The concept of "meaning" in literary translation from a Wittgensteinian Perspective

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Abstract

The concepts of *meaning, family resemblance, language games* and *way of life* that Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein developed in his book *Philosophische Untersuchungen* have been widely analysed and debated in different disciplines (i.e. Philosophy, Linguistics, Psychology, etc.). In this article, I aim to summarize them and link them to their relevance when translating literary texts. I believe that translating a literary text implies, first, an interpretation as well as comprehension of the text by the translator. In doing so, their translation cannot be a mere conveyance of words from one language to another, but of a full interpretation and search of effects.

Keywords: Wittgenstein – translation – interpretation – creativity

The purpose of this article is to present the most relevant concepts of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophische Untersuchungen* and how they are linked to some recurrent processes and problems in literary translation. I am interested in a vision that transcends the signaling of the usual conflicts in translation (e.g. tracing, localization, faithfulness, etc.) and focuses on literary translation more as a creative act than a technical process.

The link between some concepts derived from Wittgenstein's philosophy and translation studies is not new. Maria Tymoczko, for example, uses the Austrian philosopher's concept of "family resemblance"[1] in her book *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators* to present a way of defining the concept of translation.

> As in the case of language (itself a concept upon which translation rests, we must remember) discussed by Wittgenstein, there is "no one thing in common" that entails the use of the world's various words for all the exemplars of the category or concept translation [...] Open concepts or categories, such as Wittgenstein proposes for language and such as I am proposing for translation, are common in human culture – kinship relations and number and tool being among the most well known and most notorious of this type of concept.
>
> (Tymoczko)

When speaking of the processes of literary translation, Tymoczko reminds us that the meaning of the source text and that of the target text change by necessity. "Because meaning is both language-specific and conditioned by contextual relevance, translations and their source texts have different meanings" (Tymoczko 2014). When speaking about meaning in his book *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, Wittgenstein refuted (at least) three common principles on that subject:

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[1] James Holmes also uses this concept of "family airs" to assert that the very nature of translation is a common feature among different translations, although this "something" is difficult to specify (Holmes 1988 24 ff.).

1) Words get their meaning by representing objects. Wittgenstein explored this postulate in depth in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. From that book, one can conclude that this relation was not possible in all subjects of understanding (e.g. religion, ethics, and aesthetics).
2) Words obtain their meaning thanks to their link with ideas. The meaning of a word is obtained by following a thread of ideas and mental referents. For Wittgenstein, however, the meaning of words depends on a social contract.
3) All words have an essence; hence they have a meaning. From a thorough analysis one should be able to find the meaning of a word through its essence and observe how that character is imposed in the different contexts in which that word is used; this is another postulate, and a very pertinent one, when speaking of literary translation, which Wittgenstein proves to be false in this book.

We think of understanding language as a mental process that attends to our linguistic activities. That is, when I speak, listen or read, something happens in my mind that constitutes "grasping the meaning" of the signs used; there is a process of decoding language. This idea is practically taken for granted in a translation process: I know the meaning of some word because I can decode it and look up its equivalence[2] in another language. Wittgenstein, however, claims that understanding language is not a process but a skill. "When do we understand a sentence? – When we have pronounced it completely? Or while we are pronouncing it?".[3] To illustrate this thesis, he gives the example of "knowing how to play chess". If knowing how to play chess were a process, then someone could be asked, "When do you know how to play chess, all the time or only while moving a piece?" The lack of logic of these questions shows us that it is a mistake to think of understanding or knowledge as an event or a series of events in the mind. In his view, understanding or knowing something are rather capacities, practical abilities that we have. "The comprehension of the language seems like [...] being able to multiply" (§11).

In his book *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, Wittgenstein claims that there is not one "logic of language" but many, since language does not have a single essence. In his view, language is a huge collection of different practices, each with its own logic. Meaning does not consist in the denotative relation between words and things or in an image relation between propositions and facts. In reality, the meaning of an expression is its use within the multiplicity of practices that make up a language. Moreover, language is not something autonomous and finished that can be analysed without considering other factors, since language is intimately linked to all human activities and behaviours. Consequently, our different uses of language acquire content and meaning from our daily actions, our work, our interactions with other human beings, and with the world we inhabit. Language is part of what he calls a "way of life".

According to the Austrian philosopher, instead of making theories to solve philosophical or language problems, we must undo those problems by removing the misunderstandings that cause them. In his works subsequent to the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein proposed a series of considerations that can help to clarify what the philosophical problem is in each particular case and thus seek the best way to solve it. These considerations seem to me to be more than pertinent to approach and solve several (if not all) of the problems that arise during a literary translation process. Establishing rules (let alone methods) that must always be observed in a translation assumes that all texts in a language represent a single use of language

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[2] I adhere here to the definition of "equivalence" provided by A. Rędzioch-Korkuz: "Equivalence is a relation between two objects: the source and the target text; there is some kind of transfer or replacement that leads to its establishment; this transfer operates on various levels and ranks […] equivalence may be measured in terms of some extralinguistic contexts, e.g. the principle of similar effect or culture" (Rędzioch-Korkuz, 2023).

[3] „Wann verstehen wir den Satz? - Wenn wir ihn ganz ausgesprochen haben? Oder während wir ihn aussprechen?" (Wittgenstein 1984 §12). All translations from German are mine unless otherwise stated.

whose "essence" or "underlying logic" only needs to be unveiled in the complicated moments of a translation.

In order to solve the problems of language, Wittgenstein distinguishes between a "surface grammar" and a "deep grammar". But in speaking of "grammar," Wittgenstein is not referring to the common usage we give to it (e.g. generative grammar, structuralist grammar etc.) but to the logic of a given linguistic activity. Since there are many kinds of linguistic activities, there are also many ways in which the grammar of language works.

> One could distinguish a 'surface grammar' from a 'deep grammar' in the use of a word. That which immediately impresses itself on us in the use of a word is its mode of use in the sentence structure, that part of its use – one could say – which one can grasp with the ear. – And now compare the deep grammar, of the word "to mean" for instance, with what its surface grammar would lead us to suppose. No wonder, if one finds it difficult to know.

> (Wittgenstein 664)[4]

It is "difficult to know" because "to mean" means, from a superficial grammar, that someone has the desire to enunciate something, nothing more. We do not observe the intention and use of that which is enunciated at a given moment. This happens frequently in literary translation. The translator must prioritize the deep grammar of the words and propositions of the source text in order to achieve in the target text, a similar creation of the evocations, effects etc. interpreted from the source text.

One of the conclusions of the *Philosophische Untersuchungen* is that philosophy should not seek to explain but to *describe* something, because by explaining we only create more and more theories (which, in turn, lead us to add more and more information). By describing, instead, we seek to organize language in a way that is adequate to make ourselves understood through what we already know about language and thought. That is, when we encounter a translation problem, and look for the solution in surface grammar, we will hardly go beyond the dictionary. However, in deep grammar there is a multiplicity of possibilities to describe what we understand in the source text and that we do not necessarily have to translate word for word. The idea that when translating it is not necessary to look for an equivalence of words in two languages is already in common use today among professional translators, as Mark Polizzotti states:

> Throughout history, some of the most celebrated and beautifully realized translations have been successful precisely because the personality of the translator shone through and made itself felt. Recreating someone else's text [...] is less a matter of following the original line by line–replacing each word with its nearest equivalent as if they were carpet tiles–than of conveying what's between those lines, and this takes a certain amount of interpretation, not to say idiosyncrasy.

> (Polizzotti)

This, of course, does not exempt us from pointing out (and correcting) translation errors that are based on misinterpretations of meaning, whether due to a lack of understanding of the ST or for some other reason. Let's look at an example: the first stanza of an English translation of

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[4]„Man könnte im Gebrauch eines Worts eine ,Oberflächengrammatik' von einer ,Tiefengrammatik' unterscheiden. Das, was sich uns am Gebrauch eines Worts unmittelbar einprägt, ist seine Verwendungsweise im *Satzbau*, der Teil seines Gebrauches –könnte man sagen–den man mit dem Ohr erfassen kann. –Und nun vergleiche die Tiefengrammatik, des Wortes »meinen« etwa, mit dem, was seine Oberflächengrammatik uns würde vermuten lassen. Kein Wunder, wenn man es schwer findet, sich auszukennen" (§664).

the well-known poem by Federico García Lorca, "Romance sonámbulo" (Sleepwalking Ballad):

Verde que te quiero verde.	Green, how I desire you, green.
Verde viento. Verdes ramas.	Green wind. Green branches.
El barco sobre la mar	The ship upon the sea
y el caballo en la montaña.	And the horse in the mountains.
Con la sombra en la cintura	With the shade wrapped about her waist
ella sueña en su baranda,	she dreams on her balcony,
verde carne, pelo verde,	green flesh, a green coat,
con ojos de fría plata.	With eyes of cold silver.
Verde que te quiero verde.	Green, how I desire you, green.
Bajo la luna gitana,	Beneath the gypsy's moon,
las cosas le están mirando	all green things follow her
y ella no puede mirarlas (Lorca, s.f.).	yet she sees them not (Horton, 2009)

The translator adds a vocative comma in the first line and makes the word "green" (verde) the interlocutor of the first line, which does not happen in Spanish. This change is not minor, since the word "green" plays a fundamental role in the whole poem. The ambiguity generated in Spanish about what is the referent of "green" in this first line could be maintained in English: (e.g. Green I really want you green"; "Green that I want you green", "Green, I want you green", etc.). Further on, in the seventh line, the translator translates "pelo" (hair) as "coat" (animal's fur), which is inaccurate. The same happens with "la luna gitana," ("the gypsy moon") which is translated as "the gypsy's moon" and "las cosas le están mirando" ("things are looking at her") as "all things follow her", also quite inaccurate. One meaning of the Oxford English Dictionary recognizes "follow" as "pay close attention to", which would give a close equivalence to the verb "mirar" of the source text, but the translator does not repeat it. "Ella no puede mirarlas" means that she cannot look at them [the things]. He could have done so to be consistent in his choice ("yet she follows them not"), instead he chooses: "yet she sees them not".

Finally, and in my opinion most importantly, the translator desists from seeking any rhythm or musicality in his translation. Lorca's poem is written in octosyllabic verse, one of the most common measures in Spanish poetry particularly in Lorca's poetry. We know that English verse is measured in other units (i.e. foot) and follows other conventions. However, the translator could have made a greater effort to create some kind of rhythm or meter (or both) to invite his readers to follow a certain musicality. A more successful literary translation –or interpretation– does not leave out rhythm; especially in poetry, where musicality is as or even more important than the meaning of words.

At the beginning of the *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, Wittgenstein quotes, in Latin, a fragment from the *Confessions* of St. Augustine in which he talks about how he learned language.

When they [my elders] named anything, and as they spoke turned towards it, I saw and remembered that they called what they would point out by the name they uttered. And that they meant this thing and no other was plain from the motion of their body, the natural language, as it were, of all nations, expressed by the countenance, glances of the eye, gestures of the limbs, and tones of the voice, indicating the affections of the mind, as it pursues, possesses, rejects, or shuns. And thus, by constantly hearing words, as they occurred in various sentences, I collected

gradually for what they stood; and having broken in my mouth to these signs, I thereby gave utterance to my will[5].

With this quotation, Wittgenstein seeks to show that this way of looking at the learning and use of language is very old and almost universal. However, it leads us to investigate language in the wrong way, to ask questions about the essence of language, of propositions, of thought. Wittgenstein responds to Augustine's text in order to begin his exploration of the concept of "meaning" as follows:

> In these words, it seems to me, we get a certain picture of the nature of human language. Namely this: The words of language name objects-sentences are compounds of such namings. -In this picture of language we find the roots of the idea: every word has a meaning. This meaning is assigned to the word. It is the object for which the word stands (1977 [1953])[6].

Wittgenstein points out that there is no such "essence" of language with universal meanings but *uses* of language, and it is these uses that give meaning to words and propositions.

> Now, however, it can seem as if there is something like a final analysis of our linguistic forms, that is, a completely dissected form of expression. That is, as if our common forms of expression, essentially, were still unanalysed; as if something were hidden in them, which is to be brought to light. If this is done, then the expression is completely clarified and our task is solved.
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> (§91)[7]

He alludes here to over-interpretation – to the idea that a word or proposition means something more than what it says or that the meaning of the word is another word in another language. This view is compatible with the way we tend to see the language of a literary text we want to translate. We see the text as if it were an essence whose meanings are evident from the mere use of the words chosen by the writer. That is, as if in solving a translation problem, the solution was to be found in the "authorized" meaning of a word and not in the possibilities conferred by the context itself. We look for a solution to a problem (e.g. how to translate such a word or phrase) through objects (dictionaries, encyclopedias, etc.) that most of the time do not contemplate the context to which the word or phrase I want to translate belongs. In fact, finding a certain meaning of a word in a dictionary does not guarantee a good translation. It is not even a sign of having understood the text.

A translation reflects, as a matter of principle, the understanding of the translated text. Hence, a translation (like a literary text) can always be "improved" and each choice of words implies a commitment on the part of the translator. The use of words is thus key to finding their meaning(s). We use language to describe, to inform, to deny, to speculate, to give orders, to

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[5] St. Augustin, *Confessions*, Book I: 18. Wittgenstein quotes Augustin directly in Latin. I quote the English translation by Edward Bouverie, available in *Project Gutenberg*. https://gutenberg.org/files/3296/3296-h/3296-h.htm.

[6] „In diesen Worten erhalten wir, so scheint es mir, ein bestimmtes Bild von dem Wesen der menschlichen Sprache. Nämlich dieses: Die Wörter der Sprache benennen Gegenstände–Sätze sind Verbindungen von solchen Benennungen. –In diesem Bild von der Sprache finden wir die Wurzeln der Idee: Jedes Wort hat eine Bedeutung. Diese Bedeutung ist dem Wort zugeordnet. Sie ist der Gegenstand, für welchen das Wort steht." (§1).

[7] „Nun aber kann es den Anschein gewinnen, als gäbe es so etwas wie *eine* letzte Analyse unserer Sprachformen, also eine vollkommen zerlegte Form des Ausdrucks. D. h.: als seien unsere gebräuchlichen Ausdrucksformen, wesentlich, noch unanalysiert; als sei in ihnen etwas verborgen, was ans Licht zu befördern ist. Ist dies geschehen, so sei der Ausdruck damit vollkommen geklärt und unsre Aufgabe gelöst." (§91).

translate, and so on. Wittgenstein calls these activities "language games."[8] These can be defined as the different activities we carry out involving different uses of language.

> –There are innumerable such types: innumerable different ways of using everything that we call "signs", "words", "sentences". And this diversity is nothing fixed, given once and for all; but new types of language, new language games, as we can say, arise and others become obsolete and are forgotten [...] The word "language game" should emphasize here that the speaking of language is a part of an activity, or a form of life (Wittgenstein 1997 §23)[9].

It is important to note that the term "game" in reference to language has no connotation of frivolity or unimportance. Wittgenstein himself explains his reasons for using this notion:

> For example, consider the processes we call "games." I mean board games, card games, ball games, fighting games, etc. What is common to all these? -Don't say, "They must have something in common, or they wouldn't be called 'games'"-but see if they all have something in common. -Because if you look at them, you will not see something common to all of them, but you will see similarities, affinities, and quite a number of them (§66)[10].

And it is precisely this analysis that makes it possible to introduce one of the most useful concepts of these disquisitions: "I cannot better characterize these resemblances than by the word 'family resemblances'; for thus the various resemblances which exist between the members of a family overlap and intersect: Growth, facial features, eye colour, gait, temperament, etc., etc. -And I will say: the 'games' form a family" (§67)[11]. To understand the different functions of language we must first recognize its variety and multiplicity.

> Instead of stating something that is common to all that we call language, I say that there is not one thing at all common to these phenomena, which is why we use the same word for all of them, -but they are related to each other in many different ways. And because of this relationship, or these relationships, we call them all "languages" (Wittgenstein 1997 §65)[12].

It is now clearer why the concept of "meaning" proposed In the *Tractatus* is insufficient; there, Wittgenstein asserted that the meaning of a word is the object it denotes (a view, as we have

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[8] See §§ 23, 27, 280, 288 and 654 for examples of the uses mentioned above.

[9] „–Es gibt *unzählige* solcher Arten: unzählige verschiedene Arten der Verwendung alles dessen, was wir »Zeichen«, »Worte«, »Sätze«, nennen. Und diese Mannigfaltigkeit ist nichts Festes, ein für allemal Gegebenes; sondern neue Typen der Sprache, neue Sprachspiele, wie wir sagen können, entstehen und andre veralten und werden vergessen [...] Das Wort »Sprach*spiel*« soll hier hervorheben, daß das Sprechen der Sprache ein Teil ist einer Tätigkeit, oder einer Lebensform." (§23).

[10] „Betrachte z.B. einmal die Vorgänge, die wir »Spiele« nennen. Ich meine Brettspiele, Kartenspiele, Ballspiel, Kampfspiele, usw. Was ist allen diesen gemeinsam?–Sag nicht: »Es *muß* ihnen etwas gemeinsam sein, sonst hießen sie nicht ›Spiele‹« – sondern *schau*, ob ihnen allen etwas gemeinsam ist. –Denn wenn du sie anschaust, wirst du zwar nicht etwas sehen, was *allen* gemeinsam wäre, aber du wirst Ähnlichkeiten, Verwandtschaften, sehen, und zwar eine ganze Reihe." (§66).

[11] „Ich kann diese Ähnlichkeiten nicht besser charakterisieren als durch das Wort »Familienähnlichkeiten«; denn so übergreifen und kreuzen sich die verschiedenen Ähnlichkeiten, die zwischen den Gliedern einer Familie bestehen: Wuchs, Gesichtszüge, Augenfarbe, Gang, Temperament, etc. etc. –Und ich werde sagen: die ›Spiele‹ bilden eine Familie." (§67).

[12] „Statt etwas anzugeben, was allem, was wir Sprache nennen, gemeinsam ist, sage ich, es ist diesen Erscheinungen gar nicht eines gemeinsam, weswegen wir für alle das gleiche Wort verwenden, –sondern sie sind miteinander in vielen verschiedenen Weisen verwandt. Und dieser Verwandtschaft, oder dieser Verwandtschaften wegen nennen wir sie alle »Sprachen«". (§65).

already mentioned, very common in the translation processes). In the *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, he asserts that the meaning of an expression is the use that can be made of it in any of the various possible language games: „Die Bedeutung eines Wortes ist sein Gebrauch in der Sprache." ["The meaning of a word is its use in language."] (Wittgenstein 1997 §43).

At the beginning of the *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, through the quotation from St. Augustine, Wittgenstein shows that the denotative theory that he himself had proposed in the *Tractatus* is erroneous. The argument, in general terms, is as follows: if the meaning of words consisted in a denotative link to objects, then that link would have to be able to be established by means of an ostensive definition, i.e. by pointing to an object and pronouncing its name. However, the act of pointing to the object cannot be the foundation by which we learn language, since in order to understand that a pointed object is being named it is necessary to have mastery of at least one part of language: the language game that consists of naming objects.

Let us imagine that someone teaches a little girl that that object over there is called a chair; she points to the object and pronounces the word "chair". How could the child know beforehand that the word "chair" refers to the object itself and not, for example, to the colour of the object, its function, or the material it is made of? This relationship (pointing to an object and linking it to a meaning) is similarly reproduced in translation practice when we say that the meaning of a word is another word in another language. What is considered an axiom is, in reality, an automatic process that is often limited to a superficial grammatical search. Even when we say, for example, that "chair", "Stuhl" and "chaise" are three signifiers of the same meaning, we have not moved from the superficial character of the word. To attend to the meaning of a word we must consider its use, the context in which it is uttered, the intention, etc. as well as who interprets the word and under what conditions. Someone might think that it is impossible to consider all this when looking for the meaning of a word, but, as Wittgenstein himself points out, these considerations are relevant when we are faced with a problem of comprehension and not in every sentence we translate. In the case of a literary translation, the problem may not be the lack of knowledge of a word equivalent to another in two or more languages, but the tone, the sonority, the cultural implications, etc.

Wittgenstein deliberately does not use a "theory of meaning as use" in the *Philosophische Untersuchungen*. This is because the uses of language utterances are as many as the language games in which they occur and, consequently, no theory could cover all that variety. Mastery of a language, according to these postulates, consists in having the ability to use and recognize these uses in the many language games to which they belong. It is important to remember that, for Wittgenstein, understanding is neither a state of mind nor a process, as we mentioned earlier. "Einen Satz verstehen, heißt, eine Sprache verstehen. Eine Sprache verstehen, heißt, eine Technik beherrschen." ["To understand a sentence is to understand a language. Understanding a language means mastering a technique."] (Wittgenstein 1997 §199). This technique consists of following the rules of use of expressions according to the language set to which they belong. In a parallelism with translation processes, attending to the meaning of a word or expression according to contexts that are foreign to the use in the text we are translating is of little use since it creates confusion. Hence, a literary translator capable of knowing in depth the literature of an era, the works of an author, a genre, etc. will have a greater number of resources to recognize the language games and the uses of the words and expressions used in a literary work. I am not speaking here only of linguistic resources but of recognition of the uses of language too; even more: uses of language in certain circumstances. The constant reading and analysis of a literary work or group of literary works will improve our comprehension technique when translating, because our ability to interpret such literary texts will be increasingly greater. A good literary translation will be the one that manages to evoke in a reading audience the effects and images (visual, auditory, synaesthetic, etc.) perceived by

the translator; not the one that achieves a greater "fidelity" to the words of the source text. Although in principle there is no better perception of someone when reading a literary text, the translator cannot help but to interpret the text and transmit this interpretation through their translation. To my mind, the relationships between literary works, other arts and other references are what sustain the literary work; not the language in which it is written. This must be considered at all times when speaking of a literary translation. Marie Vrinat-Nikolov states:

> More than by language, it seems to me that literary forms are "influenced" (rather than influences, let's talk about mutual contacts of each other) by the crossbreeding and hybridization that have taken place, not only between literatures, but also between literature and other arts (painting, music), and this, to a great extent, through translation. It is this connection between cultures that proves fertile for literatures[13].

Of course, as Maria Tymoczko points out, the translator cannot guess the possible interpretations of potential readers, but this does not prevent us from recognizing in translation a particular reading process, whose interpretation may come close to a recreation of the multiple effects and images of the source text.

It goes without saying that authors and translators cannot ever fully anticipate or control readers' responses, and thus it follows that authors and translators cannot circumscribe the meaning of their own textual production. Nor does a text mean the same thing to author and translator or to any two readers. A text elicits different responses depending on the individual reader's (or hearer's) experience, situated knowledge, and affective life[14], and the meaning of the text is configured differently as a result.

A translator does not transfer the meanings derived from a text, since that would be an impossible task. "Instead of actually attempting to transfer meaning, a translator copes with the surplus of meaning in a text by making choices about meaning, prioritizing those meanings, and creating a heuristic for constructing the translated text so as to perform the meanings desired" (2007).

For Wittgenstein, understanding something is not deciphering an image to which the word or expression we want to understand is related, since understanding is not an experience akin to observing a form or feeling pain, for example[15]. This does not imply that in understanding something there are no simultaneous sensory experiences; something unthinkable, above all, when reading literary works (a word can evoke an image, a memory, a pleasant or unpleasant experience, another literary work, etc.) but these emotions do not constitute either the meaning of the word or our understanding of it. For Wittgenstein, this has two important implications: 1) one does not learn the meaning of words from the mental association between a word and a specific experience, object or situation; and 2) that we confer a meaning to a certain word or expression on several occasions does not mean that we will have the same experience on all of them, nor that our mental process will be identical on each occasion. Wittgenstein exemplifies the above in the following way. Let us think of pain. One

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[13] « Plus que par la langue, il me semble que les formes littéraires sont 'influencées' (plutôt que d'influence, parlons de contacts mutuels) par le métissage et l'hybridation qu'ont opérés, non seulement les dialogues entre les littératures, mais aussi entre littérature et autres arts (peinture, musique), et ce, en grande partie par la traduction. C'est cette mise en rapport entre les cultures qui se révèle fécondante pour les littératures. » (Vrinat-Nikolov, 2010).

[14] Tymoczko refers to the concept of "situated knowledge", something that seems to me to be consistent with what Wittgenstein proposes regarding knowing something and understanding it, since knowledge always comes from one or several points of view; there is no knowledge in a pure state. All knowledge belongs to a context and a time; to certain values, cultures and beliefs.

[15] See Wittgenstein, 1997: §140, §154, §§217-8.

can feel pain and say whether it lasts for a long or short time, that it is localized in the head or in the back, that it is intense or mild, etc., but we cannot say any of these things when speaking of the understanding of a word or expression. We do not say that we understand a word for a short time, in the back, or with little intensity, for example. We either understand it or we do not. In fact, different people associate different images or have different reactions to the same word or expression; therefore, the meaning of such an expression cannot consist in these mental accompaniments (images, evocations, etc.) nor can it consist in the actual understanding of the word or expression (cf. §§ 137-8). Moreover: according to Wittgenstein, in order to understand an utterance, it is not enough that a given mental process exists. That is, it is not enough for me to perform a mental process in order to "grasp" the meaning of a word because the meaning, as we have already mentioned above, depends on the use of the word and also on certain social rules and conventions. In sum: we cannot extract the meaning of a word solely from the mental associations it evokes.

To understand, therefore, is to know how to do something; in the case of language, to understand language means *to know how to use it*. Hence, understanding a second language does not only mean knowing its equivalences in a native language, but knowing how to use the language to best fulfil the strategy that constitutes the literary text[16]. The translator acts here as another interpreter of the text who will hardly be able to decode and understand all the strategies of the text. Nevertheless, they will have to make something out of them in order to translate and their interpretation will be the one shared through the translation. For Wittgenstein, the relationship between meaning, understanding and use is absolute. This has a fundamental implication for literary analysis and literary translation: understanding, as a practical ability, is far from belonging to the inner mental life of an individual; it is something that exists for all to see and belongs to the public domain. By understanding a sentence or word, we actively participate in our social environment to a much greater extent than in an isolated mental process, because understanding implies following certain rules and conventions.

The concept of rules to which Wittgenstein refers is linked to that of language games[17]. Wittgenstein proposes a concept of rules which, in a game-like manner, vary from game to game and can even be modified or adapted at the discretion of the players or participants. This is not new in the area of literary translation. It is often necessary to modify certain rules in order to carry out a translation work (e.g. if the source text uses the foot as a poetic measure and the target text uses the syllable, the length of the translated lines will have to be adapted; if in one of the working languages the concept of consonant and assonant rhyme does not exist, the texts will also have to be adapted, etc.). Wittgenstein is opposed to a universal system of language rules, among other things, because by not following these rules perfectly, one falls into the concept of "incorrectness"; a translation process is understood, interpreted or judged on the basis of an external and supposedly objective system[18].

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[16] In his book *The Event of Literature*, Terry Eagleton concludes that strategy is the key to define a literary text: "There is one concept in particular which can illuminate a good many [theories of literature] even if it is not always a concept they themselves employ. This is the idea of the literary work as a strategy." (Eagleton 2012) Eagleton speaks of a strategy when referring to the literary work because he thinks that it is the only thing that all literary theoretical and critical approaches share, since each literary work constitutes, in its own way, the set of answers to the questions that it itself creates.

[17] Wittgenstein deals with the subject of the rules of language use from §143 to §242 of the *Philosophische Untersuchungen*.

[18] This relates to the way we tend to think about the "meaning" of a word, phrase, etc., not only in a literary text. "[Semantic meaning is traditionally the type of meaning privileged in (Western) philosophical theories of meaning, as well as in translator training. Some of the types of meaning that lie outside the domain of semantic meaning are well recognized in translation studies, for instance, linguistic meaning. Form, genre, poetics (including sound, rhythm, rhyme, timing, duration, pace, and other literary conventions), and style carry meanings that go well

The collective use of a rule is, for Wittgenstein, what gives meaning to that rule. The following of the rules of a language game is established by the agreements, customs and practice of those involved. The example Wittgenstein uses to explain this is that of a traffic sign. "A rule is written there, like a signpost. Does it leave no doubt about the way I have to go? Does it show in which direction I should go when I pass it; whether along the road, or the dirt road, or cross-country?", Wittgenstein asks. The sign does not tell us what to do after following the indicated direction. Evidently, no such sign indicates the entire course one must follow to the end; they are only momentary guides (e.g. "go straight ahead," "turn left," etc.). "So I can say, the signpost does not leave any doubt. Or rather: sometimes it leaves a doubt open, sometimes not" (§85)[19]. And further on, Wittgenstein warns us against the idea that every interpretation of a rule or a sign is equally valid. And he adds: "Every interpretation hangs, together with the meaning, in the air; it cannot serve as support for it. The interpretations alone do not determine the meaning" (§198)[20]. That is, the signal tells us which direction to take, but it does not force us to follow that path nor does it tell us how to continue. The emphasis in this argument is on habit. A person understands and is guided by a traffic sign because there is a convention, generated by the habit of doing so. We read and interpret texts in the same way; in a first phase the reading is a mere decoding of signs, but later (or perhaps in parallel) one or several possible interpretations come to mind, which will have to be corroborated through an analysis, which is also guided by a habit. In fact, when we apply some theoretical model, this habit becomes the norm (e.g. structuralism, formalism, etc.). When we begin the translation of a literary text, we have already made at least one interpretation: the one that has allowed us to understand, even if only in a general way, the work to be translated. When the translator does not read the literary work before starting the translation, he/she leaves out parts of the interpretation process that could make their work more complete. Often this habit to which Wittgenstein alludes can be equivalent to the literary genres and conventions with which translators work. There are formulas (e.g. "once upon a time", "at that time Jesus said to his disciples...") or conventions that we hardly dare to question (e.g. the translation of Kafka's *Die Verwandlung* as *Metamorphosis*.) The decisions made by the translator of a literary text, from the title to the end point, reflect the level of understanding they had of the text and the ability to tackle creative dilemmas beyond an intralinguistic conversion.

In this regard, Maria Tymoczko reminds us that the translator's decisions necessarily involve biases, but these are not defects in themselves:

> As a result of such decision-making processes, translations are metonymic. In fact translating and interpreting are both metonymic processes: they are always partial representations of the source text. Inspection of literary texts illustrates clearly as well that translators introduce features into their translated texts that have metonymic significance relating to the receiving languages and cultures. Such metonymies and partialities are not defects of translation: they are often inherent in the asymmetries of language and culture, and they facilitate the reception and understanding of translated texts by receiving audiences.

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beyond semantic meaning" (Tymoczko 2007)].

[19] „Eine Regel steht da, wie ein Wegweiser. –Läßt er keinen Zweifel offen über den Weg, den ich zu gehen habe? Zeigt er, in welche Richtung ich gehen soll, wenn ich an ihm vorbei bin; ob der Straße nach, oder dem Feldweg, oder querfeldein? […] –Also kann ich sagen, der Wegweiser läßt doch keinen Zweifel offen. Oder vielmehr: er läßt manchmal einen Zweifel offen, manchmal nicht" (§85).

[20] „Jede Deutung hängt, mitsamt dem Gedeuteten, in der Luft; sie kann ihm nicht als Stütze dienen. Die Deutungen allein bestimmen die Bedeutung nicht" (§198).

Thus, translation involves metonymic processes, but based on meanings belonging to certain cultural and linguistic conventions. The translator's decisions are not gratuitous. Hence, the application of the concept of "following a rule" presupposes a custom. In short: following the rules of a language game is not a private or hidden mental activity; it is a public matter. We do not need to dwell on every word and every expression and elaborate a conscientious analysis to make every decision. We do this only when we encounter a difficulty, a problem.

Rule-following is essentially a social practice; that is, it is something that exists within a community and it is precisely the existence of *agreements* in that community that establishes the rules to be followed. "The word 'agreement' and the word 'rule' are *related* to each other, they are cousins. If I teach someone the use of one word, he will also learn the use of the other" (Wittgenstein 1997 §224)[21]. Therefore, just as no one can follow or break a rule outside a community, no one can create a meaning for himself alone, nor choose a certain phrase or word when translating that is only self-referential. Following or breaking a rule can only be checked with respect to the uses that others make of these rules[22]. For Wittgenstein, understanding a sentence implies understanding the language game of which it is a part in its use; just as following a rule or convention of language implies having a mastery in the practice of the very act of following rules.

From the above, it could be objected that, if following the rules of a language is based on the agreements of the members of a linguistic community without the "objective" limits imposed by way of facts or scientific proofs, etc., is a mathematical *truth*, for example, also the product of such agreements? If a group decides that such a word is to be translated, through agreements and customs, in this way, is it to be accepted without further ado, do dictionaries and other normative referents take second place? To this Wittgenstein responds as follows: "So you say that the agreement of men decides what is right and what is wrong?" –Right and wrong is what people *say*; and in *speech* people agree. This is not agreement of opinions, but of the way of life (§241)[23]. A "way of life" is an underlying consensus of linguistic and non-linguistic behaviours, assumptions, practices, traditions and natural tendencies that humans, as social beings, share with each other and that form part of the presuppositions contained in the language they use. Language is woven into the pattern of human character and activities, and the meaning attached to its expressions obeys the shared outlook and nature of the users of that language[24]. In the words of Fox Craig: "Wittgenstein has not offered a theory of what meaning consists in; that is, a word's meaning does not *consist* in a word's use. Rather, it is the word's use that will often lead us to see what the meaning is".

A way of life consists, then, in the natural concordance of a community in terms of its natural and linguistic responses, which are given through agreements in definitions, judgements and behaviours. This is fundamental to understand that there is also a limit established between the possible meanings of language through its own use. Because the foundations of the practices in which the uses of language belong to the "way of life" with which that language is interconnected, for Wittgenstein, questions about an ultimate explanation or justification of the concepts represented in our thought and speech very soon hit bottom. What justifies our uses of language is the shared form of life that underlies these uses and that is all: for the Austrian philosopher it is neither necessary nor possible to say more

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[21] „Das Wort »Übereinstimmung« und das Wort »Regel« sind miteinander verwandt, sie sind Vettern. Lehre ich einen den Gebrauch des einen Wortes, so lernt er damit auch den Gebrauch des andern" (§224).

[22] See §202.

[23] „»So sagst du also, daß di Übereinstimmung der Menschen entscheide, was richtig und was falsch ist?« –Richtig und falsch ist, was Menschen *sagen*; und in der *Sprache* stimmen die Menschen überein. Dies ist keine Übereinstimmung der Meinungen, sondern der Lebensform" (§241).

[24] Cf. §19, §23, §241 and of the second part: §174 y §226.

about it. The way of life is the frame of reference in which we learn to develop when we train ourselves in the use of the language of our community; learning that language means learning the views, assumptions, and practices with which that language is inseparably linked and from which expressions acquire their meanings[25].

Thus, translating a word or expression from a source text by another that is not equivalent (according to the definition provided by Rędzioch-Korkuz at the beginning of this article) in the target language must have a justification (context, accuracy, intertextuality, etc.). Errors of meaning are ruptures of the established consensuses in our way of life and breaking them when translating (whether by ignorance or whim) implies presenting the reader with an invalid or *irrelevant* (in Umberto Eco's words) interpretation of the source text. It is a fault that ranges from the lexical to the ethical; and just as we saw above how much these faults can affect a poem as in the case of the translation of García Lorca's "Romance sonámbulo" into English, such faults should be avoided even in texts whose nature is in itself a breach of grammatical, logical or semantic conventions. To make this point clearer, let us take as an example "Femme et oiseau" by André Breton, a short prose poem. It is one of the poems Breton wrote in 1958 based on a series of paintings for an exhibition by Joan Miró. The poems were published under the title *Constellations* in 1959. Here is the poem:

Le chat rêve et ronronne dans la lutherie brune. Il scrute le fond de l'ébène et de biais lape à distance le tout vif acajou. C'est l'heure où le sphinx de la garance détend par milliers sa trompe autour de la fontaine de Vaucluse et où partout la femme n'est plus qu'un calice débordant de voyelles en liaison avec le magnolia illimitable de la nuit (Breton, 2024).	El gato sueña y ronronea en la penumbra de la tienda de instrumentos músicos de cuerda. Escruta en el fondo del ébano y al sesgo lengüetea de lejos el caoba vivísimo. Es la hora en la que la esfinge de la granza afloja por millares su trompa alrededor de la fuente de Vaucluse y en la que la mujer, en todos lados, no es sino un cáliz desbordante de vocales enlazando a la magnolia ilimitable de la noche (Paz, 2000)[26].

The poem is not easy to translate. Even less so because it is about an author who was part of a literary movement that sought to subvert the poetic norms of his time and to which other writers and painters also belonged, often working together. In other words, surrealism shaped, through the work of all the artists who subscribed to this movement, its own conventions and postulates.

On first reading, some of the above-mentioned errors or "breaks in the established consensus" come to light. For example, translating "lutherie" as "stringed musical instrument store" is unfortunate because the length of the target text compared to that of the source text differs too much (6 words to 1) in the two languages. This causes a total break in the rhythm and sonority of the ST. On the other hand, "laudería" is in widespread use in several Spanish-speaking countries; furthermore, "instrumentos músicos de cuerda" shows a syntax completely foreign in Spanish and makes no sense. The same could be said of "al sesgo lengüetea de lejos el caoba vivísimo", the syntax is so messy that it renders the image (of a cat licking a very shiny mahogany instrument) meaningless and makes the rhythm of the ST completely lost.

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[25] Cf. §217 and of the second part: §226.
[26] Here I offer an English version which conveys the style of the Spanish translation: "The cat dreams and purrs in the half-light of the stringed instrument store. It scrutinizes in the ebony background and at the slant it licks from afar the vivid mahogany. It is the hour in which the sphinx of the chippings loosens by thousands its horn around the fountain of Vaucluse and in which the woman, everywhere, is nothing but an overflowing chalice of vowels linking to the limitless magnolia of the night."

Where we have a line made almost exclusively of anapests: "et de biais lape à distance le tout vif acajou," the translation lacks any rhythm at all. On the other hand, "le sphinx de la garance" is a type of butterfly typical of France; its scientific name is Hyles Gallii. Here the translator could have chosen "mariposa diurnal", "mariposa del atardecer", or "mariposa" simply, but "sphinx de la garance" does not refer the Spanish-speaking reader to any type of butterfly. Finally, "en liaison avec" means "in collaboration with" or "in a love affair with" the colour evening magnolia (although there are several types, magnolias are white or with pinkish tints) and the hue refers to dusk. It is difficult to know if Breton alludes to the figure of the woman in contrast with the colour magnolia or in an amorous act with that colour, since it is a poem inspired by a series of paintings by Joan Miró (there is a series of 23 paintings with that same title: *Constellations*) and therefore the theme of contrast and perspective makes a lot of sense. However, "enlazando a la magnolia" ("linking to the magnolia") denotes more a lack of understanding of the ST than a solution on the part of the translator. This decision does not portray any of the images that the French poem suggests.

This translation of Breton's poem "Femme et oiseau" could be accepted as valid only if it were accepted that the translator could "create" his own language; something that is unacceptable, as we have seen. For Wittgenstein, the concept of "form of life" is closely linked to the public character of language, as opposed to the idea that meaning and understanding are inner or hidden states or processes of the mind. The idea of a private language is implicit in a standard conception of those expressions that refer to our own pains, moods, feelings, etc. Since these are private, no one else can have access to these states unless those who possess them express them in the form of language or behaviour; we think that no one else can experience my moods or my pains or discomforts. Moreover, if we do not wish it, it would be very difficult for anyone else to detect them. From this we might suppose that an individual could construct a language to talk to himself about his sensations and his inner life, which would in principle be denied to others. However, Wittgenstein analyses this idea and concludes that this is impossible[27]. The reasons are as follows: a) to understand a language, one must be able to follow its rules of use, and there can be no such thing as a private following of the rules. "Therefore, 'following the rule' is a practice. And to believe to follow the rule is not: to follow the rule. Therefore, one cannot follow the rule 'privately', because otherwise *believing* to follow the rule would be the same as following the rule" (1997: §202)[28]; b) speaking a language implies participating in a way of life and for this it is necessary to have the appropriate training to be able to share this way of life, this training has to take place among other human beings (since the training to share a way of life is what gives meaning to language)[29]. What we usually think of as private mental states and processes (pain, anger, etc.) are features of human nature that therefore have natural behavioural expressions (a baby's cry to indicate hunger, for example), and the linguistic resources we use to talk about them are the result of public learning; moreover, these linguistic resources are, for Wittgenstein, replacements for behaviour. Saying, "My stomach hurts" is part of the pain. Wittgenstein calls this "verbal behaviour"; an extension of the natural expressions of expectation, desire, pain, etc., which in the case of the latter would take the form of a grimace, a holding of the hands to the area of pain, moaning, etc. As with all words, the meaning of words expressing individual sensations lies in their use; and this use is constituted by the rules publicly agreed in that shared way of life upon which the possibility of such agreement rests. The rules are the same and depend on the same public criteria.

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[27] See §243 to §363.

[28] „Darum ist ›der Regel folgen‹ eine Praxis. Und der Regel zu folgen *glauben* ist nicht: der Regel folgen. Und darum kann man nicht der Regel ›privatim‹ folgen, weil sonst der Regel zu folgen glauben dasselbe wäre, wie der Regel folgen." (§202).

[29] Cf. §244, §257 and §283.

With these remarks, Wittgenstein leads us to reconsider what we mean by understanding not just in a general sense, but also in the field of literary translation. To translate a literary work implies much more than having a good knowledge of the source language. We are encouraged to reflect on our own role in society as conveyors of meaning, as followers of language's games and rules, and on our ability to interpret a literary text before translating it.

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