from my mother her quality of thinking the best of people and also her strong sense of friendship. My mother has always had a hospitable mind [...] After my father’s death [...] she tried her hand at translating William Saroyan’s *The Human Comedy* in order to compel herself to concentrate. The translation found its way into print, and she was honored for this by a society of Buenos Aires Armenians. Later on, she translated some of Hawthorne’s stories and one of Herbert Read’s books on art, and she also produced some of the translations of Melville, Virginia Woolf, and Faulkner that are considered mine. She has always been a companion to me—especially in later years, when I went blind—and an understanding and forgiving friend. For years, until recently, she handled all my secretarial work, answering letters, reading to me, taking down my dictation, and also traveling with me on many occasions both at home and abroad. It was she, though I never gave a thought to it at the time, who quietly and effectively fostered my literary career.

(Borges & Di Giovanni, *The Aleph and Other Stories 1933-1969*.
Together with Commentaries and an Autobiographical Essay)

It seems that, with time, Borges chose to recognize his mother’s authorship when speaking of the translations he signed, but this was not enough for such authorship to be confirmed in a professional manner (the translations attributed to him are still published to this day under his name). Regarding “his” translation of *Die Verwandlung* Borges says:

I translated the book of short stories whose first title is *The Transformation* and I never knew why everyone decided to call it *The Metamorphosis*. It’s nonsense, I don’t know who came up with the idea of translating that word from the simplest German. When I worked on the text, the editor insisted on leaving it that way because it had already become famous and was linked to Kafka.

(Borges, *Un sueño eterno*)

Beyond Borges's statements regarding his mother's participation as translator of the works he signed as his own, and which could be taken as humorous remarks by the author, there are textual marks that denote that whoever translated *Die Verwandlung* in the edition published in 1945 signed by Borges, was someone from Spain, not from Latin America. In 1998, Fernando Sorrentino had spoken about this in an article:

The simple reading of the text indicated two things to me: 1) the translation did not belong to Borges, and 2) it did not belong to any Argentine translator either: there was a significant number of features that made it look like it belonged to a Spanish translator, and perhaps a bit old-fashioned in taste. For example: a) Use of enclitic pronouns; b) Use of non-Argentine lexicon or turns of phrase; c) Use of the pronoun *le* as a direct object.

(Sorrentino)

These textual marks pointed out by Sorrentino went unnoticed by a great number of readers (experts or not) for more than fifty years. It seems unbelievable that no one, at least, suspected that Borges' translation did not "sound" Latin American. This silence, as well as the absence of a rigorous critique of the translation, could be explained more by the very fact of Borges's signature than by professional disinterest. That is to say, it seems that the mere fact that a text is signed by an important writer is enough to see in it characteristics and merits that it does not have. However, it is possible that someone, without much echo at the time, noted that the translation did not seem to have been made by Borges, because he ended up recognizing this at a certain point, as Sorrentino registers it:

J.L.B.: Well: that is due to the fact that I am not the author of the translation of that text. And a proof of that – besides my word – is that I know some German, I know that the work is entitled *Die Verwandlung* and not *Die Metamorphose*, and I know that it should have been translated as *The Transformation*. But, as the French translator preferred – perhaps saluting Ovid from afar – *La métamorphose*, here we slavishly did the same. That translation must be – it seems to me from some twists and turns of phrase – by some Spanish translator. What I did translate were the other stories by Kafka, which are in the same volume published by Losada publishing house. But, for the sake of simplicity – perhaps for purely typographical reasons –, it was preferred to attribute to me the translation of the whole volume, and an anonymous translation that may have been lying around was used.

(Borges, *apud* Sorrentino)

Borges acknowledges that he is not the author of the main translation of the book and that its authorship is unknown, years later this would be verified by Cristina Pestaña, the Spanish philologist who discovered the plagiarism with irrefutable evidence that we will detail shortly.

The second step proposed by Hewson to make a critique of a literary translation consists in creating a critical framework. It therefore seems important to me to present the testimonies that demonstrate Borges's plagiarism, because in this way the textual analysis of a part of the translation can be seen in its proper context. That is to say: a) it is not an analysis of something that Borges wrote and b) it inevitably questions the interpretations that have been made of this translation by considering it as part of the corpus of the Argentine author's translations.

Spanish philologist Cristina Pestaña discovered that the translation of *Die Verwandlung* signed by Borges matched a translation published twenty years earlier in *Revista de Occidente*. In 1999, Pestaña described how she found that the 1945 translation, published in Spain (supposedly for the first time in the peninsula) matched an earlier one, from 1925:

Moved by the interest aroused by the existence of, a priori, the first translation of *The Metamorphosis* in Spain, I went to the Fundación Ortega y Gasset in order to obtain the 1945 version. To my surprise, I noticed the existence of another translation of *Die Verwandlung*, older and dated 1925, a year after Franz Kafka's death. This translation was published in two parts in the magazine itself. The first of them in issue XVIII and the second part in issue XIX of the same magazine. The name of the translator does not appear in the magazine either; it simply states that the author of the text is Franz Kafka. Comparing the one and the other, that of 1945 and that of 1925, it is easy to reach the conclusion that both translations are identical and that, therefore, the translator is the same.

(Pestaña)

Regarding the identity of the translator, "for Don José Ortega, son of Ortega y Gasset and director of the *Revista de Occidente* and of the Editorial *Revista de Occidente* from 1943, the possible translator of the work was a woman: Margarita Nelken," says Pestaña. It is not possible to corroborate this information because the magazine's archives were destroyed during the Spanish Civil War. Once Pestaña compared the translation "by Borges" with that of 1925 (and, therefore, with that of 1945), "the results are more than surprising: both texts are absolutely identical, there is no difference whatsoever". Thus, Pestaña states: "Taking into account the absolute coincidence of the texts, it did not seem exaggerated to use the term 'plagiarism' to designate the translation signed by Borges". At the end of her article, Pestaña offers the following hypothesis:

The hypothesis that I ventured to launch from the above premises is the following: Surely, Borges, as a contributor to the *Revista* and still residing in Buenos Aires at that time periodically received this publication and possibly read the 1925 text, since, as we have said above, in 1924 he published an article of his in the *Revista de Occidente*. In 1936 the Spanish Civil War broke out; in 1938 the war was practically over. Borges, aware of the chaotic situation of the time, who knows of the loss of the archives and the end of the *Revista de Occidente*, takes advantage of the situation, because it is most likely that he jealously guarded that 1924 translation in Buenos Aires.

(Pestaña)

Although it is impossible to corroborate this hypothesis, it seems to me quite plausible. And, in any case, what I wanted was to establish the context of the translation in order to give way to its textual analysis. Let this conclusion from Pestaña's article be used to close this section:

Considered one of the greatest works of Universal Literature, *The Metamorphosis*, *Die Verwandlung* in German, is one of the works of the Czech writer Franz Kafka best known to Spanish-speaking readers. But what the general public ignores is that this little work was translated for the first time into Spanish in 1925, possibly by Margarita Nelken for *Revista de Occidente*, ahead of the first English and French translations of Kafka, and, most surprisingly, the writer Jorge Luis Borges never translated the work.

(Pestaña)

Borges only partially acknowledged this plagiarism; on the other hand, we may never know if it was Margarita Nelken who translated *Die Verwandlung* into Spanish, published anonymously in 1925.

To continue with the model proposed by Hewson for literary translation criticism, let us now consider a micro- and meso-level analysis of the translation of Franz Kafka's *Die Verwandlung* in question. For reasons of space, the present analysis is limited to the first of the three parts into which this story is divided. At times, the errors are of meaning; at others, the words chosen have no referent in the German text; and, finally, at other times the translator's decisions lack an aesthetic justification (e.g. phonetic images, puns, etc.). These errors have an impact on the voices of the characters (at times Gregor sounds banal in his remarks or the mother seems overly dramatic at key moments). This, in turn, affects the possible interpretations that can be derived from this translation by attributing registers, tones, etc. that are not present in the German text.

<p><u>Über dem Tisch</u>, auf dem eine auseinandergepackte Musterkollektion von Tuchwaren ausgebreitet war –Samsa war Reisender– hing das Bild, das er vor kurzem aus einer illustrierten Zeitschrift ausgeschnitten und in einem hübschen, vergoldeten Rahmen untergebracht hatte. Es stellte eine Dame dar, <u>die mit einem Pelzhut und einer Pelzboa versehen</u>, aufrecht dasaß und einen schweren Pelzmuff, in dem ihr ganzer Unterarm verschwunden war, dem Beschauer entgegenhob.</p>	<p><u>Presidiendo</u> la mesa, sobre la cual estaba esparcido un muestrario de paños —Samsa era viajante de comercio—, colgaba una estampa ha poco recortada de una revista ilustrada y puesta en un lindo marco dorado. Representaba esta estampa una señora tocada con un gorro de pieles, <u>envuelta en una boa también de pieles</u>, y que, muy erguida, esgrimía contra el espectador un amplio manguito, asimismo, de piel, dentro del cual desaparecía todo su antebrazo.</p>
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(Kafka, Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden)

(Kafka & Borges, La metamorfosis)

The use of the verb *presidir* at the beginning of the paragraph is an unnecessary addition, which manifests the ostentatious style of the translator. A recurrent style as we will see from more examples, and which is absent completely in Kafka's text. The idea of a lady *envuelta en una boa también de pieles* is not only a case of radical divergence and of false interpretation (Hewson's terminology), but it is also meaningless.

<p>Gregors Blick richtete sich dann zum Fenster, und das trübe Wetter –man hörte Regentropfen auf das <u>Fensterblech</u> aufschlagen– machte ihn ganz melancholisch.</p>	<p>Gregorio dirigió luego la vista hacia la ventana; el tiempo nublado (sentíase repiquetear en el <u>cinc del alféizar</u> las gotas de lluvia) <u>infundióle</u> una gran melancolía.</p>
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The *cinc del alféizar* has no referent in the German text; one could say “antepecho” (sill) or “panel” of the window. This is a case of addition and relative divergence. “Infundióle” reflects the Spanish from Spain of the translator.

<p>Wenn ich mich nicht wegen meiner Eltern zurückhielte, <u>ich hätte längst gekündigt</u>, ich wäre vor den Chef hin getreten und hätte ihm meine Meinung von Grund des Herzens aus gesagt. <u>Vom Pult hätte er fallen müssen!</u></p>	<p>Si no fuese por mis padres, <u>ya hace tiempo que me hubiese despedido</u>. Me hubiera presentado ante el jefe y, con toda mi alma, le habría manifestado mi modo de pensar. <u>¡Se cae del pupitre!</u> Que también tiene lo</p>
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Es ist auch eine sonderbare Art, sich auf das Pult zu setzen und von der Höhe herab mit dem Angestellten zu reden, der überdies wegen der Schwerhörigkeit des Chefs ganz nahe herantreten muß.

suyo eso de sentarse encima del pupitre para, desde aquella altura, hablar a los empleados, que, como él es sordo, han de acercársele mucho.

The sentence “ya hace tiempo que me hubiese despedido” creates an unnecessary ambiguity; it allows the interpretation that it would be the boss who would have fired Gregor. “Hace tiempo que habría renunciado”, for example, would leave no such ambiguity. On the other hand, “¿Se cae del pupitre!” is a case of radical divergence, since the verb in Spanish is in present tense and in German it is a conditional conjugation. The same tense should be followed in Spanish. It would have been better: “Se caería del escritorio de solo pensarlo/al escucharme, etc.” Pult means desk (escritorio) in this context; “pupitres” are the desks that small children use at elementary school.

Es war halb sieben Uhr, und die Zeiger gingen ruhig vorwärts, es war sogar halb vorüber, es näherte sich schon dreiviertel. Sollte der Wecker nicht geläutet haben? Man sah vom Bett aus, daß er auf vier Uhr richtig eingestellt war; gewiß hatte er auch geläutet. Ja, aber war es möglich, dieses möbelschütternde Läuten ruhig zu verschlafen?

Eran las seis y media, y las manecillas seguían avanzando tranquilamente. Es decir, ya era más. Las manecillas estaban casi en menos cuarto. ¿Es que no había sonado el despertador? Desde la cama podía verse que estaba puesto efectivamente en las cuatro; por lo tanto, tenía que haber sonado. Mas ¿era posible seguir durmiendo impertérrito a pesar de aquel sonido que conmovía hasta a los mismos muebles?

The adjective “impertérrito” is completely outside the narrative register. It is too formal a word. “Ruhig” could be translated in this context as “tranquilo” (quiet), “en calma” (calm), etc. In fact, in the same paragraph, the translator has translated “...die Zeiger gingen ruhig vorwärts” as “...las manecillas seguían avanzando *tranquilamente*.” (...the hands continued to move *quietly*). The sentence: “a pesar de aquel sonido que conmovía hasta a los mismos muebles” (despite that sound that moved even the furniture itself) results in a false interpretation, since “conmover” means “to move” in the sense of pitying someone. The idea, in the German text, is that one cannot sleep peacefully because of the noise made by the hands of the clock. One more thing: “verschlafen” is a complicated verb to translate. However, in this context it would mean “dormitar” (to doze). “Seguir durmiendo” means to keep on sleeping. This would account only for a divergent similarity in Hewson’s terminology.

Und selbst wenn er den Zug einholte, ein Donnerwetter des Chefs war nicht zu vermeiden, denn der Geschäftsdienst hatte beim Fünfuhrzug gewartet und die Meldung von seiner Versäumnis längst erstattet. Es war eine Kreatur des Chefs, ohne Rückgrat und Verstand.

Además, aunque alcanzara el tren, no por ello evitaría la filípica de su amo, pues el mozo del almacén, que habría bajado al tren de las cinco, debía de haber dado ya cuenta de su falta. Era el tal mozo una hechura del amo, sin dignidad ni consideración.

The verb “gewartet” (waited) has been translated as “bajado” (descended). “Ohne Rückgrat und Verstand” means “sin agallas ni cerebro” (no mind and no backbone) and it has been translated as “sin dignidad ni consideración”. Both examples reflect a false interpretation since they change the meaning of the narrative. In both examples, we talk about radical

divergences: to wait for a train and to descend from a train are two completely different actions. To have dignity and to have courage are also quite different things.

Das wäre aber äußerst peinlich und verdächtig, denn Gregor war während seines fünfjährigen Dienstes noch nicht einmal krank gewesen. Gewiß würde der Chef mit dem *Krankenkassenarzt* kommen, würde den Eltern wegen des faulen Sohnes Vorwürfe machen und alle Einwände durch den Hinweis auf den *Krankenkassenarzt* abschneiden, für den es ja überhaupt nur ganz gesunde, aber arbeitsscheue Menschen gibt.

Pero esto, además de ser muy penoso, infundiría sospecha, pues Gregorio, en los cinco años que llevaba empleado, no había estado malo ni una sola vez. Vendría de seguro el principal con el *médico del Montepío*. Se desataría en reproches, delante de los padres, respecto a la holgazanería del hijo y cortaría todas las objeciones alegando el dictamen del *galeno*, para quien todos los hombres están siempre sanos y sólo padecen de horror al trabajo.

Krankenkassenarzt refers to a health insurance physician. To avoid the cacophony of “Vendría de seguro el principal con el médico del seguro” (“Seguro” is repeated twice in this sentence) there could be a substitution of “de seguro” for “seguramente”, “sin duda”, and so on. Although this is not a mistake in translation, it makes reading less fluid in Spanish. On the other hand, Kafka repeats the same term (*Krankenkassenarzt*) in this sentence, and the translator has chosen to replace it with “galeno” (an informal way to refer to a doctor in Spain) without any justification. This decision affects the register of the text, because it takes away the formality and specificity of the term in German.

Wollte er eines einmal einknicken, so war es das erste, daß es sich streckte; und gelang es ihm endlich, mit diesem Bein das auszuführen, was er wollte, so arbeiteten inzwischen alle anderen, wie freigelassen, in höchster, schmerzlicher Aufregung.

Y el caso es que él quería incorporarse. Se estiraba; lograba por fin dominar una de sus patas; pero, mientras tanto, las demás proseguían su libre y dolorosa agitación.

In this paragraph there is an error of meaning (an adaptation according to Hewson’s terminology) in the translation: “Wollte er eines einmal einknicken” means “If he wanted to bend one of them [the legs]” and the translator has opted for: “And the fact is that he wanted to join in”. The rest of the sentence changes substantively with respect to the German text. This is clearly another case of radical divergence and of false interpretation, according to Hewson’s terminology, as it has been applied throughout this analysis.

Das größte Bedenken machte ihm die Rücksicht auf den lauten Krach, den es geben müßte und der wahrscheinlich hinter allen Türen wenn nicht Schrecken, so doch Besorgnisse erregen würde. Das mußte aber gewagt werden.

Únicamente hacía vacilar el temor al estruendo que esto habría de producir, y que sin duda daría origen, detrás de cada puerta, cuando no a un susto, por lo menos, a una inquietud. Mas no quedaba otro remedio que afrontar esta perspectiva.

The first part of this sentence is an example of the pompous tone or register that abounds in the text and it adds unnecessary information. (“Mas no quedaba otro remedio que afrontar esta perspectiva”). The change of tone is a change of register too. Kafka’s language is not pompous; actually, Kafka showed a great sense of humour in many of his texts (including Die

Verwandlung) by the means of a direct language. This tone conversion made by the translator affects how Kafka is received and appreciated by Spanish-language readers. These decisions make Kafka look as a pompous writer when he is not.

"Das ist jemand aus dem Geschäft«, sagte er sich und erstarrte fast, während seine Beinchen nur desto eiliger tanzten. Einen Augenblick blieb alles still.

“De seguro es alguien del almacén”—pensó Gregorio, quedando de pronto suspenso, mientras sus patas seguían danzando cada vez más rápidamente. Un punto, permaneció todo en silencio.

Augenblick means “momento” or “instante”, not “punto”. This reflects a relative divergence, since the reader can deduce that the translator’s intention is probably “momento”. Nevertheless, this ambiguity is unnecessary. Other similar errors can be seen a little further on:

Warum war nur Gregor dazu verurteilt, bei einer Firma zu dienen, wo man bei der kleinsten Versäumnis gleich den größten Verdacht faßte?

¿Por qué estaría Gregorio condenado a trabajar en una casa en la cual la más mínima ausencia despertaba inmediatamente las más trágicas sospechas?

Firma should be translated as “compañía” or “empresa”, not “casa” (house). This is, once more, a case of false interpretation. *Größten* means major, and it has no connotation of tragedy. Therefore, “trágicas” is an addition that makes for an adaptation. All these cases of adaptations, radical divergences and false interpretations are at the micro and meso levels, so they accumulate throughout the text and result in an unsatisfactory translation.

»Haben Sie auch nur ein Wort verstanden?«, fragte der Prokurist die Eltern, »er macht sich doch wohl nicht einen Narren aus uns?«

—¿Han entendido ustedes una sola palabra?—preguntaba éste a los padres—. ¿No será que se hace el loco?

What the attorney is asking can be translated as “¿No nos estará tomando el pelo?”, “¿No se estará burlando de nosotros?” (“Isn’t he just pulling our leg?”, “Isn’t he just making fun of us?”, etc. The translator’s decision: “¿No será que se hace el loco?” accounts for a relative divergence. What is important in this elocution is that the procurator points out Gregory’s mocking intention towards them, which is absent in the translation.

Er war noch mit jener schwierigen Bewegung beschäftigt und hatte nicht Zeit, auf anderes zu achten, da hörte er schon den Prokuristen ein lautes »Oh!« ausstoßen —es klang, wie wenn der Wind saust und nun sah er ihn auch, wie er, der der Nächste an der Türe war, die Hand gegen den offenen Mund drückte und langsam zurückwich, als vertreibe ihn eine unsichtbare, gleichmäßig fortwirkende Kraft. Die Mutter —sie stand hier trotz der Anwesenheit des Prokuristen mit von der Nacht her noch aufgelösten, hoch sich sträubenden Haaren— sah zuerst

Y aún estaba ocupado en llevar a cabo tan difícil movimiento, sin tiempo para pensar en otra cosa, cuando sintió un “¡oh!” del principal, que sonó como suena el mugido del viento, y vio a este señor, el más inmediato a la puerta, taparse la boca con la mano y retroceder lentamente, como impulsado mecánicamente por una fuerza invisible. La madre —que, a pesar de la presencia del principal estaba allí despeinada, con el pelo enredado en lo alto del cráneo— miró primero a Gregorio, juntando las manos, avanzó luego dos pasos hacia él...

mit gefalteten Händen den Vater an, ging dann zwei Schritte zu Gregor hin...

Three cases of false interpretation stand out in this fragment. The first is the translation of the verb *hören* as “sentir”, because it means “escuchar” (to listen). The second is the “mugido” (moo) of the wind. The verb that Kafka uses is *sausen* which, having the wind as its subject, it translates as “silbar” (whistle). The third false interpretation consists in affirming that the mother sees Gregor first, when it is Gregor’s father. (“Sah... *den Vater an*”).

Gerade an der gegenüberliegenden Wand hing eine *Photographie* Gregors aus seiner Militärzeit, die ihn als Leutnant darstellte, wie er, die Hand am Degen, sorglos lächelnd, Respekt für seine Haltung und Uniform verlangte.

En el lienzo de pared que daba justo frente a Gregorio, colgaba un *retrato* de éste, hecho durante su servicio militar, y que le representaba con uniforme de teniente, la mano puesta en la espada, sonriendo despreocupadamente, con un aire que parecía exigir respeto para su indumento y su actitud.

This case of radical divergence (i.e. the decision to use “retrato” [portrait] instead of “fotografía” [*Photographie*]) creates, again, unnecessary ambiguities. By 1914, the year in which Kafka wrote this story, the difference between a photograph and a painted portrait was very relevant, as it referred to a technology that was little used at the time.

Sie aber, Herr Prokurist, Sie haben einen besseren Überblick über die Verhältnisse als das sonstige Personal, ja sogar, ganz im Vertrauen gesagt, einen besseren Überblick als der Herr Chef selbst, der in seiner Eigenschaft als Unternehmer sich in seinem Urteil leicht zuungunsten eines Angestellten beirren läßt.

Pero usted, señor principal, usted está más enterado de lo que son las cosas que el resto del personal, incluso, y dicho sea en confianza, que el propio jefe, el cual, en su calidad de amo, se equivoca con frecuencia respecto de un empleado.

The error in this fragment is another case of adaptation and false interpretation. This has to do with the responsibility that Gregor places on the boss of both (of the attorney and of himself) with respect to the prejudices and opinions that he forms of his employees. The text literally reads: “el propio jefe [...] *puede ser fácilmente engañado* en perjuicio de un empleado”. (the boss himself [...] *can easily be misled* to the detriment of an employee). Gregor points out that the boss can be deceived and does not mention that this happens “frequently,” as it has been translated into Spanish.

Aber der Prokurist hatte sich schon bei den ersten Worten Gregors abgewendet, und nur über die zuckende Schulter hinweg sah er mit aufgeworfenen Lippen nach Gregor zurück. Und während Gregors Rede stand er keinen Augenblick still, sondern verzog sich, ohne Gregor aus den Augen zu lassen, gegen die Tür, aber ganz allmählich, als bestehe ein geheimes Verbot, das Zimmer zu verlassen.

Pero, desde las primeras palabras de Gregorio, el principal había dado media vuelta, y contemplaba a aquél por encima del hombro, convulsivamente agitado con una mueca de asco en los labios. Mientras Gregorio hablaba, no permaneció un momento tranquilo. Retiróse hacia la puerta sin quitarle ojo de encima, pero muy lentamente, como si una fuerza misteriosa le impidiese abandonar aquella habitación.

The German text does not state that the attorney general was “convulsivamente agitado” (convulsively agitated) nor does it speak of a “mueca de asco” (grimace of disgust). These additions result in adaptations and false interpretations. What he says is that the procurator only looked at Gregor over his shoulder and with raised lips. On the other hand, Kafka speaks of “una prohibición secreta” (a “secret prohibition”) of going out of the room; not of “una fuerza misteriosa” (a mysterious force). One more case of false interpretation.

In the following passage, there is an element that does not appear in the German text and that gives the story a dramatic tone that it does not have.

<p>Drüben hatte die Mutter trotz des <u>kühlen</u> Wetters ein Fenster aufgerissen, und <u>hinausgelehnt drückte sie ihr Gesicht weit außerhalb des Fensters in ihre Hände.</u></p>	<p>La madre, por su parte, a pesar del tiempo <u>desapacible</u>, había bajado el cristal de una de las ventanas y, <u>violentamente inclinada hacia afuera</u>, cubriase el rostro con las manos.</p>
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Another case of false interpretation can be found here when the translator chose to render “kühl” as “desapacible”. “Kühl” means “frío” o “fresco” (cool). There is also the addition of “violentamente inclinada” (violently tilted). This is an adaptation used to create a dramatic effect that is absent in the German text and alters the directness of Kafka’s style (as mentioned before). What the text literally says is: “Allí, la madre había abierto una ventana a pesar del frío y, al asomarse, presionó la cara contra sus manos por fuera de la ventana” (There, the mother had opened a window despite the cold and, leaning out, pressed her face against her hands on the outside of the window).

<p>Wenn sich Gregor nur hätte umdrehen dürfen, er wäre gleich in seinem Zimmer gewesen, aber er fürchtete sich, den Vater durch die zeitraubende Umdrehung ungeduldig zu machen, und jeden Augenblick drohte ihm doch von dem <u>Stock</u> in des Vaters Hand der <u>tödliche Schlag</u> auf <u>den Rücken</u> oder auf den Kopf.</p>	<p>¡Si siquiera hubiera podido volverse! en un dos por tres se hubiese encontrado en su cuarto. Pero temía, con su lentitud en dar la vuelta, impacientar al padre cuyo bastón <u>erguido</u> amenazaba <u>desplomarle o abrirle la cabeza.</u></p>
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The translator added the adjective “erguido” (upright) to “bastón” (“Stock” in German and “stick” in English) creating another false interpretation. At the same time, there is an omission regarding “den Rücken” (the back). Some reference about it as “sobre la espalda” or “de espaldas” would be expected. On the other hand, the blow that Gregor fears to receive from his father is a mortal blow (*tödliche Schlag*); he does not only fear that his father will throw him down but that he will also split his head open. This is a case of omission and of relative divergence. Finally, we have one more case of false interpretation and another of relative divergence which creates, one more time, an unnecessary ambiguity:

<p>Vielmehr trieb er, als gäbe es kein Hindernis, Gregor jetzt unter <u>besonderem Lärm</u> vorwärts; es klang schon hinter Gregor gar nicht mehr wie die Stimme bloß eines einzigen Vaters; <u>nun gab es wirklich keinen Spaß mehr</u>, und Gregor drängte sich –geschehe was wolle– in die Tür.</p>	<p>Como si no existiese para esto ningún impedimento, empujaba, pues, a Gregorio con <u>estrépito creciente</u>. Gregorio sentía tras de sí una voz que parecía imposible fuese la de su padre. <u>¡Cualquiera se andaba con bromas!</u> Gregorio —pasase lo que pasase— se apretujó en el marco de la puerta.</p>
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The noise that the father uses to lead Gregor to his room is a “ruido particular” (particular noise) (*besonderem Lärm*), not an “estrépito creciente” (increasing clamor). Then there is a case of adaptation (“¡Cualquiera se andaba por bromas!”) (Anyone would play jokes!), which is completely out of the register of the text and that takes away the intention of the narrative voice, since it does not justify the meaning and tone. The German text says: “Now, really, it was no longer a joke”.

As we have seen after this micro- and meso-level analysis of the first part of the anonymous Spanish translation of *Die Verwandlung* published in 1925, the style of the German text (a sober, direct style with very precise descriptions) becomes pompous in Spanish. Likewise, we have shown ambiguities in the Spanish text that are not intentional in the German text. Moreover, they could have been avoided and, in turn, contribute to a dramatism that is also absent in Kafka’s text.

To use the vocabulary proposed by Hewson, it seems to me that this translation presents a problem of “false interpretation”. There are cases of “relative divergence”, “adaptations”, and “radical divergence”, as we have seen. Although the translation preserves the essentials of the plot of Kafka’s story, the tone and register are changed; and these, as in any literary text, are fundamental, since they are part of the expression of the work.

By way of conclusion – the last step in Hewson’s method to elaborate a critique of a literary translation – it seems to me that the analysis presented here corroborates the hypothesis put forward in the third step: on the one hand, the fact that the authorship of this translation has been attributed to Jorge Luis Borges affects our way of reading and analysing it and that, in itself, has important effects on the interpretation of Kafka’s tale. On the other hand, the micro and meso level decisions made by the translator also affect in an important way our perception of the Kafkaesque tale by attributing to it the characteristics already mentioned. The translation influences not only literary studies with an interest in the work of Kafka, Borges, or both, but also discursive or rhetorical genre studies, for example. Finally, the fact that Borges gave very little importance to his own plagiarism for many years contributed to our not knowing who made this translation. Unfortunately, his or her name will very likely remain in oblivion.

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