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Abstract: This article analyzes four different English-language translations of Pablo Neruda's poem "Walking Around" (1933). Although not every translation follows a specific theoretical framework, each presupposes translation methodologies and theories. In the following four translations of "Walking Around," the translator's literary and cultural motivations are expressed in their respective translations of the original text.

Keywords: Ben Belitt, John Felstiner, Pablo Neruda, poetry/poesía, Robert Bly, translation/traducción, translation theory/teoría de traducción, W. S. Merwin

This article examines four translations of "Walking Around," a poem written in 1933 by Chilean Nobel Laureate Pablo Neruda (1904–73). "Walking Around" was originally written in Spanish and is one of Neruda's most well-known poems. The popularity of "Walking Around" and Neruda's use of a variety of literary devices—which can be challenging to translate—make it a theoretically interesting work when analyzing the four versions of this poem from the Spanish to English language, translated by recognized poets and translators Robert Bly, W. S. Merwin, Ben Belitt, and John Felstiner. A brief analysis of the context, literary elements, and tone of the original poem will serve as the basis of comparison for the four translations. Ultimately, this article intends to validate the notion that the practical application of translation can be traced back to one or more theoretical frameworks when looking at how each translator has chosen to incorporate or reject certain theoretical elements as part of his translation.

The translation of a contract, will, or an insurance policy must follow commonly used terminology and vocabulary related to the text discourse. The primary purpose of these types of translations is to relay vital information to the reader in a non-abstract way. Such texts often follow a culturally conventionalized template to which the translator adheres. Poets, on the other hand, often play with and distort language according to their own design, creating patterns, rhymes, and wordplay that may not be easily reproduced in another language, if at all. Additionally, poetry differs from other genres of writing in that it is often written with the intention of being recited. Hearing an author read his or her poetry out loud allows the translator to "pick up vocal tones, intensities, rhythms, and pauses that will reveal how the poet heard a word, a phrase, a line, a passage" (Felstiner 151). Unfortunately,

the translator is most often forced to rely solely on the written form when translating, without ever knowing how the poet envisioned the poem to be read aloud. Neruda's recitations of some of his poems are instrumental in understanding his poetic vision; however, the recordings only represent a fraction of his grand *oeuvre*.

According to Susan Bassnett, the methodological problems that arise from translating poetry have rarely been studied non-empirically (92). Nevertheless, André Lefevere offers seven different possible translation strategies for poetry, ranging from phonemic translation, in which the translator tries to reproduce the sounds of the source language text in the target language text, to rhymed translation, or the reproduction of the rhyme scheme, to interpretation, in which the source language text is used as an inspiration or a starting point for the target language text (Lefevere). Despite the lack of rigorous, theory-based, poetry-specific translation studies, generic theories of translation can be applied to the translation of poetry. Although not every translator ponders his or her theoretical framework before beginning to work, every translation presupposes a methodology, whether intentional or not; this methodology in turn presupposes a theory (Doyle 108–09). Careful analysis allows us to link the act of translation with theory to facilitate a better understanding of the methodology inherent in each of the translations.

"Walking Around" forms part of the second volume of Neruda's *Residencia en la tierra*. Marjorie Agosín states that "the cycle of the three *Residences* is motivated by diverse historical experiences . . . it is clear from what we know of Neruda's life at this time that the *Residences* grew out of years of intense solitude and introspection" (40). In 1927, Neruda took a consulship for five years, living in Burma, Ceylon, Java, and Singapore, where he was surrounded by cultures unfamiliar to him (Felstiner 86). He returned to Santiago during the Depression and then traveled abroad again in 1934 (Felstiner 89). Such feelings of loneliness and despair are clearly expressed in "Walking Around," a poem which dwells on the poetic speaker's melancholic state of mind. Of special note is Neruda's decision to title his poem in English rather than Spanish, which further alienates the speaker from his own native culture and surroundings. It is meant to signify a sense of aimlessness that is not as easily expressed in Spanish (Agosín 45).

The poem is composed of a series of stanzas: six of the stanzas have four verses, three have six, and one has only three. Stanzas are used in poetry to organize ideas, signal changes, or more importantly provide the reader with a pause before continuing with the written text. The organization of stanzas can be combined with the use of other literary devices, such as anaphora, the repetition of a phrase or word at the beginning of successive verses, a prominent feature in "Walking Around." For example, the phrase "sucede que" is repeated four times, whereas "sólo quiero" is repeated twice, and "no quiero" is repeated three times. Later, verses 30–33 include five separate phrases beginning

with the preposition *a*. These verses comprise a single stanza, a literary technique that emphasizes the speaker's social entrapment in the monotony of his own existence. Neruda also employs polysyndeton, the repetition of conjunctions, when he repeatedly inserts the conjunctions *y* and *a*. In one instance, the speaker says: "Sucede que me canso de mis pies y mis uñas / y mi pelo y mi sombra" (vv. 9–10). When read aloud, the *y* replaces the use of commas, meaning that the reader/speaker is denied a pause to take a breath, thus contributing to a sense of being overwhelmed and an implicit connection between the reader and the poetic speaker, who also feels overwhelmed and trapped. The translator must understand the purpose of these poetic elements to make an informed decision as how best to proceed with a translation into another language.

If we were to situate the four translations on a continuum based on their loyalty to the original text,[1] Belitt's translation would be on the least faithful end of the spectrum, as it departs notably from the Spanish, particularly with regard to the mentioned poetic tropes. For example, verses 6–8 of the original Spanish read as follows:

> Sólo quiero un descanso de piedras o de lana
> sólo quiero no ver establecimientos ni jardines,
> ni mercaderías, ni anteojos, ni ascensores

Belitt's translation reads:

> All I ask is a little vacation from things: from boulders and woolens,
> from gardens, institutional projects, merchandise,
> eyeglasses, elevators—I'd rather not look at them.

Belitt has chosen to omit the repetition of "sólo quiero," and has also rearranged the syntax. In verse 6, "Sólo quiero" becomes "All I ask," instead of opting for the more common translation of the verb *querer* as "to want*."* Instead of repeating "all I ask" at the beginning of verse 7, Belitt moves "sólo quiero" to the end of verse 8 and chooses to translate it as "I'd rather not." This, in turn, changes the meaning of the stanza as well. By placing "I'd rather not look at them" at the end of the verse, Belitt includes the "boulders" and "woolens" in the same classification as "gardens," "institutional projects," "merchandise," "eyeglasses," and "elevators." Belitt's translation of the poetic voice expresses a desire for a vacation *from* "boulders" and "woolens." Merwin, Bly, and Felstiner, however, have interpreted this stanza quite differently. Merwin's translation of line 6 reads: "I want nothing but the repose either of stone or of wool,"

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1   In this context, I am using the term faithfulness to refer to the mechanics of the translation— the lexical choice, syntax, and so on—and how closely they align to the same elements in the original text.

while Bly and Felstiner, respectively, translate this as: "The only thing I want is to lie still like stones or wool" and "All I want is the quiet of stones or wool." Agosín agrees that for the poetic speaker, the stones evoke "tranquility and eternity" and the wool "softness and warmth" (45). The ambiguity of the preposition *de*, which has a variety of meanings, including both *from* and *of*, contributes to these differing interpretations of the Spanish.

Another of Belitt's translation techniques involves rephrasing the poem to imbue it with a more "American" sound. For example, line 21 reads "comiendo cada día." The most literal translation would be "eating every day." Belitt translates this line as "eating three squares a day." "Comiendo cada día" differs from "eating three squares a day" in that it is an adverbial phrase that is more abstract and open to interpretation—the reader does not know how often or how much the speaker is eating—whereas the translation to "three squares" evokes the image of a well-fed speaker who eats three satisfying meals each day. The translation "a square meal" is a distinctly US expression, first recorded in a restaurant advertisement in the California newspaper *The Mountain Democrat*, published in 1856 (Martin).

Belitt's translation of "dando gritos" in verse 17 as "whooping it up" also gives his text an idiomatic feel reflective of US culture. In the introduction to his translation of Neruda's *Fulgor y muerte de Joaquín Murieta*, Belitt informs the reader that his text contains "an American 'sound' not present in the inflection of Neruda" (70). He further asserts that the "choice of the translator, in such a case, is clear; he may rest on the completed action of the poet and compile a memorandum of *words* removed from the drives of the originating excitement; or he may press for a comparable momentum in his own tongue and induce translation accordingly" (102). The "memorandum of words" seemingly refers to the choice of some translators to hew closely to the original text, without adding or subtracting. Belitt's use of the term "momentum" refers to Amado Alonso's use of the same term in *Poesía y estilo de Pablo Neruda: Interpretación de una poesía hermética*, in which he describes this as "an ascending and descending play of intensity," which Belitt cites before describing his own method of translation (qtd. in Belitt 102).

Based on the above examples of Belitt's translation style, it is possible to connect his method with that of several theorists, thus furthering our understanding of his work. In this instance, Eugene Nida's theory of equivalence is applicable. Nida describes two types of equivalence: formal and dynamic. Formal equivalence focuses on the form and content of the source language text. Nida also calls this a "gloss translation" (qtd. in Bassnett 36). The objective of this technique is to allow the reader to identify culturally with a reader from the source language. In this way, the translator attempts to soften the cultural divide between the reader and writer of the translated text. On the other hand, dynamic equivalence moves away from the source language culture and

bases its theory on the equivalent effect; the readers of the target language text will experience the translation in the same way as the readers of the source language text. The objective of this translation method is for the reader to relate to the text within the context of his or her own culture. This type of translation insists on a deep understanding of the source language culture (Nida 144). Supporters of dynamic translation, such as Octavio Paz, believe that every translation is a unique text that readers interact with through their own language and culture (Paz 9). Belitt's translation of "Walking Around" reflects the usage of dynamic equivalence. As mentioned above, he Anglo-Americanizes the text, in turn giving readers in the United States and Canada an aesthetically inspired reaction to the poem, this forging a stronger connection with readers and their own culture.

Formal versus dynamic equivalence corresponds to Lawrence Venuti's writing on domestication and foreignization. The domestication of a text may make both the primary author and the translator invisible by removing all traces of otherness from the translation. This is effectively what Belitt does when he adds Anglo-American elements to "Walking Around." Venuti sees domestication as a xenophobic, imperialistic practice, and calls for a Schleiermachian foreignization,[2] which preserves elements of the source culture in the translated text and makes it clear to readers that they are indeed reading a translation (Venuti 13). Theorist, Gayatri Spivak, has also commented on the imperialistic nature of translation, arguing that translation has been used to suppress the voice of the subaltern, or cultural identities that exist outside of the hegemonic power structure. She argues that the translator "must surrender to the text," and to do otherwise would betray the text and show "rather dubious politics" (322). According to Spivak, "surrendering" typically means providing a literal translation (321).

Belitt's translation clearly rejects both Schleiermacher's "foreignization" and Spivak's "literalist surrender." He acknowledges the changes made to the poems he translates, but contests that "The 'poem itself' remains where it always was—on 'the other side of the page,' where the bilingual [is] invited to consult it, unmediated by translators, by school teachers, by critics, by polemical Methodists, and by other poets" (106). However, the audience for which Belitt is translating is by and large monolingual. Only a relatively small percentage of individuals in the United States and Canada have access to Neruda's poems in the original Spanish (Bassnett 55). The majority of readers will never know how Belitt's translations greatly differ from the original poem.

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2   Schleiermacher's concept of foreignization involves moving the target language text reader toward the original author. The translator attempts to communicate to the reader the same understanding that the translator achieves through reading the source language text, therefore introducing the reader to a foreign point of view.

In stark contrast to Belitt's translation, Merwin is extremely faithful to the original text. Repetitive phrasing is fully translated from the Spanish to English. The poem opens with the following verse: "Sucede que me canso de ser hombre / Sucede que entro en las sastrerías y en los cines" (vv. 1–2). Merwin's version reads: "It happens that I am tired of being a man / It happens that I go into the tailor's shops and the movies" (vv. 1–2). Merwin also retains the personification in the last two verses of the poem. Neruda's "calzoncillos, toallas y camisas que lloran / lentas lágrimas sucias" (vv. 44–45) becomes "underpants, towels and shirts which weep / slow dirty tears" (vv. 44–45). Not only does Merwin preserve predominant semantic elements, he also maintains the same syntax of the original poem, and does not add or remove the tropes that form such an integral part of the poem. When possible, he also uses cognates, translating "impenetrable" as "impenetrable" and "navegando" as "navigating" (vv. 3–4).[3]

Based on his determination to preserve the original elements of the author's work, Merwin's translation, as previously noted, is rather literal in nature. For example, the last stanza reveals how strictly he has stayed with the original text. The Spanish reads:

> Yo paseo con calma, con ojos, con zapatos,
> con furia, con olvido,
> paso, cruzo oficinas y tiendas de ortopedia,
> y patios donde hay ropas colgadas de un alambre;
> calzoncillos, toallas y camisas que lloran
> lentas lágrimas sucias. (vv. 40–45)

In comparison, Merwin's version is as follows:

> I stride along with calm, with eyes, with shoes,
> with fury, with forgetfulness
> I pass, I cross offices and stores full of orthopedic appliances
> and courtyards hung with clothes on wires,
> underpants, towels and shirts which weep
> slow dirty tears. (vv. 40–45)

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3 This reflects Merwin's thought process by examining his critique of Campbell's translation of _En una noche oscura_, written by San Juan de la Cruz. He argues that the translation does not preserve the "simplicity in texture, splendor of diction, directness, precision, and . . . tension in poetry" of the original (504). He cites several examples of words that he considers to have been mistranslated by Campbell, such as "gloomy" for "oscura," instead of simply "dark." "Gloomy" has a more complex connotation than "dark," implying a somber or perhaps dismal darkness rather than merely the absence of light. Merwin's critique appears to be asserting that Campbell unnecessarily changes the texture and energy of the Spanish of San Juan.

Merwin provides a nearly word-for-word translation. One of the only changes is from "tiendas de ortopedia" to "stores full of orthopedic appliances." The original verse has nothing to denote the expression "full of." His method of translation is more closely aligned with Nida's concept of formal equivalence, which focuses on preserving the form and content of the message. The resulting translation, however, also aligns itself, whether purposefully or not, with Venuti's concept of foreignization. Merwin's translation of the verse, "I cross offices," for example, conveys a sense of "foreignness," due in part to the literal translation of the Spanish "cruzo oficinas." At first, the English translation seems to imply the act of crossing a room, while the Spanish text seems to indicate that the speaker is passing by office buildings. Nonetheless, and despite his faithfulness to the text, this type of translation distances the reader from some of the poem's original meaning.

Belitt's and Merwin's translations of "Walking Around" reflect the use of formal and dynamic equivalence. While John Felstiner's and Robert Bly's versions of the poem do not limit their literary translations to the source language, they do not stray too far from the original text. Both translators syntactically adjust the phrasing so that the text is more accommodating to English readers. Consider again the verse: "paso, cruzo oficinas y tiendas de ortopedia" (42). Contrasting Merwin's "I pass, I cross offices and stores full of orthopedic appliances," Bly writes: "I walk by, going through the office buildings and orthopedic shops," while Felstiner translates the same line as "I walk along, skirting offices and orthopedic shops." These translators have chosen to describe the narrator's physical movement in two different ways: *skirting* versus *going through*. Both renditions, however, more aptly lend themselves to an English-speaking ear than Merwin's literal translation of the text.

Although Bly and Felstiner's versions are similar, they are not identical. We can situate Bly slightly closer on the continuum to Belitt, while Felstiner appears to be more conservative in his translation. While Bly does not make as many changes to the original as Belitt, he does alter the syntax. Verses 26–27 in the Spanish read: "Por eso el día lunes arde como el petróleo / cuando me ve llegar con mi cara de cárcel." Bly's version of the same verses is: "That's why Monday, when it sees me coming / with my convict face, blazes up like gasoline." To follow the syntax of the Spanish, "blazes up like gasoline" would have to be interchanged with "when it sees me coming." While Merwin follows a more word-for-word translation, both Bly and Felstiner appear concerned with the senses.

Another interesting aspect of Bly's version of "Walking Around" is a failure to translate the personification present in the last two lines of the poem. Neruda's words "calzoncillos, toallas y camisas que lloran / lentas lágrimas sucias" (vv. 44–45) assign the articles of clothing a human quality; they weep. However, Bly's version is more passive when he translates this personification

as: "underwear, towels and shirts from which slow dirty tears are falling" (vv. 44–45). Felstiner and Merwin both follow suit. Bly's reasons for eliminating the personification are unclear. In his translation of verse 26, mentioned above, he keeps the personification intact. Bly also incorporates minimal poetic tropes that do not form part of the original poem. In the second line, for example, he translates "Sucede que entro en" as "And it happens that I walk into," even though the conjunction *y* is absent in the Spanish.

In his exemplary book *Translating Neruda: The Way to Macchu Picchu*, Felstiner discusses his view of literary translation as well as his role as a translator. Theorists, such as John Dryden, have asserted that only a poet is capable of translating poetry (Bassnett 69). However, in reference to Ben Belitt's translation of a passage from Neruda's "Canto VII de Alturas de Macchu Picchu," Felstiner dryly remarks: "Evidently it can be no less hazardous to have a poet than a non-poet as translator, rebounding enthusiastically from Neruda's lines into his creativity" (23). From this, one can infer that Felstiner views the translator as an intellectually bound subject who must maintain objectivity with regard to the source text. A translation, according to Felstiner, is not an opportunity for the translator to show off his or her own personal literary style, which would be, as Dryden phrased it, "to run division on the ground-work, as he pleases" (38). Rather, Felstiner believes that the mark of a good translator is that "the original must come through essentially" (24). This is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's thoughts on translation in his seminal essay "The Task of the Translator." According to Benjamin, translation should be transparent and not "obscure the original" (81). Benjamin is not interested in whether or not the translation communicates the sense of the text; his only concern is how the translation of a language brings that language into contact with what he terms "pure language" (80). Felstiner, on the other hand, is concerned with the more practical application of preserving the tone and style of the author of the source language text. He values the translator's faithfulness to the original text.

Despite the differences inherent in these four translations, it is difficult to qualify empirically what makes one translation superior to another (excluding what one may consider translation errors).[4] The differences among the four poems analyzed here illustrate once again that a universal methodology for translating poetry does not exist. There are no rules to stipulate that a translated poem must be faithful to the syntax, grammar, or vocabulary of the original text, nor must it adapt itself to the target language culture. The idea that a good translation "reads well," or as if it were originally written in the target language, can be dismissive of the translator and what his or her goals may have been. As readers, we should ask ourselves not only *what* choices a translator may have made, but *why* he or she has made them. For what purpose does a translator chose to domesticate, or conversely, foreignize a text? What are the political

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4   For a detailed discussion of these types of errors and "translation failure" generally, see Krause.

and cultural implications of his or her choice? The decisions a translator makes stretch beyond the choice of one word over another. By following the theories that inform each instance of translation, we can critique a translation for more than just its readability in the secondary language.

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