
Research Article

Dealing with inverse translation: Word order in Spanish L1-English L2 translated Texts¹

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to focus on the arrangement of words in phrase, clause and sentence structures in English discourse and its importance in achieving successful communication, for example, when doing inverse translation. Positioning syntax is considered as a contributing factor in the construction of expression of meaning in coherent and unified pieces of translated discourse. After several years of teaching inverse translation (Spanish-English) to proficient English L2 students, I have observed that for them mastering word order in Spanish L1-English L2 translated texts is extremely challenging and more complex than is often presumed; bringing awareness of this into the classroom is worthwhile. One of the main obstacles students must overcome when producing discourse in English is that of L1 interference; misapplication of the descriptive rules of word order in their own, or any other, language, will lead to stumbling blocks in the process of communication. By providing carefully selected samples of language for analysis, together with clear explanations, this article attempts to offer a practical approach to dealing with this aspect of grammar. For the purposes of illustration, Spanish, the source language in the examples included in the study, has been used for comparative reference.

Keywords: inverse translation, Spanish L1, English L2, word order, discourse

1 Introduction

The aim of this article is to focus on the arrangement of words in phrase, clause and sentence structures in English discourse and its importance in achieving successful communication, for example, when doing inverse translation. The study is mainly based on the perspective of Spanish L1 translation students, who receive training in the translation of a wide range of registers and text types, but also includes samples from texts translated into English by Spanish-speaking professionals who do not work as translators. In the examples cited, positioning syntax has been analysed grammatically yet also considered as a contributing factor in the construction of the expression of meaning in coherent, unified pieces of discourse. In this regard, it is essential for students to be aware of the need for accuracy as well when organising words in multi-word units, such as collocations and idioms.

Generally, as EFL students gradually progress through different formal stages in their language learning, they are taught a range of descriptive word order rules, e.g. adverb positioning and placement of descriptive adjectives, and are encouraged to use this syntactical

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knowledge in both structural and communicative exercises designed to that effect. So, when veteran EFL learners set about combining words to form phrases and sequences as they construct stretches of extended discourse, why do problems in word order often arise?

From a student's perspective, word order in English may be seen as either difficult to master given its rigidity, or relatively easy to handle because of the apparent simplicity and lack of options that such rigidity would imply. A case in point is the rule of placing the subject, irrespective of its length, between the auxiliary verb and the main verb in an interrogative structure:

- Is Daisy going to sing the next song?
- Is the woman in the red dress and very high heels going to sing the next song?

As these interrogative sentences in neutral spoken English stand, no other word order is possible. Evidently, if the register is changed to a more informal conversational style, further structures uttered with different intonation could be generated e.g.

Daisy is going to sing the next song? (Excuse me...?) (Really?)

That lady in the red dress and very high heels? Is she going to sing the next song? (I'm just asking) (I'm surprised!)

In Spanish, on the other hand, the second question in neutral register could start with the predicate, with the lengthy subject noun phrase being positioned at the end:

- *¿Va a cantar la siguiente canción la señora del vestido rojo y tacones muy altos?* (going to sing/the next song/ the woman in the red dress and very high heels)

In accordance with whatever precedes this information in the discourse context, what the listener already knows, or for reasons of emphasis, it is also possible to begin with the subject:

- *¿(Es) La señora del vestido rojo y tacones muy altos (la que) va a cantar la siguiente canción?* (Is/the woman in the red dress and very high heels/going to sing/the next song)

Modern English positioning syntax for neutral and formal register generally lacks this degree of flexibility, particularly in the case of written English; in Old English (OE), however, the placement of words was freer due to a greater use of inflections as markers of grammatical category and relationship (Baugh & Cable, 2002, p. 11). Yet by the time Middle English had developed, much of OE's versatility was lost, giving rise to gradual changes that included syntactical order. As Biber and Gray point out:

A long-term perspective on the history of English makes it clear that there have been numerous important grammatical changes in English over the course of the last 1,000 years. These include the change to a fixed SVO word order, the loss of most inflectional morphology (especially case suffixes), the increase in the range of function words (including prepositions, auxiliary verbs, and infinitive marker *to*, and more recently the introduction of the dummy auxiliary *DO*...) (2016, p. 30).

Consequently, Modern English relies heavily on word order as one of the mechanisms available for conveying the grammatical relationships existing between words combined to form phrases,

clauses and sentences, so an important part of producing grammatically correct sentences in English consists in arranging the words in a sequence in a compulsory syntactic order, with little, or sometimes no leeway for other options. In contrast, as Hernando Cuadrado underlines (2005), Spanish L1 speakers enjoy a considerable degree of flexibility when positioning words in sequences since their language establishes grammatical relationships not only through word order, but also via a greater degree of inflection e.g. in the conjugation of verbs, where the subject of the verb is inherent to the verb form, to the extent that subject pronouns may often be omitted,

- (*Él*) *Era un escritor muy conocido.*
- He was a renowned writer.

After several years of teaching inverse translation (Spanish into English) to university students whose foreign language is English (C2, CEFR), I have observed that mastering word order in English is extremely challenging for them and more complex than they themselves often presume; bringing awareness of this into the classroom is worthwhile. This article attempts to offer a practical approach to dealing with this aspect of grammar, which is indeed a common language problem that contributes to what Swan (2005) refers to as discourse in “foreign” English (p. ix); in other words, discourse that can sound odd and unnatural: interlanguage-level discourse that future professional translators need to surpass.

1.1 Method and materials

By providing carefully selected samples of language for analysis, together with clear explanations, this dossier of information has been compiled with a view to raising students’ awareness of the importance of accurate word order in successful communication, as well as supplying a checklist of the most common difficulties that they will encounter when dealing with translation into English. For illustrative purposes, Spanish, the mother tongue of the students included in this study and the source text language in their translation assignments has been used for comparative reference with English, the target language of these groups of students. The examples and specimens presented in this article are a sample of the types of material used for commentary and group correction in class and for the preparation of in-class or online remedial tasks; they have been selected as a result of a word order error analysis, based on the correction of TS undergraduate students’ written work (1st-year essays and 2nd-year Spanish-English translations of authentic texts), in conjunction with Spanish-English translations by non-professional translators whose texts were revised before publication by the author. During data collection, the kinds of errors recorded were related to instances of negative L1 grammar transfer to written texts in L2 (the main source of error) and of intralingual interference (Richards, 1984) due to gaps in the students’ knowledge of grammar in the target language, whereas mistakes probably due to minor slips, lapses or distractions were not taken into account. Moreover, as part of the data collection process, not only the nature, but also the frequency of specific errors in word order was noted. This in turn led to a number of in-class awareness-raising sessions in which 2nd-year TS undergraduates were encouraged to reflect on this comparative study of the grammar of word order in their L1 and L2.

2 Word order in English: “Don’t put the cart before the horse”

2.1 Positioning syntax in English: straightforward or complex?

That word order in English is rigid does not mean it is straightforward for the EFL learner. Consider these examples: the adverbs “there” and “down” are placed in initial position with an ensuing inversion if the subject is a noun; there is no inversion if the subject is a pronoun:

- There goes the ferry! / There it goes!
- Down came the rain! / Down it came!

Similarly, with transitive phrasal verbs, students should remember to place a pronominal direct object between the main verb and its particle:

- If you do not know the meaning of that word, look it up in the dictionary.
- In contrast, a noun as direct object can be positioned before or after the particle:
- Look that word up in the dictionary/ Look up that word in the dictionary.

Following the principles of end-weight, whereby longer and heavier structures are usually placed last in a clause or sentence, if the object in the sentence above were longer, the second option would clearly be preferred; this also permits the segment of highest information-value to be positioned towards the end of the structure for the purposes of end-focus:

- Please look up that word you repeatedly asked me about yesterday.

The role of information structure in the positioning of the nominal direct object of a transitive phrasal verb has been studied in depth by Dehé (2002), who underlines the following:

[...] the choice of the word order in PV constructions in English in general depends on the focus-background structure of the utterance. A nominal complement occurs in the position between verb and particle, i.e. in the discontinuous order, if it is a background constituent. In this case, the noun is de-accented, whereas the particle is within the focus domain and is assigned the focal accent. In the choice of the word order continuous order, the nominal object is part of the focus domain in both the case of non-minimal and of minimal focus. The focal accent falls on the noun (p. 103).

Furthermore, students should note that a different arrangement of the same words in a particular sequence may convey variation in meaning; in the exercise below, the adverbs or adverbials must be correctly placed:

- He is lying. (of course, still)

Interestingly, there are two ways of interpreting *lying*, and this has bearing on the syntactical order:

- 1a. Of course, he is still lying/He is still lying, of course (he continues not to tell the truth).
- 1b. Of course, he is lying still (he is not moving at all).

If sentence 1a is produced when the speaker's intended meaning is that of 1b, the message is distorted because *still* is misplaced.

English L2 Translation Studies (TS) trainees are encouraged to carefully observe any apparent, yet justified, deviation from the simplified word order rules taught at lower EFL levels and to infer broader rules from samples of the kind provided below for in-class analysis.

Typically, the indirect object in English can be placed before or after the direct object, in the latter case a preposition, *to* or *for* is required:

- The employer denied him the job because he arrived late for the interview.
- The employer denied the job to him because he arrived late for the interview.

Spanish L1 speakers often erroneously use the syntax in the second sentence above with verbs which should only be arranged according to the pattern in the first sentence:

- The new equipment cost £1,000 to the hospital (ungrammatical).

Instead of: The new equipment cost the hospital £1,000 (correct).

Equal care is needed when using verbs belonging to a different group to those described above, whose indirect object must always be preceded by *to* or *for*:

The murderer confessed his crime to the FBI agents.

And not: The murderer confessed the FBI agents his crime.

Nevertheless, if the direct object is a phrase or clause, the information would be structured as follows:

- The murderer confessed to the FBI agents that he had committed the crime after a heated argument with the victim.

In the case of verbs such as *to deny*, if the indirect object is lengthy, it is placed after the direct object:

- In Sue's opinion, the employer denied the job to the candidates with no previous work experience/ who had no previous work experience.

2.2 L1 interference in translation tasks

Undoubtedly, L1 interference constitutes one of the key obstacles to be overcome by TS students when coping with word order in their production of discourse in English as L2 because, in order to fulfil the task, they constantly need to refer to a source text composed in their own language. However, it is important for students to understand that jumbled words in idioms and collocations or misapplication of the patterns and descriptive rules of positioning syntax in their own language, or their L3, will lead to stumbling blocks in the process of others comprehending the target text. According to Wallwork, when English L1 native speakers are accustomed to finding parts of speech, including the constituents of idiomatic expressions, in a given order, word order disruption can lead to some time-consuming interruption in their processing of information:

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If these parts come in a different order, this requires more effort by the native reader to understand the whole meaning. Even very banal differences in word order can affect readers. White and black, for instance, sounds strange to a mother tongue English person, the correct order is black and white. ... But it is likely to sound far more normal to a Hindi, Italian or Spanish speaker, where white comes before black (2011, p. 21).

In relation to the above, one of the golden rules of English word order consists in not placing any adverbs or adverbials between the main verb and its direct object, unless the direct object is particularly long, e.g. if followed by a relative clause:

- She reluctantly dictated her bank account number/ She dictated her bank account number reluctantly/ Reluctantly, she dictated her bank account number/She dictated reluctantly the bank account number that her future employer requested.

In the last example, the adverb of manner could also be placed in initial or end position.

Here are some sentences from compositions on environmental issues written by Spanish L1-English L2 1st-year TS students working at CEFR C2-level; they highlight typical instances of mother tongue interference in adverb positioning in combination with transitive verbs and their direct objects:

- This can be achieved by **applying more efficiently the regulations**.
- The gases **damage considerably the ozone layer**.

During the correction of the compositions, submitted by a total of 52 students, 68% had positioning syntax errors of the same type, involving the separation of verb and direct object with an adverbial.

In Spanish, adverbs or adverbials of manner are commonly placed between the verb and its direct object, although a different order is possible:

- The UK Foreign Secretary spoke both German and French fluently at the summit.

- *Durante la cumbre, el Ministro de Asuntos Exteriores británico utilizó con fluidez tanto el alemán como el francés.* (at the summit/the UK Foreign Secretary/ spoke/fluently/ both German and French)

El Ministro de Asuntos Exteriores británico utilizó tanto el alemán como el francés con fluidez durante la cumbre. (the UK Foreign Secretary/ spoke/both German and French/ fluently/ at the summit).

The sentence in Table 1, from the inverse translation of a research paper written by a group of Spanish L1 hospital pharmacists, and submitted to the author for revision, typifies another common error made in grammatical structures where *it* should be used as preparatory object with verbs such as *find*, *consider* and *make*:

Table 1

Example taken from a research paper by a group of Spanish L1 hospital pharmacists

Source Text	Mistranslation	Author's Proposal
Prácticamente todos los médicos (96,9%) consideraron que era importante que se les informara de la participación de sus pacientes en ensayos clínicos.	A majority of the doctors considered important to be informed about the participation of their patients in clinical trials (96,9%).	A majority of doctors (96.9%) considered it important to be informed about the participation of their patients in clinical trials.

The same information could be rephrased in English as follows:

- A majority of doctors (96.9%) considered being informed about the participation of their patients in CTms (to be) important.

Much could be said about object positioning in Spanish; nonetheless, since the main aim of this article is to underline some of the most common word order trouble spots in English from the perspective of the Spanish L1 group, suffice it to say that some of the most difficult aspects of object order in English have been explained above and that this area of grammar is considerably more complex in the Spanish language (see Bosque & Demonte, 1999).

The placement of subject and verb in various subordinate clauses should also be mentioned in relation to potential L1 interference. Consider this sentence; in the rendering in Spanish a subject-verb inversion is used:

- The journalist would like to know what the Red Cross and WHO are doing to aid the victims. (Indirect question)/ *Al periodista le gustaría saber qué están haciendo la Cruz roja y la OMS para ayudar a las víctimas.*

In other types of subordinate clause in Spanish, the subject could be positioned before or after the verb, but if it consists of several words, the tendency is to place the subject after the verb:

-*La propuesta es inadecuada; no la aceptará el Presidente de la Junta de Vecinos* (or *el Presidente de la Junta de Vecinos no la aceptará*).

-The proposal is not far-reaching enough. The President of the Condominium Board will not accept it.

As the underlined sentence in English stands, the subject cannot be displaced, although there are different positioning options for changing focus within the subject noun phrase, i.e. *The Condominium Board('s) President*. If a change of focus is desired at sentence level, a syntactical transformation is possible; the passive voice can be used to highlight the ill-fated proposal:

-The proposal is not far-reaching enough. It will not be accepted by the President of the Condominium Board.

Table 2 includes another sample of mistranslation from the research paper alluded to earlier; a false analogy based on source text subordinate clause structure has been corrected:

Table 2

Example taken from a research paper by a group of Spanish L1 hospital pharmacists

Source Text	Mistranslation	Author's Proposal
En dicho cuestionario se interrogaba a los médicos sobre su conocimiento de la participación de sus pacientes en ensayos clínicos,...sobre su interés por conocer dicha información y sobre cuál sería el método idóneo a utilizar para transmitirles dicha información.	In the aforementioned questionnaire, doctors were asked about: their degree of knowledge regarding the participation of their patients in clinical trials; ... their interest in knowing such information and what would they consider the ideal method to use in order to transmit such information.	In the aforementioned questionnaire, doctors were asked about: their degree of knowledge regarding the participation of their patients in clinical trials; ... their interest in being provided with such information and what they would consider as the ideal method to use in order to transmit this information.

Let us now focus on another false analogy often drawn by Spanish L1 students regarding word order in English; it is related to a structure beginning with *Es (It)* that favours the displacement of a lengthy subject towards the end of a sentence (Mott & García Fernández, 1992, p.196). The following example will demonstrate this point:

- Researchers in the hospital's Oncology Department are concerned about the future of their latest projects; it is not helpful the fact that the Government is currently reducing funding for scientific research (misconstruction due to L1 interference).

In the correct English sentence, the subject, despite its length, should be placed at the beginning of the structure:

- Researchers in the hospital's Oncology Department are concerned about the future of their latest projects; the fact that the Government is currently reducing funding for scientific research is not helpful.

The Spanish version would read:

- *La Unidad de Investigación del Cáncer tiene dudas sobre la posible financiación de sus últimos proyectos: es/resulta de poca ayuda el hecho de que en la actualidad el Gobierno esté reduciendo el gasto destinado a la investigación científica.* (Researchers in the hospital's Oncology Department are concerned about the future of their latest projects; it is not helpful the fact that the Government is currently reducing funding for scientific research).

The structure referred to above is a regular feature of both oral and written discourse in Spanish, but there is no direct equivalent in English syntax; if it is mistakenly transferred to English, the corresponding verb is oddly assigned two subjects, underlined in the example below. This is a decontextualised sentence taken from a business letter in Spanish and recently translated by a group of 63 native Spanish L2- English 2nd-year TS students; 56 % of the students had the following error in positioning syntax:

Debemos evitar la repetición del incidente de la semana pasada. (Source text)

It is something we need to avoid, a repetition of last week's incident. (Students' uncorrected version)

Apart from evident Spanish L1 influence in this misuse of preparatory *it*, students also tend to draw false analogies related to the grammatically correct and frequently used English sequence of preparatory *it* + verb + adjective + (for + noun/ pronoun) + infinitive; this would be a classic instance of “Structural False Friends”: “faux amis’ on the level of syntax; they can be harder to spot than their lexical equivalent” (Armstrong, 2005, p. 136).

2.3 Raising awareness: some procedural strategies

From a practical perspective and as has already been underlined, TS students should be prompted to see that wrongly positioned units of language can constitute hurdles in discourse processing enacted by listeners and readers since they oblige receivers of oral or written messages to take the time and trouble to decrypt faulty structures and their messages and mentally reshuffle them in order to ensure correct interpretation; adhering to the rules of correct word order is thus essential. In this sense, students generally find the words of Burton-Roberts enlightening:

only some of the possible ways of fitting bicycle components together produce a bicycle. A bicycle consists not just of its components but – much more importantly – in the structure that results from fitting them together in a particular way. The same goes for linguistic expressions (sentences and phrases). Suppose you have a collection of words, say all the words in an English dictionary. Can you imagine all the possible word-sequences you could construct by putting these words together? The possibilities are endless. Clearly, not all the word sequences would be acceptable expressions of English (2016, pp. 6-7).

Learner-centred in-class activities based on the correction of our students' own compositional errors or mistranslations, preferably in answer to questions and doubts posed by students themselves are highly recommended. It is also helpful to develop comparative studies of authentic target texts and their corresponding source texts (specimens are provided in this article), foment student participation by eliciting suggestions about possible improvements in the translated discourse, or the voicing of any discrepancies, together with informed discussions about the differences between any new options provided. Moreover, a holistic approach to text building is proposed: English L2 TS students should comprehend that word order rules cut across all areas of grammar and therefore have a significant bearing on meaning and interpretation in the discourse context.

As previously mentioned, the examples provided in this article have been selected for study in English L2 inverse translation classes because they focus on some of the key problems that Spanish L1 TS students encounter. Completing gapped sentences and cloze tests, restructuring jumbled sentences, practising structural transformation in rephrasing exercises are all useful for dealing with specific problem areas, but, undoubtedly, English L2 TS students must work primarily with extended stretches of authentic discourse as their main input and model.

3 Marked and unmarked word order in English

3.1 The SVO pattern

To continue with this study of the main differences between positioning syntax in English and Spanish and the difficulties they entail for the Spanish L1-English L2 TS student, by far the most common word order pattern in regular declarative sentences in English is Subject-Verb-Object (SVO), with a subject verb inversion taking place in interrogatives. When referring to the period 1970-1770, Strang (1991, p.101) offers enlightening data concerning the frequency of unmarked word order in clauses. However, it is crucial for future translators to master diverse syntactical patterns, for the purpose of adjusting focus, reflecting emphasis and also permitting a degree of variety in the syntactical sequencing of words, thus achieving a welcome departure, especially in lengthy discourse, from the potentially monotonous frequency of unmarked SVO word order. In English, marked information structures such as WH-clefts, *It*-clefts, fronting after negative and restricting adverbials, fronted adjectives or the use of the passive voice can enrich the quality of text, whether oral or written, making it more interesting and attractive.

In Spanish, the SVO word order is frequent, but different patterns are common, the choice of syntax normally being based on matters of focus and thematic/rhematic development in the discourse context.

3.2 Adjective positioning in English and Spanish: a comparative analysis

A further challenge for the Spanish L1 TS group lies in the positioning of descriptive adjectives in English; once again adjective placement in the latter is less versatile, probably as a consequence of “the disintegration of an old system of adjective concord” attributed to the period of 1370-1170 (Strang, 1991, p.270). When arranging attributive adjectives in a chain before a head noun, English follows a predetermined order, based on the semantic properties of the adjectives:

-The house is freezing! I'll just fetch Esther's large old brown woollen pullover.

The words in the underlined noun phrase cannot be displaced; they are in a stipulated order: (determiner), size, age, colour and material; any deviation from this sounds strange and is potentially disconcerting: “Since word order is the most significant indication of the meaning of an English sentence, a misplaced modifier can make a sentence unclear or at least momentarily confusing” (Johnson, 1991, p.67). Nonetheless, there is discussion among linguists about the most acceptable description of adjective chain word order in English (see Quirk et al., 1985, p.1341).

In Spanish, the above example could be rendered as follows:

- *¡La casa está helada! Voy a buscar aquel viejo jersey de lana de Esther, el de color oscuro que le quedaba tan holgado.* (The house is freezing!/ I'll just fetch/that old woollen pullover/ Esther's/the brown/large one)

- *¡La casa está helada! Voy a buscar aquel viejo jersey de Esther, el de lana de color oscuro que le quedaba tan holgado.* (The house is freezing!/ I'll just fetch/that old/ Esther's/ woollen pullover/brown/the large one)

- *¡La casa está helada! Voy a buscar el jersey de Esther, aquel de lana ya viejo y de color oscuro, el que le quedaba tan holgado.* (The house is freezing!/ I'll just fetch/ Esther's/ woollen pullover/old and brown/the large one)

Unless forming part of a virtually fixed expression where word order is predetermined (*buena suerte, sentido común*), descriptive adjectives in Spanish can generally be placed before or after the noun but, depending on the modifiers (*adjetivos adyacentes*) used, different positioning can alter their meaning or significance, to a greater or lesser extent, since in attributive position some emotion or subjectivity is often added (Alarcos Llorach, 1994, p.81-82).

3.3 Some observations about adverb and adverbial word order

Hernando Cuadrado's description (2005) of the tendency in Spanish to greater flexibility in positioning syntax is particularly relevant in the case of the word order norms affecting adverbs and adverb phrases. Naturally, though more so with regard to adverb phrases, constraints exist: unlike English, Spanish seldom separates a subject and verb, as in *Mi padre lo dice casi siempre* (My father nearly always says so).

Put simply, most adverbs in Spanish are placed next to the word they modify; if their function is to modify a whole sentence, they are usually placed at the beginning. Nevertheless, one order would be preferred by native Spanish speakers over the others on the basis of the structure of given and new information in the discourse context.

English L2 TS students should be aware of the greater degree of positioning constraints related to English adverbs; it has already been mentioned that placing adverbs or adverbials between the main verb and its direct object is avoided, with the exception of phrasal verb adverb particles. This said, except for adverbs of degree, some frequency adverbs, emphasising adverbs and the adverbial particles combined with verbs to form phrasal verbs, the descriptive rules related to adverb and adverbial positioning are quite flexible; different placements are often chosen for reasons of emphasis or to avoid accumulation of multiple adverbial expressions at some point in the structure. This uncharacteristic flexibility is often confusing for English L2 students since it is not applicable in the case of all types of adverbs:

1a. Sophie sang beautifully at the club last Friday evening.

1b. Last Friday evening, Sophie sang beautifully at the club.

In sentence 1a, the standard adverb order of manner, place and finally time is applied. In 1b, information has been distributed differently by typically placing the time adverbial in initial position, because of style, for emphasis or because of preferences based on the textual organisation of theme and rheme.

In the case of accumulation of place adverbs, the more specific reference usually precedes the general, e.g.:

- Mr Humboldt works in an important space research centre in Swindon, Wiltshire.

Additionally, in English syntax a locative adverbial comes immediately after a verb of movement since, in the logic of English word order, both directly complement each other; in Spanish such positioning is not compulsory. Spanish L1 students therefore tend to make negative transfer errors when rendering such sequences in translation; the following decontextualised specimen is an extract from a news bulletin in Spanish, where “La Moncloa” is being emphasised:

- Para sorpresa de los periodistas que estaban esperando fuera, el Presidente abandonó La Moncloa la noche pasada de forma inesperada.

However, if the emphasis were to change, so would the arrangement of words:

- , abandonó la noche pasada La Moncloa de forma inesperada.

- , abandonó de forma inesperada La Moncloa la noche pasada.

The last two options clearly influenced Spanish L1 2nd-year TS students when asked to translate the full news bulletin, as 61% had word order errors of the kind found below:

- To the surprise of the reporters (who were) waiting outside, the President unexpectedly **left last night La Moncloa** (40%)/the President **left unexpectedly La Moncloa** last night (21%).

Similarly, in Table 3, given the close semantic relationship between the phrase *stood here* and the complementary expression *overlooking the coastline*, readability should not be interrupted by separating them:

Table 3

Sample taken from a tourist leaflet distributed in the region of Murcia

Source Text	Mistranslation (taken from translations by students)	Author's Proposal
En el sudeste de España, dentro de la Región de Murcia y en el centro de la amplia curvatura que presenta el Mar Menor, aparece ante el viajero Los Alcázares, nombre que recibe en recuerdo de los palacios que durante el Medioevo estuvieron asomados a la orilla del mar.	In the Region of Murcia situated in the Southeast of Spain, and embraced by the ample contour of the Mar Menor, the visitors find Los Alcázares, which was named after the palaces that stood here in the medieval times looking over the coastline.	In the Region of Murcia situated in the Southeast of Spain, and embraced by the ample contour of the Mar Menor, visitors find Los Alcázares, which was named after the palaces that stood here overlooking the coastline in medieval times.

Other syntactical features of adverbs and adverbials are not so plainly logical and, not only is it risky for students to make false analogical inferences about similarities between L1 and L2, but also regarding what would misleadingly appear to be potentially similar patterns within the L2 itself. Below an imperative structure has been combined with the frequency adverb “never”, which cannot be displaced.

- Never answer a question with another question.

Nevertheless, with other adverbs, greater positioning flexibility becomes possible:

- Answer a question occasionally with another question. / Occasionally answer a question with another question. / Answer a question with another question occasionally.

4 The role of register, style and genre

4.1 Dealing with different types of discourse in translation

A further aspect of positioning modification in English concerns register. A case in point is the placement of a preposition before the relative pronoun in formal, particularly written, style:

- Mr Lewis is the lecturer to whom I submitted my essay. (Pied-piping construction)

is more formal than the zero-pronoun structure:

- Mr Lewis is the teacher I gave my essay to. (Preposition-stranding construction)

Changes in positioning syntax can also be made to render conditional sentences more formal or emphatic:

- If the clinical trial were successful, the drug could be on the market very soon.
- Were the clinical trial (to be) a success, the drug could (very soon) be on the market (very soon).

Be that as it may, translator trainees often find difficulty in shifting from one level of formality to another; consequently, considerable oral and written input of quality materials covering a range of registers in both L1 and L2 is required in order to facilitate their becoming more register-sensitive and acquiring the syntactical and semantic knowledge essential for generating well-composed texts in different styles and registers.

The social constructionist view maintains that a determining factor regarding the nature of text is the discourse community for which it is intended (Swales, 1990. See also Johns, 1990). Such communities use a variety of intercommunication genres, created for sharing information and feedback. When translators are requested to render discourse generated by these groups in a target text, their translating activity becomes highly complex and demanding, as they usually have “outsider” status (Bizzell, 1987).

Regarding the discourse found in scientific, technical and medical publications in English, one of its principal characteristics is abundant use of nouns as pre-modifiers of main nouns, especially when classification and measurement are expressed (Swan, 2005). If a chain of pre-modifiers is required before a head noun, the inverse translator needs to know how to arrange them. Attributive noun modifiers are not randomly positioned, but are generally placed in order according to their function, which can normally be easily understood if the pre-modifying nouns are mentally transformed into prepositional phrases and/or relative clauses e.g. “*the London*

drug addiction research centre” refers to the centre in London that carries out research into addictions that are caused by drugs.

An “of structure” could be preferred, e.g. when mentioning units as partitives, in certain metaphorical expressions, e.g. *I was told she had a heart of gold*, or to create a change of focus. In Leech et al. (2009), it is argued that because of the increasing tendency in Modern English to “densification” in attributive (noun and adjective) sequences before a head noun, both the “of-phrase” and the “of-genitive” are declining in use. This development is certainly most notable in writing found in the Press, in academic prose and even in General Prose. However, in Table 4, with reference to a sample taken from a hospital research document written in English; on revising the paper, the author suggests highlighting the type of chronic patient selected for the study by means of a prepositional phrase used for end focus:

Table 4

Sample from a hospital research document

Original version	Author’s Proposal
The tool was adapted to the solid organ transplant recipients, a perfect example of the chronic high complex (sic) patients.	The tool was adapted to the solid organ transplant population, a perfect example of the chronic patient of high complexity.

Nevertheless, in other texts and for other reasons, a Saxon genitive may be used e.g. *The Dutch Government’s new healthcare proposals were backed by a majority of other European countries*, i.e. the Dutch Government made some new proposals. In fact, because of the current trend towards “high densification” Leech et al. (2009) point out that particularly in genres where information is regularly compressed, the use of the Saxon genitive has increased whilst the “of-genitive” is generally falling into decline. This preference for the Saxon genitive represents a major challenge for Spanish-speaking TS students grappling with, for example, scientific, technical and academic texts, as no such grammatical feature exists in their language, which clearly prefers the use of prepositional phrases in these cases.

Noun modification is an enormously complex area of English grammar, yet arranging the words in a syntactic pattern correctly is pivotal (see Brenan & Kolkmann, 2019). An example often given in class for the purpose of helping students to appreciate the different nuances that can be expressed through changes in structure and word order is that, when rendering *La Universidad de Salamanca* in English, they will find that the translation depends on the speaker’s perspective: *Salamanca’s University* belongs to the people of that city; *The University of Salamanca* focuses on that particular university, and not others; *Salamanca University* refers to the location of the institution.

Arguably, for Spanish L1 TS trainees, the main problem regarding complex attributive noun sequences in texts translated into English resides in the fact that, influenced by the grammar rules of their own language, they often neglect to exploit the possibility of using this syntactical resource, resorting instead to post-modifying prepositional phrases that sound strange or awkward to the English L1 speaker. The following is a decontextualised sample, taken from a company’s annual report, which was recently translated by a group of 63 native Spanish L2-English 2nd-year TS students; 60 % of the students failed to write “brand value” and only 15% chose to employ a Saxon genitive (The Coca Cola Company’s) rather than an *of*-genitive:

Combinamos la historia, recursos y **valor de marca** de The Coca-Cola Company con nuestra experiencia en el proceso de embotellado, distribución, gestión de clientes y capacidad de ventas (Source text).

We combine the history, resources and **value brand** of The Coca-Cola Company with our experience in bottling, distribution, customer management and sales capacity (Students' uncorrected version).

Finally, with regard to word order and register, we should mention the use of passive structures in informational written texts and how this can prove troublesome for Spanish-speaking TS students. According to Biber and Conrad:

the dense use of passive verbs in academic prose has been so stigmatized, with some critics claiming that it is used merely to sound objective and to distance the practice of science from human agents ... [yet] ... while it is conventional to use passives to report research findings in many fields, there are also functional factors that affect the choice of passive. In fact, the passive often serves important functions in academic registers. Even a brief analysis of passives shows that general prescriptions to students such as "avoid passive voice" are misguided. In many cases where passives are used, the subject of an active voice verb would just be a vague group of researchers ... Even more importantly, passive voice allows concepts and objects (rather than people) to be the grammatical subject of the sentence, making the discourse topic clear. This is not just important for research articles (2019, p.126).

Yet, despite the flexibility and change of focus that the passive voice can fulfil, once more, as with attributive noun sequences, L1 Spanish students tend to forget to use the passive voice in their translations into L2, or, if they do, there can often be negative transfer problems. In Spanish, the true passive, formed with *ser* and the past participle, is little used in comparison with its English counterpart, *to be* and the past participle; alternative constructions, some of which use the reflexive pronoun *se*, exist and are also frequently used to describe experiments and procedures in scientific and technical texts written in Spanish; when the impersonal *se* structure appears in a source text in Spanish, it often leads to positioning problems in the target text in English because of a tendency to resort to quasi-literal translation of the Spanish syntax with *se*, involving the erroneous *it*-structure referred to earlier. In such cases, before translating, it can be helpful for students to mentally convert the *se* structure into an equivalent featuring the Spanish true passive. Here is a relevant sample, again used for analysis and comment in class:

Table 5

Research paper on the development of antibodies

Source Text	Mistranslation	Author's Proposal
Se analizó la precisión entre lotes utilizando 3 lotes diferentes del anticuerpo para cada muestra.	It was assessed the level of precision between batches using three different batches of antibodies for each sample.	The level of precision between batches was assessed using three different batches of antibodies for each sample.

The importance of avoiding positioning mistakes that lead to conceptual mistranslation, i.e. the faulty rendering of ideas or principles, and a resulting misinterpretation is vital in the field of scientific and medical texts; it is essential for the translator to study parallel texts of the same genre: reliable, scholarly articles originally written and published in the target text language. In the following extracts from a stem cell research paper written by specialists (see Table 6) and

shown to students for debate in class, the arrangement of modifiers in the translation into English was corrected by the author who, as a non-member of the discourse community the paper was intended for, was compelled to study a significant amount of similar discourse in order to learn about accurate positioning of modifiers in these chains:

Table 6

Extracts from a paper on stem cell research

Source Text	Mistranslation	Author's Proposal
-Servicio de desarrollo de anticuerpo policlonal fosfoespecífico en conejo frente a péptido TAU.	-Service for the development of phospho-specific polyclonal antibodies in rabbit against peptide TAU.	-Service for the development of rabbit phospho-specific polyclonal antibodies against peptide TAU.
-El anticuerpo monoclonal anti-CD8 procede de la hibridación de células de mieloma de ratón SP2 y células de bazo de ratón BALB/c inmunizado con linfocitos T humanos.	-The monoclonal antibody anti-CD8 derives from the hybridisation of myeloma cells of mice SP2 and mice BALB/c spleen cells immunised with human T lymphocytes.	-The anti-CD8 monoclonal antibody derives from the hybridisation of mouse SP2 myeloma cells and spleen cells from BALB/c mice immunised with human T lymphocytes.

4.2 Broadening the perspective

As with any language, “English is not a single language but a huge collection of overlapping languages with diverse and overlapping sets of sentences produced by different people, in different places and who belong to different generations” (Burton-Roberts, 2016, p.255). Nonetheless, throughout this article, the framework of reference for positioning syntax in English has principally been standard British; standard in accordance with the criteria outlined below:

We could identify as standard the variety used by a group of people in their public discourse—newspapers, radio broadcasts, political speeches, college and university lectures, and so on. In other words, we could identify as standard the variety used for certain activities or in certain situations. Alternatively, we could identify as standard the variety that has undergone a process of standardization, during which it is organized for description in grammars and dictionaries and encoded in such reference works (Finegan, 2008, p.350).

Finegan also states that: “The principal varieties of English throughout the world are customarily divided into British and American types...” (2008, p.350). The establishment of standard forms of different varieties of English are not only useful, but necessary, yet much has been written about the difficulties this entails, given the regional differences affecting both British and North American English (Schneider, 2006. See also Algeo, 2006). However, in the speech and writing of educated native English speakers on both sides of the Atlantic, diversity in grammar and spelling is limited². As regards positioning syntax, perhaps one of the most notable variances is that affecting mid-position adverb placement (see Table 7):

² For an interesting study of differences and their frequency of use, see Leech et al. (2009).

Table 7

Examples of the usual placement of mid-position adverbs (see also Swan, 2005, p.22)

Standard British English (non-emphatic)	General American English
1. They have probably left the dog at home.	1. They probably have left the dog at home.
2. He was always pleasant to them.	2. He always was pleasant to them.

On the issue of English as a global language, covering a vast array of World Englishes in class is obviously time-restricted so teachers will probably devote more time to what Kachru referred to as “inner circle Englishes” (1992). However, translator trainees must know that variation is to be expected and dealt with. Direct translation of texts written in one of the many World Englishes, whose positioning syntax can differ considerably from that of the standard varieties mentioned, is demanding, as both meaning and expression in the original discourse must be captured. Even in the case of seemingly fixed, or frozen, expressions, diversity in the word order of World Englishes is not uncommon. Consider the proverb “You can’t have your cake and eat it”, as used in British English; in Nigerian English, the word order is “You can’t eat your cake and have it” (Igboanusi, 2002). In contrast, in the same proverb in Spanish the figurative language is very different, although the word order is similar: “No se puede nadar y guardar la ropa” (You can’t swim and hang on to your clothes”).

With regard to literary translation, comprehending the source text and rendering it adequately as a target text is extremely challenging, especially in the case of poetry. In poetic works written in English, students are informed that it is quite normal, and legitimate, for writers to disrupt standard word order as part of the creative process:

In the following line from Walt Whitman, the direct object *Vigil strange* is fronted, an occasional unusual order in non-poetic language.

Vigil strange I kept on the field one night

Also abnormal is the order *vigil strange* rather than *strange vigil*, since adjectives generally come before the nouns they modify (Greenbaum & Nelson, 2002, p.229).

Variation in positioning syntax can also be found in the context of the media, both in oral and written communication. Advertisers frequently resort to the uncommon grouping of words in their commercial messages, e.g. the stringing together of a breath-taking number of modifiers before a head noun. When translating such discourse, reflecting its true essence and expressing its fundamental concepts in an appropriate register should be the primary objective of the inverse translation student.

In a 2014 BBC4 radio programme (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04k6sd7> - BBC Radio 4- Germany: Memories of a Nation, Bismarck the Blacksmith), the presenter quotes from a famous speech given by the “Iron Chancellor”: “The position of Prussia in Germany will not be determined by its liberalism, but by its power... not through speeches and majority decisions will the great questions of the day be decided... but by iron and blood”. Macgregor emphasises that Bismarck is regularly quoted in English as saying “by blood and iron”. However, he deliberately uses the same word order as Bismarck himself. Why? The presenter explains that he mentions “iron” first because the term evokes not only images of weapons and military conflict, but also the might of Prussia’s industrial power, precisely what Bismarck himself was so keen to proclaim.

5 Conclusion

Much could still be said about word order in English; this overview of the most common difficulties, from the perspective of groups of L1 Spanish speakers in 2nd-year TS classes, will hopefully serve as a reminder that this sometimes neglected area of grammar requires a good deal of attention, practice and correction. Many well-compiled grammars providing information about positioning syntax and word order in multi-word units in English are now available. So, in theory, everything is accounted for, or is it? Language usage, like any other human activity, is constantly evolving, and although grammar rules are to be adhered to in discourse production, encountering new, unexpected patterns is almost inevitable, and professional translators are required to understand and cope with this skilfully.

Native speakers often delight in creatively exploiting the linguistic constituents of their language in order to draw attention, be innovative or give new and special meaning to particular combinations of words. Consequently, in addition to mastering source and target text languages in all of their facets, including the rules of word order and the structuring of information, the activity of translating involves enquiry, analysis and the expansion of background knowledge, and a further requirement: knowing the rules, but also being imaginative; this extra dimension is necessary for effectively interpreting and rendering nuance and special meaning in translation.

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