The analysis of translated literary irony: some methodological issues[1]

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This article outlines some conceptual and methodological issues regarding the analysis of translated literary irony. In the first part it is argued that the TS scholar's adherence to a specific conception of literary irony is not value-free and entails programmatic consequences for TS research on translated irony. Only a dynamic approach to irony—where irony "happens" rather than "exists"—allows us to embrace three relevant orientations in descriptive empirical TS research: (1) target-side functional investigations, (2) historical-descriptive oriented analyses and (3) translational interpretive oriented analyses. The second part focuses on three issues regarding the comparative ST-TT procedure, namely (1) the unit of comparison, (2) the degree of the differences looked upon and (3) the specific traits on the basis of which the differences and similarities are identified. The paper winds up with remarks on one kind of normativity inherent to the comparative procedure.

1. Introductory note

The translation of irony is rarely the explicit object of study in TS (see Fehlauer-Lenz, 2008 and Chakhachiro, 2009 for recent exceptions). Most often, this kind of inquiry is included in research on related phenomena, such as the translation of humour, parody or intertextuality (see Lievois, 2006 for an overview). There are at least two reasons why relatively little attention has been given to the translation of literary irony so far: (a) the lack of consensus regarding the definition and conceptual scope of literary irony and (b) the fact that investigating irony within a product-oriented methodology entails a number of thorny questions regarding the procedures of comparative microtextual analysis.

These two questions will be outlined further below. First, the lack of consensus regarding the definition of literary irony will be discussed and exemplified by means of a short analysis of the status given to both the ironist and the interpreter in two canonical works on literary irony (2). Second, it will be shown that the adherence to one concept or another is by no means value-free and entails programmatic consequences for TS applications. In my opinion, a dynamic pragmatic approach to literary irony is epistemologically superior in that it allows for three kinds of orientations in TS applications (3). Finally, attention will be paid to a series of problematic issues concerning the way ST-TT comparisons can be carried out. More particularly, I concentrate on (a) the way to establish the unit of comparison, (b) the degree and the nature of the differences looked at and (c) the specific traits with regard to which the differences and similarities

are identified. Then a heuristic construct, the *ironic*, is proposed and illustrated by examples. I conclude with some final remarks regarding the inherent normativity in comparative procedures and the way these can be converted into indicative factors when procedurally formalized (4).

2. The lack of consensus regarding the definition and conceptual scope

TS scholars could overcome the first problem—i.e. the lack of consensus regarding the definition of irony—by stating that defining irony does *not* belong to the strict domain of TS. They could then adopt an existing definition from literary analysis and remodel it for purposeful use in TS research. However, things are not that simple for one fundamental reason: the profoundly incompatible philosophical background underlying different definitions of literary irony. The best way to illustrate this divergence is by examining the status given to both the ironist's *intention* and the interpreter. In order to typify these variances, the present inquiry will be restricted to two canonical critics, because their investigations are comparable in goal and scope but clearly reveal different conceptual underpinnings. Both Booth (1974) and Hutcheon (1994) aim at understanding the (mis)interpretations of irony in artistic manifestations.[2] The fact that I comment on these two specific works reveals my methodological preference: even if research on the clausal or phrasal level has provided very useful analytical toolkits, it does not, in my opinion, suffice for the comprehension of more sophisticated forms of irony that are displayed through contradictions or incongruities on above-phrase level. This is the main problem with (psycho)linguistic or cognitive approaches (see Gibbs & Colston, 2007 for a general overview) which tend to focus too closely on the verbal make-up of isolated ironic utterances. They are less convenient for those types of irony brought about by structural or even genre-related factors (for a similar viewpoint, see Ballart, 1994, p. 266), nor can they account for the numerous "hermeneutic helpers" (Hutcheon, 1994, p. 141) formally present but textually distanced. I am therefore convinced that literary irony cannot be investigated without an interpretation of the literary work in its entirety. This of course does not mean that (psycho)linguistic empirical research on verbal irony cannot prove to be very useful: it provides us with better insights into the logical mechanisms at the basis of irony and the processing of irony, [3] but it also supplies fine-tuned analytical instruments for the textual analyses.

Let us now return to our two critics. The first one, Booth, does not provide a straightforward definition of irony but suggests a rather traditional rhetorical definition (*saying one thing and meaning another*) when he elaborates the first of four steps in the ironic reconstruction: the reader is invited to reject the literal or surface meaning (1974, p. 26) because s/he becomes aware of certain inconsistencies. These are suggested

by incongruities either in what is read or between what is read and what is known. For Booth, interpreting an ironic message is nothing more than deciphering correctly those messages intended ironically. The interpreter first rejects what is expressed and then reconstructs a covert, real, superior meaning. The task for the interpreter, then, is relatively easy: if s/he is a competent reader –i.e. if s/he does not suffer one or several of the "crippling handicaps" (1974, pp. 222-229) standing in the way of a proper reconstruction of the ironic message– then the irony will be interpreted correctly. This way of reasoning leaves little margin for the interpretive pole: literary discourse is static and unidirectional; it proceeds "from author to text to reader" (Newton, 1995, p. 65). All alternative readings are, as one critic has put it, "the product of a reader's bias and self-interest" (Dane, 1991, p. 62). Booth theorizes within a traditional vision that considers literature as a conscious act of communication where meaning is transferred from a sender to a receiver. As Susan Suleiman has put it, for Booth "proper reading" essentially entails "*inferring* meanings implied by every aspect of the text" (1976, p. 15).

The second approach, typified here by Hutcheon, takes into consideration the more dynamic and complex interactions between ironist, text and interpreter. Hutcheon does not abandon the ironist's intention, but limits its exclusive and central role by stating that the issue of intentionality should be considered from both poles onwards, i.e. the ironist's *and* the interpreter's. Irony is not necessarily something deposited in the message by an intentional author but *happens* by the ironic attributions made by an active interpreter: "the attributing of irony to a text or utterance is a complex intentional act on the part of the interpreter, one that has both semantic and evaluative dimensions, in addition to the possible inferring of ironist intent (from either the text or statements by the ironist)" (1994, p. 13).

What opposes the two critics is the exact nature of *intention* and, intrinsically linked to this issue, interpretation and meaning. Booth adheres to an essentialist notion of intentionality. In accordance with the true nature of the author's intention, the reading of ironic excerpts consists in the pursuit of the ironist's intention to communicate something more than the explicitly stated. Irony, then, is a rhetorical device by means of which one rejects a surface meaning (1974, p. 22) to reconstruct a real, covert one. Hutcheon, on the other hand, approaches intention within pragmatic dynamics: although she does not abandon the issue of intention altogether because it is one of the few mechanisms enabling us to distinguish between lying and irony (1994, p. 118), she does, nevertheless, broaden the limited scope of the unilateral intentionalist theories of irony. This pragmatic approach to irony has an effect on her definition of irony being "a discursive strategy [that] depends on context and on the identity and position of both the ironist and the audience" (1994, p. 178).

Interpreters of irony *create* ironies because they attribute an ironic intention to specific utterances. *Whether* they identify irony and *what kind* of irony is created will be determined, not so much by the author's intention as by the discursive communities to which interpreters of irony belong (1994, pp. 85-96). For Hutcheon, irony does not create groups—for instance the privileged public which has fully understood the irony as opposed to the victims of the irony—it is rather because of the existence of a plurality of discursive communities that some interpreters create some kind of ironies whereas others do not.

3. Programmatic consequences for TS applications

By no means do I want to suggest here that one conception is ontologically more valid than the other: both are different models for interpreting irony in literature and reflect the specific cultural backgrounds in which they were developed. What I do want to put forward are their programmatic consequences for the TS scholar. Working with the Booth conception forces us to stick to the original text, for it is there that the author's intentions lie and have to be reconstructed by means of the formal footprints left behind. Hutcheon's proposal agrees more with the general conception of translation ever since the Cultural Turn of the 1980s dethroned the sacred, original source text and made scholars abandon it as a normative yardstick in the comparative procedure (Snell-Hornby, 2006, pp. 47-67). Hutcheon's dynamic approach to irony, then, is epistemologically superior for TS applications in that it allows for three orientations in descriptive, target-oriented empirical research: (1) target-side functional investigations, (2) historical-descriptive oriented analyses and (3) translational interpretive oriented analysis. What I call here *translational interpretive analysis* is loosely based on the proposals of Koster (2000, p. 28) and Naaijkens (2002, p. 46), who define this kind of analysis as the specific vision that a translator has on the ST *as is apparent* from the TT.[4]

This third kind of research becomes irrelevant if we adhere to the Booth conception. If, as Booth suggests, the locus of meaning is situated in the text, [5] and in the text only, for it is there that stylistic traces left behind by an intentional author can be—and *should* be—correctly interpreted by a competent and willing reader, then meaning is stable and unchanging, encoded in the text and awaiting decoding from the reader. If, however, as Hutcheon suggests, irony *happens*, not exclusively by means of the ironist's intentions encoded in the text but also, or rather, as an attribution of ironic intention on behalf of the interpreter, then we assign a much greater role to the translator. S/he is an active agent and might infer an ironic meaning or define the particularities of the ironic meaning according to the discursive community from where s/he acts, i.e. "the norms and beliefs that constitute

the prior understanding we bring to the utterance" (Hutcheon, 1994, p. 137).

The way translated irony is investigated depends, of course, on the reasons that underlie the analysis. It is my firm belief that one way—perhaps the only one—to overcome the untranslatability dogma often related to irony is to work within a descriptive paradigm, i.e. taking the existing and empirically observable texts as the starting point for the analysis, without having previously adopted fixed criteria and minimum conditions according to which a given text is considered a translation of another text. From that point of view, translatability becomes a dynamic and historically variable concept: nothing is untranslatable if we are ready to accept that not all texts are translated according to the same guidelines. Among the factors intervening in these changing guidelines, I will cite only four: space, time, text types and individual translators. Investigating these factors can be done by means of the three kinds of research stated above. I will only briefly mention the first and second type of investigations because the main interest here is to discuss the methodological issues related to the third kind, the translational interpretive oriented analysis.

Target-side functional investigations may investigate how the *skopos* of the text affects the translation product. In our specific case, this kind of research may be useful when analysing how ideologically charged ironic texts are modified when translated for a completely different communicative environment or by means of a different structural make-up (e.g. when the text-type has been modified). Descriptive-historical oriented investigations may focus on geographical and historical TT features in the *manipulation* of ironic texts within new political and ideological environments. Research into the reader's horizon of expectations on the one hand and into the marketing strategies and budget policies of the editorial apparatus on the other, may reveal why some ironic literary works do not find their way into a specific TT market. Conversely, the kind of irony displayed in the literary work may explain why some remarkable works have not been translated. This may particularly be the case in instances of ironic satire: being anchored in time and space, it often requires annotated versions and/or runs the risk of being dated all too soon.

All these are very interesting research lines but do not provide insight into one last fundamental element of the translation process, namely, the translator him/herself. Translators are "clearly not detached observers and neutral carriers of meaning across textual boundaries" (Crisafulli, 2004, p. 29) and they interpret texts according to previous readings, the target reader's horizon of expectations, their own ideological constructs and their own explicit and/or implicit views on translation. This inevitably produces an effect in the translated text. Regarding the way to observe and describe this interpretation, my position is in keeping with Koster's, according to whom the translator's interpretation in a retrospective product-oriented

analysis can only be described by means of an analysis of the displacements and similarities observed between ST and TT (2002).

4. Thorny questions regarding ST-TT comparative procedures

There are, however, some urgent questions regarding the way comparisons between STs and TTs should be carried out. The fact that several scholars have underscored the lack of systematic reflection on how to carry out ST-TT comparisons (Koster, 2000, pp. 24-25, Naaijkens, 2002, p. 45, Tymozcko 1999, p. 287) is, in my view, an uneasy consequence of the unilateral focus on the cultural and social function of translation that has dominated TS research over the last three decades. I suspect that at least part of the success of exclusively (or radically) target-culture oriented analysis is due to the fact that it avoids a series of questions regarding *comparative procedure*. Even though I agree on the fundamental importance of metatexts and contextual analysis, I am also convinced that even small-scale linguistic choices may be extremely important. It seems therefore impossible to "bypass close textual analysis" (Tymozcko, 1999, p. 287) in descriptive translation studies.

Any comparison is partial by nature (Toury, 1995, p. 80): when we compare two (or more) excerpts we necessarily look for *similarities* within two *different* entities (Rabadán, 1991). This is however not a specific characteristic of translational comparison but inheres in all comparative practice. It encompasses three central problematic features, already pointed out by Halverson (1997, pp. 209-210) in an article on the various philosophical underpinnings of the concept of equivalence in TS. It is fundamental for any comparative procedure to reflect on and, if possible, to agree on (1) the terms between which the comparison will be realized, i.e. the unit of comparison, (2) the nature and the degree of the differences and similarities that will be identified and (3) the criteria according to which the comparison will be carried out. Relocated in the context of analysis on translated irony, these three elements include a series of interrelated problems. As for the first issue underscored by Halverson, the unit of comparison, it is clear that, at the top level, the comparison of the texts in my corpus could not be any easier, given that the point of departure is that of empirically observable texts where one text is presented paratextually as *being a translation of another text*. The problems, however, are situated on every rank below this level. Should we consider elements of structure or of content? Even if we agree on the beginning of a literary text as a fairly reasonable unit for the start of any analysis, we still do not know if "one [is] supposed to begin on the level of morphemes, or words, or phrases, or sentences, or [if one should] look initially at textual, rather than linguistic features, and with respect to form or to function" (Koster, 2000, p. 101). Then, what about the directionality of the comparative procedure: should

the textual analysis be carried out first on the ST level or on the TT level? Or should the units of comparison be established for the two texts *simultaneously* as was proposed by Toury (1995, p. 89) with his coupled pair of replacing and replaced elements. Last but not least, we have the question of comparative systematicity: should one adopt the repertory or the distinctive feature method? Koster, drawing on Holmes (1976 [1988], p. 89, quoted in Koster, 2000, p. 98) suggests that the repertory method—i.e. establishing beforehand a required repertory of features always to be analysed—agrees better with the establishment of a *tertium* set independently and separately for both the ST and TT. Put in other words, when we identify distinctive features—an *a posteriori* activity—the *tertium* is based on one of the texts under comparison, which means that "as a consequence, the comparison is always undertaken from the point of view of one of the texts" (Koster, 2000, p. 160). Even though the repertory method does not automatically ensure research which prioritizes the *relation between texts*, rather than just *one text* (be it the ST or the TT), Koster still claims it suits the heuristic purposes of the tertium better in that "[a] *tertium* should not be used to determine the conditions for invariance, but should provide for a level of comparison. Any source-text dependent *tertium* is bound to be linked with a preconceived notion of invariance, and as a consequence procedurally formalizes normativity" (2000, p. 161). Crisafulli puts into perspective Koster's observations and points out his tendency for rigorous taxonomy. According to Crisafulli, the repertory method "might be a useful point of departure for the comparative study of source and target text. But it is simply not feasible to ascertain in advance what textual features are relevant to all literary texts" (2004, p. 88). Even though Crisafulli does not expand much on the issue, he rightly underscores the incompatibility between "neat categories of analysis" [6] (2004, p. 88) or rigid taxonomies on the one hand and the interpretive factor proper to hermeneutics on the other.

I too subscribe only partially to the heuristic possibility—or even requirement—of absolute, fixed and exhaustively categorized taxonomies. I am fully aware that this might be at the expense of both systematicity and interpersonal comparability but I remain convinced that the interpretive factor inherent in irony prevents me from concluding otherwise. Therefore, a list of ironic clues (Booth, 1974, pp. 53-76) or formal markers signalling "the possibility of ironic attribution" (Hutcheon, 1994, p. 154) functions, in my method, as a point of departure and as nothing more. This is as close as one can get to a repertory method. Such a list will always be deficient in that it cannot account for the relevance, or irrelevance, of certain formal clues for the ironic interpretation of a literary work in a specific discursive community (Hutcheon, 1994). Even Booth, who strives for interpersonal, univocal interpretation through strict formal analysis, admits that ironic clues are there only to invite us to recognize an ironic meaning (1974, p. 49). In accordance with her pragmatic approach of the *ironic happening*,

Hutcheon stresses the fact that ironic markers, rather than constituting irony in themselves, merely "signal the possibility of ironic attribution" (1994, p. 154). Let us not forget that "irony signals don't signal *irony* until they are interpreted as such" (1994, p. 151). Moreover, she insists on one final, but extremely important issue for research in TS, "all markers, of course, are more than likely culture- and situation-specific: what may function ironically in one social context might well gravely offend in another" (1994, p. 155).

So, the features that I will include in my (incomplete and provisional) list will also determine the level of my unit of comparison. Since irony cannot be easily delimited in isolatable linguistic units (such as the ones determined by phonological, lexical or syntactical structure), it seems more workable to include a superior textual level triggering – potentially—the ironic happening of the literary text. For the sake of practicality, then, this textual level is considered hierarchically superior and includes a series of variable linguistic means. This is illustrated here with a relatively straightforward case of stylistically ironic signalling through hyperbolic and antiphrastic language. The example is taken from *The Invention of Morel* (1940/1964) by Bioy Casares (1914-1999). In this novel, an anonymous fugitive reaches what he takes for a desert island, but soon realizes that he shares it with strange people who seem to consciously ignore him. It is only towards the end of the novel that the protagonist will discover that these characters are nothing more than three-dimensional images, projected by a machine that works according to the rhythm of the maritime tides. The I-character desperately falls in love with one of them, Faustine, and tries to observe her when she sunbathes on the rocks reading a book. What he does not know is that her presence (or absence) is totally dependent on the sea tides required to make the machine work. When he arrives one afternoon and finds no sign of her, he is profoundly annoyed by his lack of punctuality and utters a series of contradictory evaluations of his birth city, Caracas:

(1) (Mi impuntualidad me exaspera, ¡pensar que en esa corte de los vicios llamada el mundo civilizado, en Caracas, fue un trabajoso adorno, una de mis características más personales!) (Bioy Casares, 1940, p. 137, my emphasis)
= [My unpunctuality exasperates me, to think that in that court of vices called the civilized world, in Caracas, that was a laborious ornament, one of my most personal characteristics.]
My lack of punctuality exasperates me—to think that in the civilized world, in Caracas, I was always late deliberately; that was one of my most personal characteristics!) *(Bioy Casares, 1940/1964, p. 31, my emphasis)*

The ironic signalling through the disharmonious description of Caracas makes us aware of the negative judgmental stance (Hutcheon, 1994, p 37) of irony, inferred through a tone of mockery or contempt. What the I-character suggests here is that Caracas might be considered by many as a civilized place, but his paradoxical evaluation clearly indicates the contrary: his evaluation of Caracas is far from positive. The way the English translation omits the antiphrastic paraphrase ("corte de los vicios", literally translated as "that court of vices") clearly eliminates all the ironic *happening* of the excerpt. The impression the reader of the English text is left with is a coherent one: it is no longer Caracas as the urban centre of paradoxical human nature which is being criticized; rather, it is the I-character which is criticized for being irresponsible. The absence of the paradoxical language no longer invites the English TT reader to make inferences about the I-character.

The analysis of this excerpt shows the possible advantages of an analysis which starts off with a list of textual features always to be analyzed: by including above-unit level, textual features such as antiphrastic, paradoxical or hyperbolic language use, the problem of the unit of analysis has been solved. If the comparison is no longer made on the level of a specific linguistic unit but on whatever linguistic means are used for the expression of, let us say, the antiphrastic, paradoxical or hyperbolic language use, the unit of comparison is delimited in a fairly systematic way.

Nevertheless, the repertory method cannot possibly be operational for the identification of *every* ironic instance. In the example above, the reader's emotional response was triggered relatively easily by the paradoxical expressions used by the I-character when he puts his home town in a negative light. It is however impossible to predict *all possible triggers* of emotive responses able to generate the perception of the evaluative edge or axiological nature associated with irony in almost all the literature on irony (see for instance Ballart, 1994, Muecke, 1969, Schoentjes, 2001). This would lead to "unwieldy descriptive models" (Crisafulli, 2004, p. 89) where elaborated preliminary, descriptive analysis of both ST and TT would in the end prove useless.

Apart from the feasibility problem, the repertory list is limited methodologically in that its *a priori* nature pinpoints irony to concrete linguistic or textual manifestations without being able to account for more interpretative processes. There is little doubt, however, about the question of irony being a complex cognitive process (Kaufer, 1981, p. 1983) determined by the discursive community in which it is produced and interpreted (Hutcheon, 1994). Put in other words, the *a priori* nature leaves little or no margin for the reader's interpretation triggered by elements previously processed, whether intra- or intertextually.

Let us consider an example where irony is triggered intratextually. The excerpt is taken from Vargas Llosa's novel *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter* (1977/1982), a semi-autobiographic novel relating the story of

the 18-year old Marito, a law-student with aspirations as a writer. He desperately falls in love with his aunt-in-law, Julia Urquidi, and engages in a passionate relationship. Due to the increasing difficulties of their secret relationship—Julia is his political aunt, a divorced woman, fourteen years his elder, unable to marry him because he has not reached the legal age of 21—he suffers from insomnia and arrives early at work—a thing very unusual for him. This is how he informs the reader on his professional activities:

(2) Estuve en mi altillo de Panamericana más temprano que de costumbre y cuando llegaron Pascual y el Gran Pablito, a las ocho, ya tenía preparados los boletines y leídos, anotados y cuadriculados (para el plagio) todos los periódicos. (Vargas Llosa, 1977, p. 309)
= [I was in my attic at [the radio station] Panamericana earlier than usual and when Pascual and Great Pablito arrived, at eight o'clock, I had all the bulletins prepared already and I had read, annotated and marked (for the plagiarism) all the newspapers]

If we analysed this excerpt according to the repertory method approach, this passage would not even stand out. [7] Situated in the overall constellation of the narrative, however, things are quite different. This is mainly because the reader knows how the mature narrator evaluates his former professional activity: a job with a "pompous-sounding title, a modest salary, duties as a plagiarist, and flexible working hours: News Director of Radio Panamericana" (Vargas Llosa, 1977/1982, p. 3). The title does not square with the job's content, which consists in "cutting out interesting news items that appeared in the daily papers and rewriting them slightly so that they could be read on the air during the newscasts" (ibid.) or retyping "news items from El Comercio and La Prensa, changing adjectives and adverbs" (ibid., p. 10). Neither does the title convey the poor quality of his editorial staff, composed of Pascual—who selects news items in function of their bloody crime rather than their informative relevance—and Big Pablito, a complete illiterate. Marito's material working conditions are in as poor condition as his editorial staff: he is stuck in a filthy shack, his desk is taken away to give to the accountant and his typewriter to the author of popular radio shows. All the above certainly foregrounds the absurdity of the narrator's working situation or, at the very least, diminishes its importance. Let us first return to the passage mentioned above and compare it with the US and the Dutch target texts:

> *I was at my desk in the shack at Panamericana earlier than usual that morning, and when Pascual and Big Pablito arrived at eight, I had already written the bulletins, read all the newspapers, and annotated and marked in red all the news items <u>to be plagiarized</u> (Vargas Llosa, 1977/1982, p. 237, my emphasis)*

> *Ik was vroeger dan anders in mijn dakkamertje van radio Panamericana en toen Pascual en grote Pablito om acht uur kwamen, had ik de bulletins al klaar en alle kranten doorgelezen, van aantekeningen voorzien en aangestreept* ***(****om plagiaat te voorkomen****)****. (Vargas Llosa, 1977/1981, p. 263, my emphasis)*
> = [I was at my shack at Panamericana earlier than usual and when Pascual and Big Pablito arrived at eight, I had already finished the bulletins and read all the newspapers, annotated and marked **(**to avoid plagiarism)]

Both translators have textually manipulated the source-text's ambiguous reference concerning the plagiarism: in both cases, there is a shift towards more explicitness. The way they have done this, though, clearly indicates that they have interpreted the irony in a different way. The US translator highlights the causal relationship between the marking in the newspapers and the plagiarizing. Marito prepares the newspapers by marking in red the relevant news items which will be plagiarized by Pascual afterwards. Interestingly, the Dutch translator's textual manipulations lead to a very different reading. Having arrived early, Marito has already prepared several bulletins. That is: he has already plagiarized several news items, retyping them by modifying some adjectives and adverbs. But contrary to what happens in the US text, the Dutch Marito marks the newspapers so that Pascual would not plagiarize his own work when preparing the other bulletins. These textual modifications have also affected the evaluative dimension. Both the US and Dutch readings are still edgy but the target of the negative judgment is different: in the US text, the mature narrator exposes the illicit character of his former professional activity. In the Dutch text, though, the mature narrator mocks his younger self and highlights the absurdity of the situation insofar as he wants to avoid that others plagiarize his work which is itself full of plagiarisms. This last reading would be odd if it did not square with so many other textual samples where the younger self's pedantry is harshly exposed by the mature narrator. The fact that this reading was privileged only by one of the two translators clearly indicates the interpretive component of irony. On a methodological level, it is a reminder of the limits of pre-established lists of criteria for the selection of literary ironic fragments.

Example (2) marked the limits of a repertory list for instances in which the reader's ironic attribution *happens* as a consequence of information gathered in other parts of the novel's textual space. Example (3) will point out the same limits but for instances where ironic happening depends on an intertextual mechanism. The example is taken from the novel *Tres tristes tigres* (1967) by the Cuban writer Cabrera Infante (1929-2005). I will not get into all the details of this extremely fragmented novel. Suffice

it to say that the author juxtaposes different male characters that compete with each other. Their central activities are centred on women and language. Silvestre, a writer who seems to have little luck—both with women and writing—tries to seduce a young but very dumb blonde. She is accompanied by a girlfriend with whom she has a lesbian relationship, as suggested more than once in the chapter. When Silvestre realizes he is not making any progress at all, he mocks his own condition by manipulating the words of a very popular Cuban saying. He replaces the well known "perro huevero, aunque le quemen el hocico, sigue comiendo huevo", -meaning literally "an egg eating dog will always eat eggs, even when he burns his snout"- combining the first part of the saying "perro huevero, aunque" with "esté entre avestruces". Translated literally, this means as much as "an egg eating dog, even when" combined with "being among ostriches". Only the original excerpt will be listed here; the two translations analysed (French and Dutch) will be inserted below.

(3) Perro huevero, aunque esté entre avestruces (Cabrera Infante, 2005, p. 424)
= [an egg eating dog, even when being among ostriches]

The contrast between what is mentally activated in the reader's mind on the one hand—necessity obliges hungry dogs to continually burn their mouths —, and what is stated literally by the reference to the ostrich's habit of putting its head in the sand in order to consciously ignore danger on the other hand, is what triggers the mocking self-protective irony of the character, a sort of "expression of […] wisdom in a world full of snares" (Muecke, 1969, p. 234). The manipulated saying signals to the reader the character's daring attitude—as stated—but its partial repetition and the ensuing mental echoing of the original saying prefigure the unhappy consequences the protagonist will have to face when he burns himself once more, i.e. when once more his sexual hunger does not get satisfied. It is the partial repetition that makes the reader interpret Silvestre's attitude as both verbal wit *and* self-irony. The manipulation of the saying also induces a second reading: for the reader relying on the biblical intertext (Job 39:13-18), the image of the ostrich points to the women's lack of intelligence, to a person without wisdom or understanding. This second reading is very plausible, particularly if we take into consideration the exact timing of Silvestre's comment: he has tried several times to make the women laugh, but his intellectual humour inevitably falls on deaf ears. When he tries to make them laugh once again, this time with a pun, he finally realises that it is no use trying and makes the dog-comment. Silvestre's observation therefore not only conveys a good dose of self-irony but also severely criticizes the women's lack of humour and intelligence.

Even if it were possible to include in an *a priori* repertory list all the features that could possibly account for the evaluative signalling or

intertextual framing, and provided that identifying these features in both ST and TT were feasible on a descriptive level, this would still only solve one part of the threefold problem inherent in comparative procedures. As has been suggested above, two more problematic features, the degree of difference and the specific traits according to which the comparison is carried out, are still to be dealt with. This last issue concerns the *value* to be attributed to the shifts and similarities established through comparative procedure. Koster rightly underscores that establishing shifts is not tantamount to identifying normative practices. It is not so much the shifts in themselves but the way they are put to use that possibly makes them normative. If the ST is regarded as the sole point of comparison—i.e. when shifts identified between the ST and TT are considered as deviations of how a translation *should* be realized –, then the ST is used as a normative yardstick. If, however, shifts are considered as "a deviation from a *potential* rendering, rather than a deviation from a maximal or optimal rendering" (Koster, 2000, p. 159) then dissimilarities (or shifts) between texts are even "essentially positive in that they become highly meaningful" (Crisafulli, 2004, p. 238) for the way in which individual translators carry out specific readings of the ST. As Koster suggests (2000, p. 159), one way of deriving the invariant relative to which a shift will be established is by working with more than one translation of the same ST: either in the same or in different languages. Koster's convincing reasoning does not solve the problem that the interpretive nature of irony makes it difficult to define the relevant qualities in terms of which dissimilarities have to be defined.[8] Let us analyse this in the light of the former example; the manipulating of the Cuban saying which triggers the reader's interpretation of Silvestre's self-irony. In French and Dutch respectively, this has been rendered as follows:

> *Le criminel revient toujours sur les jeux de son crime (Cabrera Infante, 1967/1970, p. 404)*
> = [The criminal always returns to the games of his crime.]
>
> *De vos verliest wel zijn haren maar niet zijn teken (Cabrera Infante, 1967/2002, p. 389).*
> = [The fox does loose his fur but not his ticks.]

Let us say I establish the shifts relative to an invariant such as *the ironic*, a rather elusive literary effect but, as suggested above, probably the only way there is to merge fundamental elements in the ironic happening: formal signalling which is, if *irony happens*, combined with a series of emotive responses generated through framed interpretive processes. In our example, *the ironic* in the ST operates through a distancing contrast between the stated and the mentally activated ironic repetition. From a textual perspective, it animates Silvestre in that it pinpoints him as a self-conscious and witty character who compensates his lack of luck in love with self-

irony. Even though he knows he will once again get burnt (dog), he consciously ignores the danger or unpleasant facts (ostrich). We have also suggested a second possible reading, triggered by the ostrich image symbolizing the woman's stupidity.

In the French text, the mechanism underlying the irony is no longer the accumulation of meanings through what is stated and what is merely suggested by means of mentally activated echoic repetition. Rather, the accumulation of risky behaviour and self-knowledge is activated jointly in the image of the criminal and no longer operates by means of a "simultaneously double ironic meaning" (Hutcheon, 1994, p. 60). Above the level of the simple sentence, though, it still fulfils a similar textual function in that it animates Silvestre as a self-ironic character. The Dutch case is different in that it puts forward Silvestre's slyness through a very funny manipulation of a well known Dutch saying which might be translated as "the leopard cannot change its (s)pots". What is evoked here is the unchangeable nature of Silvestre: womanizing (and *not* succeeding in it) is indeed one of his most frequent activities. But the fox image does not combine the inclusive meaning of both consciously ignoring danger and getting burnt. Its cutting edge is oriented differently: in both the ST and the French TT Silvestre mocks his negative qualities by anticipating ironically his imminent failure to seduce. In the Dutch text, the fox-imagery merely communicates Silvestre's unchanged habit but does not give away the character's negative self-judgment nor does it anticipate his failure. It should also be noted here that neither the French nor the Dutch text allows for the second reading that I have suggested above: the criticism of the woman's stupidity has been completely erased.

Let us now return to the discussion regarding the relevant qualities which will enable us to distinguish and evaluate the shifts. If, as I have stated above, we evaluate according to *the ironic*, then both TT excerpts – the French and the Dutch—show shifts. They are, however, of a very different nature. The displacements can be optimally grasped only if I artificially isolate three criteria included in the establishment of the invariant as a heuristic construct: (1) irony's semantics, (2) its cutting edge and (3) its formal markers and framing[9] making the irony come into existence (Hutcheon, 1994). Both the French and the Dutch excerpts, then, show major shifts regarding the irony's semantics in that there is no superposition of the said and the unsaid. It is true that the French excerpt accumulates both meanings through connotation in the burglar imagery, but this is not done by distancing a stated and an unstated meaning through the manipulation of a saying; it is triggered by the inferences we make about the possible consequences for a burglar returning to the scene of his crime. In the Dutch excerpt, there is no inclusive meaning whatsoever. Regarding the cutting edge, I have shown the Dutch excerpt's shift towards a much less evaluative stance: the I-character's self-irony of the ST has evolved in praise of his own sly tricks and unchanged habits. This brings us to the third

element, the formal signalling of irony, where there is no shift at all. Both the French and the Dutch translation's comical manipulation of an original saying makes the reader aware of possible irony: the triggering mechanism works in the same way. However, only in the French text does the exact choice of the saying, i.e. its lexical-semantic load, serve the character's self-irony in that it conveys his attitude towards his own stupidity. The fox in the Dutch excerpt does not arouse critical self-judgment but merely satisfaction with one's own sly tricks.

5. Inherent normativity

Summarizing these elements, one is tempted to claim that the Dutch excerpt is no longer ironic, whereas the French one still is. This evaluation should, however, be put into the right perspective: it reveals no judgment on the part of the scholar whatsoever, but is merely used as a comparative technique. It does disclose, though, the inherent normativity in the way I have organised my methodology. Let us state first that the normativity I am talking about is not a consequence of source-orientedness: by positing *the ironic* as the invariant for the comparison, this obstacle has been dealt with. In fact, there are numerous examples showing an ironic TT excerpt for an un-ironic ST excerpt. The uncritical stance, then, stating that source-text oriented analysis is *necessarily* normative whilst target-orientedness *automatically* safeguards against it, does not hold. In my view, there is only one reason why target-orientedness should be preferred in (or combined with) translational interpretive analysis and that is its epistemological added value. Indeed, complementing ST-TT comparisons with research into target-side contextual features is necessary in that it gives us access to a series of "factors impinging on translation behaviour" (Crisafulli, 2004, p. 24). It is highly regrettable though that much radical target-side research has inevitably led to an excessive "predilection for abstract patterns and regularities of behaviour, which inevitably obfuscates single translators" (Crisafulli, 2004, p. 328).

The inherent normativity mentioned above, then, is of a wholly different nature and has, though differently, been underscored by Koster (2000, pp. 155-157). This kind of normativity, which is *unavoidable*, is related to the nature of comparative procedure itself. Since, as he argues, any comparative procedure "one way or another, entails an evaluation of actual choices against a range of possible choices" (2000, p. 156), the decisions regarding what does and what does not constitute a shift will always be dependent "on the describer's views of the relationship between the two linguistic, literary and/or cultural systems involved" (2000, p. 157). The only way to avoid normativity, then, is by "abstaining from translation comparison altogether" (2000, p. 157). He comes to terms with this pessimistic reasoning by arguing that the comparative procedure between

what *is* (the translated) and what *could have been* (the range of potential renderings) is in fact "not different from any process of signification" (2000, p. 157) and that, in that sense, "the normativity of translation description is inherent to the status of Translation Studies as an academic discipline *taking cultural products as its object*. Since the study of cultural products and practices is itself a cultural practice it is bound to be *interpretive*" (2000, p. 157, my emphasis). I fundamentally agree with this argument but would like to expand on the exact implications that this has for my methodology. By narrowing the scope of my research—the ironic—and by identifying shifts according to *the ironic*, I will necessarily focus first and exclusively on the way the ironic has been affected, be it in the ST or in one of the TTs. I will always look upon my samples with analytical lenses that prioritize the way relevant formal features or emotive and intertextual framing making the irony happen, have been translated. Looking at translations in a retrospective way and with a particular research aim means that, inevitably, I restrict the possible incidence of other elements having interfered in the translator's ultimate and definitive option. There is, however, one fundamental difference between the translator's practice and the scholar's analysis: the translator is forced to prioritize between multiple variables and will decide whether to prioritize certain features at the expense of others. The describer's interest and conceptual lenses will always be guided by his or her research aims and objectives. Even though his concern is mainly the translation of humour, Zabalbeascoa's warning can be adapted *mutatis mutandis* for the case of irony:

> […] when translating humor, we need to know where humor stands as a priority and what restrictions stand in the way of fulfilling the intended goals [...]. The complexity of translation, then, arises from the range of possible combinations of so many variables. Priorities and restrictions may change considerably from translation to translation and even between the translation and its source text. [...] If a certain feature is perceived [by the translator] as a top priority it must be achieved at all costs, middle range priorities are highly desirable but share their importance with other textual features. Marginal priorities are the ones which are only attempted as long as more important priorities are fully accounted for first. Priorities that are prohibited should not appear in the text at all, although they may be perfectly legitimate in other circumstances (2005, pp. 201-202).

The discrepancy between the scholar's microscopic focus and the translator's general one will necessarily have an influence on the evaluations regarding the ironic. The only way to deal with this discrepancy is by formalizing it throughout the way the ironic shifts will be evaluated. Therefore, the shifts looked upon must not be formulated in evaluative

terms: a shift in *the ironic* does not entail a better or inferior translation but can reveal indicative factors of the way(s) a translator has interpreted a specific (un)ironic excerpt.

6. Conclusion

In the first part of this paper I have highlighted why the adherence to a specific conception of literary irony is by no means value-free and entails programmatic consequences for the TS scholar. Only a dynamic approach to irony—whereby irony happens rather than exists—allows us to embrace three relevant orientations in descriptive empirical TS research: (1) target-side functional investigations, (2) historical-descriptive oriented analyses and (3) translational interpretive oriented analysis. In the second part of the paper I have focused on this third kind of research, because it involves a series of thorny questions regarding the comparative ST-TT procedure. I have organised these difficulties around three central issues: (1) the unit of comparison, (2) the degree of the differences looked upon and (3) the specific traits on the basis of which the differences and similarities are identified. I have illustrated why the repertory method can only function as a point of departure: the interpretive and evaluative nature of irony is incompatible with exhaustive taxonomies pinpointing the analysis to strict linguistic or textual features. That is why I have proposed as an invariant *the ironic*, a rather elusive literary effect which enables me to merge three fundamental elements in the ironic happening: its semantics, its cutting edge and its formal markers. This methodological construct offers a double advantage: by considering an invariant such as the ironic, I can (1) establish the unit of comparison on whatever (linguistic, textual, intertextual) level is necessary and (2) account in one single concept for very divergent elements such as formal signalling, interpretive/evaluative processes and the semantic mechanisms underlying the ironic phenomenon. I have not, though, overcome one fundamental issue inherent in the comparative procedure: the discrepancy between the scholar's narrow conceptual lenses and the translator's final decisions deriving from general considerations. This is an essential issue which must be taken into account when we evaluate the identified shifts. I conclude that this aspect, rather than constituting a limit for the analysis, can be essential in that it reveals fundamental aspects regarding the specific way in which certain features of the ST have been interpreted.

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2 Unlike Booth, the illustrative examples given by Hutcheon are not restricted to literary works. Her examples come from a varied range of media (music, opera, film, visual art, performance, etc.), which is motivated as follows: “[T]his choice represents my recognition of the fact that irony “happens” […] in all kind of discourses (verbal, visual, aural), in common speech as well as in highly crafted aesthetic form, in so-called high art as well as in popular culture” (1994, p. 5).

3 I will develop elsewhere these factors that are essential in the argumentation of the three key notions at the basis of my methodological construct, the ironic.

4 The exact quote by Naaijkens is: “Vertaalinterpretatie wordt begrepen niet als de in het proces van het vertalen zich ontwikkelende zienswijze maar wel de speciale zienswijze op de brontekst zoals deze uit het vertaalproduct blijkt” (2002, p. 46). I will come back to the methodological implications of this issue later on in this paper.

5 Suleiman very rightly identifies the imbrications of meaning and intention: "the notion of intention is a necessary, if embarrassing, component of any critical theory that locates meaning in the text: necessary, because if the text represents or contains a stable meaning, then that meaning must have been "put there"—willed, intended—by someone; embarrassing, because it threatens to lead back to the bogs of biographical criticism and to the Author as ultimate authority and guarantor of the meaning of his text" (1976, p. 16).

6 Like Delabastita (2001), Crisafulli uncovers the paradox in Koster's critique of the Adequate Translation (Toury, 1980) as a form of tertium comparationis on the one hand and Koster's own, equally positivistic, purpose on the other: "Koster's totalizing, all-encompassing framework for the description of poetic discourse in translation, which should supposedly yield an invariant semantic skeleton of the source text that can serve as a tertium comparationis, is tantamount to endorsing a positivistic-structuralist conception of the Adequate Translation" (2004, p. 54).

7 Unless, of course, we were to include in the list the use of brackets as a possible trigger of irony. Once again, this would lead to extremely laborious preliminary analyses. If, in my repertory list, I were to include brackets as a potential trigger of ironic attributing, I would have to list all instances where brackets were used and then verify whether they allow for ironic inferences or not. This would of course be extremely time-consuming.

8 I have slightly modified Halverson's suggestion as to the way she formulates the problematical issue. Since she discusses equivalence, it is not surprising that the "third component of the concept of equivalence which […] has been […] the focus of conceptual debate is the quality in terms of which the sameness is defined" (1997, p. 210, my emphasis). I think, however, that, provided some slight changes (i.e. differences instead of sameness), it very rightly summarizes the three fundamental issues of comparative procedure.

9 My term is inspired by Hutcheon's (1994, pp.141-175) who herself draws on a warning by Culler suggested in Framing the sign: "[s]ince the phenomena criticism deals with are signs, forms with socially-constituted meanings, one might try to think not of context but of the framing of signs: how are signs constituted (framed) by various discursive practices, institutional arrangements, systems of value, semiotic mechanisms?" (1988: ix, quoted in Hutcheon 1994, p. 145). Hutcheon's use of frame leaves more margin to the interrelatedness of context and frames: "in fact, frames change contexts, so the notion of context is not so much supplanted by as supplemented by the theory of framing" (1994, p. 145). Context, then, is not a "positivistic entity existing outside the utterance but rather is itself constructed through interpretive procedures. And these procedures, in turn, have been formed through our prior experience with interpreting other texts and contexts" (1994, p. 146).