The translation of style: linguistic markedness and textual evaluativeness

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to report on a number of recent developments in the study of translation and to focus on the issue of ‘markedness’, singled out here as a central element in the process of translation. Linguistic markedness and the twin notion of ‘textual evaluativeness’ are examined as part of the wider issue of dealing with ‘style’ in translation or the need to translate not only ‘what’ is said, but also ‘how’ it is said. The perspective adopted is essentially applied text-linguistic: the linguistic focus is on the ‘text’ as a unit of both communication and translation, while the scope of application is specifically informed by a practitioner research paradigm. The markedness, evaluativeness and style theme is pursued against a backdrop of how the theory and practice of translation has evolved in the last 50 years or so from an emphasis on formal notions of translation ‘equivalence’ within the ‘linguistics phase’, to more dynamic notions of equivalence within the ‘cultural model’, and ultimately to models of translation which see equivalence in the light of text in context and beyond.

Keywords: markedness; evaluativeness; style; text; practitioner research; linguistic/cultural/contextual models of translation

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1 Linguistic markedness: an overview

In the maze of textual activity which characterizes language use in general, texts interact with contexts in highly intricate and meaningful ways. Appreciating the complexity of this interaction is crucial to the work of the translator who both as reader and writer exploits the diverse range of textual stimuli or ‘communicative cues’ (Gumperz, 1982) as points of reference on a journey of contextual discovery in the reception and production of texts. One set of clues which stimulate and guide this interaction is to do with linguistic ‘markedness’. This is opting for a form or meaning that is less ‘preferred’ or less ‘normal’ than a comparable form or meaning potentially available in a comparable context. An example which might illustrate this kind of benign deviation from norms is the following text on ‘loss of memory’ from a medical novella by Oliver Sacks (a neuropsychologist by profession):

…But it was not merely the cognition, the gnosis, at fault; there was something radically wrong with the whole way he proceeded. For he approached these faces – even those near and dear – as if they were abstract puzzles or tests. He did not relate to them, he did not behold. No face was familiar to him, seen as ‘thou’, being just identified as a set of features, an ‘it’. (Sacks, 1985)

According to the Preface to the collection of articles which includes Francis and Kramer-Dahl’s (1992) detailed analysis of this and related texts, such style features set Sacks’s writing apart from mainstream neuropsychological discourse, are constitutive of its unique appeal, and reflect and express Sacks’s distinctive views of epistemology and appropriate procedure in the treatment of people who are neuropsychologically impaired. (Toolan, 1992: 53)

To appreciate this point, compare this style with how a similar chunk of reality might be conventionally depicted by a traditional neuropsychologist:

…when the same objects were rotated in front of her immobile head, then 9 out of 20 were recognized. (Kertesz, 1979)

2 Markedness, evaluativeness and informativity

In general, a marked use of language occurs less frequently and is more complex than an unmarked or less marked variant (Wilt, 1994). As a linguistic variable, markedness can be present at any level of language – the word, the clause or the level of text structure. In fact, entire styles, genres or mediums (e.g. speech
vs. writing) can be marked or unmarked, as we have seen in Sacks's example above. It is at these higher levels of text organization that the description of linguistic ‘markedness’ needs to be supplemented by textual variables such as ‘evaluativeness’: is a given instance of linguistic markedness evaluative (i.e. contextually motivated and functional) or is it merely a systemic matter opted for almost by default and thus not worthy of the text receiver’s attention? We will return to such questions and deal with the specific issue of ‘evaluativeness’ at a later stage in the discussion.

These features of text in context are subsumed under what may generically be labelled ‘informativity’, a term that has less to do with ‘information’ as with the ‘distribution of information’ in texts. This is a standard of textuality which all well-formed texts must meet and which specifically concerns the extent to which utterances within a text are expected or unexpected, given or new (Beaugrande, 1980). Striking an appropriate balance in the way ‘given’ and ‘new’ information is distributed both at the level of the utterance and that of the text is crucial for the cohesion and coherence of texts.

The distribution of information in this way is not an unconstrained activity. At one level, it is to do with text receiver expectations, and what is seen as expectation-defying in one context may well fulfil expectations in other contexts. For example, while it would be surprising to read a goal was scored or the ball was passed in a sports report, the use of the ‘agentless passive’ would be quite normal in a laboratory report. Similarly, while the agentless passive might serve a sexist agenda when a newspaper reports the murder of a small girl as Girl 7 murdered as mum was drinking in the pub, the use of this kind of passive in a laboratory report usually goes unnoticed (e.g. the sample was analyzed and the following results were obtained).

3 Linguistic stylistics

Over the last two or three decades, developments in linguistic stylistics and critical discourse analysis (Fowler, et al., 1979; Simpson, 1993; Fairclough, 2003) have shifted the traditional focus in literary and language studies from one which sees ‘style’ virtually as the sole preserve of literary studies, to one which sees style as ubiquitous, as a way through which writers or speakers express their thoughts and feelings and thus as a common property found in all texts. These insights into the reality of texts have seriously challenged the elitism that has prevailed in literary studies, where the attention of the critic was for a long time focused on such aspects of the work as the writer’s personality, emotions and ‘creativity’, notions invariably defined in unhelpfully loose and subjective terms (Savory, 1957).
The new trend links up with the study of markedness in terms of the defamiliarizing effect which expectation-defying uses of language convey (Fowler, 1986). This is encountered when certain devices of linguistic expression (e.g. emotive diction, word order, parallelism) are deployed in such a way that the use itself stands out, attracts attention to itself and is perceived as somewhat ‘non-ordinary’. A good example of this ‘alienating’ effect from literature is the remarkable incidence in Gothic novels of clauses in which a noun referring to an inanimate object serves as the subject of an action predicate:

As Melmoth leaned against the window, whose dismantled frame, and pieced and shattered panes, shook with every gust of wind, his eyes encountered but that most cheerless of all prospects, a miser’s garden...

In a detailed analysis of this text, Fowler (1986: 223) shows how, through this kind of stylistic preference, ‘the Gothic genre indulges its heroes and heroines in morbid feelings and sensational imaginings’. The use of this particular stylistic device is normally shunned in a language like Arabic which, particularly in non-fictional texts, finds inanimate agency slightly alien. A laboratory report opening with a sentence such as

The sample was analyzed and the following results were obtained

would commonly be rendered as Active in Arabic:

we analyzed the sample and obtained the following results

However, Arabic is not static and, as we will see shortly, the need for the suppression of agency in scientific reporting, for example, is being catered to. In literary translation, imposing inanimate agency on the Arabic text would certainly be one way of preserving the disorienting effect of a genre like the Gothic novel.

4 Critical translation studies

The challenge to received wisdom in the domain of style studies and the influence this has exerted on the critical analysis of discourse have extended to translation studies where at one stage, ‘literary translation’ was also envisaged in elitist terms as the preserve solely of ‘creative’ translators, an act of ‘inspiration’ and a process not amenable to close scrutiny. There were endless discussions of such issues as the ‘voice’ of the translator (Steiner, 1975), and linguistically-oriented analysis of literary texts was often parodied as ‘a mere obsession with the minutiae of linguistic expression’, as ‘not seeing the wood for the trees’ and so on. Within what may be labelled ‘critical translation studies’ (e.g. Hatim &
Mason, 1990) and subsequent developments such as ‘relevance and translation’ (Gutt, 1991), however, translators are encouraged to look for style not only in sacred and sensitive texts but also on cereal packets and medicine bottles (Kelly, 1979; Enkvist, 1991). Within the new trend, translators are also urged to take interest in ‘translating’ not only what the original has to say but also, when appropriate, how this is said.

To illustrate how such notions as informativity, markedness, and evaluativeness can inform decision-making in translation, and to show the diversity of sources from which texts might acquire their ‘style’, let us first consider a biblical example. This is the Greek of St Luke viii, 8 (discussed in Gutt, 1991) which in word-for-word translation reads:

(1a) and other fell on the ground the good

The Authorized Version has this:

(1b) And other fell on good ground

This is plain, fluent English. At one level, the Source Text’s (ST) noun–adjective sequence can be simply an element of the language system and thus practically intentionless. Yet, in certain contexts, some form of emphasis could be involved and the linguistic structure may thus be ‘marked’: what may be intended can be glossed as something like

(1c) on ground that was good

The question for the reader or the translator now is: would the non-ordinary gloss in Example (1c) do justice to the biblical context and the ‘discourse’ in question? Put differently, is this reading overlooked by the Authorized Version where there is certainly a distinct loss of emphasis due to the neutralization of word order markedness?

This and similar issues will occupy us in what follows. But, before we attempt to explore the various possibilities, it might be helpful to show that this is not only a sacred text’s problem but one encountered more pervasively in much humbler contexts and more lowly texts. With markedness in mind, let us consider an example from a modern political context. In a statement delivered before the UN in the wake of a US air strike on Iraq in the mid 1990s, the Iraqi delegate started his argument by saying:

(2a) Inna al-‘amaliyyat al-‘askariyya… alHaqat… damaaran waasi’al niTaaq…

The military operations… wrought… large-scale destruction….
The structure used is: emphatic particle *inna* – Noun Group – Verb Group. In Arabic, this noun-first arrangement is known as a Nominal sentence structure, distinguished from its generally more expected counterpart – the Verbal sentence structure (verb-first). Linguistically, the Verbal is also available to the speaker who could equally readily have said:

*AlHaqat al-‘amaliyyat al-‘askariyya damaaran waasi’al-niTaaq…*

Word-for-word, this is

(2b) wrought the military operations destruction large-scale…

This Verbal structure was obviously not used for the simple reason that the structure was not felt to be appropriate in this particular context. The constraints governing the use of the Verbal or Nominal structures in Arabic (Hatim, 1997) are closely bound up with style, linguistic markedness and textual evaluativeness as will be demonstrated shortly. Before we do so, let us look at another example which illustrates the disparity, on the one hand, between what we actually choose to say and what we could potentially say but we don’t and, on the other hand, between what is said and how it is said. Consider this text-initial element in an Arabic news report. The sentence structure opted for happens to be Nominal (i.e. noun-first) which in back-translation reads:

(3) *al-tawatur al-damawi bayna al-suud wa al-yahuud fi madinat NY awdaHa al-Hassassiyya bayna…*

the bloody tension between the Blacks and the Jews in New York city exposed the sensitivity…

Counter to expectations pertaining to news reports, a Nominal structure has been used ushering in an element of non-ordinariness. The reader is left to work out the rhetorical motivation behind the choice of the Nominal when the Verbal is not only available but highly expected in this kind of text. This will become clearer shortly.

5 Preliminary explanations from critical translation studies

It is important to recognize that in dealing with the biblical example in (1a) above, it is discourse values that are primarily at stake. By ‘discourse’ we simply mean adopting a certain attitude (a perspective, a stance) towards a particular aspect of sociocultural reality (be this a set of sociopolitical issues such as globalization and militarism, a field of knowledge such as cloning, an area of language in social life such as racism, etc). For the translator to opt for Example (1b) (a reading that preserves the necessary emphasis), he or she would have needed to invoke
elements of the relevant cultural code (or discourse) that sanction certain biblical attitudes or a particular perspective on the biblical context.

In dealing with the political text (Example 2a above), a different set of values are implicated in addition to the discourse factor. In this text, the primary consideration is a ‘rhetorical’ one, having to do with the structure of the text defined as a communicative occurrence realized by a sequence of cohesive and coherent sentences. The Nominal sentence is most appropriate in conveying the ‘concession’ (e.g. *Certainly…*) that actually precedes the ‘rebuttal’ (*However…*), thus serving a counter-argumentative text format and conveying the overall impression:

‘Yes, there has been destruction to infra-structure, etc., but this is not the issue for now. The issue is the destruction caused by the military attacks to the environment. This cannot be condoned’.

Finally, what is implicated in dealing with the news report (3a above) is not so much (or only) discoursal or rhetorical-textual as ‘communicative’ and ‘conventional’, a set of values to do with ‘genre’ as a communicative event, and with the set of conventional do’s and don’ts surrounding the use of language within this event. In theory, the Arabic Verbal sentence structure is most appropriate for this kind of text since the Verbal is rhetorically perceived as a linguistic vehicle for detachment (Hatim, 1997). In deliberate violation of the canonical news reporting genre, the Nominal structure is opted for. The deviation succeeds in shifting the genre and thus in serving the communicative requirements of a new genre – a hybrid between news reporting and editorializing.

The question for the translator, however, remains: having done one’s homework deciphering intentions and motivations, what is one to do with this discursive, textual and genre-related input in the actual process of translating? To answer this question, it might be helpful to attempt a thumbnail sketch of translation studies, and to examine how such issues as markedness and evaluativeness have been addressed by the various models of translation.

6 Style values in translation studies

Features of dynamic uses of language and how best to deal with them in translation have always been contentious issues in the theory and practice of translation. In the majority of cases, a commonly agreed procedure has been that non-ordinary constructions in the source language are translated by non-ordinary usage in the target language. This approach seems to work well for the bulk of what we translate. Lacking the necessary criticalness, however, the strategy is conducive to the kind of blind literalism and hit-or-miss approach
regrettably all too prevalent in our translation practices around the globe. A number of factors tend to complicate the seemingly straightforward process of transferring non-ordinariness across linguistic and cultural divides.

Context-sensitive models of translation are certainly well-placed to deal with problems of this kind. However, it would be wrong to assume that credit for contextual insights into the translation process must exclusively go to recent trends in text linguistics and discourse analysis. With varying degrees of explicitness, almost all proponents of the equivalence paradigm (from Catford to present-day models of discourse and the translator), as well those scholars working within other disciplinary frameworks such as cultural studies, descriptive translation studies, etc., have all, in one way or another, contributed to the development of an overall framework for dealing with such textual manifestations as markedness and style (Newmark, 1988; Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990).

Nevertheless, the general consensus seems to be that only notions of equivalence which envisage texts and their translations strictly with a sociotextual framework can adequately account for which instance of non-ordinariness to preserve and which to jettison.

Within this framework, source or target language ‘non-ordinariness’ is no longer seen in static terms but rather within a process of initially reacting to ‘signifiers’, establishing the cumulative relationship which these ‘communicative clues’ have with their underlying ‘signifieds’ and meaningfully interacting with the communicative settings in which these ‘signs’ are found, as elements of text in context within and across linguistic and cultural boundaries. To put this differently, what is linguistically marked (and thus unexpected, new, defamiliarizing, etc.) cannot be simply reconstructed, with the forms of the original always transferred more or less intact. Rather, a process is set in motion in which the communicative status of a given feature is assessed in an effort to establish (i.e. build a model of) what is intended by the source text utterance, and only then to work out how the target reader is to be made aware of the intricacies involved.

7 From formal to dynamic renderings of markedness

Although not commonly recognized by most writers on translation, this attitude to translatability and interpretability has been catered for (albeit indirectly and implicitly) by one of the earliest models of translation equivalence – Catford’s ‘formal equivalence’. Also referred to as ‘structural correspondence’, formal equivalence is a relationship which involves the purely ‘formal’ replacement of one word or phrase in the source language by another in the target language (Catford, 1965). But this is not the same as literal translation, and the two processes must therefore be kept distinct. In an overall re-assessment of earlier
models of translation, Hatim and Munday (2004: 41) suggest that the distinction between ‘formal’ and ‘literal’ translation may usefully be seen along the following lines:

While literal translations tend to preserve formal features almost by default (i.e. with little or no regard for context, meaning or what is implied by a given utterance), a ‘formal’ translation is almost always contextually motivated: formal features are preserved only if they carry contextual values that become part of overall text meaning (e.g. deliberate ambiguity in the ST).

This operational principle is extremely useful in tackling the more challenging cases of linguistic markedness. The marked biblical example cited above (Example 1a: the ground that is good) graphically illustrates the kind of problem that formal equivalence, envisaged in these contextual terms, should be able to handle. The attempt to recreate the effect of source-text word order succeeds in that it is bound to impede target text fluency and thus draw attention to itself as defamiliarizing.

However, formal equivalence does not have to be ST structure-bound. In dealing with the marked Nominal in (2a) or (3a), for example, a certain departure from ST pattern is ‘formally’ justified. If formally rendered into English, the ‘noun-first’ arrangement which is highly marked in Arabic would be perceived as unmarked in English and the rhetorical point could thus be lost on an English-speaking reader. In situations like this, and for a wide variety of texts, there is often a need for some source-text explication and adjustment, still within the bounds of ‘formal’ equivalence. An example of this kind of modification is recasting the ST Nominal structure (Example 3a) into a cleft construction in English: It was X which…

Intervention on the part of the translator, however, can take more drastic forms, in which case the translator would resort to more ‘dynamic’ forms of equivalence. Through dynamic equivalence (Nida, 1969; 1964), we can thus cater for a rich variety of contextual values and effects which utterances carry within texts and which formal equivalence and literal translation, each in its own specific way, would simply fail to convey. These effects would be not so much form-bound as content-bound. That is, we opt for varying degrees of dynamic equivalence when, for whatever reason, form is not significantly involved in conveying a particular meaning, and when a formal rendering can only lead to meaningless literalism. In dealing with Example (2a), for example, some way of signaling that the utterance is a ‘concession’ to be ‘rebutted’ may be necessary (Certainly… However…). This ‘strawman gambit’ effect can be enhanced by the additional use of a core verb (e.g. wrought instead of the bland
led to) that creates a necessary turbulence on the surface of the text and thus draws attention to itself and proves defamiliarizing.

These changes are introduced in the so-called ‘restructuring’ stage of the translation process, a phase which follows ‘analysis’ and ‘transfer’ (Nida, 1969: 484). What restructuring involves is a set of procedures by which the input accrued from both analysis and transfer may be transformed into a ‘stylistic form appropriate to the receptor language and to the intended receptors’ (Nida & Taber, 1969: 206). In particular, restructuring ensures that the impact which the translation is to have on its intended receptors is as close as possible to what the source text producer has intended (Nida, 1969: 494–5): any message which does not communicate is simply useless. It is only when a translation produces in the audience a response which is essentially similar to that of the original audience that the translation can be said to be dynamically equivalent to its ST.

8 Opening up to pragmatics and beyond

Equivalence of response has been a controversial issue. In a series of articles assessing the plausibility of Nida’s scheme, the Chinese translation scholar Qian Hu questions the validity of the entire ‘dynamic equivalence’ concept and argues that total compatibility between any two languages is precluded not only on linguistic grounds but also by dint of the fact that even speakers of the same language may have such different backgrounds that they will often perceive the same utterance or concept differently (1994: 427).

No doubt, the general thrust of such arguments is valid. Equivalence of response is certainly difficult to achieve with any degree of certainty or precision. However, this restriction would no longer be relevant if we were to focus on the effect of ‘non-ordinariness’ (i.e. how it is perceived). After all, no one would ever claim that non-ordinariness can or should be transferred intact all the time. In translating any non-ordinary instance of language use, the minimum requirement is simply that, across languages and cultures, we must ensure that equivalents continue to convey an alienating effect which to all intents and purposes is as ‘disturbing’ in the target language and culture as it was intended to be in the source language and culture. This is surely not unattainable. Perceptions of markedness seem to be universal. That is, in all languages and cultures and in a huge variety of ways, people tend to recognize what stands out as unusual, an argument which amply justifies the need to preserve such effects in translation. Whether or not such effects are appreciated (or indeed need to be appreciated) in a particular target language or culture is a different matter. But qualities such as ‘interestingness’ or ‘disturbingness’ strike us as elements of linguistic expression which the human mind tends to
recognize almost universally despite the different guises which these elements take on in the process of communication.

This insight into the nature of equivalent effect defined in such terms as ‘non-ordinariness’, however, does not by itself render the dynamic equivalence scheme valid in its entirety. Misgivings about dynamic equivalence paved the way in the late 1970s for more context-sensitive approaches to equivalence, informed primarily by pragmatics – the study of the purposes for which utterances are used (Stalnaker, 1972). The strength of models of ‘pragmatic’ equivalence (championed most prominently by German translation theorists House, e.g. 1977; Koller, e.g. 1979) lies mainly in the fact that they were ‘inclusive’, not ‘exclusive’: they built on both formal and dynamic equivalence but allowed for the possibility that these may be overridden in certain contexts. Thus, for a variety of linguistic, rhetorical and cultural reasons, ‘referential’, ‘denotative’ or even ‘connotative’ types of equivalence, for example, may not deliver the desired effect, in which case equivalence is to be sought at the higher level of, say, textual context – through so-called text-normative equivalence. Textual norms are conventions which go beyond connotations and which enable us to work with the kind of language that is typical of a certain kind of text, mode of writing, attitude, etc. Contexts of use would match in this case, and so would the effect on the target text reader which would in this specific domain of sociotextual practices be sufficiently close to that experienced by the source-text reader.

To achieve similarity of effect and cater for reader expectations is thus to attain full pragmatic equivalence. The Nominal sentence in the Arabic news report (Example 3a above) is a case in point. As we have established in the case of utterance in Example (2a) (from an Arabic political speech), Formal Equivalence would simply miss the point, hence the need to resort to dynamic equivalence, a procedure which may not be ideal but which would go some way towards solving the problems inherent in the use of non-ordinary. What is at stake in Example (3a), however, goes beyond the mapping of intersentential relationships within a ‘text’. The deviation from the norm in the source text encroaches on genre membership and only an equivalence relationship that is text-normative can adequately capture source genre effect and recreate this in the target language (James, 1989).

In the case of (3a), equivalence would even have to go beyond static genre-membership matters. The target reader of this kind of text should be able to engage not with a run-of-the-mill news report but with an investigative, editorializing form of reporting of the kind we encounter in Newsweek's Periscope,
for example. *Periscope* material is a witty, even satirical, in-depth commentary on the news of the previous week. Consider this typical example:

**PERISCOPE**

Middle East
Getting Out Ahead

The Bush Administration’s grand plan to reform the Middle East may be gaining traction – even though most governments in the region remain deeply suspicious of the U.S. president and his proactive agenda…

*Newsweek* 22 March 2004

As we have pointed out above, there would be room for adjustment in dealing with text in Example (3a) to allow for the use of such marked constructions as a cleft construction, and for the addition of something like *which ended in bloodshed*. The text-initial sentence may be rendered as follows:

It was the tension between the Blacks and the Jews in New York City, which ended in bloodshed, that glaringly exposed how precarious the relations are between the two groups …

The success of the target version will essentially lie in ensuring that the text convey an element of evaluativeness of the kind we see in a *Periscope* piece of writing.

This is in line with what text linguist and translation theorist de Beaugrande suggests regarding the notion of ‘equivalence’. Beaugrande sees equivalence relations in terms of the translation generally being ‘a valid representative of the original in the communicative act in question’ (1978: 88). The decision-making involved would be partly subject to system criteria such as grammar and diction, and partly to contextual factors surrounding the use of language in a given text. These considerations can only lend credence to the proposition that effectively it is not the word which is the unit of translation but rather the ‘text in communication’ (Beaugrande, 1978: 91). Fawcett (1997: 64) sheds useful light on the psychological reality of using ‘text’ as a unit of translation:

What professional and even novice translators actually do is relate the translation of the microlevel of words and phrases to higher textual levels of sentence and paragraph, and beyond that to such parameters as register, genre, text conventions, subject matter, and so on.
9 Text, discourse and genre

By far the most concrete set of criteria for effective decision-making thus seems to be grounded in text type (Reiss, 1977/1989). But texts do not occur in a contextual vacuum. At one level, they tend to exhibit specific discursive affiliations, which make them part of wider belief and value systems, explicit and implicit ideologies, and a diverse range of sociocultural perspectives on such areas of sociocultural life as ‘racism’, ‘feminism’, and so on. For example, one could be ‘arguing’ for the merits of a scheme from a ‘racist’ or from a ‘feminist’ perspective. Arguing as a ‘textual’ process would not change; the point of the particular argument as a ‘discursive’ practice would.

At a different level, texts tend to function within well-defined genres that ground the interaction in conventionally recognized ‘communicative events’. For example, a racist or a feminist argument acquires a sharper focus and sense of purpose when deployed within, say, a ‘Letter to the Editor’ or an editorial (text forms with their own distinct do’s and don’ts, participants and communicative goals, etc).

The question now is: Do we really need to invoke these larger templates if our concern is essentially with local, utterance-level non-ordinariness? Put differently, can discourse, text and genre criteria shed any useful light on how we should deal with the ‘unexpected’ in a given utterance?

We recall that, in dealing with non-ordinariness or defamiliarization and with markedness as the linguistic realization of such phenomena, what underpins the diverse alienating effects produced is a seemingly strange (even deviant) form of expression. The reader must first appreciate this deviation for what it is and ascertain that it is contextually motivated. Deviations can be mere aberrations due to linguistic incompetence or inattentiveness, in which case the deviation becomes gratuitous and should therefore be ignored. On the other hand, deviations may be meaningful and must therefore be recognized and heeded as such.

10 Effort and reward: Minimax

Communicating in this way is not unconstrained. As suggested above, motivated departures from the norm tend to be both less frequent and more complex than their unmarked variants. In other words, instances of marked linguistic behaviour are more demanding to process and, for the interaction to run smoothly in situations of this kind, text receivers are prepared to invest more effort but only if some reward is forthcoming. The principle which regulates this effort and reward and keeps the trade-off in check is the so-called Minimax principle.
Minimax is a processing principle originally proposed by the Leipzig translation theorist Levy (1967) as part of the decision-making process characteristic of any translation act. In choosing between a number of solutions to a given problem, the translator ultimately settles for that solution which promises maximum effect for minimal effort on the part of the reader. The kind of question the translator asks is: would preserving a certain feature of a source text (e.g., rhyme) be worth the target reader’s effort? These issues (originally discussed in Sperber & Wilson, 1986) have been picked up by researchers into ‘relevance’ in translation (Gutt, 1991). If rhyme, for example, turned out to be essentially meaningless in the target context (i.e., not ‘relevant’), the effort and reward balance (or Minimax) would be gratuitously upset, and the interaction of stimulus, contextual assumptions and interpretation disturbed. Seen from the standpoint of text production and reception, what Minimax and relevance models seem to be suggesting is that text producers tend to ensure, and text receivers expect, that any extra effort is justified and commensurately rewarded, and that such textual manifestations as opaque word order, repetition, the use of metaphorical language or any other form of implicitness are not gratuitously used.

To be meaningful, then, non-ordinariness of language use must always be contextually motivated and communicatively rewarding. Take a phenomenon such as repetition. As we pointed out above, this could occur in sloppy writing, could be intentionless, especially in languages with a great deal of ‘residual orality’ (Ong, 1988), or indeed, could be there merely to uphold cohesion in the text. In such cases, repetition would not be significant, and the question of contextual motivatedness does not even arise. However, repetition can be – and in more literate writing traditions often is – functional: it is usually intended to serve particular rhetorical purposes within the text, enhance the discursive thrust of texts or uphold genre membership. In contexts of this kind, repetition becomes a marked feature of language use that must be accounted for.

In the search for motivation for ‘why here’, ‘why like this’, the translator reads for intention and identifies the source of the communicative ‘turbulence’ on the textual and contextual planes of discourse. This non-ordinariness may be transferred intact and with minimal intervention on the part of the translator, creating in the process an equal measure of turbulence in the target text. Often, however, readers/translators encounter a number of complications to do with whether it is possible in the target text/context for this ‘turbulence’ to be linguistically realized, recreated almost intact and perceived as motivated.

An important interactional yardstick for judging whether or not a communicative clue meets these criteria of acceptability is that of the ‘cooperative principle’ outlined by Grice (1975). The last court of appeal for deciding on whether cooperativeness is ‘flouted’ and new and interesting meanings generated is to invoke
the set of do's and don'ts governing what can or cannot be said within a certain
text, discourse or genre. The non-ordinariness of the biblical text (1a) resides in
a doctrinal attitude promoted by the Bible, that of the political text (2a) in the
counter-argumentative rhetorical purpose pursued, and that of the news report
(3a) in the genre membership of the text. Judging target language renderings
of these utterances would have to be conducted within parameters set by these
discourse, text and genre values.

11 From markedness to salience and evaluativeness

It may be useful at this stage to work through an example which illustrates how
these sociotextual practices tend to shape and in turn be shaped by linguistic
behaviour. Consider the laboratory report as a genre that, in the interest of
scientific objectivity, etc., has evolved to admit certain forms of linguistic
expression and disprefer others. The English passive-without-agent, for exam-
ple, is a favoured pattern in this kind of text (e.g. *the sample was analyzed and
the following results were obtained*). This particular structure is ‘linguistically’
marked, but in the context of laboratory reports tends to be ‘rhetorically’
non-salient. It serves no other purpose beside communicating scientific facts
as objectively as possible and in such a way as to present the ‘process’ as
more important than the ‘conductor’ of such a process. In translation, we
are therefore under no obligation to heed this particular syntactic arrange-
ment in any special way. It is perhaps worth noting that, at one stage in the
development of modern standard Arabic, English source text ‘passives’ were
liberally rendered as Actives (a structure preferred by the rhetoric of composi-
tion in this language). But that was before a need was perceived to develop
a scientific register in Arabic. When such a need became urgent, a structure
evolved to accommodate this arrangement (the so-called ‘tamma-Passive’) a
nominalizing device commonly in use these days for a passive-without-agent
construction.

Staying with laboratory reports, let us now turn our attention to the occur-
rence of the Active construction. In this kind of text, the Active would be
linguistically unmarked but rhetorically salient. To leave this structure as it is
and render it as Active in a language like Arabic is to gloss over this ‘salience’
or textual ‘evaluativeness’: Arabic Actives are both unmarked and rhetorically
non-salient. The translator must be aware of this disparity and must thus try
to find a way of preserving this ‘salience’ or ‘evaluativeness’. A cleft sentence
structure may be one of the means resorted to in order to convey to the target
reader that something out of the ordinary is involved.

Schematically then:
In addition to linguistic markedness, we need an additional variable, namely ‘salience’ or ‘evaluative salience’. It is only when a particular feature of the lexicon-grammar is both linguistically marked and rhetorically salient that the feature in question becomes noteworthy and must thus be as ‘turbulent’ in the target language as it is in the source text.

12 Conclusion

In this paper, the issue of ‘markedness’ (or non-ordinary use of language) is discussed as a central theme in such applied linguistic activities as translation and genre analysis. It is suggested that, in translation, source text markedness cannot (and should not) always be automatically and uncritically transferred into the target text. Rather, a process ought to be set in motion with the aim of assessing the communicative status of the marked lexicogrammatical feature in question. What should be conveyed, then, is not ‘linguistic markedness’ as such, but an ultimate effect. This is defined in the light of a range of sociotextual parameters such as textual rhetorical purpose, discursive attitude and genre membership. The notion of textual ‘evaluative salience’ is proposed to cater for this overall salience which emanates from the interaction of text with context.

References


