



Harmonic Resonances

A new model/metaphor for translation?

Communication takes place across many different frequencies

I believe we are all taking statistics as we negotiate meaning along with other aspects of human interaction mediated by language. And these statistics are being taken on several (maybe more than several in many instances) different “frequencies” at once. So we are trying (both in original communication and then again in translation) to line up the most relevant frequencies to achieve some kind of harmonic resonance between the communication and our understanding (or translation) of it.



Communication takes place across many different frequencies

For example:

Communicative:

E.g. negotiating meaning *per se* vs.
negotiating relationships (identity)

Pragmatic:

E.g. denotation vs. connotation

“Purely” linguistic:

1. Phonology
 2. Morphology
 3. Syntax
 4. Lexicon
 5. Etc.
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Yet “harmonic resonances” can exist at different frequencies

- ▶ When I say "table" vs. "mesa," I may refer to the same object in the world, or even to a sufficiently similar idea in the brain of my hearer, but what I also communicate (whether I want to or not) is something about my own identity as a speaker of English or a speaker of Spanish.
- ▶ The “harmonic resonance” is not only at the level of object reference, but also at the level of identity reference.





Yet “harmonic resonances” can exist at different frequencies

- ▶ The use of *ch'ul totic* and *ch'ul metic* (holy father/holy mother) vs. *totic* and *metic* (father/mother) or *ca'cal* and *u* (day/month) by Chamulas in Chiapas depends not at all on the reference-all are to the sun and moon.
- ▶ But only traditional animists will use the first pair, while only Catholics use the second and only Protestants the third. People apparently first of all process their identity, and then choose the natural pair of terms accordingly. Of course this does not happen quite like this, as it quickly becomes automatic.





Yet “harmonic resonances” can exist at different frequencies

- ▶ Amos’ “cows of Bashan” clearly refer to rich aristocratic women of Samaria, but that reference, while important, is taken for granted in the original communication while the “frequency” being emphasized is Amos’ disdain of these women as well as his negotiation with his audience to share that disdain with him.
 - ▶ A good translation will find a harmonic resonance with that negotiated distain, perhaps even to the detriment of the physical reference.
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Yet “harmonic resonances” can exist at different frequencies

- ▶ In English we say “on the corner” when we mean an **outside** corner, while we say “in the corner” when we mean an **inside** corner. We use the same word, but different prepositions. (grammatical “frequency”)
- ▶ In Spanish, different words are used, but the same prepositions: “*esquina*” means “on the corner,” while “*rincón*” means “in the corner. In both cases the preposition “*en*” would be used. (lexical “frequency”)



Yet “harmonic resonances” can exist at different frequencies

- ▶ Here the “frequencies” being monitored for adequate similarity in translation or understanding are not object/idea reference vs. identity of speaker, but rather the different strategies employed by English (prepositions) vs. Spanish (lexicon) to achieve the same communicative goal. Languages make use of all the frequencies available (phonology/morphology/syntax/lexicon/pragmatics/etc.) to achieve similar goals using different strategies. And the hearers and translators need to be taking statistics on both sides of the equation in order to get adequate harmonic convergence or resonance.
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Literal translation is often patently dissonant:

□ English

Spanish

- ▶ “How old are you” = ¿Que tan viejo eres?
- ▶ (It sounds like an insult: “How old you are!”)



Literal translation is often patently dissonant:

□ Spanish

English

- ▶ ¿Que tantos años tienes? = How many years do you have?
- ▶ (In English one cannot “have” years, it is impossible.
- ▶ It sounds like “How many sticks do you have?”)



▶ Yet if we align the right frequencies it comes out right:

□ English

Spanish

▶ “How old are you” = ¿Que tantos años tienes?



Yet “harmonic resonances” can exist at different frequencies

- ▶ Hebrew acrostic poems use all 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet at the beginning of each successive verse to express the “completeness” of the poetic utterance (in Lamentations, the utter depth of grief over the destruction of Jerusalem).
- ▶ In the *Traducción en Lenguaje Actual* translator Alfredo Tepox used the 22 letters of the phrase he used to translate the opening (and repeated) cry of the book “¡Pobrecita de ti, Jerusalén!” as the basis for a new “acrostic.”



Hebrew acrostic (Lam I)

Spanish TLA

1	אִיכָהּ וַיִּשְׁכַּח בְּדַד הָעִיר רַבָּתִי עִם הִיטָה כְּאַלְמָנָה רַבָּתִי בַּגּוֹיִם שְׂרָתִי בְּמִדְיָנוֹת הִיטָה לִּמְסָ:
2	בָּבוּ תִבְכֶּה בְּלֵילָה וְדַמְעָתָהּ עַל לַחֲיָהּ אֵירָלָה מִנַּחֲמָהּ מִכְּלֵיאֲהֲבִיָּה כְּלִדְרָעִיָּה בְּגָדוֹ בָּהּ הָיוּ לָהּ לְאִיבִים: ׀
3	גָּלְתָה יְהוּדָה מַעֲלִי וּמִרְבַּע עֲבֹדָה הִיא יִשְׁכַּח בַּגּוֹיִם לֹא מִצָּאָה מְנוּחַ כְּלִדְרָפִיָּה הַשִּׁיגוּהָ בֵּין הַמִּצְרִים: ׀
4	דָּרְכֵי צִיּוֹן אֲבָלוֹת מִבְּלִי בָּאִי מוֹעֵד כְּלִישְׁעָרֶיהָ שׁוֹמְמִין כִּהְיָה נֶאֱנָחִים בְּתוֹלְתֶיהָ נוֹגוֹת: ׀ וְהִיא מִרְלָה: ׀
5	הָיוּ צָרֶיהָ לְרֹאשׁ אִיבִיָּה שָׁלוּ כִּי־יִהְיֶה הוֹגָה עַל רַב־פְּשָׁעֶיהָ עוֹלָלִיָּה הִלְכוּ שָׁבִי לִפְנֵי־צָר: ׀
6	וַיֵּצֵא *מֶרְ"בֶּת *מִבְּחִצִּיּוֹן כְּלִדְהָרָה הָיוּ שְׂרִיָּה כְּאִילִים לֹא־מִצָּאוּ מִרְעָה וַיִּלְכוּ בְּלֹא־כֶחַ לִפְנֵי רֹדֶף: ׀
7	זָכְרָה יְרוּשָׁלַם יָמֵי עֲנִיָּה וּמִרְדּוּתָהּ: ׀ כֹּל מִחֲמַדֶּיהָ אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ מִימֵי קֶדֶם בְּנִפְלַע עָמָה בִּידְצָר וְאֵין עוֹזֵר לָהּ רָאוּהָ צָרִים שָׁחֲקוּ עַל מִשְׁבַּתָּהּ: ׀
8	חֲטָא חֲטָאָה יְרוּשָׁלַם עַל־כֵּן לִנְיָדָה הִנֵּחָה כְּלִמְכַבְּדֶיהָ הַזִּילוּהָ כִּידְרָאוּ עֲרוֹמָהּ גִּסְתִּיָּה נֶאֱנָחָה וַתִּשָּׁב אַחֲרוֹר: ׀
9	טִמְאַתָּה בְּשׁוּלְיָהּ לֹא זָכְרָה אַחֲרִיתָהּ וַתִּדַּר פְּלָאִים אֵין מִנַּחֲמָה לָהּ רָאָה יְהוָה אֶת־עֲנִיָּי: ׀ כִּי הִגְדִּיל אוֹיֵב: ׀
10	יָדוּ פֶרֶשׁ צָר עַל כְּלִמְחַמְדֶּיהָ כִּידְרָאָתָהּ גּוֹיִם בָּאוּ מִקְדָּשָׁהּ אֲשֶׁר צוּיְתָה לֹא־יָבֹאוּ בִקְהֵל לָר: ׀
11	כָּל־עָמָה נֶאֱנָחִים מִבְּקָשִׁים לָחֵם נָתַנוּ *מִחֲמַדֶּיהֶם **מִחֲמַדֶּיהֶם בְּאָכַל לְהַשִּׁיב גִּפְשׁ רָאָה יְהוָה וַתִּבְטִישֶׁהָ כִּי הִיָּתִי זוֹלָלָה: ׀
12	לֹא: ׀ אֲלֵיכֶם: ׀ כָּל־עֲבָרֵי דֶרֶךְ הִבִּיטוּ וַרְאוּ אִסְיָשׁ מִכְּאוֹב מִכְּאֲבִי אֲשֶׁר עוֹלָל לִי אֲשֶׁר הוֹגָה יְהוָה בְּיוֹם חֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ: ׀
13	מִמְרוֹם שְׁלַח־אֵשׁ בַּעֲצַמּוֹתַי: ׀ וַיִּרְדֶּנָּה: ׀ פֶּרֶשׁ רֶשֶׁת לְרַגְלִי הַשִּׁיבֵנִי אַחֲרוֹר נִתְנָנִי שְׁמָמָה כְּלִהְיוֹם דָּוָה: ׀
14	נִשְׁקַדְתִּי עַל פְּשָׁעֵי בִידּוֹ יִשְׁמַרְגּוּ עָלָיו עַל־צוֹאֲרֵי הַכְּשִׁיל כַּחַי נִתְנָנִי אֲדָנִי בִידִי לֹא־אוּכַל קוֹם: ׀
15	סָלָה כְּלֹא־בִירִי: ׀ אֲדָנִי בְּקִרְבִּי קָרָא עָלַי מוֹעֵד לְשֹׁכֵר בַּחוּרִי גַת דֶּרֶךְ אֲדָנִי לְבַתּוֹלַת בְּתִי־יְהוּדָה: ׀
16	עַל־אַלָּה: ׀ אֲנִי בּוֹכִיָּה עֵינַי: ׀ עֵינַי: ׀ יִרְדֶּה מִיָּם כִּידְרַחַק מִמֶּנִּי מִנַּחֲמָה מִשִּׁיב נִפְשִׁי הָיוּ בְנֵי שׁוֹמְמִים כִּי גָבַר אוֹיֵב: ׀
17	פֶּרֶשׁ צִיּוֹן בִּידֶיהָ אֵין מִנַּחֲמָה לָהּ צָנָה יְהוָה לִיעֲקֹב סִבִּיבָיו צָרִיו הִיטָה יְרוּשָׁלַם לִנְדָה בִּינִיָּהם: ׀
18	צָרִיק הוּא יְהוָה כִּי פִיהוּ מְרִיתִי שְׁמַעוּנָא כָּל־עַמִּים **הַעֲמִים וַרְאוּ מִכְּאֲבִי בְּתוֹלְתִי וּבַחוּרֵי הִלְכוּ בְּשִׁבִּי: ׀
19	קָרָאתִי לְמַאֲהֲבִי הֵמָּה רְמוֹנֵי כִהְנִי וְזָקְנֵי בַעִיר גִּנְעוּ: ׀ כִּיבְקָשׁוֹ אֲכָל לָמוֹ וַיִּשְׁיבוּ אֶת־נִפְשָׁם: ׀
20	רָאָה יְהוָה כִּיצַרְלִי מַעֵי חֲמַרְמָרוֹ נִהַפֵּךְ לִבִּי בְּקִרְבִּי כִי מָרוּ מְרִיתִי מִחוּץ שְׁכֵל־הַחֲרִב בְּבֵית כְּמוֹת: ׀
21	שְׁמַעוּ: ׀ כִּי נֶאֱנָחָה אֲנִי אֵין מִנַּחֲמָה לִי כְּלֹא־יָבִי שְׁמַעוּ רַעְתִּי שָׁשׂוּ כִי אָתָּה עֲשִׂיתָ הַבָּאָת יוֹס־קִרְאָתָהּ וַיִּהְיוּ כְּמוֹנֵי: ׀
22	תָּבֹא כְּלִדְרַעְתָּם לִפְנִיךָ וְעוֹלָל לָמוֹ כְּאֲשֶׁר עוֹלָלָת לִי עַל כְּלִפְשָׁעֵי כִידְרָבוֹת אֲנַחְתִּי וְלִבִּי דוּי: ׀ פ

1	¡Pobrecita de ti, Jerusalén! ...
2	Olvidada y bañada en lágrimas ...
3	Bajo el peso de las cadenas, ...
4	Ruido ya no se escucha ...
5	Es tanto tu pecado, ...
6	¡Cómo has perdido, Jerusalén, ...
7	Insistes en recordar ...
8	Tanto has pecado, Jerusalén, ...
9	¡Asombrosa ha sido tu caída! ...
10	Dueño de todas tus riquezas ...
11	El pueblo entero llora ...
12	Todos ustedes, que pasan y me ven, ...
13	Intensa lluvia de fuego ...
14	Juntó Dios todos mis pecados ...
15	En mis calles hay muchos muertos. ...
16	Ruedan por mis mejillas ...
17	Un montón de escombros ...
18	Siempre Dios hace lo justo, ...
19	Ayuda pedí a mis amigos, ...
20	¡La muerte me quitó a mis hijos ...
21	El enemigo no esconde su alegría ...
22	No hay un solo pecado ...

Keys, chords, transpositions and genres

- ▶ Ernst Wendland has suggested that other musical concepts might fit well under this model/metaphor. Here are some first thoughts about those ideas:
 - ▶ **Keys** and **transpositions** might represent literary styles or linguistic registers.
 - ▶ **Chords** might help deal with the concept of faithfulness within seemingly radical transformations.
 - ▶ **Genres** could represent inter-semiotic translation across media.
 - ▶ But there may be better and more apt comparisons which others will surely point out in due course.
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