Diverging Author/Translator Interventions in the Dutch, French and US Translations of the Cuban Novel *Tres tristes tigres:* Some Explanatory Factors

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Abstract

The conditions in which the Cuban novel *Tres tristes tigres* (Cabrera Infante 1967) was translated into French, English and Dutch were very different, particularly as regards (1) the type of collaboration between the original author and the translators and (2) the publication dates of these translations. In this respect, the French and the US English translations are very similar: both *Trois tristes tigres* and *Three Trapped Tigers* were realized in collaboration with the author and both were published in the target cultures shortly after the original (1970 and 1971 respectively). The making of the Dutch translation, on the other hand, is very different: *Drie trieste tijgers* was published for the first time in 1997 (with a revision in 2002) and was realized without virtually any sort of collaboration between the author and the Dutch translators Fred de Vries and Tessa Zeiler.

In the light of these data, it was expected that the collaboration between the author and the French and American translators (Albert Bensoussan and Suzanne Jill Levine respectively), as well as the proximity of the publication dates would affect the textual features of the translations. More precisely, it was expected that the French and US translations would be comparable and that these two would show substantial differences compared to the Dutch one. These initial assumptions were verified on the basis of three stylistic features, selected because they enforce decision-making processes on the translators: (a) intralingual speech variety, (b) (monolingual) language play and (c) intertextual irony. The initial assumption, though, was not corroborated. In fact, for two of the three categories analyzed, similarities were observed *not* between the US and French translations but between the US and Dutch translations.

We will briefly exemplify these data and then explore clarifying factors beyond the two conditions privileged initially. These explanatory elements are organized in a framework that draws on two of Bourdieu's key concepts (capital and field) but also includes data gathered by ethnographical modes of inquiry that enrich the predominantly relational focus of Bourdieu's concepts as used in TS. We focus on (1) the cultural and social capital of the different translators and their position in their respective literary fields, (2) the author's opinion regarding translation as an unlimited creation, and his unequal attitude towards the target cultures and languages involved and (3) the translators' poetics (including the translators' stance towards language, their own (in)visibility and the author's intention and original creation).

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General Presentation of the Novels: *Tres tristes tigres*, *Three trapped tigers*, *Trois tristes tigres* and *Drie Trieste tijgers*[1]

Tres tristes tigres (*TTT*)[2], written by the Cuban-born writer Guillermo Cabrera Infante (1929-2005) is considered a remarkable but complicated and fragmented novel. It was first published in 1967, but only after substantial remodelling: only some of the chapters that compose *TTT* today were presented in 1964 as part of a vast manuscript *Vistas del amanecer en el trópico*. It won the prestigious Premio Biblioteca Breve awarded by the Catalan publisher Seix Barral. Political overtones were rampant in the manuscript and its narrative structure was extremely fragmented. For these reasons, the jury of the Premio Biblioteca Breve advised the author to divide the original manuscript into two separate books with clearly demarcated purposes: the first one socio-political and the second exclusively aesthetic (Souza 1996: 78). In spite of this warning, Carlos Barral, then director of Seix Barral, and the author himself decided to submit the existing manuscript to the Franco censorship. When the censorship prohibited its publication, the author decided to rewrite significant parts of the novel. The major modifications concerned its initial political connotations: Cabrera Infante himself had come to consider the initial manuscript too "Sartrean", and now gave the novel a stricter aesthetic dimension; polemical (political) passages were ruled out. Even so, when this reconfigured novel passed the Franco censorship in 1967, it was not after it had suffered another 22 cuts (Cabrera Infante 1989: 217).[3]

The novel relates the nocturnal outings of several friends keen on playing, both with words and women, and gives an insight into Havana's night life in the pre-Castro era. Critical reception insisted on the importance of the transgression of language (Volek 1984; Sklodowska 1999), the satiric (Nelson 1983) and parodying intention (Lang 2008) of the novel. The author himself described his text in an interview with Rita Guibert as "a joke lasting for about five hundred pages" (1973: 415). The novel is full of puns, parodies and has a high degree of intertextuality (Rowlandson 2003; Hall 1987). Considerable parts of the novel are written in the Cuban Spanish vernacular as it is spoken in the streets of Havana.

[1] Warm thanks to Lars Bernaerts, Redgy Vanhove, Suzanne Jill Levine and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on previous versions of this paper. All omissions and errors remain, of course, mine alone.
[2] We will use the abbreviation for the ST only. The titles of the translations will be mentioned fully. All references to the novels' pages refer to the novels cited in the bibliography.
[3] The non-censured version was published for the first time in 1989 (Caracas, Biblioteca Ayacucho).

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The author collaborated very intimately with his French and American translators, Albert Bensoussan and Suzanne J. Levine respectively. He invited his translators to live and work at his London residence where he lived in exile from 1965 until his death. As for the Dutch translation, first published in 1997 (Anthos) and revised in 2002 (Ambo), collaboration was limited to four written messages (faxes) between the author and the translators. According to the Dutch translator Fred de Vries, the problems discussed in these communications were related to lexicon and very local references.[4]

Outline of the initial hypothesis and verifying categories

The present research initially assumed that the author's collaboration would be traceable in the translation product. Our starting hypothesis was that the translators' decisions would be influenced by the author's presence. This hypothesis was formed mainly on the basis of the declarations by the author himself, who stated that, whenever possible, he interfered in the translation process. In particular, it is worth mentioning the author's view on original creation and translation: since no single version can be perfect or final, translation provides an excellent opportunity for improvement. More specifically, the structural and linguistic make-up of this novel—with its dominant oral nature and imitations of local speech varieties—requires a particular translation. In an interview with Rita Guibert, he stated:

> For me, a book is always susceptible to correction and improvement, because perfection is not a state but a goal. As I don't believe in improvisation I believe in improvement. The translation of *TTT* [...] has been more of a refurbishing than a removal. [...] One can never translate the voices and my book starts from the concept of oral literature, or writing derived from speech and the voice. In this case the narrative took shape in Cuban speech and voice. Narrative in the traditional sense was not vital to this book, wasn't even important (1973: 409)

[4] All the information concerning the translation process of *Drie Trieste tijgers* was obtained through interviews (2006, 2009) and written communication (2009) with Fred de Vries. The second Dutch translator, Tessa Zeiler, who died in 2000, was not taken into consideration. I have disregarded her profile and possible incidence in the present research discussing only excerpts translated by Fred de Vries.

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In the light of the author's views and his interference in the French and US translation process, it was expected that the French and US translations would show similarities as regards the translational interventions. Conversely, it was expected that the Dutch translation would present fundamentally different characteristics, since this text was translated virtually without any author/translator collaboration and more than 25 years after the French and US translations. This hypothesis was verified by means of three different stylistic features: (1) intralingual speech variety, (2) (monolingual) language play and (3) intertextual irony. These three categories were retained because they are predominant features in the ST and because they force decision-making processes on the translators.

Illustrative example 1: intralingual speech variety

The *intralingual speech variety* has clear textual dimensions in the ST: local Cuban speech varieties are used systematically to satirize the uneducated, low-class female characters. The analysis of several excerpts of the translations showed a normalizing tendency in the French text, whereas the English and Dutch translations more clearly emphasized the original's grammatical irregularities by means of equivalent or compensating mechanisms available in the target languages. We will exemplify this with the following excerpt, copying first the original excerpt, and then the French, Dutch and English translations respectively. For a better appreciation, a standard Spanish version of the ungrammatical source-text is added between square brackets right after the ST version; corrections pertaining both to morphosyntax, lexicon and orthography have been underlined:

> Bueno ahora creo que tendremos que casalno pola iglesia y tóese lío, tú sabe queso una moda hora. Ya me encargué el trusó. Mira tú para eso, yo de novia hora después haber sío querida de Sipriano desde tengo uso rasón y después de vieja y pelleja meterme a novia de punten blanco. Bueno la cuestión que ya somos sosios y para eso que te llamé. (Cabrera Infante 2005: 46, sic)

> [Standard Spanish version: Bueno ahora creo que tendremos que casarnos por la iglesia y todo ese lío, tú sabes que eso es una moda ahora. Ya me encargué el trousseau. Mira tú para eso, yo de novia ahora después de haber sido querida de Cipriano desde que tengo uso de razón y después de vieja y pelleja meterme a novia

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de punto en blanco. Bueno la cuestión es que ya somos socios y es para eso que te llamé]

[FR] Maintenant je crois qu'il faudra qu'on se marie à l'église et tout le touin-touin, tu sais que c'est à la mode maintenant. J'ai commandé le trousseau. Tu vois ça un peu, moi fiancée maintenant après que j'ai été la maîtresse de Sipriano depuis que j'ai l'âge de raison et maintenant que j'ai roulé ma bosse me voilà fiancée avec la fleur d'oranger et tout. (Cabrera Infante 1970: 44-5; tr. by A. Bensoussan)

[DU] Dus ik denk dat we nou ook wel in de kerk moeten trouwen, ja, met alles d'rop en d'ran, das nou eenmaal mode op 't moment. 'Kep zelfs me bruidsjuk al besteld. 'Tis toch niet te geloven, ik opeens ze bruid terwijl ik al zo lang ik me kan herinneren Sipriano ze liefje ben geweest en nu dattik oud en verlept ben wor ik nog zo'n echt bruidje helemaal in het wit en zo. Maar goed 'tis dus zo dat we nu lid zijn en daarom he'k je gebeld. (Cabrera Infante 2002: 43-44, sic; tr. by F. de Vries en T. Zeiler)

[EN] I think we gotta get married in church now. You know, that's the trend. But it's gonna be a gas anyway, what with the wedding gown and all, so I've already been seeing to the true so or whatever way you say it. What dya think of that? Me a bride after being Cipriano's querida or kept woman as my granny loved to hate to say, balling in sin as long as I can remember, to start doing it same as always but with the Bishop's blessing this time. Ain't it wild? Specially now I'm on my way to matchurity... (Cabrera Infante 2004: 35, sic; tr. by S.J. Levine)

As can be observed here, the lower-class speech variety in the French translation is made explicit almost exclusively through lexical expressions ("tu vois ça un peu", "tout le touin-touin", "roulé ma bosse"); it is a prudent translation applying neither deviations pertaining to morphosyntax nor the insertion of deliberate orthographic errors. In contrast, in the Dutch translation, the grammatical deviations are much more salient: personal pronouns are deformed ("ze" instead of "zijn" in "*ze* bruid", "*ze* liefje") or agglutinated with verbal forms ("kep", "he'k" instead of "ik heb" and "heb ik"), vowels omitted ("d'rop en d'ran" instead

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of "d'erop en d'eraan"), words assembled ("dattik" instead of "dat ik") or deformed ("bruidsjuk" instead of "bruidsjurk") in order to imitate the spoken language of the lowly-educated. What is striking in the American translation is the use of slang ("gas", "balling in sin") and of unorthodox verbal forms ("gotta get married", "it's gonna be", "ain't it"), lexical terms ("granny") or pronunciation ("matchurity") associated with the Afro-American speech variant. What can be observed here at the micro-level is a consistent procedure for the translation in its entirety: the Cuban low-class variant is replaced systematically by the "particular accents and vocabulary of southern Black Americans", a decision defended by Levine who argues that this target group was "the closest culturally and ethnically to *TTT*'s many mulatto and black characters" (Levine 1991: 68). It should also be noted that the Dutch translators inserted mild imitations of Surinamese Dutch on several occasions, but preferred not to do this as systematically as was done in the US translation.[5] The decisions adopted in the Dutch and US translations are in striking contrast to the French solution. In the latter case, no particular target group was chosen and ungrammatical language use is absent.

Illustrative example 2: language play

As had been the case for the first category, the second one – language play – also showed similar tendencies in the empirical data from the Dutch and US translations and not from the French and US translation, as we had expected initially. The Dutch and American translators had a particular interest in preserving or even emphasizing the comic character and the punning dimension of the ST. By way of example, we will briefly comment on the following excerpt, in which the photographer Códac is talking about his friend Bustrófedon who recently passed away but whose influence on the other male characters remains considerable. Bustrófedon, as his name in English also suggests (Bustrophedon), is the master of punning, semantic safaris and always in search of new words in the Dictionary of Palindromes (Cabrera Infante 2005: 233). In the following passages we will list the comment made by Códac about his friend in the same order as above, i.e. first the ST, followed by the French, Dutch and US translations respectively:

[5] These textual findings were confirmed by Fred de Vries (2009). He preferred not to replace systematically in order to maintain the different nuances of speech variety present in the ST: according to de Vries, not every woman talks the same way, and these subtle differences should not be standardized.

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y [Bustrófedon] seguía con sus palabras felices:

Ana

ojo

non

anilina

eje (todo gira sobre él)

radar

ananá (su fruta favorita)

sos y

gag (la más feliz)

y estuvo a punto de hacerse musulmán por el nombre de Alá, el dios perfecto, y se exaltaba con la poca diferencia que hay entre alegoría y alegría y alergia y el parecido de causalidad con casualidad y la confusión de alineado con alienado (ibíd.: 234)

[FR] et [Bustrófedon] continuait avec ses mots heureux:

Aga

Ana

ara

été

nanan

non

radar

sos (le plus malheureux)

gag (le plus heureux)

et il avait été sur le point de se faire musulman à cause du nom d'Alla, le dieu parfait, et il s'émerveillait du peu de différence qu'il y a entre allégorie et allergie, entre casuel et causal ou de la confusion entre aligné et aliéné (Cabrera Infante, 1970: 223-4; tr. by A. Bensoussan)

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[DU] en dan vervolgde [Bustrófedon] met zijn gelukswoorden:

Anna

non

rot(at)or (daar draait alles om)

meetsysteem

kutstuk (palindroomloos proza)

radar

kajak & racecar (zijn favoriete voertuigen)

s.o.s (redder reder) en

lol (het leukste)

en het had een h-tje gescheeld of hij was moslim geworden, hoewel hij door zijn m.o. slim genoeg was, vanwege de naam van Allah, de bijna volmaakte god, en hij raakte opgewonden door het geringe verschil dat er is tussen allegro, allegorie en allergie en de gelijkenis tussen causaliteit en casualiteit en de verwarring tussen penskoker en peniskoker (Cabrera Infante 2002: 214; tr. by F. de Vries en T. Zeiler).

[EN] and [Bustrophedon] went on with his happy trip around the words:

Tit

eye

nun

kayak

level

sexes (everything starts with them three)

radar

civic

sos (the most helpful)

gag (the funniest)

boob

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> and for years he missed Miss Gardner lovesickly because he said, Ava was the ideal woman, and he went crazy over the simihilarity between allegory and allergy and causality and casuality and chance and change, and how easily farce becomes force (Cabrera Infante 2004: 223-4; tr. by S.J. Levine).

Striking in the Dutch and English recreations of this excerpt is the inclusion of several new palindromes or isolated terms related with a sexual semantic field (the Dutch "kutstuk" and "peniskoker", the English "tit", and "sexes"). Even though this is not induced by the ST's immediate co-text, it unmistakably squares with the dominant sexual flavour of the novel in its entirety. Moreover, these two translations add new parenthetical comments: the Dutch text even includes two new palindromes ("redder", "reder") and what seems to be a metalinguistic commentary: "palindroomloos proza" (literally translated as "palindromeless prose") echoes "droomloos proza" ("dreamless prose") suggesting a critical evaluation of the coarse connotation of the palindrome "kutstuk", which translates literally as 'piece of cunt'. New puns are inserted ("h-tje" for "haartje" and the division of "moslim" into "m.o." and "slim"). The American translator compensates the lack of palindrome equivalent for the Spanish Alá ("Allah") by a new play on the proper name of the actress Ava Gardner, thus including a cinematographic reference which is a frequent characteristic of the ST. She includes new deformed words ("simihilarity") and has the palindrome "sexes" followed by an intertextual literary reference to the speech of Aristophanes about the three sexes rendered in Plato's *Symposium*.[6]

The French translation is not so much remarkable for its lack of sexual connotations in the recreations – since nothing in the immediate ST induces this – as for the fact that the translator seems far less preoccupied with compensating mechanisms. This is particularly the case in the way the comments between brackets were recreated, but also becomes clear in the paragraph after the list of palindromes.

[6] This apparently arbitrary decision is in fact very consistent with another reference to the duo Plato and Socrates when in section XI of the last chapter ("Bachata") Silvestre, transcribing the quotes and dreams of his friend Arsenio Cué, abruptly interrupts stating that he "got tired of being a Plato for this Socrates" (Cabrera Infante 2005: 363).

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Illustrative example 3: intertextual references

Whereas for the first and second category, similar tendencies were attested in the Dutch and US translations, the last category – the intertextual ironic references – clearly sets apart the US translation. We will exemplify this briefly with an excerpt taken from section XVII of the chapter "Bachata", where two characters, Silvestre and Cué, talk about their friend Rine Leal. They want to make the women they have just picked up believe that he is a great Cuban inventor. One of the women, Magalena, can hardly conceal her contempt for his Cuban nationality. This is how she reacts (the points of interest for the present discussion have been highlighted):

- Pero [Rine Leal] es un gran inventor-insistí sobre Cué […].

- ¡Phabuloso!-dijo Cué con énfasis radiofónico.

- ¡No digan!-dijo Magalena. – En Cuba no hay inventores.

- Pocos pero hay-dije yo.

- Aquí to viene de fuera-dijo Magalena.

- ¡Qué oror!-dijo Cué. – Las mujeres que no tienen fe en su patria dan hijos sietemesinos.

- Lo único que falta –- dije yo — es que digas, Caballero, mira que lo blanco inventan (Cabrera Infante 2005: 413).

- But that doesn't stop him from being a great inventor, I said […].

- A phabulous hinventor! Cué said with radiophonic emphasis.

- Oh, come on! Said Magalena. – There aren't any inventors in Cuba.

- Not many but they do exist, I said.

- It was necessary to invent them, Cué said.

- Everything here comes from someplace else, Magalena said.

- Quel heurror! Cué said. – Women who have no faith in their country, may their children all be steel born.

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> **- "All that's needed – I said, -- is for you to say, Bwana, white man he invent all thing good. Mistah Kuétz, he dead?"** (Cabrera Infante 2004: 413; tr. by S.J. Levine).[7]

Levine alludes to "Mistah Kurtz, he dead", the epigraph of T.S. Eliot's poem "The Hollow Men", but she does so manipulating the quote according to the proper name of the character involved, Cué: Mistah Kurtz thus becomes Mistah Kuétz. The manipulation of proper names in the light of characters is a very frequent procedure in *TTT* and imitated here by Levine in order to enhance the intertextual irony of this particular excerpt. Eliot's epigraph alludes to the mad ivory trader Mr. Kurtz of Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* and has been interpreted as questioning the very ambiguous frontiers between the assumed light of civilization and the obscurity of the primitive. In the context of *TTT*, its use is ironic in that it is precisely Magalena, the most Cuban of all female characters, who openly states her contempt for national inventions and geniality. Nevertheless, the US translation enhances the critical evaluation of this irony even more in that the characteristics of Kurtz (hollow, mad, morally disintegrated) thus affect the character Cué, which squares unquestionably with the way he is described in other parts of the novel.

Explanatory factors

The remainder of this paper will focus on possible explanatory factors that may clarify why the initial hypothesis was not confirmed. We will do so by adopting two of Bourdieu's key concepts, capital and field, and complementing them with data gathered by ethnographical modes of inquiry (Flynn 2007 and 2009). These data allow for a more fine-tuned understanding of the translators' decisions and may thus be considered as "co-products of translation practices" (Flynn 2009). It is our viewpoint that, for this specific case, the empirical data may best be understood in terms of the personal and professional trajectories of the agents involved in the translation process, and by means of a critical analysis of their internal insights in their work and role as translators.

The question whether the translation field may be considered an autonomous field or not, will be disregarded in the present paper (see for instance Sela-Sheffy 2005; Simeoni 1998;

[7] The French and Dutch translations being literal, I have listed only the ST and US excerpt which are at the centre of the present discussion.

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Wolf 2007). We agree with Gouanvic (2005: 154) that translations integrate existing fields in the target culture, in our case the literary one. What is beyond discussion though is that these fields are hierarchic structures characterized by continuous struggles involving the different agents who invest their respective capital in order to determine, strengthen or modify their position in the field (Accardo 2006 [1997]: 55-85). In view of these particularities, it is essential that the author is taken on board as another (be it temporary) agent in the French and US translation process: the pressure he exerted on other agents in the translation process has been attested in several metatranslative documents (Levine 1991; Bensoussan 1990, 1999a, 1999b). Before we focus on the explanatory factors as such, we will set out our reluctance to use, in this particular investigation, the notion of habitus. Therefore, let us first go back to the motives Bourdieu had when he conceived of habitus as an adequate tool for the analysis of social phenomena. He uses habitus with one particular goal in mind: to explain the social domination that governs the quasi totality of social relationships. In order to do this, it is essential – still according to Bourdieu – to understand the mechanisms subjacent to the logics of this domination and, above all, in order to understand the reasons for the historical persistence of social domination. Still from Bourdieu's perspective, only when understanding thoroughly the social structures will we be able to become fully conscious of the profoundly unequal relations on the one hand and enhance the possibilities of some sort of emancipation of the dominated structures on the other. Habitus, then, combines two characteristics which allow him to explain the relative *status quo* of social domination: it encompasses both structural considerations (i.e. the fact that social environment exercises considerable influence on the individual agent) and agency accounts (i.e. in spite of important structural pressure, an individual is not totally exempt of individual agency).

The exportation, however, of a conceptual tool which was originally elaborated for a better comprehension of persistent unequal social relations in essentially monocultural settings explains why its usage in TS has often been criticized as deterministic, static and one-directional (Meylaerts 2008: 94). The remodelling of the notion of habitus for TS purposes (Simeoni 1998; Gouanvic 2005 and 2007) has implied a reduced focus on *primary socialization*, which was essential in Bourdieu's approach, in favour of *specialized habitus*. We believe, however, that we should take seriously Sela-Sheffy's warning (2005: 15) concerning the danger of "the narrow interpretation of the 'specialized habitus of the field' it may lead to." She rightly emphasizes the gap that prevails between the conceptual analyses

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on the one hand and the practical applications it has often given way to on the other: "[i]deally, she claims, the 'field habitus' means a range of tendencies and preferences of the agents in various aspects of their life (i.e. their 'taste')." However, in practice, "this classification seems to lead inadvertently to delimiting the 'habitus of the field' to the specific skills and preferences employed in performing translations (i.e. "the styles of writing translation", Simeoni 1998: 18-19)" (ibid). She is right to emphasize that there is little point in using "a complex conceptual tool such as the habitus" if the use we make of it remains confined "to this single, most obvious level of translators' action, by which translators are formally recognized" (ibid).

In this specific case, two more, interrelated, elements explain why we did not use the habitus concept: the *scope* of our investigation and the *nature* of our data. Let us remind briefly the course of the present investigation: it is the contradictory outcome of the textual data (i.e. the fact that our initial hypothesis did not produce supportive textual evidence) that made us look for possible explanatory reasons in the translation process, and not the other way around. To state it in different terms: the scope of this investigation is predominantly textual and focused on the translation *product*. The availability of metatranslative relevant data (Gouanvic 2007: 26) made it possible to look for explanatory reasons which concern both the *product* and the *process* alike. However, the nature of our data – insight, retrospective perspectives from the translators on their collaboration with Cabrera Infante, their opinions regarding language, creation and (in)fidelity – and the limited scope of our investigation – one literary work, one author and three translators pertaining to very different literary fields – do not allow us to make inferences about the habitus of these translators. What is lacking is quantitatively more representative data on their life-trajectories (both of these agents *and* of others with whom they interact), their tastes, self-representations and the various ways in which their primary socialization interact with their specialized habitus. The type of information we dispose of allows for an interpretive, qualitative centred understanding of the translator's tasks and performances.[8] We draw here essentially on Flynn (2007 and 2009) who insists on the potential contribution of the internal perspective offered by the agents engaged in the field. Of particular interest to us are the status of the agents (both translators and author) and their views on creation and intention, language and translator's

[8] See also Pym (2006: 14) for whom sociological factors "tend to have a quantitative aspect and can be associated with relations between people" whereas cultural factors "are more predominantly qualitative and can be related to signifying practices."

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fidelity. These have been organized into three subgroups: (a) a brief outline of the translators' positioning in the different fields, (b) the original author's poetics and his opinion regarding translation as an unlimited creation, but also his unequal attitude towards the target cultures and languages involved and (c) the translators' poetics, including their views on language, creation and (in)fidelity.

Bensoussan, Levine and de Vries

Let us go back to the French and US literary field as it was configured at the end of the sixties, and analyze the position of the translators involved. Their situation is not so different: none of them were professional translators at the time; both had scarce experience and were quite young. Both took advantage of the international success of Spanish-American fiction and the increasing volume of translations (see for instance Munday 2007, for the US tradition, and Malingreau 2002 and Molloy 1972, for the French situation).

Their cultural and social capital is slightly different. Bensoussan, an Algerian-born Jew, had worked as an assistant professor at Paris-Sorbonne from 1963 till 1966 and finished his PhD thesis in Iberian Studies that same year. He wrote his first novella, *Les Bagnoulis* (*Mercure de France*) in 1965 and has published several novels since. He worked first as an assistant lecturer in Paris and then as a professor at the University of Rennes from 1978 till 1995. Today, he is a very well-known literary translator, but in 1969, he had very little experience in (literary) translation: *Trois tristes tigres* is the first novel he translates. As for Levine, who has a secular American New York Jewish background, she was a graduate student at Columbia University. Before *Three Trapped Tigers* she had translated a short story for *The London Magazine* and came into contact, through her professor Gregory Rabassa at Columbia University, with the world of New York writers and particularly Latin American writers, where she met Rodríguez Monegal, an important and well-connected Uruguayan literary critic who was also just appointed a professor of Latin American literature at Yale University. Levine stated that the critic motivated her to read *TTT*, which, as an enthusiast already of the new Latin American writing, she was completely drawn to because of its humour and its brilliant and funny imitation of spoken language (Levine 1991: xiii). The same Rodríguez Monegal, who edited the Paris based literary magazine *Mundo Nuevo* from 1966 to 1968 and was very passionate about supporting the new Latin American writers,

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introduced her to Cabrera Infante in London in 1969. Cabrera Infante and Rodríguez Monegal had known each other since 1965; the writer has stated his debt towards Rodríguez Monegal who helped him (even financially by assigning him as a regular contributor to *Mundo Nuevo*) during the difficult years in exile.[9] Levine would enter the academic circle as a professor later after obtaining her PhD in Latin American literature, but was still a graduate student when she decided to translate *TTT*. She had finished her BA in Hispanic Literature and was studying for an MA in Translation. As stated above, one of her teachers, the renowned Spanish-English translator Gregory Rabassa, encouraged her to continue as a translator.

As for the Dutch translation, first it should be noted that this translation was commissioned halfway the nineties, when Spanish-American literature had lost its prestige and its prominence in the translation flows. According to Steenmeijer (1996), the novel was not translated earlier because its volume and complexity made it unprofitable for a very small Dutch-speaking market. Although this does not teach us anything about the final make-up of the text, it does suggest something about the motivations of the agents engaged in the translation process. According to de Vries, it is not so much due to his own social or cultural capital, but rather to the personal motivation of the Anthos editor at the time, Robbert Ammerlaan, who had read the English translation, was delighted and had been energetically searching for a translator willing to do the job. De Vries and Zeiler accepted in 1996. Ever since de Vries had graduated in 1978, he had been combining his job in education – teaching Spanish at secondary level and translation courses at the University of Amsterdam – with the translation of pragmatic texts. His experience as a literary translator was quite limited: he had translated three novels (two of them in co-translation), several short stories and two volumes of poetry in the early eighties. He considers *Drie trieste tijgers* his first *real* literary translation but also declared that his teachings at the University of Amsterdam yielded valuable insights that changed his way of thinking and of translating. When he was asked why he had accepted this translation project when others had refused it before him, he

[9] Rodríguez Monegal intervened in favour of Cabrera Infante with Carlos Barral who no longer wanted to publish *TTT*, because Cabrera Infante had (meanwhile) publicly criticised the Castro regime. The author also contributed to several volumes of the Paris based literary magazine *Mundo Nuevo*, which was directed by Rodríguez Monegal from 1966 until 1968, and which provided a source of income to the Cabrera Infantes during the difficult initial years of their exile (Souza 1996: 85).

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declared that the novel's language play and meta-literary dimension both attracted and challenged him.

The original author and his views on (re)creation

We have already touched on the author's aesthetic position, in that it constituted a cornerstone of our initial hypothesis: if, as Cabrera Infante is keen to openly advertise, the translation of one of his novels is an excellent opportunity for him to remodel, then we might expect to find traces of this intervention in the translations in which he participated. The fact that this did not appear from the data made us look for other possible reasons. Let us first consider the author's personal aesthetic position in more detail and relate it to the biographical notes. Clearly, Cabrera Infante interferes in the translation whenever possible, but this does not necessarily imply that he interferes to the same degree and with the same intensity. The author's biography clearly teaches us that his attitude towards and knowledge of the French language and culture is by no means comparable to the openly stated admiration he feels for Anglo-Saxon novels, writers and humour. Several elements back this up: he learnt English at a very young age, attended various language schools, and read English novels in the original version whenever these could be found on the island (Souza 1996: 15-29). His earliest writings show an important Anglo-Saxon component, both on a thematic and linguistic level (Matas 1987). Unlike so many other Latin American intellectuals who settled in Paris at that time (Weiss 2003), he preferred London as the locus of his exile. He openly declared this preference when he stated that "[t]he City of Light has never been a lighthouse for me. I've never found the verbal candy of the French language pleasant to the ear. On the other hand, I've always had a passion for English. I first found English hidden behind a screen as a child, its mystery fascinated me" (Guibert 1973: 389). When Levine decided to translate *TTT* and visited him in London, he had been living there for four years, interiorizing even more the Anglo-Saxon culture and English humour which characterized the ST anyhow: the original text already had a significant amount of English-Spanish multilingual punning, and shows several influences of Anglo-Saxon novels, writers and writing techniques.

It is very likely that the author's different attitude towards the target cultures involved interfered in the creation of the English and French translations. However, if these are the only or the most decisive factors, how then can we explain the recurrent similarities

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observed between the US and Dutch translations? The inconsistent textual data suggest that other elements – i.e. the translators' views on language, creation and fidelity – have been at least as decisive as the original author's intervention.

Translators' stance towards language, creation and fidelity

Both Bensoussan and Levine have left written statements which include very precise information on the translation process of *TTT* but also general statements about the translator's work and task, the role of language and the writer's creativity. The information about the Dutch translation was obtained through several interviews with Fred de Vries (2006, 2009). Toury warned scholars to take a critical stance towards information given by translators about their own work: it may be biased and (un)consciously manipulated (1995: 65-66). However, as Flynn (2009) rightly underscores, ethnographical approaches from neighbouring disciplines have developed fine-tuned analytical instruments sufficient for critical discourse analysis. This was put into practice in Malena's article (2009) in which she contrasts the written statements of Bensoussan and Levine. Even though we do not agree with some of her genre-driven arguments, we do subscribe to her general thesis that Bensoussan and Levine have a very different attitude towards the author, the text and the author's (in)fidelity (2009: 51). In Bensoussan's essays, fidelity towards the author, the translator's invisibility and the limits imposed by the French language are the central preoccupations. Levine, on the other hand, puts into perspective the original author's creation, ponders very little about the translator's (in)visibility and centres on the *effect* some of her interventions may bring about for the reader. She assumes full responsibility for her interventions when she states that "*Three Trapped Tigers* was written in 1971 for North American readers" (1991: 27). At first sight, Bensoussan shares this viewpoint on the historic and geographic variability of a translation, when he states that every reader is "in the first place a text critic […] and the text [is] inseparable from its context [which] varies according to the period, […] the history, the medium […] the geography and the ethnography" (1999a: 102; our translation). However, they disagree when it comes to the receptivity of their respective languages. Let us consider a remark by Bensoussan acknowledging the fact that (translated) Spanish-American prose has had a positive influence on the evolution of the French language:

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> The French language as used in the Spanish-American translations is marked by certain particularities, deformations, a manifest baroque extravagance, in the image and likeness of the Spanish used in those texts. Is it any wonder then that it has affected the French used by certain French novelists […] the Spanish-American boldness, so evident, is in this case very profitable, since it helps the French language in its evolution, its liberation - it frees it from its shackles (1999a: 114; our translation).

For Bensoussan, then, the French used in the translations of Spanish-American novels is much more malleable, and shows positive baroque extravagance. This is profitable in that it helps the French language in its own evolution and liberation. But does this observation contradict the empirical data, which have shown a tendency in the French version towards a more prudent use of ungrammatical syntactic structures? In our view, it does not. It reveals that Bensoussan experiences language-related restrictions still prevalent in the French tradition. The fact that the French translator feels the effect of strong restrictions may also be inferred from comments made on specific problems. Let us consider for a moment the tone and the words he uses when he declares that a French translated text is always, as an average, twenty percent longer; he illustrates this with an excerpt from one of his translations: "I admit a *mea culpa* here but in my defence, plead the inevitable correspondence of the objects and the terrible rules imposed by the French preposition" (1999a: 110; our translation). This at least suggests a burden felt by the French translator. In addition to this, it should be noted that Bensoussan insists, much more than the other translators, on the novel's innovative language and its peculiar character for the French literary market of the late sixties (1999b). For Bensoussan, language indisputably constituted a matter of concern. In our view, this explains, at least partly, why the grammatical deviances in the French translations are very restricted.

Levine's position towards the target language is very different: like Bensoussan, she is aware of the dissimilarities between Spanish and English but, unlike Bensoussan, she emphasizes these differences in order to portray translation as a subversive act:

> Consider briefly the lacunae between Spanish and English. The pitfalls are many: the temptation to choose cognates, Latinate words whose effect in English is often archaic, or even vague, such as amiable, whereas the Spanish counterpart amable is a common, vivid word. Or the betrayal of gender-identified noun in Romance

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> languages by the neuter noun in English […]. A provocative grammatical difference is the optional presence of the subject pronoun in Spanish: The subject can be ambiguously (un)designated, subsumed in the predicate verb unless the writer needs to emphasize or clarify the subject's identity […] The Spanish language tolerates, even seeks polyvalence, while modern English demands straightforward clarity. […] A translation should be a critical act, however, creating doubt, posing questions to its reader, recontextualizing the ideology of the original text. Since a good translation, as with all rhetorica, aims to (re)produce an effect, to persuade a reader, it is, in the broadest terms, a political act (1991: 2-4).

The Dutch translator Fred de Vries fully agrees with Levine's position. Even though he does not postulate as openly as Levine that translation constitutes a political act, he does agree with her that the most important concern for a translator is to consider the *effect* that an intervention may produce. He also states that he has never felt any restriction whatsoever in the Dutch language: if a pun does not work as it should be, or a fragment is not brilliantly translated, this may have several reasons, but one should first look at the ability or competence of the literary translator and not at the Dutch language as such. When asked about the permeability of the Dutch language, and its acceptation of neologisms, or innovating syntactic and stylistic structures, de Vries responds that he has never felt any pressure from a central linguistic authority whatsoever. However, when he was asked whether, in his viewpoint, this applied equally to other languages, he immediately replied that neither two languages nor target culture conditions are ever the same. De Vries spontaneously mentioned the French language, which, according to him, is held in check by a very restrictive normative power.

These restrictions imposed by the French tradition are also suggested in other contrastive analyses, such as the one conducted by Ilse Logie (2002). She analyses the US, French and Dutch translations of *Boquitas pintadas*, a novel written by the Argentine writer Manuel Puig, and mentions that the writer could hardly conceal his deception when reading *Le plus beau tango du monde*, the French translation of his novel. Puig himself attributed the French result and his ensuing deception to the strong French rhetorical tradition (2002: 72). According to the Argentine writer, some of his characters are perceived in the French texts as brushed up because their speech in French does not reflect the low-class connotations they have in the ST. The French-speaking female characters in *Trois tristes tigres* show

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similar tendencies: even while they are still profoundly stupid and superficial women, their language is far more polished than the one they use in the ST or the other target texts under analysis.

Furthermore, it should be noted that Cabrera Infante's comments stress the difficulties he experienced to recreate in *Trois tristes tigres* an effect similar to the original's one. In the same interview with Guibert, he emphasized both the hesitations of the French translator to use deviating language and the authoritarian influence of the French Academy:

> I kept reflecting that in spite of the closeness of French to Spanish – their grammatical complexities and many roots being identical – a translation into French would be the hardest, not to do, but to succeed in – and so in fact it turned out. [...] French is a very restricted language, pigeonholed as it is by its Academy, depending always on correctness, on what should or should not be said. The commonest phrase I heard from the lips of my translator, was "Ça, ce n'est pas du français!" I had a hard job convincing him at the outset that my text was not Spanish either and that the licences I allowed myself were not allowed by the Royal Academy of the Language nor by the most liberal of Spanish dictionaries (Guibert 1973: 410).

In addition to these observations concerning language and its (real or perceived) restrictions, other elements set apart the three translators: their opinions regarding translators' fidelity and the original author's intentions are also very different. All have similar concerns at the outset: *Fidelity: of course! But to what and to whom*? (Bensoussan 1999a: 30; Levine 1991: 2; de Vries 2009). Despite the apparently similar initial concerns, the three translators deal with the author's intention in a very different way. Levine's stance towards the text and the author is openly poststructuralist, Bensoussan seems more concerned with fidelity to the author's intention whereas de Vries's fidelity is somewhere in-between these two. The term poststructuralist as it is used here does not correspond to the absolute death of the author and the subsequent negation of author's intentionality in the literary text. In our view, the poststructuralist stance towards the text is to be understood as the explicit claim *not to restrict* literary interpretation to the reconstruction of this intentionality. In other words: the term does not imply disregarding the author either as the origin of the literary text, or as a possible intervening factor for the comprehension of this text, but does allow for alternative, equally valid readings operated from horizons others than the author's one (see for instance Burke 1998 [1992]). If we get back to Levine, it is clear that, on several occasions, she put

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the author's intention into perspective. This apparently originated in her close collaboration with Latin American authors: working with them made her realize that, even for the authors themselves, the original is nothing more than one plausible version among many alternatives:

> As I worked with [Guillermo Cabrera Infante], and later with Manuel Puig, I observed that the dilemma of one word versus another was not a problem unique to translation. The original writer constantly chooses words and phrases, compelled by intuitions and reasons that often have more to do with language than with his own intentions […] creativity is not a matter of inspiration but of choices, of decision-making. The original is one of many possible versions (1991: xiii).

This way of conceiving the original text and the author's intention has also influenced how she perceives her own work and the interpretation she uses when translating:

> Far from the traditional view of translators as servile, nameless scribes, we might consider the literary translator a subversive scribe, and not only because translations are betrayals in the traditional traduttore, traditore sense. An effective translation is often a "(sub)version", a latent version, "underneath", implied in the original, which becomes explicit (1989: 33).

Several of her comments suggest that the author's participation in the US translation had a liberating effect on her as a translator: she does not hesitate to describe her approach to *TTT* as a "faithfully unfaithful approach", except that this time the "author was one of the translators" (1991: 27); she also observes that "author-cum-translators elaborated on the original, adding more allusions, mostly to American and English culture" (1991: 25) which made their version "more artificial, more literary" (1991: 26).

This kind of comment is absent from Bensoussan's essays, which suggest a more traditional view on his role as a translator, emphasizing fidelity towards the author:

> the translator's vocation is not – as was the case in the Renaissance period – to stand in for the author in order to make his own voice heard. He has to speak as his author, follow his footsteps, put on his coat, his slippers, spy his tics, watch carefully his gestures and restore like a double in the theatre does, his silhouette and the inflections of his voice (1990: 599-600; our translation).

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De Vries's information on this issue is revealing. Through their written communication (faxes), Cabrera Infante invited the Dutch translators to substantially modify the ST, add new puns and intertextual references. De Vries declared that the written remark gave him some kind of psychological liberty to add compensating neologisms and language play, but did not significantly alter his view on the text. Whatever the author's opinion or liberties yielded, the written text is for de Vries a finished product which takes a course independent of the author's wishes. Therefore, a translation should aim at an effect similar to the original one but is, at the same time, subject to the legibility restrictions of the target public. Still according to de Vries, legibility, in the case of this novel, was of course of a very different nature: *TTT,* being very dense, is an elitist novel which is fully understood and appreciated only by a small part of the reading population. Therefore, considerations relative to legibility for the Dutch-speaking reader did not work in any restrictive way: de Vries never felt the urge to make the novel more transparent or explicit, but considered it essential to maintain the central focus of the novel, that is language play and parody.

Essential clarifying elements

These insights do not allow conclusive remarks regarding the translation processes, but do contribute to a better understanding of the textual data, thus supplementing elements which were lacking at first and may help us to remodel the initial hypothesis. For our specific purpose, the internal perspectives of the agents involved revealed several clarifying elements:

- At the time of translating, all three were inexperienced *literary* translators. This ruled out the influence of the translator's experience on the translation product, which could have been essential, considering the complexity of the novel, both on a thematic (referential) and linguistic level.
- The brief survey of the conditions of the respective literary fields showed that the Dutch translation was not an easy project, financially, and that it emanated from the particular interests of two agents active in the Dutch literary field: the chief editor and the translator himself: Fred de Vries.
- De Vries as well as the American translator stressed their fascination for the punning in the ST. These remarks confirm the empirical data observed: both translators show

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a tendency to maintain, compensate or even enhance the puns in the ST.

- The French translator's preoccupations with restrictions imposed by the French language and literary tradition clarify why his deliberately ungrammatical language use is much more prudent.
- Finally, Levine's interventions in the intertextual dimension and exemplified by a (deformed) reference to "Mistah Kurtz, he dead" may be explained in terms of her poststructuralist stance towards (original) creation and translation. Undoubtedly, her opinions about what a translation is, how a translator can intervene as a subversive scribe and the enhanced intertextuality of the US translation were influenced by her collaboration with the original author, whose particular interests in English culture is apparent from his work and life-trajectory.

Conclusion

The present analysis took as its starting point two particular conditions of the translation process of the Cuban novel *TTT*: (a) the collaboration (or non collaboration) between author and translator(s) and (b) the publication dates of the translations. In the light of these elements, it was expected that the French and US translations would chime and that both of them would show significant differences compared to the Dutch one. This was verified according to three stylistic features (intralingual speech variety, language play and intertextual irony) which have been briefly exemplified and commented upon. The fact that this initial assumption was not confirmed made us explore other explanations beyond the two conditions privileged initially. Three elements proved of particular significance for a better understanding of the empirical data: (1) the cultural and social capital of the different translators and their position in the field in which they were operating, (2) the original author's opinion regarding translation as an unlimited creation, but also his unequal attitude towards the target cultures and languages involved and (3) the translators' poetics (including the translators' stance towards language, translators' (in)visibility and the author's intention and original creation). On a methodological level, taking on board these elements allowed for more fine-tuned insights into the internal perspective of the actual agents involved in the translation process.

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