Relevance Theory and Explicitation Strategy in Translation

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Abstract

This paper consists of three sections. The first section starts with relevance theory as a major development recognizing that linguistically decoded information is usually very incomplete and that pragmatic inference plays an essential role in the derivation of the proposition explicitly communicated. This not only holds in the case of substantial utterances, but it holds also for the vast majority of fully sentential cases (Carston, 1997; Sperber, 1986). Accordingly, what is communicated is usually a set of fully propositional thoughts or assumptions, which are either true or false of an external state of affairs in the world. The second section deals with translation process (Bell, 1991: 213), maintaining that the writer's intention is mediated by the context in which the text was produced, by the writer's assumptions and decisions concerning 'what constitutes a relevant and recognizable frame of reference in which to anchor the communication' (Traugott and Pratt 1980: 273) and the conception of the 'ideal reader' who shares this frame of reference and at whom the text is aimed. The third section narrows the area of research within this framework concentrating on explicitation strategy in translation, which is some kind of shift between source and target text, examining its conditions of use (Williams and Chesterman, 2003: 6). The English translation by Edward Rehatsek of the Gulistan of Sa'di (Tashibi, 1988) serves the purpose of the study. Thus, a considerable number of examples are analyzed. This way, I not only investigate the regularities of the translator's behaviour, and also the general principles that seem to determine how certain things get translated under certain conditions, but also illustrate the application of relevance theory in the process of translation.

Key words: relevance theory, explicitation strategy, source and target texts.

Introduction

Grice's cooperative principle (henceforth CP) (Grice, 1975) can be well understood within the context of previous work by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), which had largely been concerned with the relationship between direct and indirect speech acts, and the concept of things that they could 'do' with words. These proponents of the Use theory showed a growing interest in the meaning of utterances rather than sentences. It has been emphasized that at the discourse level there is no one-to-one mapping between linguistic form and utterance meaning. A particular intended meaning (which could be produced via a direct speech act) can in fact be conveyed by any number of indirect speech acts. Grice is

concerned with this distinction between saying and meaning. The interesting point is how these implicit meanings are generated, and how they are understood by the assumptions on the part of the addressees. The aim is to discover the mechanism behind this process.

He suggests that there is an accepted way of saying as accepted standard behaviour. When we produce an utterance, we assume that it will generally be true, have the right amount of information, be relevant, and will be couched in understandable terms. If an utterance does not conform to this model, then we do not assume the utterance is nonsense; rather, we assume that an appropriate meaning is there to be inferred, and an implicature generated.

Grice is concerned with the distinction between saying and meaning: how the utterer's intention is recognized when there is a production of implicit language. At a purely practical level, what may seem explicit and obviously clear to the addressor may not be so for the addressee; there seems to be too great an assumption of shared knowledge/common ground here.

Within this theoretical foundation, we can look into the process of translation in terms of the conception of the 'ideal reader' (Bell, 1991: 213) who shares a relevant and recognizable frame of reference and at whom the text is aimed. This is done through investigating explicitation strategy in translation, the shift between source and target text.

1. Relevance Theory

Grice hold that: "Make your contribution such as required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (1975: 45). Therefore, what is communicated must pragmatically be relevant. Let's look at one example given by Davies (2000: 2) to see how the mechanism behind this process is at work.

(i)   a: Is there another pint of milk?
         b: I'm going to the supermarket in five minutes.

In the above example, a competent speaker of English would have little trouble inferring the meaning that there is no more milk at the moment, but that some will be brought from the supermarket shortly. This is a way of explaining this implicature process by virtue of relevance theory.

In general terms, Grice can be grouped with Austin, Searle, and the later Wittgenstein as "theorists of communication-intention" (Miller 1998: 223). The belief of this group is that intention/speaker meaning is the central concept in communication, and that sentence meaning can be explained (at least in part) in terms of it. This is in contrast to the 'truth-conditional theorists' (e.g. Frege) who believe that sentence-meaning via truth conditions is the gold standard, which has to be prior to any explication of speaker-meaning. An important aim of the Gricean Program is to manage a watertight definition of sentence-meaning in terms of speaker intention.

Grice (1957) is concerned with the types of meaning which can be identified in language. The first distinction made is between *natural meaning* and *non-natural meaning*.

(ii)   (a) Those spots meant measles.
          (b) Those spots meant measles, and he had measles.
          (c) *Those spots meant measles, but he hadn't got measles.
          (d) Those spots didn't mean measles, and he didn't have measles.
                                        Adapted from Grice (1957: 377)

In example (ii-a), the relationship between spots and measles is a natural one; one cannot state this relationship and then deny that it is true (ii-c). Both propositions *of the p*

mean (spots, measles) and *q* have (x, measles) must have the same truth value for the sentence to make sense (ii-b & ii-d). In semantic terms, *p* meant that *q* entails *q.*

(iii)   (a) Those three rings on the bell (of the bus) mean that the bus is full.
          (b) Those three rings on the bell (of the bus) mean that the bus is full, and in fact, the bus is full.
          (c) Those three rings on the bell (of the bus) mean that the bus is full, but in fact the conductor has got it wrong and the bus isn't full.

<div align="right">Adapted from Grice (1957: 377-8)</div>

In the examples above, the relationship between the ringing of the bell and the bus being full is a *nonnatural* one. Essentially, the meaning is conveyed because of a conventional link between that signal and the intended meaning. There is no natural reason why three rings rather than one or two should convey this meaning; it is simply an accepted fact. Grice's contention is that much of language is concerned with this type of non-natural meaning.

The final distinction made by Grice is worth mentioning in terms of conventional and nonconventional meaning. Meaning is defined as conventional meaning, thus words have conventional meaning. In terms of implicatures, conventional meaning is conceptually prior to an implicature. Thus, it is essential for a sentence to have a conventional meaning before it can trigger an implicature.

2. Translation Process

The process of translation can be well understood in terms of *polysystem* – coined by Itamar Even-Zohar in the 1970s – which is elaborated by Toury in the following manner:

> The position of translation (as entities) and of translating (as a kind of activity) in a prospective target culture, the form a translation would have (and hence the relationships which would tie it to its original) and the strategies resorted to during its generation do not constitute a series of unconnected facts. (Toury 1995: 24).

According to Bell (1991: 17), the process of translation involves the translator to be a communicator. While communication starts with nine steps which take us from encoding the message through its transmission and reception to the decoding of the message by the receiver, the translator receives the message and then creates it in the target language for another of addressees on the receiving end.

Bell (ibid.:164) enumerates seven standards of textuality including: cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, relevance, and intertextuality.

Next, he presents the following widely accepted definition of text:

> …. a COMMUNICATION OCCURRENCE which meets seven standards of TEXTUALITY. If any of these standards is considered not to have been satisfied, the text will not be communicative. Hence non-communicative texts are treated as non-text. (Bell, 1991: 164)

Then the definition extends the notion of text to discourse. These are constitutive principles which define textual communication. They are all considered as:

> *Relational* in character**,** concerned with how occurrences are related to others: via grammatical dependencies on the surface (cohesion); via conceptual dependencies in the textual world (coherence); via the attitudes of the participants towards the text (intentionality and acceptability); via the incorporation of the new and the unexpected

(informativity); via the setting (situationality); and via the mutual relevance of separate texts (intertextuality). (ibid.)

It is now clear how the relevance theory is connected with the process of translation. In fact, the translator who understands what is meant rather than what is said would be in a position to recreate the same sense in the target language.

3. Explicitation Strategy

This strategy is defined as some kind of change or shift between source and target texts, and examine its conditions of use (c.f. Williams and Chesterman, 2003: 6-7). According to Shoshana Blum-Kulka (1986: 19) "the process of interpretation performed by the translator on the source text might lead to a TL text which is more redundant than the SL text." The Blum-Kulka's term *explicitation* accounts for the kind of translation process where implicit, co-textually recoverable ST material is rendered explicit in TT.

Within the descriptive framework of translation studies, let us now examine the following examples – which can illustrate the use of explicitation strategy – taken from the Rehatsek's translation of Gulestan (Rose Garden) (cf. Tasbihi, 1988) [1].

(1) Whose hand and tongue is capable to fulfill the obligations of thanks to him? (p, 5)

از دست و زبان که برآید کز عهده شکرش بدرآید

In the above English version, the word "obligations" is clearly added to express the deep meaning of the poem because of the verbal context where it is considered necessary to thank the God for each of the blessings He has bestowed upon us. Hence, the addition of the word is well justified in this instance.

(2) Words of the most high: Be thankful, O family of David, …. (p, 5)

اعملو آل داود شکراً .....

In the above version, there is the addition of "Words of the most high" and there is also a footnote giving reference to the Quran where there is allusion to the Quranic verse. This kind of addition in the text and the footnote explicitly indicate the use of intertextuality to the English reader.

(3) The tradition is that whenever a sinful and distressed worshiper stretches forth the hand of repentance … (p. 8)

هر گاه که یکی از بندگان گنه کار پریشان روزگار دست انابت ...

The phrase "the tradition is that" appearing in the translated version communicates the Islamic tradition to the English reader. Obviously, the Persian text is implicitly clear to the source text reader because of the inclusion of Arabic version in the original text as a reference to what seems to be an oral narrative from the prophet Mohammad (PBUH).

(4) Those who attend permanently at the temple of his glory confess the imperfection of their worship and say: … (p. 9)

ع اکفان کعبهء جلالش بتقصیر معترف که:

Here the phrase "Those who attend permanently at" is a paraphrase equivalent for the highly ideologically loaded word in the source text (ST) at the beginning of the sentence. This strategy, in fact, helps to convey a somewhat similar meaning. Moreover, the words "and say:" are used instead of "that" in the ST to establish a cohesive link in the target text (TT).

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[1] The examples are all taken from the full text of Gulistan (Rose Garden) of SA'DI and its translation by Rehatsek as edited by Tasbihi (1988). So, not to repeat the same source when the examples are given, only the page number where the English translation of the original text appears in the book will be cited.

Similarly, in the following example you can see that the word "saying:" is similarly used instead of "that" for the same purpose.

(5) … those who describe the splendour of his beauty, are rapt in amazement <u>saying</u>: (p. 9)

<div dir="rtl">واصفان حلیهء جمالش بتحیر منسوب <u>که</u>:</div>

Another example which establishes a similar textual link is the following:

(6) 'I intended to fill the skirts of my robe with roses, when I reached the rose-tree, as presents for my friends <u>but</u> the perfume of the flowers intoxicated <u>me</u> so much that I let go the hold of my skirts.' (p. 9)

<div dir="rtl">بخاطر داشتم که چون بدرخت گل رسم دامنی پر کنم، هدیهء اصحاب را.</div>
<div dir="rtl">چون برسیدم بوی گل چنان مست کرد که دامنم از دست برفت.</div>

The underlined words in (6), "but" and "me", are present in the translated version only. Although implicit in the original text, they seem necessary in the target text. The word "but" serves as a conjunction showing the contrast between the sentences whereas the word "me," which can be implicitly conveyed in Persian, must be made explicit in English because of the requirement of English grammatical constructions.

Examples (7) and (8) also include additional phrases in the target texts:

(7) One of my connections informed me how matters stood <u>and told him that …</u>

<div dir="rtl">یکی از متعلقان منش بر حسب این واقعه مطلع گرداند که:...</div>

The above is another example of addition of the phrase "and told him" for the purpose of establishing cohesion as realized in the target text.

(8) … was intent upon <u>spending the rest of my life in continual devotion and silence, advising him at the same time,</u> … (p. 28)

<div dir="rtl">... نیت جزم که <u>بقیت عمرمعتکف نشیند و خاموشی گزیند</u>، ...</div>

There are two points to mention for (8). First, the paraphrase equivalent of "spend the rest of my life in continual devotion and silence" is an attempt to explicitate the cultural and ideological practice by some believers who stay in the Mosque for some time as a sign to respect the God, and, at the same time, to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with what they actually experience in their milieu. Second, the added clause, "advising him at the same time", is used to establish the textual cohesion.

The next example illustrates the shift from a general to a specific reference:

(9) THE CAUSE FOR COMPOSING <u>THE GULISTAN</u> (p. 24)

<div dir="rtl">سبب تالیف <u>این کتاب</u></div>

The underlined words in the original text are "THIS BOOK", whereas the phrase has been explicitly rendered into "THE GULISTAN".

Examples (10), (11) and (12) include equivalent additions in the target text:

(10) When thou fightest with anyone, <u>consider</u>
    Whether thou wilt have to flee from him or he from thee. (p. 29)

<div dir="rtl">چو جنگ آوری با کسی بر ستیز.که از وی گریزت بود یا گریز</div>

In the translation of the above poem lines, the word "consider" makes explicit what is implied in the original text.

(11) I happened to spend the night in a garden with one of my friends and <u>we found it to be</u> a pleasant cheerful place with <u>heart-ravishing</u> entangled trees. (p. 30)

<div dir="rtl">شب را ببوستان با یکی از دوستان اتفاق مبیت افتاد. موضعی خوش و خرم و درختان در هم، ...</div>

The underlined parts are, in fact, meant but not said in the original text. So, the translator successfully inferred the meaning, and made it explicit in English to produce a coherent text.

(12) The wind had in the shade of its trees
Spread out <u>a bed of all kinds of flowers</u> (p. 31)

باد در سایه درختانش.گسترانیده <u>فرش بوقلمون</u>

The underlined phrase in the translated English version is based on the interpretation of the underlined phrase in Persian which literally refers to "a carpet of a colourful plant". The translator has chosen "a bed of all kinds of flowers" which can convey a similar significance of the poem lines because all kinds of flowers can be spread in the shade of trees by the wind, and because they are obviously in different colours.

Example (13) is a paraphrase equivalent of the Persian text:

(13) … and the season passes away … (p. 31)

...و عهد گلستان را وفایی نیست...

Here the paraphrase is, in fact, the result of the source text translated into English but this has been made explicit by a footnote referring to literal translation of the source text reading as "the season of garden has no fidelity".

The example (14), (15) show the use of equivalent rather than identical words:

(14) <u>He asked</u>: 'Then what is to be done?' (p. 31)

گفتا: طریق چیست؟

In (14) the underlined words "He asked" rather than "He said" in Persian is taken to be the right equivalent for introducing a question. Next, the narrated question is functionally and explicitly translated within its own context.

(15) 'I may compose for the amusement of <u>those who look</u> ² and for the instruction of <u>those who are present</u> …' (p. 31)

گفتم: برای نزهت ناظران و فسحت حاضران (کتاب گلستانی) توانم تصنیف کردن

Regarding the discourse structure in the context, we notice that the deletion of "I said" is compatible with an effective translation where the sentences subsequently follow one another. According to the footnote given, by 'those who look' readers, and by 'those who are present' listeners are meant …

Example (16) illustrates the addition for establishing textual coherence:

(16) … when the book of the Rose-garden was finished <u>but it will in reality be completed</u> only after approbation in the court of the Shah. (p. 32)

...تمام آنگه شود، بحقیقت، که پسوندی آید در بارگاه شاه ...

The word 'but' in the above example clearly shows that the use of the conjunction "but" in the translated text joins the two sections of a sentence, and establishes the grounds for textual coherence.

Examples (17), (18) and (19) are illustrative of explicitation strategy based on the translator's understanding of the context of the original text.

(17) … appear in the assembly of <u>persons endowed with pulchritude, unless adorned with the ornaments</u> of approbation from the great Amir … (p. 34)

...در زمره <u>صاحب دلان</u> متجلی نشود، مگر آنکه متجلی گردد بزیور قبول امیر...

The underlined part is based on the translator's understanding of the original text, and as it is clear, a clause replaces a compound word in Persian.

(18) Whoever <u>reposes</u> in the shadow of his favour,
His sin is <u>transmuted</u> to obedience and his foe into a friend. (p. 37)

<div dir="rtl">هر که در سایه عنایت اوست گنهش طاعتست و دشمن دوست</div>

The underlined words in the translation of the Persian text show that the translator has properly changed the copular verbs into dynamic words as an explicitation strategy.

(19) "It is better for me to <u>consider what to speak</u> than to repent of what I have spoken". (p. 42)

<div dir="rtl">اندیشه کردن که چه بگویم به از پشیمانی خوردن که چرا گفتم؟</div>

The verb phrase "consider what to speak" is an explicit and natural equivalent of a form such as "think of what I should say".

Conclusion

The examples presented from Rehatsek's translation of Gulilstan illustrate the use of explicitation strategy, which not only indicate the regularities of the translator's behaviours, but also demonstrate the application of the principles in the process of translation to produce a coherent and comprehensible target text for the intended readership.

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