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**SIMPOSIO INTERNACIONAL "DESARROLLO HUMANO,
EQUIDAD Y JUSTICIA SOCIAL"**

**Translation Strategies for Hedging Devices in English Newspaper
Articles on Climate Change**

*Estrategias para la traducción de matizadores discursivos en artículos
periodísticos en inglés sobre cambio climático*

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Abstract:

Translation has increasingly become an essential recognized activity for intercultural communication. However, errors in translation can have negative consequences in cases of inadequacy in fields such as science, medicine, law, or technology. One of the main problems found in translation is the difficulties to translate some linguistic devices such as hedges. As linguistic devices, hedges are embedded in several types of discourse, which could lead to problems in understanding and translating the text and the author's initial intentions. This paper proposes a set of strategies for the translation of hedging devices (from English into Spanish) in online English newspaper articles on climate change. The study was carried out through a comparative analysis of a parallel English-Spanish corpus compiled from the newsroom of the websites of three environmental agencies by using the software AntConc 3.5.8 for Windows (2019) and LF Aligner 4.21 for Windows (2019). The set of strategies proposed can help improve the quality of the teaching and learning process of translation in the degree course English Language with



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a Second Foreign Language. In addition, professional translators could benefit from the proposal.

Resumen:

La traducción se ha convertido en una actividad reconocida y esencial en el ámbito de la comunicación intercultural. Sin embargo, los errores en la traducción pueden tener consecuencias negativas en campos como el de la ciencia, la medicina, el derecho o la tecnología. Uno de los principales problemas en la traducción son las dificultades para traducir recursos lingüísticos como la atenuación. Como recurso lingüístico, la atenuación forma parte intrínseca de varios tipos de discurso, lo que podría llevar a problemas de comprensión y traducción del texto y las intenciones originales del autor. Esta ponencia propone un conjunto de estrategias para la traducción de matizadores discursivos (del inglés al español) en artículos periodísticos en inglés en línea sobre el cambio climático. El estudio se realizó a través de un análisis comparativo de un corpus paralelo en inglés y en español compilado de las secciones de noticias de los sitios web de tres agencias medioambientales con los software AntConc 3.5.8 para Windows (2019) y LF Aligner 4.21 para Windows (2019). El conjunto de estrategias propuestas puede ayudar a mejorar la calidad del proceso de enseñanza y aprendizaje de la traducción en la carrera de Lengua Inglesa con Segunda Lengua Extranjera. Además, la propuesta también puede beneficiar a traductores profesionales.

Keywords: hedging, hedging device, newspaper discourse, parallel corpus, translation strategy

Palabras Claves: atenuación, matizador discursivo, discurso periodístico, corpus paralelo, estrategia de traducción

1. Introduction

Translation is conceived as a form of intercultural communication, and it arose when people speaking different languages tried to interact among them in an attempt to



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overcome language barriers. In the field of translation teaching, one of the main problems professors come across is that, sometimes, translation students have difficulties to translate certain aspects such as those related to pragmatic competence, more specifically: hedging, "a rhetorical strategy that attenuates either the full semantic value of a particular expression [...] or the full force of a speech act" (Fraser, 2010). Not recognizing it can lead to misunderstanding the native speaker's ideas or intention, a pressing issue for translators.

At the Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas (UCLV), for almost 30 years, students majoring in English Language with a Second Foreign Language have been trained to become translators and interpreters. Nevertheless, some difficulties have been observed related with students' accuracy to translate hedging devices (from English into Spanish) in English newspaper articles within the subject *Traducción de Textos Periodísticos* in the second semester of the 5th academic year. Therefore, developing students' translation competence, specifically related to the translation of hedging devices in English newspaper articles, can help improve the quality of their translation skills.

This particular situation led to the overall aim of the paper of proposing a set of strategies for the translation of hedging devices (from English into Spanish) in online English newspaper articles on climate change. This topic was chosen due to its remarkable importance for the sustainability of the planet nowadays. Moreover, to accomplish this aim it was necessary to compile a parallel corpus of newspaper articles on climate change in English and Spanish, to identify the hedging devices employed in the English sub-corpora and to classify the strategies used for their translation. This process was completed using corpus linguistics.

This paper first presents some insights found on the bibliographic review regarding the topics of translation strategies and hedging; then it follows a description of the methodology as well as the results, discussion and conclusions.

1.1 Translation Strategies

Translation, as an activity, has gained great value and recognition. However, if the translator transfers the wrong meaning, it may be misleading and bring about negative



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repercussions. Thus, finding ways which may lead to better translation becomes crucial. One of these ways is the application of translation strategies. The translation must be done in an organized way so that the translator knows what to do when facing a problem. The procedures and techniques performed when solving a problem are called translation strategies.

The translator has to make the correct decision and choose the most convenient and effective strategy to achieve the intended purpose of the message and to make it accessible to a wider range of readers and this is an important stage of the translation process. Translators can apply those strategies advised by experts in translation studies when there is no appropriate equivalence in the target language.

Sanjun Sun (2012) also explains that the term *strategy* in the field of Translation Studies has usually been used as a synonym of terms such as *procedure*, *technique*, *method*, *tactic*, *approach*, and others. The meanings for such terms often overlap, and are defined in different ways by translation scholars.

Despite the variety of terms and definitions, as of the 1990s, there has been a surge in the use of the term *translation strategy*, which may explain its abundant presence in studies after that decade. For the purpose of the research herein presented, this term will be used to refer to the techniques and procedures consciously used by the translator to solve problems and to deliver a translation of quality that fulfills the lexical, syntactical and cultural-specific features of the target audience.

1.1.1 Translation Strategies Classification

When searching for a classification of translation strategies, the bibliographical review showed that the same discrepancies found when trying to reach a terminological agreement on the term *strategy* are transferred to the discussion regarding a classification. Most researchers describe their own classifications considering different aspects, which lead to a conceptual discussion, but also to different classifications.

However, most of these classifications overlap and represent the authors' attempts to impose their own perspectives on the matter which in most cases only means a change in the terminology. For the present study we revert to the classification proposed by



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Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) since it has served as a basis for most authors in the field. Further insights on this classification are provided below.

Vinay and Darbelnet's (1958) Classification for Translation Strategies

Although there has been much translation analysis since the 1950s aimed at creating a standard classification of translation strategies, there still is a wide range of models. As stated above, the present study is focused on Vinay and Darbelnet's (1958) taxonomy of translation strategies as their research had a significant impact and has been considered the starting point for later classifications of translation strategies and techniques. Furthermore, their work has been referred to as a manual of reference for students, professional translators and researchers.

Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) divided *translation strategies* —what they called *translation procedures*— into two categories: *direct* (or literal) *translation* and *oblique translation*, which comprise seven procedures taking into account three levels of style: *lexical*, *morphosyntactic* and *semantic*. The classification of the two categories and their corresponding strategies is shown below:

Direct translation strategies: when the message on the SL can be directly transferred to the TL because there is structural or extra-linguistic parallelism. These include:

- ✓ *Barrowing*: a word is taken directly from another language (SL) and employed with its same form in the TT without translation. This strategy is used in different languages in order to fill a semantic gap in the TT.
- ✓ *Calque*: a special kind of borrowing where the SL phrase or expression is literally translated word-for-word to create a new lexeme in the TL, while respecting the syntactical structures of the SL.
- ✓ *Literal translation*: when a ST is translated word-for-word into a TT. Here the translator tries to respect the structure of the original as much as possible by keeping the format, extension and content of the ST in the TT. However, *literal translation* is not acceptable, if: a) has a different meaning as the original or has no meaning, b) is not possible because it changes the structure of the ST, c) is not equivalent to the same level of the language or d) does not have a corresponding expression within the metalinguistic experience of the TL.



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Oblique translation strategies: valid when literal translation is not possible. They are applied when certain stylistic resources of the ST cannot be transferred without modifying the morphosyntax or lexis of the TT and include:

- ✓ *Transposition*: operates at a grammatical level and it involves the replacement of a word class of one part of the speech for another without changing the original message. It consists of changes in the word type or their sequence. Most common transpositions consist in changes of: *verbs* for *nouns*, *nouns* for *prepositions*, *adjectives* for *nouns*, *adverb* for *nouns*, *adverbs* for *adjectives*, *adverbs* for *verbs*, and *possessive articles* for *definite articles*. There are also changes in idiomatic constructions such as *participle + adverbial phrase* for *noun + participle*.
- ✓ *Modulation*: consists in the variation of the form of the original message by modifying the point of view without changing the meaning. It involves a change of perspective: the translator uses a phrase that is different in the SL and the TL to transfer the same idea. This strategy entails a shift in the semantics and the point of view of the SL and it is accepted in those contexts where either a literal or a transposed translation sounds unsuitable, unidiomatic or awkward in the TL, although the result is grammatically correct.
- ✓ *Equivalence*: refers to cases where languages describe the same situation by different stylistic or structural means. An utterance of the ST is replaced in the TT with one that fulfills the same pragmatic function, although it differs in form and meaning. This strategy is mainly used for the translation of idioms, proverbs and the onomatopoeia of animal sounds.
- ✓ *Adaptation*: implies changing the cultural reference when the cultural-specific peculiarities of the ST do not exist in the target culture and they must be eliminated or replaced by other cultural-specific peculiarities appropriate in the TT. Adaptations are particularly common in the translation of film and book titles. (Vinay and Darbelnet, 1958)

As already stated, translation strategies are those conscious procedures meant to solve the problems that arise during any translation activity. The nature of such problems can



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be varied and sometimes is mostly related to equivalence problems. However, there are other aspects of language that have proved to be difficult for translators such as those related with pragmatic competence. Since hedging is an element of pragmatics which usually poses a problem for translators, it will be analyzed hereinafter.

1.2 The Notion of Hedging

It is estimated that *hedging* as a linguistic phenomenon was first identified in the mid-1960s; however, it was linguist George Lakoff (1973) who first defined hedges more specifically as “words whose meaning implicitly involves fuzziness – words whose job is to make things fuzzier.” Decades later, Hyland (1998) described hedges as rhetorical means that are used to transform statements in order to express caution, modesty and humility, the removal of which confers greater certainty to propositions.

Over the past fifty decades there has been an increase in scholars’ interest regarding the idea of hedging, an interest that has risen in this 21st century. Elheky (2018) highlights that scholars have identified different reasons for hedging from which the author mentions: a) to tone down their utterances and minimize the risk of opposition; b) to inform readers that what they claim is not clear-cut and the final word on the topic; c) to establish a relationship between readers and writers or speakers and listeners as well as securing a certain level of acceptability in the society; and d) because it has become a convention to use a certain degree of hedging. This author also explains that hedging is present in all natural languages even though it varies from one language to another since the structure of the language exerts an influence.

Based on the aforementioned statements, the present study perceives hedges as those words or phrases expressing caution, hesitation or uncertainty regarding the truth value or level of precision in a statement. Hedging expressions pose a challenge to the translator because their identification is not always straightforward and their meanings are ultimately subjective. When dealing with hedges, translators need to take the style and meaning of the ST into consideration while still making sure that the TT fits naturally into the target culture. Moreover, hedges are worth studying from a translational perspective as they may be treated differently, and used more or less frequently, in different languages. As hedges originate in the author’s intentions with



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his/her text, the problem in the identification and translation of hedges is that the author's intentions are rarely known to the translator.

1.2.1 Classification of Hedging Devices

Several studies have revealed that the identification of hedges is ultimately subjective and that some are easily overlooked due to their assertive nature, while other words may be falsely identified as hedges. This motivates extra carefulness by the translator, to make sure that only real hedges are transferred to the TT as such. In order to facilitate their recognition, researchers have attempted to develop a taxonomy or classification.

However, even if there is a general consensus on the function and purpose of hedging devices, the classification of hedges is not very clear. Hooi and Shuib (2014), in their article *An Analysis of Hedging Devices in Complaint Business Letters*, attempt to summarize some of the different taxonomies or models used in the different studies. They mention House and Kasper's (1981), Skelton's (1988), Myers' (1989), Salager-Meyer's (1994), Hyland's (1996), Markkanen and Schröder's (1997), and Crompton's (1997).

Apart from the already mentioned taxonomies there are several others that have also been used for the categorization of hedging; however, the present study will only review the classification proposed by Salager-Meyer (1997) since it has been deemed the most pertinent for a study of this sort. Salager-Meyer's (1997) classification of hedges is summarized below.

According to Salager-Meyer (1997), hedges can be classified in:

- ✓ *Modal auxiliary verbs*: They express possibility and are the most straightforward and widely used means of conveying modality in English.
- ✓ *Lexical verbs*: Also known as speech act verbs, they are used to perform acts such as doubting and evaluating rather than merely describing. They have a varying degree of illocutionary force. These verbs tend to be semi-auxiliaries, epistemic lexical verbs and verbs of cognition.
- ✓ *Adjectival, adverbial, and nominal modal phrases*: Expressions or words that reflect mood or attitude of the speaker and it used to increase or decrease the degree of the certainty and the level of commitment. These forms of hedges



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include probability adjectives, nouns and adverbs (which could be considered as non-verbal nouns).

- ✓ *Approximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time:* Those words that indicate an unwillingness to make precise and complete commitment to the proposition expressed.
- ✓ *Introductory phrases:* Phrases that express the author's personal doubt and direct involvement.
- ✓ *If clauses:* Phrases used to express uncertainly and hypothetical meanings.
- ✓ *Compound hedges:* These are phrases made up of several hedges, the most common forms being: a modal auxiliary combined with a lexical verb with a hedging content, and a lexical verb followed by a hedging adverb or adjective where the adverb (or adjective) reinforces the hedge already inherent in the lexical verb.

Translation students need to distinguish between different degrees of emphasis which writers may exert on their claims so that the translation obtained conveys the writer's intentions. Tahririan and Shahzamani (2009) state that errors committed while using or interpreting hedges in journalistic language can cause "misunderstanding, misinterpretation, ambiguity, and vagueness"; however, it appears that very little attention has been given to examining hedging in newspaper discourse from a translating perspective. In the next section, the methodology followed will be analyzed.

2. Methodology

To fulfill the objective of the present study, a mixed-method approach was held since, as a method, it focuses on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data. This approach provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone (Creswell and Plano, 2011). The methods used were:

- ✓ Theoretical: *Historical-Logical, Analysis and Synthesis, and Induction and Deduction.*



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- ✓ Empirical: *Traditional document analysis, Content analysis, Survey to specialists, Corpus Linguistics, Lexicometric techniques and Participant observation.*
- ✓ Statistical: *Percentage analysis.*

The whole research process consisted of three (3) main stages:

First stage: the bibliographical review to establish the theoretical framework of the study consisting of the main concepts and aspects related to the topic under research.

Second stage: the compilation and analysis of the parallel corpus according to the specific necessities for the present research. At this stage, the hedging devices used in the English sub-corpus were identified and their Spanish equivalents were located in the second sub-corpus. In addition, the strategies for the translation from English into Spanish of such hedging devices were also determined and classified. For analyzing the corpus, the software AntConc 3.5.8 for Windows (2019), and LF Aligner 4.21 for Windows (2019) were used.

Third stage: the elaboration of a set of strategies for the translation of hedging devices (from English into Spanish) in online English newspaper articles on climate change as a tool for improving the translation competence of 5th year students of the degree course English Language with a Second Foreign Language at UCLV.

3. Results and Discussion

Based on the data obtained after the analysis, the most common strategies identified for the translation of hedging devices in online English newspaper articles on climate change were *literal translation* (59.4%), *transposition* (29.4%) and *modulation* (4.8%). At the same time, the strategy of *omission* of these hedges in the TT was used only in the 6.4% of the cases. These results can be better observed in table 1 below.

Table 1. Strategies for the Translation of the Hedging Devices Identified in the Corpus. Source: own elaboration

Type of	Total	Translation Strategy Used	Omissions
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Hedging Device		<i>Literal Translation</i> (% of total)	<i>Transposition</i> (% of total)	<i>Modulation</i> (% of total)	(% of total)
Modal Auxiliary Verbs	106	61 (57.5%)	29 (27.4%)	6 (5.7%)	10 (9.4%)
Lexical Verbs	49	27 (55.1%)	20 (40.8%)	2 (4.1%)	-
Modal Phrases	19	8 (42%)	4 (21.1%)	4 (21.1%)	3 (15.8%)
Approximators	129	85 (65.9%)	35 (27.1%)	2 (1.6%)	7 (5.4%)
Introductory phrases	3	2 (66.7%)	1 (33.3%)	-	-
If clauses	5	3 (60%)	1 (20%)	1 (20%)	-
Compound Hedges	3	1 (33.3%)	2 (66.7%)	-	-
Total	314	187 (59.5%)	92 (29.3%)	15 (4.8%)	20 (6.4%)

These results will be further explained hereinafter.

Literal Translation

Even though English and Spanish do not share the same root, news articles share structures and functions in both languages which, in turn, justify the use of this strategy to maintain the author's original intentions. Moreover, most of the hedging devices identified in this study are constituted by only one word (i.e., 106 modals auxiliary verbs, 49 lexical verbs, 19 modal phrases, and 128 approximators), thus fostering the use of *Literal Translation* as the most common strategy. As previously mentioned, *Literal Translation* was used in 59.5% of the cases, which represents more than half of all examples.

The main element taken into account to classify the strategies as *Literal Translation* was the arrangement within the utterance. If the hedging device and most of the utterance's constituents were organized in practically the same order in both versions (i.e., English and Spanish), and there was a word-for-word equivalence of the hedging device in both languages, the strategy applied was classified as *Literal Translation*.

However, if the word order of the utterances had been rearranged in the Spanish version for stylistic purposes or the TL phrase was different from the SL phrase, the strategies would be classified as *Transposition* or *Modulation*, even though the hedging devices



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were translated using word-for-word equivalence. The strategies of *Transposition* and *Modulation* are further described next.

Transposition and Modulation

Transposition and *Modulation* were the other two translation strategies used. They imply a sense-for-sense translation involving a variation in the form of the original message, word category or syntactic structure. These two strategies were used in the corpus in the cases where *Literal Translation* was not possible given the peculiarities of the TL and its differences with the ST.

Of these two strategies, *Transposition* was the most commonly used. This strategy operates at a grammatical level and was identified in the cases where there had been a change in the word order of the utterance as stated above. Moreover, there were other cases in which this strategy was used such as those where the word class of the hedging device was replaced by another part of the speech for stylistic purposes.

Furthermore, *Modulation* was the other translation strategy used. This strategy was identified at a lesser degree than the other two. It involves a change of perspective where a phrase that is different in the SL and the TL is used to transfer the same idea. *Modulation* is mostly used when neither *Literal Translation* nor *Transposition* provides an adequate solution for the translator taking into account the characteristics of the TL.

As can be noted from the table above, the strategy of *Transposition* was used in more than one fourth of the cases (29.3%), while *Modulation* was used in less than 5% of the cases (4.8%).

Omission:

During the analysis of the strategies applied for the translation of the hedging devices identified in the corpus, it was determined that in some cases hedges were not translated or omitted. In this dissertation, *Omissions* were considered to occur in three cases: 1) when the whole phrase, where the hedging device was present, had no equivalent in Spanish, 2) when the whole phrase, where the hedging device was present, was translated using the strategy of *Modulation* but the hedging device was not translated in any way and 3) when the whole phrase, where the hedging device was present, was translated but the hedging device was not.



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It is interesting to note that the strategy of *Omission* of the hedging devices was used with a higher frequency than the strategy of *Modulation*. However, the frequency of its use within each classification of hedges was not high enough to consider *Omission* as a regular strategy when translating hedging devices since one of the main tasks of the translator is to transmit the ST author's intentions, not to suppress it. At an institutional level, when there are omissions in self-translations it is usually due to institutional decisions which are not under consideration in the present study.

From the analysis described, it can be inferred that the most commonly used strategy for the translation of the hedging devices identified in the corpus is *Literal Translation* (59.5%), followed by *Transposition* (29.3%) and *Modulation* (4.8%), the latter in lesser degree. *Omission* was used in 6.4% of the cases and, even if this figure is higher than the frequency of use of the *Modulation* strategy, it is hardly used within the different types of hedges as opposed to *Modulation*. Therefore, the present study proposes the use of the *Literal Translation*, *Transposition* and *Modulation* as the set of strategies for the translation of hedging devices (from English into Spanish) in online newspaper articles on climate change and does not recommend their *Omission*.

4. Conclusions

The study of hedging in newspaper discourse aimed at developing strategies for its translation with the help of corpus linguistics has been rather scarce. Therefore, the present study constitutes a novelty and a step forward in this field. Thus, it is possible to set the following conclusions:

- The bibliographical review carried out on the topic provided some insights necessary to understand the present research by analyzing the debate regarding translation strategies, as well as the notion of hedging. For translators of newspaper discourse their role goes beyond that of simply transferring the ST into the TT and hedging devices pose a problem to achieve a result of quality. Therefore, overcoming this problem embeds the use of translation strategies.
- The methodology employed to elaborate a set of strategies for the translation of hedging devices (from English into Spanish) in online English newspaper



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articles on climate change consisted of three interrelated stages: bibliographical review, the compilation and analysis of the corpus and the elaboration of the set of strategies. To carry out the second stage, the software AntConc 3.5.8 for Windows (2019) and LF Aligner 4.21 for Windows (2019) were used.

- Therefore, the proposal of the set of strategies for the translation of hedging devices, composed by *Literal Translation*, *Transposition* and *Modulation*, resulted from the analysis of the compiled corpus of online English newspaper articles on climate change.

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