DBB 408 TRANSLATION STUDIES
IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Introducing Text

- So far we have attempted to deal with some of the basic 'building blocks' of language: its **lexical stock** and **grammatical structures.**

- We now need to take a broader look at language and to consider the possibility that, as part of a language system, lexical items and grammatical structures have a **'meaning potential'.** This 'meaning potential' is only realized in communicative events, that is, in **text.**

- Following Brown and Yule (1983: 6), **text** is defined here as **'the verbal record of a communicative event'**; it is an instance of language in use rather than language as an abstract system of meanings and relations.

Text vs. non-text

- A good translator does not begin to translate until s/he has read the text at least once and got a 'gist' of the overall message. But this is only the first step.

- Once the source text is understood, the translator then has to tackle the task of producing a target version which can be accepted as a text in its own right.

- The phraseology and the collocational and grammatical patterning of the target version must conform to target-language norms, but even then the translation may still sound foreign or clumsy. Worse still, it may not even make sense to the target reader.

- A **text,** then, has features of organization which distinguish it from non-text, that is, from a random collection of sentences and paragraphs.

- Just like collocational and grammatical patterning and a host of other linguistic phenomena, these features of text organization are language- and culture specific. Each linguistic community has preferred ways of organizing its various types of discourse.

- A translation may be undertaken for a variety of purposes. However, we will assume that the ultimate aim of a translator, in most cases, is to achieve a measure of equivalence at text level, rather than at word or phrase level.

- To achieve this, the translator will need to adjust certain features of source-text organization in line with preferred ways of organizing discourse in the target language.

Features of text organization

- Any text, in any language, exhibits certain linguistic features which allow us to identify it as a text.

- First, there are connections which are established through the arrangement of information within each clause and the way this relates to the arrangement of information in preceding and following clauses and sentences; these contribute mainly to topic development and maintenance through **thematic** and **information structures**.

- Second, there are surface connections which establish interrelationships between persons and events; these allow us to trace participants in a text and to interpret the way in which different parts of the text relate to each other (**cohesion**).

- Finally, there are underlying semantic connections which allow us to 'make sense' of a text as a unit of meaning; these are dealt with under the heading of **coherence** and **implicature**.

- Another important feature of text organization derives from the overlapping notions of **genre** and **text type.**

- Texts have been classified in two main ways:

- The first and more straightforward classification is based on the contexts in which texts occur and results in institutionalized labels such as 'journal article', 'science textbook', 'newspaper editorial', or 'travel brochure'.

- The second is a more subjective, less institutionalized classification which does not normally apply to a whole text but rather to parts of it. Typical labels used in this type of classification include 'narration', 'exposition', 'argumentation', and 'instruction'.

Textual equivalence

➼ The linear arrangement of linguistic elements plays a role in organizing messages at text level. Of the numerous formulations available for expressing a given message, a speaker or writer will normally opt for one that makes the flow of information clearer in a given context.

➼ To illustrate what is meant by 'information flow', consider some possible formulations of sentence (2) in the following extract from Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* (1988: 3).

➼ The flow of information is smoother in (2c) because the progression of links is less messy and therefore easier to follow than in (2a) and (2b).

Sentences (2a–c) consist of the same elements, but the sequencing of elements is different in each one.

(2)a. But Ptolemy had to make an assumption that the moon followed a path that sometimes brought it twice as close to the earth as other times, in order to predict these positions correctly.

b. But an assumption that Ptolemy had to make in order to predict these positions correctly was that the moon followed a path that sometimes brought it twice as close to the earth as at other times.

c. But in order to predict these positions correctly, Ptolemy had to make an assumption that the moon followed a path that sometimes brought it twice as close to the earth as at other times.

Proposed theme: The fitter, he sent these documents to the office.
These documents, the fitter sent them to the office.

Postposed theme: He sent these documents to the office, the fitter.

He sent these documents to the office, the fitter did.

The fitter sent them to the office, these documents.

■ Here is an advertising leaflet which accompanies a range of cosmetic products by Estée Lauder.

Extraordinary new colors.
Extraordinary new compacts.

ESTÉE LAUDER SIGNATURE.

Singular. Intense.
Privileged. Provocative.

Colors to astonish.
Make resistance impossible.

Consider them. Yours.
Like a fingerprint.

- Thematic elements are omitted to foreground a rheme, for example *Make resistance impossible (They/These colors*?).

- Full stops are inserted in unexpected places to force the reader to treat certain elements as complete units of information. This is particularly effective in the case of *Consider them. Yours,* where one automatically gets the two interpretations: 'consider them' (i.e. think about them), 'they are yours', and 'Consider them yours'.

- Clause as a message can be analysed in terms of two types of structure: (a) **thematic structure** and (b) **information structure.**

- There are two main approaches to the analysis of clause as a message.

- The Hallidayan approach treats thematic and information structures as separate. The two structures are seen to be essentially distinct from each other.

- Linguists belonging to the Prague School by and large conflate the two structures and combine them in the same description.

- The two approaches are often at odds with each other and can produce completely different analyses of the same clause. However, translators with different linguistic backgrounds should benefit from a brief exposure to both points of view.

Thematic structure: Theme/Rheme

- **Thematic structure: theme and rheme**:

- One way of explaining the interactional organization of sentences is to suggest that a clause consists of two segments. The first segment is called the **theme.** The theme is what the clause is about.

- In ***Ptolemy's model provided a reasonably accurate system for predicting the positions of heavenly bodies in the sky***, the theme is ***Ptolemy's model.*** This is what the clause is about.

- The second segment of a clause is called the **rheme.** The rheme is what the speaker says about the theme. It is the goal of discourse. In the above example, the rheme is: ***provided a reasonably accurate system for predicting the positions of heavenly bodies in the sky***, which is what the writer has to say about Ptolemy's model.

- This basically means that every clause has the structure of a message: it says something (the rheme) about something (the theme).

- Now we will look at a slightly more extended example of how a Hallidayan style thematic analysis of a text might proceed in English. The following short extract selected for analysis is from Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* (1988: 2):

- Aristotle thought that the earth was stationary and that the sun, the moon, the planets, and the stars moved in circular orbits about the earth. He believed this because he felt, for mystical reasons, that the earth was the center of the universe, and that circular motion was the most perfect.

Suggested analysis:

T_1 Aristotle

R_1 $\Big\{$
     thought that
     t_2 the earth
     r_2 was stationary   (and that)
     t_3 the sun, the moon, the planets, and the stars
     r_3 moved in circular orbits about the earth.

T_1 He

R_1 $\Big\{$
     believed this   (because)
     t_2 he
     r_2 $\Big\{$
       felt, for mystical reasons,   (that)
       t_3 the earth
       r_3 was the center of the universe,   (and that)
       t_4 circular motion
       r_4 was the most perfect.

➧ According to the analysis:

➧ Thematic analysis can be represented hierarchically. Each clause will have its own theme– rheme structure which may be subordinate to a larger theme–rheme structure.

A brief assessment of the Hallidayan position on theme-rheme

- One of the main differences between the Hallidayan and other approaches is that Halliday has always insisted that, at least in English, the theme–rheme distinction is realized by the sequential ordering of clause elements.

- Theme is the element placed by the speaker in first position in the clause; rheme is whatever comes after the theme. A rheme–theme sequence therefore has no place in Halliday's system.

- This position contrasts sharply with that taken by Prague linguists.

- The attraction of the Hallidayan view is that, unlike the rather complex explanations of the Prague School, it is very simple to follow and apply.

THE PRAGUE SCHOOL POSITION ON INFORMATION FLOW: FUNCTIONAL SENTENCE PERSPECTIVE

- The Prague School position on theme/rheme and given/new is quite distinct from Halliday's and results in a significantly different explanation of how these categories are realized in discourse. This approach is generally referred to as **functional sentence perspective (FSP)**.

- The theory of functional sentence perspective was developed by a group of Czech linguists who pioneered most studies investigating the interaction between syntax and communicative function.

- For one thing, a functional sentence perspective approach may prove more helpful in explaining the interactional organization of languages other than English, particularly languages with free or relatively free word order.

- The main premise in FSP theory is that the communicative goals of an interaction cause the structure of a clause or sentence to function in different kinds of perspective.

- *In China the book received a great deal of publicity.*

- *The book received a great deal of publicity in China.*

- *In China* would be considered rhematic in both formulations according to Prague linguists.

- In the Hallidayan approach, *In China* would be considered rheme in the second and theme in the first example.

Suggested strategies for minimizing linear dislocation

- A number of linguists have suggested a variety of strategies for resolving the tension between syntactic and communicative functions in translation and language learning.

- *Strategy no. 1: voice change*
  This strategy involves changing the syntactic form of the verb to achieve a different sequence of elements.

- *Strategy no. 2: change of verb*

  This involves changing the verb altogether and replacing it with one that has a similar meaning but can be used in a different syntactic configuration.

  I like it vs. It pleases me.

  I bought it from John v.s. John sold it to me.

- ***Strategy no. 3: nominalization***

    Nominalization involves replacing a verbal form with a nominal one (e.g. *describe - description*).

- ***Strategy no. 4: extraposition***

    Extraposition involves changing the position of the entire clause in the sentence by, for instance, embedding a simple clause in a complex sentence.

    a. Someone who we don't know left a message.

    b. Someone left a message who we don't know. - Extraposition of relative clause out of subject

    a. Some guy with red hair was there.

    b. Some guy was there with red hair. - Extraposition of prepositional phrase out of subject

- The above strategies are potentially available for resolving the tension between word order and communicative function.

- To sum up, a translator cannot always follow the thematic organization of the original.

- If at all possible, s/he should make an effort to present the target text from a perspective similar to that of the source text.

- What matters at the end of the day is that the target text has some thematic organization of its own, that it reads naturally and smoothly, does not distort the information structure of the original and maintains a coherent point of view as a text in its own right.