Text as a Basic Unit of Translation with Special Reference to the Interpreter's Training

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Abstract

There is a confusing tendency for translation theorists to regard the whole text, whether it is spoken or written, as the unit of translation. Free translation has always favored the sentence; literal translation the word. Nowadays, free translation has moved from the sentence to the whole text. In the recent years, the argument has been revived by those who maintain that the only true unit of translation is the whole text. It falls into four sections:

Section one is an introduction which refers to some related definitions of the basic terms.

Section two sheds the light on text analysis studies.

Section three discusses the concept and the significance of text as the basic of translation.

Section four is a concluding section of this study that may be helpful in solving the students' problems in the perspective of seeing the text as a whole unit.

1. Introduction

It has been made clear that linguistic investigation can no longer treat the sentence as the basic unit since language does not occur in words or sentences, but in connective text. A text may reveal meaning and significance which is not apparent in the isolated sentence. Therefore, linguistics has moved towards the study of aspects of language beyond the sentence because linguists have realized that language cannot be studied in isolation from the communicative intentions of language users and the context within which they use language. Text analysis, then, is demanded as a new approach to linguistic study (Stern, 1983:133).

As an interdisciplinary discipline, translation has been influenced by this recent development in text analysis. It has changed from a concern with isolated words to text in situation with emphasis on cultural background. Work in text analysis, then, may be directly relevant to translation studies and language learning and the recent interest in this area is representative of the shift in emphasis in language learning from the view of language as a set of structures to the view of language as communication. In such a shift, meaning and the use of language play a major part (Trosborg, 2000:217).

Hence, the present study explores the connections that might usefully be made between text and translation, and how text analysis can help the translator/ interpreter.

2. Text and Text Analysis

2.1 Text

It is difficult to give a single definition of text analysis as a research method. It can be characterized as a way of approaching and thinking about a problem. It enables to reveal the hidden motivations behind a text to interpret it. (Johnstone, 2008:1).

Carter (1982:184) defines text as the organization of connected language units beyond the level of the sentence. It is a unit of linguistic performance which stands complete in itself. It is viewed as all aspects of language organization (whether structural or not) that operate above the level of grammar.

The text also represents "the meaningful combinations of language units which serve various purposes and perform various acts in various contexts" (Steel, 2002:1). Text, then, is studied to investigate how people produce and understand connected language.

2.2 Cohesion

As Halliday and Hasan (1976:4) have defined it as a semantic concept which belongs to the relations of meaning that exist within a text. It occurs when the interpretation of an element in the text is dependent on that of another element. It covers "those features in a text which link its component parts" (Hartman and Stork, 1972:40), i.e. the features that bind sentences to each other grammatically and lexically. Halliday and Hasan (ibid) have identified five types of cohesive ties; they are: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, repetition, and collocation.

2.3 Coherence

Coherence is a characteristic of a connected text. It refers to the logical integration of sentences within a paragraph (McCrimmon, 1957:567). Text coherence is determined by two factors. First, it depends on consistency in tense. Second, it results from arranging one's text according to perceivable order (Corbett, 1977:70).

Coherence is described as a quality assigned to text by a reader or listener, and is a measure of the extent to which the reader or listener finds that the text holds together and makes sense as a unity. Therefore, it has to do with an impression of wholeness. "If a text is coherent, it makes sense and is not just a list of disconnected words and sentences" (Christmas, 2001:1).

3. Text Analysis and Translation

3.1. Text Analysis: Beyond the Sentence

The origins of text analysis lie in classical rhetorical theory (Aristotle, Cicero, Longinvs) and its successors (Lemke, 2002:5).According to this theory, text "ought to be constructed like a living creature, with its own body, it must not lack either head or feet; it must have a middle and extremities so composed as to suit each other and the whole work" (Stewart, 1987:6).

Allerton (1979:5) sees this field of enquiry as having been remarked since 1945 when "a new generation of Prague Linguists (F. Danes and J. Firbas) has made notable contributions to aspects of grammatical theory concerned with relations between sentences in a text.

Text analysis presents a way to consider the perspective of seeing the text as a whole within its communicative situation and cultural orientation, from which communicative translation may arise.

The study of text is known as text analysis. It consists of attempts to study the organization of language above the sentence or above the clause, and therefore to study larger linguistic units, such as conversational exchanges or written texts. It follows that it is also concerned with language in use in social contexts, and in particular with interaction or dialogue between speakers (Bahrami, 1999:60).

In view of the previous definitions of text, it is noted that the main aspects of text are act of communication, context, social interaction, and functions and purposes which underlie the linguistic units above the sentence level. Hence, text analysis is looked upon as involving both language form and language function and including that part of communication that is unfolded in spoken or written texts by means of various linguistic devices.

3.2 Text Analysis Development

Major contributions to the development of text analysis were made by works of scholars, which have originated in a variety of disciplines. Text analysis seems to be a meeting point among five disciplines: linguistics, sociolinguistics, sociology, and social psychology. Dell Hymes (1972), the American Anthropologist, has broken such a basis of studying speech in its social setting to cover the forms of address. The work of British linguistic philosophers, J. L. Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), was influential in the study of language as a social activity. M.A.K. Halliday (1970) and his systemic - functional linguistics emphasized the social functions of language and the thematic and informational aspects of speech and writing above the utterance/ sentence level. Text analysis may be recognized as covering aspects of text structure falling within the textual component of the linguistic system such as cohesion, thematic development, etc.(Butler,1989:9). Also Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) and their model of description of interaction in school classroom is grounded on a revelation of a structural

hierarchy…with such levels as move, act, exchange, etc (Robinson,1980:55).

The field of 'conversational analysis' is in line with this development where the emphasis is not on structure but on the behaviour of participants in talks and on patterns recurring within a wide range of natural data as basic units to be studied within the field. W. Labov's (1970and 1972) studies are major contributions.Van Dijk (1972, 1981) sets out an analytic approach to text which has its origins in attempts to produce a 'text grammar'. He makes a distinction between 'macrostructures'and 'superstructures' and argues that "the semantic presentation of discourse is its macrostructures" (Van dijk,1981:4).

3.3 Approaches to Text Analysis

There are several different approaches to the linguistic analysis of text: speech act theory, international sociolinguistics, ethnography of communication, pragmatics, conversational analysis and variation analysis.

However, Text linguistics, Critical Discourse Analysis, Argumentation Theory, Genre Studies, Discursive Psychology, Holistic Discourse Analysis, and so forth, may all be included within the category of approaches mentioned above. Each approach emphasizes different aspects of language use, and they all view language as social interaction (Yalden, 1987:44).

3.4 The Text Analysis Materials

The material with which text analysts work consists of actual language units (Johnstone, 2008: 20). It is viewed as any connected passage of language units, whether it is spoken or written". It is "a series of sentences linked up to form a continuous and cohesive sequence" (Fowler, 1977: 45).

Nord (1991) refers to it as "communicative action which can be realized by a combination of verbal and non-verbal means" (quoted in Robinson, 1997:209). Text, then, serves the basis for linguistic analysis and represents the product of communicative language units.

The form and function of any text is partly the result of what other texts are like and what their functions are. One commonly used term for the relationships between texts and prior texts is "intertextuality" which refers to the ways in which all language units draws on familiar formats and texts (Johnstone, 2008:191).

4. Text Analysis and Translation

Speaking about translation with reference to text analysis has a very strong tradition both in the discipline of translation studies itself and translator training. Interpretation is not supposed to take place from the micro level of the word (bottom-up processing) but from the macro structure of the text to the micro unit of the word (top-down processing).Orientation towards the function of the target text prevails prescriptions concerning the target text by relating it to the source text, and translations are regarded as concrete assignments serving specific functions. Translation quality assessment is no longer based exclusively on the criterion of equivalence. For one thing, equivalence may not be possible because of diverging linguistic systems in source and target language. For another, equivalence may not even be a desirable criterion.

The drawbacks of a "bottom-up" approach are many when it comes to translating: Students may be tempted to as closely as possible to source text structures, which is likely to lead to linguistic interferences and mistakes even when translating into the native language; they also run the risk of losing sight of the text as a whole, just as differences in cultural orientation may easily be neglected (Trosborg, 2000:217).

4.1 Semantic Translation and Communicative Translation

Newmark (1982:7) vouches that translation "a craft consisting in an attempt to replace a written message and/or statement in one language by the same message and/or statement in another language". He suggests two main types of translation, i.e. semantic translation and communicative translation.

Semantic translation aims at conveying the semantic and syntactic structure of the source language text. In other words, it concentrates on the content of the message rather than the effect of the message. In semantic translation, the translator is very loyal to the author of the original text more than anything else. Then, semantic translation seems to be more complex, more concentrated and inclusive of more details. Anyway, semantic translation may result in loss of meaning and may sometimes lead to poorly written texts.

On the other hand, communicative translation aims at producing the same effect on the target language reader as that of the original source language text on the source language reader. It emphasizes the force of the message rather than its content. In communicative translation, the translator gives himself the right to remove obscurities, to eliminate repetition or to add certain lexical items in his rendering in order to make thought and cultural content of the original text more accessible to the reader. Consequently, communicative translation, which is adopted in this study, seems to be smoother, simpler, clearer and more direct.

4.2 Characteristics of Spoken Language

Leech, et al (1982:133) state that text includes the use of written, spoken, and sign language and also other forms of communication. The unit of text can be larger than the sentence, or a single utterance, or a set of newspaper articles, or a conversation, or even silence. The analysis of a unit tends to investigate how linguistic forms relate to functions. A text analysis of written text might include a study of topic development and cohesion across the sentence, while an analysis of spoken language might focus on these aspects in addition to turn taking practices, opening and closing sequences of social encounters, carrying out certain conversational activities such as requesting and giving information, as well as how speakers express different aspects of their identity as they do talking. However, it is assumed that each of discourse units performs different functions in society, uses different forms, and exhibits different linguistic characteristics.

Brown and Yule (1983:1) concluded that of paramount importance is the defining characteristic of interaction which is usually ascribed to spoken discourse, and they maintain that language can be seen as having two functions: transferring information (transactional function) and establishing social relationships (interactional function).Whereas interactional language is listener-oriented, transactional language is message-oriented).

4.3 Interpreter's Training

An interpreter listens to a speech (spoken text) and then reproduces it in a different language. This means that he must resort to short-term memory. For this reason, improving the memory techniques are of utmost importance in interpreter's training.

One possibility is that of internally visualizing the content of a speech, creating images in one's mind, and concentrating on ideas, not on single words. Another option is that of connecting the main ideas and on the links among them, trying to reproduce the structure of the speech as a kind skeleton. The objective is to create a telegraphic version of the text, and to link its different parts through its semantic-logical connections.

In the context of speech analysis, we have to underline another basic point, which is the importance of the beginning and the end of the text to be interpreted. The beginning is just like the starting point of a journey, and it often includes significant elements which are useful to understand the overall meaning of a speech.

The end is usually the most important part of a message, since it contains its conclusions, or a summary of what has just been said, or a comment of vital significance, and therefore interpreters, sensing the end coming near, have to redouble their concentration in order to provide a precise, well-structured and clear oral translation of the final part of a speech.

Since the present study draws the line at the interpretation (spoken translation) in terms of cohesion and the links between different parts of a text, it is turned out to mention the basic principles of interpreting in terms of an interpreter's training.

The essential part of an interpreter's training is done in three activities: the understanding of the speaker's original message, the immediate analysis of its content, and the re-expression of the same content in another language, with the help of some notes the interpreter writes down upon hearing the original message (www, 2006:1).

4.3.1 Understanding

The understanding we refer to here is not of words but of ideas, since an interpreter has to convey concepts. But what happens if an interpreter does not know a word or an expression that he hears in a speech? First of all we can underline that an interpreter can understand a speaker's meaning without actually understanding every single words and expression used.

The interpretation is possible without all the words and without changing the meaning. There other occasions, however, where a word is too important to be left out. Moreover, in order to understand meaning without knowing all the lexical items, and to be able to deduce from the context, interpreters must in any case have a thorough knowledge of their working languages, and that is one of the reasons why it takes three or four years on average to form a professional with sufficient knowledge to allow him undertake the this career. Another key element in interpreting is the kind of attention required, that is to say an active attention, which must lead the interpreter to ask himself: what does the speaker mean?

There are also ideas that have to be transmitted, not through a word by word analysis, but after analyzing the whole paragraph. The kind of attention needed here is not a natural gift: it is something which can be internalized through a specific training, and requires a great concentration power, a clear mind as well as a sound psychophysical condition.

4.3.2 Analysis

In the analysis of a message, the interpreter has to identify the main ideas and give them their proper relevance in the interpretation. Moreover, owing to the intrinsic difficulty of a speech or to the speaker's speed, he might be forced to omit one or more elements of the original. It is clear that if the interpreter does not translate some details, the interpretation will not be perfect but still adequate, whereas, if he misses significant points of the discourse, the result will be a seriously flawed performance.

Indeed, interpreters should be capable of providing a summary of a speech, since delegates often do not want a detailed interpretation but only an exhaustive and precise summary of what has been said. Generally, one can say that delegates need answers to these three basic questions: who does what, and when, and who says or thinks what.

This simplification represents the main ideas according to the subject-verb-object model, but we have to keep in mind that there are always secondary details, expressed by adverbs, adjectives, lists of examples, exclamations which also have a role to play in the speech, and that if left out, do not necessarily impinge on substance of the message.

To sum up, the interpreter has to stress the most important ideas of a speech, pay great attention to verb forms, identify the relative value of the secondary elements of the discourse and leave out anything which is irrelevant to the understanding of the original message.

4.3.3 Re-expression

After understanding and analyzing, interpreters have to re-express the speech they have just heard. It must be clear that they are not required to give an academically perfect translation. Their role is to make sure the speaker is understood by the audience. First, interpreters must recognize that they are public speakers and therefore they have to establish contact with the audience, speaking clearly and articulating precisely. They are supposed to establish eye-contact with the audience, since there is always the risk of looking at their notes all the time, thereby losing contact and communicative interaction with the recipients of the message.

A good interpreter will look at his notes only from time to time, and express the interpretation in an effective way, without wavering or repeating ideas, through a steady but not monotonous rhythm. When dealing with figures, for instance, he will reduce the pace so that the delegates can jot down notes. The general gist of the speech will be conveyed also by means of a correct use of pauses and changes in tone, in order to enliven the performance.

Interpreting is a profession that is all about communication. In order to communicate well, interpreters have to "make their own speech" out of the speeches they interpret, and their speech must be faithful to the original and as accurate as possible.

Interpreters understand the ideas of a text and have to re-express the same ideas: therefore they can invent the order of two sentences, merge two sentences in one, or divide long sentences up into a number of shorter ones. In order to do that, they must have clearly understood and completely analyzed the original speech before starting with the re-expression.

Here, there's another point to be kept in mind: real interpreters have to continue to work on their working languages, including their mother tongue, with the aim of keeping them rich, lively, effective and up-to-date (www,2005:1-6) .

Conclusions

To this end, it is possible to conclude that the only true unit of translation is the whole text. This means that translation/interpretation cannot proceed without the recognition of the units above the sentence. Hence, an translation/ interpretation should not become a code-switching operation with emphasis on lexical and syntactical equivalences, i.e. with the focus of attention directed towards smaller units of language. Instead, the perspective of seeing the text as a whole within its communicative situation and cultural orientation has been emphasized.

Moreover, the translator/ interpreter should make use of all the possible resources available in their working languages in order to reach an effective level of performance. Also, he should be informed about the latest national/international events with the purpose of learning new terminology and also of grabbing the spirit of the era we're living in.

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