

The pedagogical value of translation solution types

Abstract: Typologies of translation solutions have been used in translator training at least since the 1950s. Despite numerous criticisms, some of the oldest versions are still held to have pedagogical value as the toolboxes of the trade. Here we report on class activities in which two classical typologies – Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) and Loh (1958) – were learned, applied, and critically evaluated by four classes of final-year Masters students translating into a variety of European and Asian languages. It is found that students working with European languages prefer Vinay and Darbelnet, while students working with Chinese prefer Loh. The students' evaluations of the solution types nevertheless reveal surprising lacunas in both, and evince the need for some careful redefinitions. The pedagogical value of the solution types thus lies not in their capacity to describe actual translation processes, since there is a strong linguistic relativity involved, but in the way their imperfect metalanguages allow students to reflect critically not only on their own practice, but also on the difficulties of theorization.

1. Introduction

Translation solution types – also known as “procedures,” “techniques,” “shifts,” and “strategies” – have been present in translator-training classes at least since their formulation by Vinay and Darbelnet (under the name “translation procedures”) in 1958. Here we prefer the name “translation solutions” because they are based on comparing texts, rather than on data from process research (see Zabalbeascoa, 2000; Pym, 2011). The solution types usually come in packets of between seven and ten categories, arranged in descending order of translation-unit size: Loan, Calque, Literal Translation, Transposition, Modulation, and so on (in the Vinay and Darbelnet version). There are many such lists, and almost as many criticisms. They have been justly accused of being devoid of cognitive grounding, unable to tell students *which* solutions to use, badly organized, and restricted to specific language pairs (see, for example, Koller, 1979, p. 235; Delisle, 1988, p. 72-73; Séguinot, 1991; Muñoz Martín, 2000). At the same time, the traditional categories have remained remarkably stable across different theorists and different languages, without any obvious progress in terms of conceptual elegance or data-based testing (see Muñoz Martín, 2000; Pym, forthcoming). This suggests that they retain some pedagogical value, over and above the theoretical and empirical shortcomings. Our aim here is to test the nature of that pedagogical value, specifically with respect to the way they might relate to specific language pairs.

Our point of departure comes from the remarkable coincidence that, in the same year when Vinay and Darbelnet published their solution types in *Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais* (1958), the Chinese scholar Loh Dian-yang (or Lu Dianyong, 陆殿扬) published a similar list in his book *Translation: Its Principles and Techniques* (1958). There seems to have been no direct connection or influence between these two projects, although there were certainly indirect historical connections: Loh was drawing on the Chinese translation of Fedorov (1953), who was framed by a formalist linguistic tradition

that was nominally in touch with the Geneva-school stylistics that Vinay and Darbelnet were working from – we cannot assume that either set of solution types is in some way autochthonous. Whatever the intricacies of history, the same year gives us two versions of solution types: one for French-English, the other for Chinese-English. The fortuitous coincidence in the year superficially enables us to give both typologies an equal chance, perhaps deploying a certain shared retro charm. As it happens, though, the Loh typology has remained fairly stable in subsequent textbooks for Chinese translation (Zhang, 2001, Zhang and Pan, 2009), just as Vinay and Darbelnet’s basic approach has continued to inform the European tradition. In exploring the pedagogical value of two lists from 1958, we might thus hope to be testing indirectly the relative virtues of the traditions that were based on those works.

A rough outline of what is involved can be seen in Table 1, where we attempt to align the two sets of solutions types. Direct comparison is made difficult by the “prosodic effects” that Vinay and Darbelnet actually list as second-order adjustments. It is nevertheless possible to see how the two approaches aim to do more or less the same work, with some non-correspondences being immediately obvious: the Chinese typology has more categories for the various types of word-order borrowing, just as the Vinay and Darbelnet have more categories for the transformation of large-scale cultural referents at towards the bottom of the table. How important might such differences actually be?

Table 1: Possible alignment of categories from Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) and Loh (1958) (cf. Zhang and Pan, 2009, p. 366)

Vinay and Darbelnet	Loh
Borrowing	Transliteration Semantic translation Coinage of new characters
Calque	
Literal translation	
[Prosodic effects: <i>Amplification/reduction,</i> <i>Explicitation/implicitation,</i> <i>Generalization/particularization</i> <i>Compensation</i>]	Omission
	Amplification
	Repetition
Transposition	Conversion
Modulation	Inversion Negation
Reformulation (<i>équivalence</i>)	
Adaptation	

We have been able to explore the pedagogical value of the solution types by teaching them in mixed practicum classes where students work between English and several different Asian and European languages. All the students in three mixed classes were taught Vinay and Darbelnet, and then all the students in a later mixed class were taught Loh. We have thus been able to see how Asian-language students handle European solution types, and how European-language students handle Chinese solution types.

2. Methodology

The initial hypothesis we want to test is that the Vinay and Darbelnet typology works best for students translating between European languages, whereas the Loh typology works best for students translating between English and Asian languages – where the verb “works” means that the students understand the types and can apply them to analysis of their own translations. This is a fairly broad and obvious hypothesis, especially since the two typologies are dated and conceptually flawed. The real interest of the exercise concerns the way the typologies can be used in class, with students adopting a critical, analytical attitude to them rather than accepting them as authoritative frames. A secondary interest lies in the possibility that, if we can locate the specific items that fail to “work” for one particular language group, we might try to repair those items and thus approach something like a universal set of solution types. The exercise is thus at once critical and utopian.

From 2009 to 2013, a total of 58 final-year Masters Students participating in the Translation Practicum at the Monterey Institute of International Studies were taught standard sets of solution types. The class sizes ranged from 16 to 21 students, with a mix of languages that included Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Spanish, French, Russian, and marginal German, all used in combination with English.¹

A factor perturbing uniformity was the fact that some of the students had been taught these or similar categories in the past, although only the students in the Russian program had been regularly exposed to such things at the Monterey Institute. Moreover, the data from 2010 was lost thanks to a transition between Moodle systems, so here we are reporting on the years 2009, 2011, 2012, and 2013.

In the first four of those years, the students were introduced to the seven main Vinay and Darbelnet categories, illustrated with examples from authentic class material developed and used in Spain (Holt 2005).² The class in each year lasted 100 minutes. First they did a warm-up activity in which they translated a set of phrases especially designed to activate the solution types. Then the categories themselves were presented and explained, in a version where the term Reformulation was used, perhaps mistakenly, for Vinay and Darbelnet’s original “*équivalence*” (also called “correspondence” and “total syntagmatic change”) (see Appendix 1). After that, the students were asked to return to their warm-up translations and attach labels to the solutions they had found. Within 50 minutes, the class would be conversant with the seven terms, at least when working on isolated phrases.

In the following 50 minutes, the students were asked to apply the categories to the solutions used in one of their partner’s previous 200-word translations into their A language (or L1), attaching comments to the text to label the solutions. The texts varied from year to year, but one used in three of the years was a description of a Turkish bath, in which several Turkish terms needed Transliteration of some kind and/or explanation.³ Other texts were mostly front-page newspaper articles that appeared the day the translations were carried

¹ The breakdown into classes was as follows: ten in 2009, fifteen in 2011, nineteen in 2012 and fourteen in 2013. Of these, 34 worked with Chinese, ten with Korean or Japanese, nine with Romance languages, three with Russian, and two with German.

² The names for the solution types and the sample problems were the work of Mike Holt, a professional translator who taught in the Masters in Translation Technologies at the Universitat Rovira i Virgili in Tarragona in the early 2000s.

³ This was actually a text previously used in an experiment by Fabio Alves (2005).

out.⁴ This ordering of the classroom activities assumes that the students were actually using the solution types *prior* to being introduced to the metalanguage, and that was indeed the case for most of the categories. At the same time, however, the attempt to apply the categories, especially in dialogue with a partner, inevitably raised questions about why a particular option had not been employed or why a particular translator tends to prefer one or two solution types. In this sense, the use of the metalanguage was not to produce new translations, but to enable discussion of alternatives, at the same time as it reflected critically on the metalanguage itself.

The students were then invited to answer several questions on how easy the categories were to apply. The questions asked in all years were as follows:

Is it easy to distinguish between the solution types? If not, why not?

Do you think the categories could be improved? If so, how?

Further questions were formulated in order to follow up on the findings from previous years: we asked which solution type was most often used, whether certain categories needed to be changed, and whether some categories were missing.

In the fourth year, with a class of 14 students, exactly the same procedure was carried out except that the solution types came not from Vinay and Darbelnet but from Loh Dian-yang (1958) as reported in Zhang and Pan (2009). As Table 1 suggests, Loh's work names solution types that are in some instances remarkably similar to Vinay and Darbelnet's but are presumably more appropriate to translation between English and Chinese. We taught his main categories with English-Chinese examples from his textbook (see Appendix 2).

Of the 58 students, 34 worked with Chinese, ten with Korean or Japanese, nine with Romance languages, three with Russian, and two with German. We have coded the students according to their non-English language (C=Chinese, F=French, G=German, J=Japanese, K=Korean, R=Russian, S=Spanish). In cases where the indicated language is not the student's L1, the L1 is indicated in parentheses. In some cases the students answered in pairs, and in one case in a group of three.

Although the research has enough subjects to give some quantitative results, it should be clear that we are dealing with an authentic classroom situation, where many variables have not been controlled in any rigorous way (affecting variations in the questions asked, the proportions of the languages tested, and the texts on which the students tested their understandings of the categories). Our questions and methods are thus mostly qualitative, giving as much voice as possible to the students themselves.

3. Results for Vinay and Darbelnet

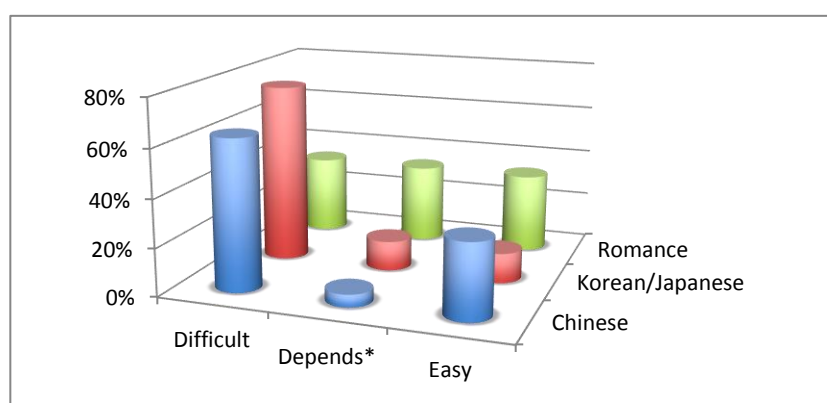
Here we present the general findings for each of the questions asked, first for Vinay and Darbelnet, then for Loh.

⁴ The use of newspaper articles was not a matter of sheer expediency, as it may be for some translation instructors. The texts were all designed to test other variables (see Pym, 2009), and the most important criterion was that they be equally new and relatively accessible to students of all the languages in the class. Further, since Monterey trains translators and interpreters for various departments in various governments, current affairs is one of the fields in which the students are expected to be well versed.

3.1. Is it easy to distinguish between the solution types? If not, why not?

From 2009 to 2012, students were asked if it was easy to distinguish between the Vinay and Darbelnet solution types. If their answer was negative, they were requested to say why. This gave three broad kinds of responses: positive, negative, and mixes of positive and negative aspects, summarized in Figure 1 as “Depends.” These responses allow for a quantitative representation for three language groups only: Chinese, Korean-Japanese, and Romance.⁵ As Figure 1 indicates, the Vinay and Darbelnet list did not fare very well. Some 66% of the students considered that the categorization as a whole is difficult to understand: 75% of the Japanese and Korean students, 63% of the Chinese students, and 33% of the Romance-language students. So the Vinay and Darbelnet categories are difficult, but less difficult if you are working between English and Romance languages.

Figure 1: Students’ views of the Vinay and Darbelnet categorization (percentages by language)



To understand these low percentages, especially what is happening in the “Depends” category, it is necessary to follow the students’ narratives, which have developments and contradictions. C18, for example, comments that, “by the definitions, yes [it is easy]” but then states that for a certain example “I am really hesitant what type it should belong to.” S1 hints at a similar experience when he argues that “[i]t depends on each case. Sometimes, there are cases where there is a fine line: you feel you might be using either one or another technique.” For F2, some of the techniques were easy while others were difficult. Similar differentiations between techniques were put forward by other students, even by those who had considered all of them difficult or easy.

Among those who found the categorization difficult to apply, there were several comments regarding its inapplicability to Asian languages. K4 says “[b]asically, the Korean translator has to reconstruct the sentence structure all the time in both directions” and therefore considers the Vinay and Darbelnet categories useless. C1 echoes this idea for Chinese: “These categories are not so applicable to E-C translation, which might be the reason why in China, we only divided into three categories: transliteration, literal translation and free translation.” There are also calls for new categorizations: “Since Asian languages are more distant from English than some of the European languages, I suggest that we can come up with some categories for Asian languages specifically.”

⁵ The three Russian students and two German students, who all found the solutions difficult, are not included in the table because the sample is too small for percentages to be significant.

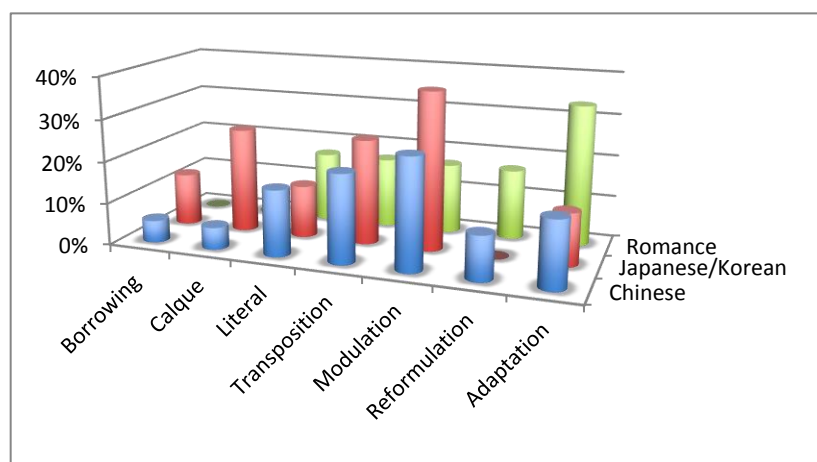
These evaluations, and others like them, make it fairly clear that the most discontent came from students working with Asian languages, which should not be surprising. Our initial hypothesis seems verified. However, a few other complaints are also fairly widespread: a lack of clear dividing lines, and the fact that several types can co-exist within the one solution (as Vinay and Darbelnet do indeed recognize). For example, F1 states that “[o]verall I notice that one solution is rarely enough to solve translation problems in a sentence, so in a way none of these solutions can stand alone.” That is a good thing to observe, and a good thing to teach.

When giving the lessons, it was easy enough to admit to the whole group that the various solutions are often used in combination, since this is made clear by the theorists we were presenting (this is the case in Loh as well). The possibilities of mix-and-match solutions, however, do little to make students more confident in their use of the metalanguage. One suspects that, if the students had *not* been invited to test the categories critically, some of them would have felt that they, the students, were inadequate to the task, rather than the categories being inadequate to the learning situation.

3.2. Perceived difficulty of individual categories

Some students commented on difficulties with specific categories. We have counted the positive and negative comments in order to quantify the relative difficulties.

Figure 2: Solutions types reported to be difficult (% of language groups)



As can be seen in Figure 2, Asian students reported difficulties with Calque and Borrowing that other language combinations did not share. Modulation and Transposition were difficult to understand for many students, even for those with Romance languages. Adaptation was also pointed out as being difficult to understand, particularly by students working with French and Spanish, which is itself rather difficult to understand (although there were only seven students in that category).

C2 summarizes the position of several students who feel they understand the techniques but are unable to distinguish between certain pairs:

It is easy for me to distinguish between Borrowing, Transposition, Literary Translation [sic] and Reformulation. But I can't tell which cases are called Calque,

Modulation and Adaptation, for I don't know the differences between Borrowing and Calque, Modulation and Transposition as well as Reformulation and Adaptation. I think they are too similar.

In view of this, we take a closer look at the comments on each of the categories in turn, focusing on the most commonly reported problems.

3.2.1. Borrowing and Calque

While many students criticize these two solutions as being unclear (C17, C18, C20) or even useless (K1, J1), two Chinese students considered Borrowing and Calque easy to distinguish.

If we compare the translations of the same text (on Turkish baths) from English into Chinese, we see that some students found no Calques, some found six; one found one Borrowing, others found eleven. Although different solutions were indeed being used, all of the Turkish terms actually had established equivalents in Chinese – the problem was not with the terms, but with different understandings of the Vinay and Darbelnet solution types.

For languages with a different script, transliteration is unavoidable, and yet it is not among the Vinay and Darbelnet types. Understandably, C4, C5, C6, C14, C24 and R2 all suggested that “Transliteration” be added as a solution.

3.2.2. Literal Translation

In Vinay and Darbelnet, Literal Translation basically means “word for word”: it applies to cases where words with the same syntactic function appear in the same order, as generally only happens between highly cognate languages. In the students' minds, however, it is frequently confused with criteria of accuracy or fidelity: the students have been taught to be “faithful,” and this is mixed up with being “literal.” This understanding of “Literal translation” is the key to answers like C11/C12/C13's (they worked together): “Literal translation was the most used, for we regard faithfulness as our top priority when doing the task.”

A more instructive understanding comes from C22/C23: “Translators usually do Literal translation while changing the order of words or phrases according to the features of Chinese or English.” This could mean that they choose Literal Translation *plus* a change in word order, or that changes in word order are a part of Literal Translation. The ambiguity serves to underscore a very basic question: *Where do changes in word order fit into the Vinay and Darbelnet schema?* We return to this below.

In general terms, Literal Translation seems impossible in languages with a different default word order, like Japanese or Korean. In this situation, J1 (L1E) and J2 creatively propose a new category called “reverse literalism,” since they realized that in certain translation “[a]ll sentence elements followed the same logical order, but starting from the end and ending with the beginning.”

At the other extreme, C16 realized he was using literalism only because the text was a piece of international news, where he was effectively translating many of the Chinese terms and phrases “back” into English.

Another possibility proposed by S3 is to separate “true techniques (strategic choices made, such as expansion or adaptation) from normal/systematic language conversions.” That is, just accept what is obligatory (these students are learning translation, not

languages), and concentrate on what is optional (the things to choose between, and the ways of choosing).

3.2.3. *Transposition*

If Literal Translation is the default solution between cognate languages, Transposition might play the same role when moving between English and Asian languages, perhaps along with Modulation. K1 expresses this clearly: “Transposition” was used the most in almost every sentence due to structure differences between English and Korean. As it was used in every sentence of this example, it wasn’t even color-coded here as it was seen as kind of ‘given.’”

That said, there seem to be several different understandings of the nature of Transposition. J1(L1E) comments that “[s]trictly speaking, the solution used for said sentence was a Transposition since it was just about the word order being different.” He thus understands Transposition to be a change in word order, not in word class, whereas in Vinay and Darbelnet it very definitely concerns word class (1958/1972, p. 50). C17 expresses the same doubt: “If everything is word-for-word translation except that the order of one word is switched, is it considered as Literal Translation or Transposition.” These students are reading “trans-position” in its literal sense, as a change in position (what the Russian and German traditions, as well as Nida, would call “permutation”).

The strange thing is that there seems to be no first-order category for “word order change” in Vinay and Darbelnet. So the students’ comments reflect not so much a misunderstanding as a legitimate quandary – they are pointing to a missing category. (As we shall see, the Chinese typology does have a major category for this, as did Fedorov.)

On a more positive note, C14 proposes a new category called “Segmentation Restructuring” which would cover moving “the orders of meaning units around, or chunks off sentences.” C19 proposes “Transposition in Structure.”

3.3.4. *Modulation*

The limits of Modulation seem to be unclear for most students. C24 confesses that whenever there was a solution she could not classify, she would put in under Modulation. R1 mentions how it is especially difficult to distinguish between Modulation and Reformulation: “Sometimes a semantic difference can appear to be a completely different way of expressing things.” Two lines later, the same student suggests that “Transposition and Modulation should be merged since the difference between them seems difficult to discern.” Merging Modulation with either Reformulation or Transposition is also proposed by C20, C22/C23, and G2. While merging techniques just because they are difficult to discern might not be a good way to live a life, the desire to join things up certainly indicates that inadequate terms are the cause of divergent construals.

K4 proposes a new category called “Transposition of Content (e.g. cause and effect),” which once again suggests a lack of understanding, as such a change would normally be considered a Modulation.

3.2.5. *Reformulation and Adaptation*

The students’ comments show that they had trouble distinguishing between Reformulation and Adaptation. In part this was due to the lesson being badly taught, since Vinay and Darbelnet restrict their *équivalence* (which we called Reformulation) to corresponding idioms and proverbs. This difficulty notwithstanding, the students recognized that these

were extreme solutions, rarely applied in the technical and referential texts with which they normally work. Hence C8: “A translator may use more techniques, such as Reformulation and Adaptation, in literary articles with heavy cultural allusions.” In fact, when it came to identifying solutions in the students’ previous translations, these categories were only really noted by J3 (L1E) who observed 15 cases of Adaptation because in her start text “reference to Japanese characters [fictional people] had no meaning in English.”

3.3. How do you think these categories could be improved?

As can be seen in the comments cited so far, the students were not short of creative ideas about how the categories could be improved. Some proposals concerned solutions that are considered necessary for all languages; others are for just one or a few languages.

3.3.1. Promoting categories that are minor in Vinay and Darbelnet

Several students commented on how some new categories are needed across the board. R3 asked for Explicitation and Implication to be major categories, as did F1, C18, and C24, among others. (All students had had a previous lesson on these categories in the parallel course Research on Translation.) Some of the arguments used to support this claim are based on language comparisons: R3 commented on the necessity to “explicitate” articles (*the, a*) in all translating from Russian into English, since Russian does not use articles in the way English does (although this would not count as Explicitation in all definitions of the term). G1 highlighted how adverbials that express time aspects in German can be expressed implicitly in the verb tense in English. Similarly, K14 proposed that Specification and Generalization be upgraded (as indeed they are in Loh). Similarly, C18 proposed Simplification, C14 talked about Elaboration, C19 wanted Explanation, and C16 (L1E) sought Definition.

3.3.2. What solution types should be added?

Different language combinations lead to new possible categories. As mentioned above, Transliteration seems unavoidable between languages with different scripts. Languages with different word orders also require a major category for changes in position, or perhaps no category at all since the solutions are constant and obligatory. K4 and others also recommended Segmentation, that is, breaking up sentences, while C16 (L13) felt the need for a category called Omission. C18 asked for Paraphrase to be added, which seems to be what C19 wanted to call Reformulation.

4. Results for Loh

As mentioned, in the classes from 2009 to 2012 many Asian students, especially Chinese, expressed discontent with the Vinay and Darbelnet typology, with some asking us to “redefine categories for Chinese” (C9/C10). In 2013 we decided to respond to this call and teach the whole class a Chinese typology of translation solutions, expecting that this time the Asian students would respond more favorably than those working with European languages only. As mentioned, we selected the typology published by Loh Dian-yang in

1958, the same year in which Vinay and Darbelnet were first published. The purpose of the class, once again, was not to impose orthodoxy but to encourage critical thought.

Unfortunately, the low number of students in the 2013 class (14) does not allow for any meaningful quantitative comparison with the previous classes. There are, however, certain qualitative features that are clear enough.

4.1. Which of Loh's categories should be changed?

The 100-minute class was taught in exactly the same way as in previous years, except for the replacement of Vinay and Darbelnet with Loh (whose categories and explanations were taught exactly as in Appendix 2).

Following the complete lesson cycle, the students were asked whether any of Loh's categories should be changed. We organize the replies in accordance with the categories.

4.1.1. Transliteration, Semantic translation, Symbolic translation, Coinage of new characters

Whereas Vinay and Darbelnet had just two categories for foreign names (Borrowing and Calque), Loh gives four, which can be mixed. This is understandable enough, given the move from Latin script to Chinese characters, and it corresponds to some of the complaints expressed in recent years by students with a background in languages with non-Latin script.

Perhaps because the demand was met, or because four types cover all bases (as a highest common multiple rather than a lowest common denominator), there were no proposed changes to Loh on this point. F3 nevertheless missed Calque and Borrowing – and since she worked with Latin script, she had no real need of the rest.

4.1.2. Omission / Amplification

Loh uses the terms “Omission” and “Amplification” for what Vinay and Darbelnet call “Implication” and “Explication,” and this usage has been followed by later publications in Chinese. In effect, the categories that are lower-order “prosodic effects” in Vinay and Darbelnet here become first-order categories, in keeping with the idea that syntactic and semantic relations are generally (but not always) more implicit in Chinese than in English. The different nomenclature, however, appears to have created some discontent, perhaps because these students had had a lesson on explication in a parallel course:

C27: I think Omission sounds like losing something. Perhaps we can change it to “reduction.”

C28: As for Omission, while it can be an omission of a part of speech without any loss of meaning, it can also be possible that the translator chooses to leave out some information which he/she regards as unnecessary.

S5: When Amplification refers to explaining information implicit in the text, it should be called explication.

F3: Amplification should include explication strategies, if it does not already.

There was also some doubt about whether the types referred to obligatory or optional changes. Thus, F3 says: “I feel that Loh's categories often seem to merely explain necessary changes between languages rather than translation solutions or best practices. For example, Omission appeared to only include omitting things that do not exist in Chinese.”

In principle, Loh's category covers both obligatory and voluntary changes, although the dividing line is far from clear. This remains a problem in most typologies of solution types, including Vinay and Darbelnet.

4.1.3. Repetition

Loh's inclusion of Repetition as a solution type is somewhat anomalous, although it does respond to the important stylistic role that repetition can play in Chinese. Loh had a long-standing interest in the relation between repetition and the "liveliness" of discourse, and not just in Chinese. In a booklet on rhetoric in English (1924) he claimed that repetition is the main way one gives "life" to a text, while in 1958 he discusses repetition under the head of "How to make a translation full of life." Yet the students were not entirely convinced. For C34 "the scope of 'repetition' Loh described is too limited. Repetition strategies differ and vary in different contexts", and K6 suspected a Chinese specificity: "Does Repetition solution suit for languages other than Chinese?".

4.1.4. Conversion and Inversion

In Loh's system, Conversion is a word-class change (what Vinay and Darbelnet call Transposition) and Inversion refers to word-order changes that are *marked* in the target language – like Repetition, they are part of the art of writing in a lively way. The Chinese students had little to say about this. The non-Chinese students, though, were not quite so seduced. For K6, "Inversion and Conversion should have more specification since the nature of the sentence structure is quite different or even opposite in some ways to name the translation solution." S5, on the other hand, thought these solutions would be better seen as parts of a wider category: "Inversion could also be called syntactic rearrangement when it deals with reordering different parts of speech within a clause." And F3 returned to the problem of what is obligatory or not: "I agree with the explanation of Inversion for emphasis, but necessary Inversion is not a strategy."

4.1.5. Negation

A tip that is quite widespread in the literature is that a positive can be translated by a negated negative: if you cannot find a word for "shallow," for example, try "not deep" (as in done in French, Spanish, and sometimes German (*untief*). Loh elevates this to a solution type and includes more general shifts between positive and negative actions ("I gave an unprepared speech" becomes "I improvised a speech"), which would probably be Transposition plus Modulation in Vinay and Darbelnet's system. The students accepted this, although C32 thought that hairs were being split unnecessarily: "I think paraphrase should be added and negation will be removed and included into the broader category of paraphrase."

4.2. What solution types should be added?

Some students, all of them Chinese, suggested that some solution types should be added to Loh. For C27, "[w]e can add Paraphrase or Free Translation to refer to translation not bound by the exact words of the source text but conveys the same meaning on syntactic or paragraph level." C34 is similar but more succinct: "Loh may include another category called 'liberal' strategy in translation." C29 suggested that "[w]e can add breaking long

sentences,” and this is indeed a category that was added in later Chinese publications, starting from Zhang, Yu, Li, & Peng (1980). And C33 was looking for something on the other side of the equation: “Loh’s existing categories are fine; however, I think he should have added the category of Word-to-word translation.” In Loh’s day, however, word-to-word interference in Chinese was more likely to be from Japanese or Russian than from English, so it was perhaps not on Loh’s mind.

4.3. Chinese vs. the rest

Out of the 13 students that worked with Loh, only two commented on his adequacy to languages other than Chinese. We have seen K6 asking if Repetition was only important for Chinese. And F3 (L1 E) claimed that, “(f)or foreign terms, Borrowing needs to be added; Calques should probably be added as well. I do not think that I would ever use Loh’s categories for dealing with foreign terms, given my language combination. For naturalness, I also feel that Modulation should be added.” That is, she wanted a return to Vinay and Darbelnet, and did not see that Modulation might be at work in Loh’s Negation.

It is interesting to note that the focus on Chinese was questioned not just from a European perspective, but also from Korean.

4.4. But what did they really understand?

Only one solution type, of all those presented by Vinay and Darbelnet and Loh, did not receive any comment, neither negative nor positive: Transliteration. Such wide acceptance would seem to make this a suitable case to test how well the students actually understood the solution.

C30 and C31 worked on Chinese translations of the “Turkish bath” text from English, trying to identify each other’s use of Loh’s techniques. C31 found seven examples of Transliteration in his translation; C30 found one. Neither of them made any comment on the difficulty of the category or reported problems when applying it. So why the difference?

C31 identified the following examples of Transliteration: 1) 土耳其 (Tǔ'ěrqí, Turkey), 2) 小亚细亚 (Xiǎoyàxiyà, Minor Asia), 3) 罗马帝国 (Luómǎ dìguó, Roman Empire), 4) 拜占庭 (Bàizhàntíng, Byzantium), 5) (Mùsīlín, Muslim), 6) 土耳其浴室 (Tǔ'ěrqí yùshì, Turkish Bath), and 7) 奥斯曼 (Àosīmàn, Ottoman). C30’s one example of Transliteration was 8) 安纳托利亚 (Ānnàtuōliyǎ, Anatolia). We looked at C30’s analysis of translation solutions to see how he had classified C31’s changes. Examples 1, 3, 4, 5 and 7 were translated in exactly the same way by C30. However, C31 had not classified them in any particular way. It could be that he thought words in normal use (Turkey, Roman, Muslim) required no special solution type at all. Regarding example 6 (“Turkish bath”), C31 probably saw only the first part as Transliteration, whereas C30 understands the same rendering of “Turkish bath” to be a semantic translation, paying more attention to the rendering of “bath” and taking for granted the translation of “Turkish”.

This small comparison highlights the fact that even the most clearly defined solution type may not be as straightforward as it seems. C31 sees Transliteration in any Chinese word created by translating sounds from a different alphabet, regardless of when it was done. C30 seems only to see transliteration in the solution he composed himself. The strange this is that, reading Loh, it is hard to say who is right, in part because words that were obvious transliterations in 1958 are now part of the language.

5. Vinay and Darbelnet vs Loh in practice and theory

Both quantitatively and qualitatively, it is clear that the Vinay and Darbelnet typology does indeed “work” better suited to translation between European languages, just as Loh “works” better for translation with Chinese. Our classroom activities nevertheless also allow for comparisons on other levels as well, notably with respect to the kinds of solutions that students report they actually use.

The central position of Literal Translation in Vinay and Darbelnet’s table is significant and the visual form of the table is meaningful: “Literal Translation” is supposed to be the “safe” solution. When translators are unable to find a solution at that level, they can move either upwards (incorporating elements from the start text) or downwards (drawing on elements in the target language and/or culture).

We suspected that in the case of Asian languages, Literal Translation would not be the default solution. Answers to the question on what solution type was most often used were not as revealing as expected (we asked this in the later years after observing that most Asian students found far more Transpositions and Modulations than anything else, whereas students working between European languages had Literal Translation as their default solution). In the entire sample, only eight students claim Transposition is the default solution (two Chinese, two Korean, one Japanese, two Russian, one German); four students claim Literal Translation is the “most common” or default solution (one German, one French, one Spanish, one Chinese). The language structures and the possible variant understandings of “Literal Translation” might explain this.

The negative comments on Vinay and Darbelnet’s solution types contrast with the overall tone of the remarks on Loh’s categorization, which are positive or merely technical, commenting most often on terminology.

On the other hand, students working with Loh also seemed to be able to identify the shortcomings of the categories much more easily, particularly with respect to what is obligatory or optional. While more students agreed that Vinay and Darbelnet’s categories were problematic, they had greater trouble agreeing on what the problem was: were they too general or too specific? C18 claims that “[t]he present ‘solution’ system needs to either expand the definitions of at least some ‘solutions’ (such as Adaptation and Reformulation) so that more practical translation strategies could be incorporated,” while C17 asks for exactly the opposite, stating that “[t]here seems some overlap between Adaptation and Reformulation, they may merge into one category.”

Seven students ask for wider definitions of Loh’s solution types. We can consider that regardless of the suitability and posterior applicability, Loh’s categorization is more clearly explained. Indeed, F3 finds Loh too simple: “I feel that Loh’s categories often seem to merely explain necessary changes between languages rather than translation solutions or best practices.”

6. Conclusion: Solution types as a pedagogical tool

The simple finding of our study is that Asian students prefer the Asian typology, and European students prefer the European one. That kind of relativity would only be surprising if it were considered some kind of dead-end. Should we therefore all go our separate ways, in solution types and in anything else concerning culture-bound views of translation?

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A slightly more interesting finding is that students from both sides of that false divide are able to use and assess the categories of the other, producing criticisms and suggesting improvements that are by no means constrained by some over-reaching cultural allegiance. Teaching translation can and should be far more engaging than the reproduction of cultural difference.

Our findings also concern a second false divide, the one set up between theory and practice. As we have seen, when they try to categorize their translation solutions, students reflect both on their work and on the difficulties of theorization. If there is pedagogical value in these activities, it lies in that double process, rather than in the lists of solution types themselves. To be sure, the solution types should have enough relation to actual practice for the theorization to engage; they should cover the full range of what translators can be expected to do (and more, in some versions); and a lack of clarity in the names, definitions, or examples can lead to more than a few metalinguistic cul-de-sacs. However, even when these criteria are met, the solution types nevertheless cannot and should not be put up as gospel truths – that should not be their pedagogical function. Learning is a dynamic process, and the prime function of the types is to stimulate and guide that process, as proposals that are also able to evolve dynamically. We have seen this happening in several ways.

First, group discussion and comparison of what solutions have been used helps trainee translators discern specific values of the languages they are working with. In these particular classes, European students learned much about the implicit and indirect nature of Asian languages, and Asian students learned that not all European languages are the same. In classes that are language-pair specific, the discovery process is more likely to involve awareness of a fuller range of possible translation solutions.

Second, students' comments bring out hidden assumptions about the acceptability of certain solution types. For example, C8 wanted to restrict some solutions to certain genres: "a translator may use more techniques, such as Reformulation and Adaptation, in literary articles with heavy cultural allusions." Text-genre constraints were also important for F2: "the [solution types] are all clearly defined, but I think it was also easy in my case, since the texts that I translate did not require any of the more complex solution types, such as Reformulation/Adaptation." In this way, the discussion of solution types can lead into related topics for debate and discovery.

Third, students reflect on the relation between translating and theorizing. There is a hidden assumption that theory needs to be prescriptive and should show translators "best practices" (F3). Some of the students proposed changes to make the typologies "practical and useful for translators [since] translators don't want to spend too much time learning those categories yet find them difficult to apply" (C22/C23). This is an understandable ambition. The important point is that the *students* had to propose the improvements, rather than accept bad categories or dismiss theorization altogether. That is, the students started theorizing, no matter what their initial rejection of theory might have been. Along the way, they were also learning about applied terminology.

Finally, the students' proposals could indeed help refine future lists of solution types. These 58 students, with little or no previous knowledge of the typologies, managed in 100 minutes to uncover several very basic deficiencies in the proposals by Vinay and Darbelnet and Loh. Even in cases where they might appear to have misunderstood the categories, closer inspection shows that many of their construals can be justified, either in terms of deficiencies in the lists themselves (or their teaching), or in view of the specific

languages in question. The students thus picked up several basic but frequently overlooked points: “word order” is absent from Vinay and Darbelnet, and “resegmentation” at sentence level is absent from both (although this is admittedly more important for Chinese). Further, differences in the application of Transliteration suggest new specifications should be included in its definition. And a specific conceptualization of “literal translation” probably has to be borne in mind when working with Asian students: since “word for word” (as in the Vinay and Darbelnet concept of Literal Translation) is not a default option when translating between their languages and English, Asian students are logically more likely to understand “literal” as meaning “faithful” or “accurate” translation.

Many of the lacunae picked up in class are actually addressed in the long tradition of solution types since 1968 – word-order change is called Permutation in the Russian and German traditions, and Resegmentation, understood as the breaking and joining of sentences, appears in later typologies in Chinese (Pym, forthcoming). Should we have used those later typologies, rather than simply rejoice in the ways the students themselves have been able to spot the missing categories? Yet descriptive completeness, the presumed authority of theory, is scarcely the issue in matters of pedagogical value. A descriptive typology can run into 19 categories (in Molina and Hurtado-Albir, 2002) or even a neat 30 (in Chesterman, 1997), producing metalanguages that are too rich and detailed when deployed to stimulate the minds of near-professionals. As the 1958 authors seem to have realized instinctively, a typology of seven to ten terms is more or less what students can be expected to grasp and explore.

In our next classes on solution types we would like to have a better list to offer, but it should not be much longer. We can and should be working towards a set of solution types for many languages, critically but progressively. But our efforts will certainly not be perfect for *all* languages, and they need not be: it is enough that students can use it to reflect critically on their translations, and on the difficulties of theorization. All in all, teaching and trying to apply solution types in the translation class brings benefits not only for the training and self-training of students, but also, hopefully, for the development of translation theory.

Appendix 1: Vinay and Darbelnet solution types as taught (from Holt, 2005)

Solution type	Definition/Explanation	Example
Borrowing	Taking words straight into another language, e.g. “software,” “punk.” The target language has no (generally used) equivalent The source-language word sounds “better” To retain some “feel” of the source language.	sputniks “Madrileños are surprisingly unworldly”
Calque	A literal translation at phrase level, leading to a collocation or syntactic structure that is in some way unnatural in the target language.	aseguramiento de calidad, assurance qualité, Qualitätssicherung
Literal translation	The translation is as word-for-word as possible:	“El equipo está trabajando para acabar el informe” “The team is working to finish the report.”
Transposition	Parts of speech “play musical chairs”:	She likes swimming” “Le gusta nadar” (not “nadando”) “Sie schwimmt gern” “Elle aime nager”
Modulation	Using a phrase that is semantically different in the source and target languages to convey the same idea:	“Te lo dejo” (“I leave it to you”) “You can have it”
Reformulation (<i>équivalence</i>)	Expressing something in a completely different way, for example when translating idioms or, even harder, advertising slogans:	The Sound of Music <i>Sonrisas y lágrimas</i> (Smiles and Tears)
Adaptation	Something specific to the source-language culture is expressed in a totally different way that is familiar or appropriate to the target-language culture.	Belgian jokes Irish jokes Polish jokes

Appendix 2: Loh’s techniques, as taught (from Zhang and Pan, 2009)

Solution type	Definition/Explanation	Example
For foreign noun phrases	Transliteration (音译) Semantic translation (语义翻译) Transliteration plus semantic translation Symbolic translation with semantic explanation Coinage of new characters	chocolate 巧克力 airplane 飞机 utopia 乌托邦 cross 十字架; barrel 琵琶桶 [loquat(-shaped) bucket] oxygen 氧
Omission		She covered her face with her hand as if to protect her eyes. 她用手蒙脸，好像去保护眼睛。 [She used ... hand cover ... face, as if to protect ... eyes.] Give him an inch, and he will take a mile. 得寸进尺。 [Get an inch try for a yard.]
Amplification		昨天元旦，人人都很高兴。 [Yesterday New Year’s Day, everybody all very happy. It was New Year’s Day yesterday, and everybody felt very happy. (1958: 128)]

		There is no more scrambling and starving. 现在不再有争抢，挨饿等事了。 [Now no more scrambling and starving types of things.]
Repetition		The custom has (been) handed down generation after generation. 这风俗世代代传下去。 [The custom (has been) handed down era after era and generation after generation.] Nels had it all written out neatly. 纳尔斯把它写得清清楚楚。 [Nels had it all written out neatly and clearly.]
Conversion	Items change word class (e.g. a noun becomes an adjective)	Independent thinking is an absolute necessity in study. 独立思考是学习所绝对必要的。 [Independent thinking is absolutely necessary in study.]
Inversion	1. The order of phrases changes to make them sound natural. 2. Markedness in the ST is rendered by a marked change of syntax in the TT.	I don't know his very name. 我连他的名字都不知道。 [I even his name (do) not know.]
Negation	Shifts between positives and double negatives.	They never work without helping each other. 他们每逢工作，必互相帮助。 [They whenever work, definitely help each other.]

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