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Shokouhi, Hossein 2013, Information structure and the flow of translation, in Problems in translation : Abstracts of the International Scientific and Practical 2013 conference, Institute of Arts and Cultures, Orel, Russia, pp. 11-13.

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INFORMATION STRUCTURE AND THE FLOW OF TRANSLATION

Abstract

Translators often follow the established conventions of translations set out by founders like Nida and Taber (1969) or Newmark (1988). The principal convention, one could say, is to adhere to the source text in form and meaning. Another major convention is to keep the flow of the translated text natural, often referred to as ‘readability’ (Baker and Saldanha, 2009; Hatim and Munday, 2004). These two conventions are hard to go together, and one of them is often flouted. To maintain the same position of discursal elements or information structure of the source text which include thematic information, left-dislocation, contrastiveness, and passive voice in the translated text is not an easy task. This exacerbates the task especially if the source and the target language have different typological features. This paper argues that discursal elements are determinant in understanding the flow of the texts in the source language and should not, therefore, be frequently switched around in the translated texts to fit the norm of the target language. The order of these information structure elements should be maximally maintained when translating a text into a target language. It is after all the employment of such information structure units by the writer of the source text which is significant at any given point in discourse both cognitively, when processing the text, and interactionally, when communicating with the reader.

Discussion

Concepts like given and new information (Chafe, 1976), topical elements (theme, rheme), and information structure (Halliday, 2003) have always been central to discourse. The linguistic representations of these have particular force at the time of production for they create a similar effect in the reader. While this is very significant in text production, the fluidity of language or the natural flow of a text is as important. The translator is often caught between the two facts: to preserve the linguistic elements as they appear in the source text or to observe the flow of information. We know that the arrangement of words in a text is not haphazard and the words are strung together according to the writer’s perception of the reader. I like to argue that preserving the position of these elements in the target text is essential unless adherence to the form of the source text makes fundamental changes in the form of the target text and makes it incomprehensible to the reader of the target language. In cases where the translator finds it impossible to keep up to the arrangement of these linguistic elements in the target language, s/he can sacrifice the arrangement for language fluidity.

Let us briefly look at some instances from popular books which are translated in Persian. In all of these cases, the arrangement is violated in the translation. For example, if we encounter the following dialogue in a text about ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ by T. S. Eliot, we tend to fuse the two propositions into one.

According to Gelyukens (1988), the writer's intention is in the first place to create a situation whereby this particular love song is recoverable by the reader and then to put forth the question about that song, so fusing can violate the structure.

(1)

"Now about the Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock. What is that poem about (do you think)?"

Similarly, in the following, the translator feels at ease to omit the cohesive 'And'. The conjunction is very crucial here because its presence in the initial position gives reference to some previous discourse.

(2a)

"Jimmy: ... And Mrs. Porter gets 'em all going with the first yawn."
(Osborne, 1957: 11)

(2b)

"Lady: And the letter, don't you want to read that?" (Shaw, 1966: 192)

Likewise, the repetition of 'Ten minutes ago' in the following highlights its importance because it foregrounds the reasoning for the Lady's statement, thus it is essential to be translated in both sentences.

(3)

"Napoleon: Ten minutes ago, nothing else would satisfy you.
Lady: Ten minutes ago you had not insulted me beyond all bearing." (Shaw, 1966: 192)

In the following the repetition has a different cause; it is for the sake of contrast and/or emphasis.

(4a)

"Miss Watson she took me in the closet and prayed." (Twain, 1968: 204-205)

(4b)

"Pap he hadn't been seen for more than a year ..." (Twain, 1968: 206)

In the 18th century popular novel by Sterne, we read:

(5)

"To my uncle Mr. Toby Shandy do I stand indebted for the preceding anecdote, to whom my father, who was"

The left-dislocated prepositional phrase 'To my uncle' and its pronominal repetition 'to whom' should be translated in the same position if they intend to carry a similar force or effect in the reader of the translated text.

Contrastive statements play a key role in the grammar of discourse. Consider the succession of statements in the following excerpt by D.H. Lawrence. The translation of these sentences into affirmative statements cannot convey the message appropriately because the message carries a contrastive tone.

(6)

"We can't go back. The renegade hates life itself. He wants the death of life. So these many 'reformers' and 'idealists' who glorify the savages in America. They are death-birds, life haters. Renegades. We can't go back.

And Melville couldn't. He wanted to. He tried to. And he couldn't.”
(cited in Fowler, 1977, p. 61)

By looking at three Persian translations of the text below, Afshar, (2001) realizes that they are all different. Strangely enough, I found that none has translated the initial ‘because’, the subordinate conjunction which is the basis for reasoning of Descartes’ following philosophical statements.

Descartes said, “Because I think, I am.” Because I am, I pray. *Prayer*, to the thinking person, is almost inescapable.”

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ПРОЦЕСС ПЕРЕВОДА КАК ОСОБЫЙ КОМПОНЕНТ КОММУНИКАЦИИ

Вопрос об изучении процесса перевода является наиболее важным в теории перевода. В этой связи следует отметить работы Л.С. Бархударова, который выступает за изучение перевода как процесса, но при этом оговаривается, что термин “процесс” применительно к переводу понимается им “в чисто лингвистическом смысле, т. е. как определённого вида языкового, точнее межязыкового преобразования или трансформации текста на одном языке в текст на другом языке” (Бархударов 1975: 6) Термин “преобразование” (или “трансформация”) может быть употреблён лишь в том смысле, в каком термин применяется в описании языка вообще: речь идёт об определённом отношении между двумя языковыми и речевыми единицами, из которых одна является исходной, а другая создаётся на основе первой. В данном случае