

## Unit A9

# Text type in translation

As part of the ‘**form vs function**’ debate or whether we should be concerned with how something is said as opposed to what is intended by it, **relevance** research (e.g. Gutt 1991) took a ‘**cognitive**’ turn essentially to critique the ‘textual’ turn that was gaining momentum throughout the 1970s (e.g. Beaugrande 1978, Koller 1979). In the analysis of STs or the composition of TTs, the **relevance** model has drawn on mental resources such as ‘**inference**’ as a more viable alternative to **taxonomic** classifications such as **text typologies**. Yet, most theorizing by proponents of ‘**relevance**’ on translation strategy (**descriptive vs interpretive, direct vs indirect**), could not completely ignore macro-structures such as **text type** or **genre**. By the end of the 1990s, there was a clear admission that **inference** can only be enriched by awareness of the conventions governing the **communicative event** within which texts or **genres** occur (Gutt 1998). In Unit 7 of this book, we introduced the ‘textual’ dimension to the model of **pragmatic** equivalence and presented the main claims of the textual model. The present unit re-examines these claims and properly assesses the status of **text type** in the translation process.

### STANDARDS OF TEXTUALITY

Translation theories informed by **textual pragmatics** (e.g. Thomas 1995) see ‘**equivalence**’ in relative and hierarchical terms (Koller 1995) and specifically view a ‘translation’ as a valid representative of ST communicative acts (Beaugrande 1978). Concepts such as ‘valid representative’ or ‘communicative act’, however, are problematical in that they can cover quite a range of translation phenomena, from producing a **literal** replica to a **free** paraphrase of sentences or entire texts.

From its very inception in the early 1970s, **text linguistics** has rejected the **form–meaning** split and the popular but counter-intuitive assumption that communicative contexts are simply too diffuse to yield meaningful generalizations regarding language use. From a textual perspective, context is seen as:

A strategic configuration in which what things ‘mean’ coincides intentionally and in systematic ways with what they are used for and with whatever else is going on in the situation.

(Beaugrande 1991: 31)

This notion of context as **purpose** and **function** is underpinned by several **standards of textuality** which all well-formed texts (or their translations) must meet (Beaugrande 1980). **Cohesion** subsumes the diverse relations which transparently hold among the words, phrases and sentences of a text. Underlying these surface phenomena is **coherence** which taps a variety of conceptual resources, ensuring that meanings are related discernibly.

These aspects of **texture** link bottom-up with **situationality**, a cover term for the way utterances relate to situations. Situational appropriateness (together with efficiency and effectiveness provided by **cohesion** and **coherence**) is regulated by the principle of **informativity**, or the extent to which a text or parts of a text may be expected or unexpected, thus exhibiting varying degrees of **dynamism** (i.e. uncertainty or interestingness, see the ‘**markedness**’ section on p. 69–70). The entire communicative transaction is driven by the **intentionality** of a text producer, matched by **acceptability** on the part of a text receiver, which together ensure that the text is purposeful and that it functions in a particular way to serve the purposes for which it is intended. Finally, **intertextuality** ensures that texts or parts of texts link up in meaningful ways with other texts.

### Example A9.1

She *woke* at midnight. She always *woke up* then without having to rely on an alarm clock. A wish that had taken root in her *awoke* her with great accuracy. For a few moments she was not sure she was *awake*. . . .

Habit *woke* her at this hour. It was an old habit she had developed when young and it had stayed with her as she matured. She had learned it along with the other rules of married life. She *woke up* at midnight to await her husband’s return from his evening’s entertainment . . .

(N. Mahfouz (*Bayn al-Qasrayn*) *Palace Walk* (1962) [italics added])



### Task A9.1

- Consider Example A9.1 and answer the questions below. Pay particular attention to those elements in the text in italics.
  - What strikes you as interesting about the repetition of *woke*, *woke up*, etc.? (**Cohesion**)
  - How does this repetition help to sustain the narrative threading its way through the text? (**Coherence**)
  - What do you think is intended by the repetition? (**Intentionality**)
  - Can this function be appreciated for what it is by the average reader of the text? (**Acceptability**)
  - Is it normal and expected, or dynamic and unexpected? (**Informativity**)
  - What aspect of social life does the repetition underscore? (**Situationality**)

- Does this kind of language, scene, etc., remind you of other texts? Does it sound like an argument, an explanation, a narrative, etc? (**Intertextuality**)
- In the light of this analysis, work out a strategy for translating the passage into a language of your choice.

As a general template for the study of **equivalence**, then, the textual-pragmatic scheme focuses our attention on the range of textual relations that can be established and must be accounted for in moving from a ST to a TT.

## MARKEDNESS

One particular relationship worth noting in this respect is **markedness** or what we have so far referred to variously under such labels as textual **salience** and **dynamism**. The arrangement of words and sentences may take a ‘preferred’ or ‘expected’ form (i.e. unmarked), or a somewhat unfamiliar and unexpected form (i.e. **marked**, **salient**, **dynamic**).

Unmarked options confront us with no significant problems. But texts are rarely if ever so straightforward. There are situations in which language is deliberately used in a non-habitual, non-ordinary way, and it is this **dehabitualization** or non-ordinariness (i.e. **dynamism**) that usually proves particularly challenging in translation. The theoretical thinking on this issue in Translation Studies runs something like this: if **contextually motivated** (that is, if used ungratuitously), marked grammar and lexis must be accounted for in the processing of text and preserved in translation. Practice tells a different story.

### Task A9.2



- Consider this specific example from an Arabic ‘absurdist’ drama (T. Al-Hakeem (1960) *al-Sultan al-Haa’ir*, *The Sultan’s Dilemma*) which has seen two translations into English, one heavily **domesticated**, the other less so. Focus on the italicized elements in this respect, and reflect on the effect likely to be generated by the different renderings:

#### Example A9.2a (Version 1, italics added)

EXECUTIONER: . . . Now that I have warned you of this condition, do you still want me to sing?

CONDEMNED MAN: *Go ahead.*

E: And you will admire and applaud me?

CM: Yes.

E: Is that a solemn promise?

CM: *It is.*

**Example A9.2b (Version 2, italics added)**

- EXECUTIONER: . . . Now, having drawn your attention to the condition, shall I sing?  
 CONDEMNED MAN: *Sing!*  
 E: And will you admire me and show your appreciation?  
 CM: Yes.  
 E: You promise faithfully?  
 CM: *Faithfully.*

Version 1 is from a translation which has opted for some form of **dynamic equivalence** (see Unit 6), drastically **glossing** the source utterance, while Version 2 is from a translation which predominantly uses **formal equivalence**, reproducing **form** for **form** and thus preserving such aspects of the text as the repetition considered here to be maximally motivated. Informed by **textual pragmatics**, we could say that the effect which the latter translation conveys is **defamiliarizing**: the translation seeks to preserve subtle aspects of ST meaning, such as the fact that the speaker in this text sounds ‘ridiculous’, ‘absurd’, etc.

But is preserving non-ordinariness in this way a valid solution all the time? Within the textual model, it is maintained that non-ordinariness should not be seen in static terms, with the non-ordinary forms of the original simply reconstructed or transferred more or less intact. Rather, a process is set in motion in which some form of negotiation takes place to establish what precisely is intended by the ST, and then to ascertain how the target reader may best be made aware of the intricacies involved. The communicative resources of the TL may have to be stretched, but this must always be interpretable. One way of enhancing this sense of interpretability is to exploit the target user’s cultural experience and knowledge of his/her language. Text examples discussed in Unit 2 (e.g. Examples A2.2–2.5) show how interpretability can suffer irreparably sometimes.

**TEXT-BASED INFORMATION**

In dealing with issues such as **markedness** and **equivalence** from a **text-linguistic** point of view, a gradient may be proposed to capture how, specifically as a reader, the translator tends to move backwards and forwards between what may be called ‘reader-supplied’ information at one end, and information ‘supplied by the text’ at the other. Research into reading suggests that, as the reading process gets underway, there would ideally be *less* reliance on information supplied by the reader, and *more* on information which the text itself supplies. Indeed, according to Beaugrande (1978: 88), it is only when reading becomes almost entirely dependent on information dominated by the text that a ‘truly objective translation’ is possible, ‘a translation which validly represents the perceptual potential of the original’.

What precisely is involved in ‘text-based information’? This term is a misnomer, and the focus has been placed erroneously on ‘**form** or **content** *concretely present* in the

text', which is not necessarily always the case. To appreciate this point, consider the following unidiomatic, published translation of an editorial:

### Example A9.3a

#### EDITORIAL

#### A necessary move

Through Lebanese satellite's channels and newspapers we acknowledge and always emphasize the unity of the Lebanese and the Syrian tracks. [ . . ]

We do not discuss the idea of the two tracks' coherence in spite of remarks about liberating South Lebanon. But we would like to point out that [ . . ]

(*Al-Watan* 1999)

The translator is concerned with 'what the media are saying', etc., an area of **content** which, although physically present in the ST, is simply not relevant to what is intended. The reference to *satellite channels and newspapers*, for example, is a rhetorical way of talking which cannot be taken literally. The text producer is simply saying something like 'we have publicly acknowledged that . . .'. This is part of a concession which could be conveyed much more effectively by using an appropriate signal such as 'Certainly', 'Of course', followed by an adversative: 'However, this is not the issue'. If used, this format would naturally pave the way for a forthcoming contrast: 'The issue is . . .', ushering in the counter-claim.

### Task A9.3



- With a clearer idea of what 'text-based information' means, edit and revise the published translation (Example A9.3a).

The **text-linguistic** view regarding what is said vs what is intended and how it is a combination of the two that can properly signal what text-based information is about, is stated clearly by Beaugrande (1978: 91): 'the word cannot be the **unit of translation**'. This claim is informed by a general stance which takes **text** to be the minimal unit of communication. In the above translations, a pragmatic reading of text-based information necessitates that we depart drastically from the surface manifestations of both **form** and **content** (i.e. from **surface structure** and **denotative meaning**).

This is consistent with the view that text-based information is yielded not by 'purely formal features, but rather as the result of an intense . . . evaluation of the communicative relevance of formal features' (Beaugrande 1978: 95). In the above example, the conditional structure or a word such as *discuss* is a striking example of how the **lexicogrammar** tends to communicate meanings that go beyond

structural relationships and that must be placed within larger templates to be appreciated properly. This wider framework, we suggest, is provided by **text type**, a macro-structure which essentially encompasses the purposes for which utterances are used under what we will explain shortly as the **rhetorical purpose** of the text.

## READER-SUPPLIED INFORMATION

Reader-supplied information is another potentially misleading term. It is best seen not as sole reliance on **form** or **content** but in terms of ‘linguistic competence’. This competence in turn would not be in the mechanics of **syntactic** or **semantic** structures per se, but would relate to the individual’s ability to operate within a set of constraints imposed by such macro-structures as **text type**. We are specifically concerned with real-life situations, and with the influence of variables such as socio-economic status, education and training, knowledge and beliefs. In dealing with the above text examples, for example, what the reader supplies would certainly relate to **content** and to knowledge of the grammar (say, of conditionals) and the **semantics** of words such as *satellite channels* and *newspapers*. But the focus would inevitably be much wider. It would cover how this content or **lexicogrammar** is deployed to serve higher-order value and belief systems to do with the **function** of text in context:

- serving social institutions and social processes (e.g. countering an adversary’s claim subtly);
- maintaining relations of **power** and solidarity (e.g. issuing the counter-claim politely without alienating the adversary);
- making sense (conveying a semblance of a balance between claim and counter-claim cohesively and coherently).

Example A9.3a, for example, would now read something like:

### Example A9.3b (suggested amendment)

Certainly the Lebanese and Syrian tracks for peace with Israel run parallel and in perfect harmony. However, this is not the issue. The issue is [ . . . ]

Thus, it is the values yielded by these text-in-context relationships that collectively make up the ‘perceptual potential’ of the text which is the sole basis of ‘**textual equivalence**’ (in Beaugrande’s terms; compare with Catford’s term in Unit 4). This is the outcome of an intricate interaction between **form** and **content** which we seek to preserve in translation. Let us examine what is involved in greater detail.

## TEXT TYPOLOGY

The text-oriented models of the translation **process** that have emerged in recent years have all sought to avoid the pitfalls of categorizing **text** in accordance with situational criteria such as subject matter (e.g. legal or scientific texts). Instead, texts are now classified on the basis of a ‘predominant contextual focus’ (e.g. **expository**, **argumentative** or **instructional** texts). This has enabled theorist and practitioner alike to confront the difficult issue of **text hybridization**. That texts are essentially multi-functional is now seen as the norm rather than the exception.

### Task A9.4



- What justifies the combination of reporting and commentary? Can you, for example, justify the use of a **cleft** structure (*it was . . . that*) and other emphatic devices in the following translation of an Arabic news report?

#### Example A9.4

*It was the tension between the Blacks and Jewish communities in New York which ended in bloodshed in yesterday's clashes that glaringly exposed how precarious the relations are between the two groups. [ . . ]*

The tension *simply* began with a traffic incident when [ . . ]

(*Al-Majalla* 1981 (italics added))

In this example, there is undoubtedly a certain amount of commentary. There are two points to make about this case of **hybridization**. First, the **evaluativeness** in this news report is justified in the light of a number of factors including, most importantly, the sensitivity of the issue reported. Second, despite the presence of evaluative material, we cannot fail to recognize the text for what it is: predominantly a news report. We are aware of this because we are familiar with what straight reporting (as opposed to commentary) looks or sounds like. But, perhaps more significantly, we are almost sure that reporting and commentary cannot be equally prominent. Since there is insufficient evaluation to turn the text into an editorial, the overall **purpose** of the text must be ultimately to report the news.

With the emphasis on contextual focus, the multi-functionality of all texts is thus no longer seen as a weakness of the **text type** model, nor indeed as a licence for an ‘anything goes’ attitude in the production or analysis of texts or translations. For example, it is recognized that, while a distinction may usefully be made between so-called **expressive** texts (of the creative, literary type) and **informative** texts (of the factual variety), texts are rarely if ever one or the other type. Yet it can safely be assumed that, unless there is a good reason to do otherwise, metaphors in predominantly **expressive** texts, for example, are best rendered metaphorically, while

those in predominantly **informative** texts may if necessary be modified or altogether jettisoned (Reiss 1971: 62).



### Task A9.5

- Example A9.5 is an extract from the Charter of the Palestinian militant group Hamas. Given what charters should look or sound like, can you suggest some improvements on this translation, perhaps cutting down on the emotiveness that is allowed to feature too prominently. Would you, on the other hand, accept a reasonable measure of emotiveness in this particular context? Why?

### Example A9.5

#### Article Nine

The state of truth has disappeared and was replaced by the state of evil. Nothing has remained in its right place, for when Islam is removed from the scene, everything changes. These are the motives.

As to the objectives: discarding the evil, crushing it and defeating it, so that truth may prevail and homelands revert to their owners [ . . . ]

*(The Hamas Charter 1990 (trans Prof. R. Israeli))*

Whether you have approved of or rejected the decision to preserve emotiveness in the Hamas text, your decision will have been informed by what the text is intended to do in a given context for a given text user. Central to **text typologies** of the kind advocated by context-sensitive theories of translation is the view that language use beyond the sentence may helpfully be seen in terms of **rhetorical purpose** (e.g. **exposition, argumentation, instruction**). This sense of **purpose** yields increasingly finer categories (e.g. report, counter-argument, regulation), and a variety of text forms identified on the basis of such factors as subject matter or level of formality (e.g. reporting, **argumentation** or **instruction** may be technical/non-technical, subjective/objective, spoken/written). But to reiterate, it is generally accepted that, in all cases, such a categorization is necessarily idealized and that, since all texts are in a sense hybrid, the predominance of a given **rhetorical purpose** in a given text is an important yardstick for assessing **text-type** ‘identity’.

Models of translation informed by **text typology** have thus sought to encompass and account for the diversity of **rhetorical purposes** normally served in any act of communication. This entails that communicative values (related to such contextual factors as **situationality, intentionality, intertextuality**) are fully integrated into the way **text types** are used or produced. A set of constraints emerges, and **text types** are seen as ‘guidelines’ which text users instinctively refer to in adopting a given translation strategy with an eye on both sides of the translation divide – the ST and the TT.

## Summary

In this unit, we have examined the minimal criteria which texts or their translations must meet to be effective, efficient and appropriate. But it may happen that the criteria are not followed either for no good reason (in which case we would be dealing with gratuitous ‘violation’) or with justification (**contextually motivated** ‘flouting’). The **rhetorical purpose** of a text is thus an important yardstick by which to assess, first, whether the text is intended to **monitor** (view with detachment) or **manage** (evaluate) and, second, whether, within each of these broad categories, the text is intended to serve any of a number of sub-purposes such as counter- or through-**argumentation**, conceptual or narrative **exposition**. Finally, **rhetorical purpose** is important not only in defining **norms** but also in spotting deviations which (if **contextually motivated**) must be heeded and preserved in translation.