



FACOLTÀ DI STUDI UMANISTICI

Lingue e culture per la mediazione linguistica

# Traduzione

## LESSON 6

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# What is translation?

What words come to your mind when talking about discourse and text?

How would it influence the translator?



# Topic of this lesson

- From co-text to the difference between discourse & text
- Theme & Rheme
- Thematic progression
- Textuality &:
  - Sentence structure
  - Punctuation
  - Tense & Aspect



# Discourse & Text

- Section of lg that owns unity (either from the surrounding text or from the world outside lg)
- Discourse: a section of communication within the context of situation
- Text: the formal tools used to link sentences in their co-text (Widdowson 1979; Leech & Short 1981)
- Functional level: a sentence is contextualized when in its context of situation
- Formal level: a sentence is contextualized when linked to preceding and following sentences into larger units (co-text or linguistic text)



- Discourse: pragmatic coherence among sentences in communication
- Text: formal (linguistic & semantic) cohesiveness among sentences
- “Texts as particular instances of communication within a more general context of discourse” -> “Particular manifestations of discourses and the meanings of discourses, and the sites of attempts to resolve particular problems” (Kress 1985, Ulrich 150)



# For the translator,

- Text as a whole
- Text as a combination of elements to create meaning
- The translator works between sentences and beyond sentence boundaries
- The text as the basis for translation
- Vocab & grammar: components of a text w/in a context
- Competence in: text analysis, in understanding how communication takes place, in reading comprehension + writing skills



# Thematisation

- Arranging the text, attracting the reader's attention on certain parts (the most important ones for the writer's intentions & for intelligibility) - a chain where new information is attached to already-familiar information previously given
- New information is associated to known/ shared information (in the co-text or situational context)
- Known v new information – according to the writer

**THEME:** the info given. Context-dependent: the reader has access to it



- The morpheme is the smallest unit of discourse v
- The smallest unit of discourse is the morpheme
- The theme is context-dependent

The remainder of the clause is the **RHEME**, that functions as the new context-independent element – it holds the new info about the theme & carries most of the sentence's communicative relevance (Ulrich 152)

Theme/rheme – subject/predicate



- When the theme appears at the beginning of the sentences -> unmarked (declarative sentences: subject)

## **Thematisation and manipulation:**

If the rheme is placed in a thematic position, it becomes relevant: new info is conveyed, 'passed out' as given, as shared knowledge

a. '**Io** non conosco Giorgio'. Io : **theme**; rheme: new info.

NOT MARKED

b. '**Giorgio**, io non lo conosco'. MARKED TOPICALISATION:

Giorgio : **theme**; I don't know him RHEME, new info.

There is a pause separating the two.



# More examples

‘Un minuto dopo si sentì bussare alla porta, e Hugh Alcott entrò nella stanza, senza neppure notare che era stato il tenente Peters ad aprirgli’  
(*Come in un libro giallo*, 1969)

The character is mentioned for the first time BUT IT IS IN THEMATIC POSITION. It should have been in RHEMATIC POSITION ( new info).



## STANDARD POSITIONS

- a) In English declaratives sent. the initial position is usually occupied by a noun phrase with function of subject;
- b) SVO(A) – Theme-Subject, Rheme-Object;
- c) Yes/No interrogative sentences – the theme is the subject (operator);
- d) Wh- Questions, the theme is the wh-interrogative pronoun

Ex: the grandma gave a bunch of flowers to her niece; did you get a gift?; what did you get?

- English v Italian structure



# Deviation from normal word order

- Fronting – an element different from the subject is moved to the opening of the sentence + echo an element or the subject is moved to the end of the sentence
- Inversion – subject-verb inversion (mainly w/ place adverbials moved to the front), subject/operator inversion (w/ restrictive or negative adverbial)
- Clefting – division of the sentences into 2 clauses, each w/ its own verb (anticipatory subject *it* + verb *to be ... that*)



- Pseudo-clefting – *wh*- pronoun becomes the subject to foreground another clause element
- Left & right dislocation – used to foreground elements. *Left disl.* to anticipate identification (marked themes), *right disloc.* to postpone identification (cataphoric substitute theme related to the postponed theme) – mainly in informal spoken discourse
- End-focus – focal element if at the end (written discourse)



# Thematisation

- **THEME:** usually at the beginning, = unmarked position.
- MARKED POSITIONS : FRONTING; CLEFT SENTENCES; LEFT/RIGHT DISLOCATION; END FOCUS
- **FRONTING**

David (S) owes (V) £4000 (DO).

The direct object *£4000* can be 'fronted' as follows:

£4000 (DO) David (S) owes (V).

*Ice-cream* he wants! (cf. He wants *ice-cream*.)

*Some games* we won easily. (cf. We won *some games* easily.)

*That much* I understand. (cf. I understand *that much*.)

A subject complement (► [see 1.5](#)) may also be fronted:

*Stone cold* her hands were. (cf. Her hands were *stone cold*.)

*Extremely rude* she was. (cf. She was *extremely rude*.)



# Thematisation

- **THEME**: usually at the beginning = unmarked position.
- **MARKED POSITIONS : CLEFT SENTENCES**

It was Simon who studied French last year.

This is called a **cleft sentence** because the original simple sentence has been divided (or 'cleft') into two clauses:

**Clause 1:** *It was Simon*

**Clause 2:** *who studied French last year*

It was *French* that Simon studied last year (not German).

It was *last year* that Simon studied French (not this year).



# Thematisation

- **THEME**: usually at the beginning, = unmarked position.
- **MARKED POSITIONS** : LEFT/RIGHT DISLOCATION; a noun phrase in a peripheral position + a pronoun in the core of the clause
  - a. Her parents seem pretty uncaring. [non-dislocated]
  - b. They seem pretty uncaring, her parents [right dislocation]
  - c. Spring blossoms smell wonderful. [non-dislocated]
  - d. Spring blossoms, they smell wonderful. [left dislocation]



# Thematisation

- **THEME:** usually at the beginning, = unmarked position.
- **MARKED POSITIONS : END FOCUS** focal element if at the end (written discourse)

‘Diagnosis is the single most important skill and most undervalued capacity for exercising adaptive leadership.’ (unmarked)

‘The single most important skill and most undervalued capacity for exercising adaptive leadership is diagnosis.’ (marked)

## **Focusing the Audience's Attention**

ALGERNON: Why is it that at a bachelor's establishment the servants invariably drink the champagne? I ask merely for information.

LANE: I attribute it to the superior quality of the wine, sir. I have often observed that in married households **the champagne is rarely of first-rate brand** (Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest* 431)

the info about the quality of the champagne in married households receives greatest intonational stress as end-focused information



- Active/passive voice – the person who does the action is the subject/theme in the former, in the latter what matters is not the agent but the person or thing influenced by the verb
- The focus moves from what or who causes the happening to the happening itself
- The translator's choice depends on the known information (Julia lost her doll v the doll was lost by Julia)
- Double object verbs – text dynamism
- Impersonal style



- Focus on the verb: the emphatic operators do/did -> a contrast, the rejection of a previous remark in the co-text or context
- Also emotive emphasis: personal worry, blame or grumpiness



# Passive vs active voice

- The focus moves from what or who causes the event to the event itself

The use of the passive depends on the theme/rheme chain

Matthew picked these apples.  
These apples were picked by Matthew.

Active: apple as rheme

Passive: apples as theme

BUT

Passive is also a morphosyntactic strategy to convey a specific stance

‘USA attack Lybia’ vs ‘Lybia attacked by USA’, ‘Lybia attacked’:  
where is the responsibility clearly stated?



# Thematic progression

- Communication evolves through the theme/rheme division, alternation, of clauses
- Known -> new = known -> new
- Theme + rheme: communicative dynamism of successive sentences in the text, where the theme carries the lowest degree of communicative dynamism & the rheme drives the communication forward (Ulrich 162)
- Functional organization of the clause in terms of theme & rheme = FSP (functional sentence perspective, Firbas 1964, Danes 1974)



# Recognizable patterns

- Overall thematic structure and rhetorical purpose of the text
- Thematic progression: the choice & ordering of the theme & rheme in relation to superior text units (paragraphs, chapters) and the whole text (Ulrich 163)
- The translator identifies the ST thematic progression & replicates it in the TT according to the TL conventions (*ibidem*)
- thematic progression: distribution and organisation of theme and rheme over progressively larger text units (paragraphs, chapters, the whole text).



- Linear thematisation of rhemes

T1 -> R1

|

T2 -> R2

|

T3 -> R3

Simple linear progression is a logical means of creating cohesion but less obtrusive than constant progression

The new house was built by Mr. Jones. He was ...



# Examples

- Outside my **window** is a big lawn. In the middle of the lawn is a flower bed. The flower bed is full of roses. The roses are my favourite flowers.
- ‘PRINCE Harry was so moved by shattered marine Ben McBean’s fight for life that he publicly hailed him as a “true hero”. **Brave Ben** was barely conscious after losing an arm and a leg as the two comrades flew home from Afghanistan (The Sun: 17.9.2008).



- Thematic progression with a constant theme  
(subsequent themes are related to the first)

T1 -> R1

|

T1 -> R2

|

T1 -> R3

Typical of advertising (theme = brand)



# Examples

'**Li Ping** was born in China. **He** was very interested in learning English, and (**he**) always tried to find opportunities to speak English with his friends. When he was twelve, **he** could communicate with his foreign friends freely.

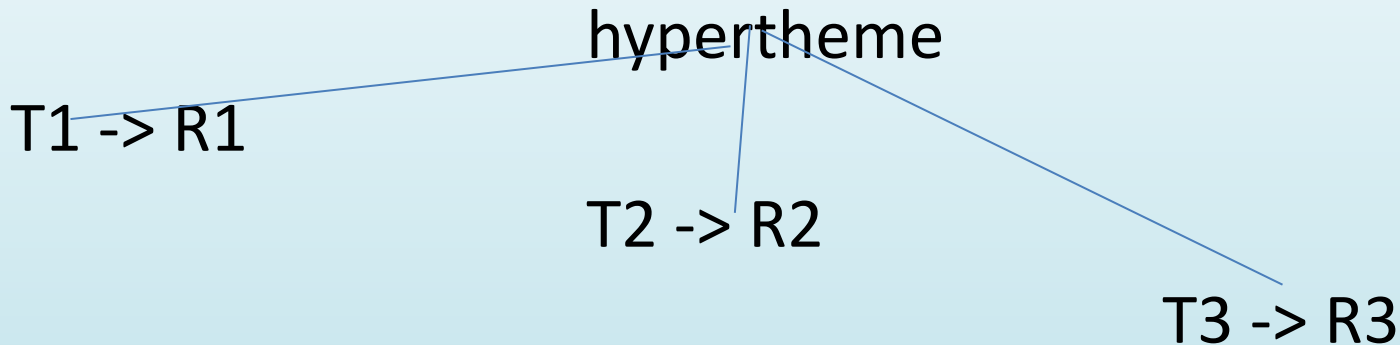
'...intriguing begins against the leader, matters always come to a head at some point. And until they do the party cannot make any progress or see its future clearly. The Labour Party should determine that, for it, that moment has come now. The party may decide that... (The Times: 15.9.2008).

[such repetition is a forceful way to make a point but warned that it may also be perceived as overly 'demagogic' (Hawes 2015)]





- Thematic progression w/ subsequent themes derived from a *hypertheme* or *metatheme*



*D. Hypertheme / derived progression:*

*'Inflation is expected to tumble further today. Industry is virtually strike-free and wage settlements are the lowest in years. Yet sterling hangs on the Ropes like a battered boxer because opinion polls suggest Labour might win the next election' (The Sun: 11.10.1991)*

*Inflation, industry, wage settlements and sterling are, in context, all derived from the hypertheme 'the economy and the coming general elections'*



- Thematic progression w/ subsequent constant themes related to the first rheme

T1 -> R1

|

T2 -> R2

|

T2 -> R3

|

T2 -> R4

Ex. Kids drink milk. Milk is white. Milk comes from  
COWS. ...



- Thematic progression w/ subsequent new themes related to a constant rheme

T1 -> R1

T2 -> R1

T3 -> R1

Ex. Kids drink milk. Poppies drink milk. Adults drink milk

So... themes & rhemes are placed & re-used in subsequent discourse according to the writer's text-plan & audience-orientation



# Thus,

- The way themes & rhemes are placed & re-used in subsequent discourse mirrors the writer's text-plan & audience-orientation
- Use of adverbials as themes (travel guides)
- Spatial description & orientation of the reader
- Thematisation of time adverbials in detective stories

# Sentence structure & Textuality



- Sentence structure, sequencing of main & dependent clauses to create textuality
  - Different focus of information
  - ✓ Parallelism: the use of parallel structures to highlight the functional relationship between different segments of discourse -> to foreground elements of the message
- Same sentence pattern + lexical support creates cohesion in the reader's mind
- Sometimes tough to translate in another lg



# Examples

- "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today." - Martin Luther King, Jr.
- "My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." -John F. Kennedy
- "My fellow citizens: I stand here today humbled by the task before us, grateful for the trust you have bestowed, mindful of the sacrifices borne by our ancestors." -Barack Obama
- The opening paragraph of Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*
- Parallelism of "it was" to connect opposing ideas.
- "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way."



- Variation in sentence length & type to express diverse degrees of emphasis
- Coordination (same level & ranking, independent) & Subordination
- In translation, main clauses should keep their position & relevance, not downgraded to a subordinate
- In English, periodic sentences (starting w/ a subordination) build expectation toward the end-focus main clause
- The ST author chooses sentence pattern according to the way s(he) wants to carry forward the text's information dynamism



- **Loose sentences:** main clause at the beginning, & subordinate afterwards -> easy as important info comes first & is followed by background & supporting info
- For the translator, deciding the TT sequence depends on the ST type: expressive (reproduction of ST author's purpose), vocative (assessment of ST author's aim + adapting according to TT conventions) & informative (convey the message)
- **Excessively long & complex sentences** -> difficult to translate from IT into En -> break down into clearer & more straightforward syntax w/out losing thematisation & communicative dynamism



- Misrelated or dangling modifiers: a modifying phrase, introduced by a gerund or by a past participle is unconnected to the word it modifies (Ulrich 180)

Ex. Using a soft material which ....., soft lenses provide a high level of comfort

- English prefers a finite clause to a non-finite phrase



# Punctuation & Textuality

- Punctuation holds the same function in writing as pauses, intonation & gestures in speaking
- It is complementary to logical word order & sentence sequencing
- In this case, the reproduction from the ST to the TT is not possible. The translator will have to decide between full stop, semi-colon & colon
- Textual factors linked to communicative dynamism & ST/TT conventions influence this choice



# Punctuation & Textuality

<https://rivistatradurre.it/2018/05/tradurre-la-punteggiatura-un-primo-tentativo/>

logic-Syntactic function : guide the reader into understanding the internal logical organisation of a text; its prepositions it is composed by; its global meaning

prosodic function : helpful when reading out loud, 'viene legata al concetto di pausa del respiro' (Fornara 2010, 29). Prosodic function is a consequence of the logical function .



# Punctuation

- **Full stop** – same way as in IT, more frequent in EN, differences w/ numbers (decimals & thousands- The convention of the TL have to be respected FULL STOP : to end sentences both EN and IT. more frequent in EN, Numbers, decimals differ: 3,5 IT / 3.5 EN; thousands differ : 8,531 EN / 3.531 IT
- **Semi-colon** – both pause & linkage: linkage of logically or grammatically related coordinate clauses (=and) + separation of coordinate clauses joined by a connector (e.g., however); more frequent in IT to identify sequences of events not sufficiently independent. Sometimes IT prefers a comma where EN prefers a semi-colon



1. **Colon** – not used for coordination but 1. to introduce a clause or phrase which has the aim to illustrate, explain, amplify, restate something already mentioned. It stands for: that is, in other words, in short, etc. 2. Also used to introduce a list (if a collective term has been given), 3. to introduce a comment or explanation at the end of the sentence. EN prefers a comma if what follows is a phrase; 4. to introduce quotations and should be used to separate a main heading from a subdivision; 5. To introduce direct speech (+ inverted commas).
- **Comma** – separates elements of a sentence and helps to group words, phrases, clauses for clarity (Ulrich 186)



## Colon

*Ex: My name was not among the winners: I was not surprised.*

English prefers a comma if the comment at the end of a sentence is not a clause but only a phrase;

*Si tratta però di una lingua grezza: come il cinese.*

*It is a rudimentary language, like Chinese.*

## Comma

Ex. restrictive vs nonrestrictive relative clauses

I want to know why so much sympathy is expended on the man *who* kills another in the vehemence of his own bad passions, and why the man *who* kills him in the name of the law is shunned and fled from?

TT Voglio capire come mai tanta compassione è espressa per l'uomo che ne uccide un altro nell'impeto delle sue malvagie pulsioni, mentre colui che esegue una sentenza capitale nel nome della legge è evitato e rifuggito.



# Punctuation & Textuality

2. *ST His testimony is extremely valuable, because it is the evidence of an educated and observing man, **who** [...] was quite satisfied that the Punishment of Death should continue.*

TT La sua testimonianza è estremamente preziosa perché resa da un uomo colto e rispettabile, **che** [...] si era schierato piuttosto a favore del mantenimento della Pena di Morte (*traduzione Marco Brambilla*).

EN: commas has to be there because of *non-defining relative clauses*,

IT: no need BUT PROSODIC value

Ex. isolating single clauses to signal their importance

*ST. GENTLEMEN. I choose this time for addressing to you, the first of two or three letters on the subject of Capital Punishment*

TT. SIGNORI. Colgo quest'occasione per inviar**Vi** la prima di due o tre lettere riguardanti la materia della Pena Capitale (*traduzione Marco Brambilla*).

direct translation :«colgo l'occasione di inviare a voi» possible, but less PLEASING



- Commas should be used for the purpose to help the reader understand the meaning of the sentence & reduce ambiguity
- Speech marks: dashes (–), parentheses, quotation marks/inverted commas -> direct v indirect speech -> the translator need to follow the TL conventions



# Punctuation & Textuality

**En dash:** relation or opposition (A *father – son* relationship, *The Manchester – Liverpool match*)

**Em-dash:** semantic relationship

## WHEN TO USE DASHES



The **en dash** (–) is slightly wider than the **hyphen** (-) but narrower than the **em dash** (—). They are different in appearance and usage.

### EN DASH



**1. Expresses a period of time.**

He lived in this town from 1998–2009.

**2. Indicate a range of numbers.**

You could choose 2 numbers from 1–50.

**3. Used with scores.**

The red team won 3–1 in this match.

**4. Indicate distance.**

Europe–USA is a long flight.

### EM DASH



**1. Show a break in a sentence.**

Please call my supervisor – John Wick – on Friday.

**2. Marking of unimportant words**

To get to New York from here – you are heading there, right? – you need a car or a train.

**3. Create emphasis.**

My mom loves fish – my dad loves beef.

**4. Indicates a sudden change of thought**

I had a great vacation in Bali – oh! Is that your dog? He's so cute!



# Punctuation & Textuality

First. Whether one of the two great objects of all punishment (reserving the second for its proper place) be not to reform the offender. Secondly. Whether an irrevocable Doom—which nothing can recall, which no human power can set right if it be wrong, which may be wrongfully inflicted with the most just intention and which has been wrongfully inflicted with the most just intention, *as we all know*, more than once—should ever be pronounced by men of fallible and erring judgment, on their fellow-creatures.

Vorrei dapprima domandarmi se uno dei due grandi fini di qualsivoglia punizione (riserverò un momento più opportuno alla discussione del secondo) non debba essere quello di riformare il reo. In seguito, se una Sentenza irrevocabile—che nulla può sovvertire, che nessun potere umano può correggere se si rivelasse sbagliata; che può essere erroneamente inflitta con le più rette intenzioni e che è stata, *come tutti sappiamo*, più di una volta erroneamente inflitta con le più rette intenzioni—debba mai essere pronunciata a danno di loro simili da uomini il cui giudizio è fallibile e soggetto all'errore



# Tense, Aspect & Textuality

- Verb Time & Tense – Tense as a grammatical category: the relationship between the grammatical form of the verb & our concept of time.
- Lack of identity between time & tense -> potential translating issues (Ulrich 187)
- Choice of tense & aspect < writer's attitude & involvement, thematisation & foregrounding, discourse constraints, appropriateness & consistency



# Translating issues IT-EN-IT

- IT-EN: appropriate narrative text -> past tense v present tense: narrative, prose narratives (author's perspective on events). Choice of present tense to create a sense of immediacy & involvement, for actions physically and emotionally close to the author
- Historic present: shifts to the progressive aspect for strong focus on actions + break in the time sequence
- EN stricter than IT in the consistent use of narrative tenses



- Both in IT & EN, the past, & the present, dominate long sequences of sentences.
- EN past tense: used for *passato remoto*, *passato prossimo* & *imperfetto*
- Past v present perfect do not overlap with *passato remoto* (remote past) & *passato prossimo* (recent past)
- Use of present perfect is stricter in EN than in IT -  
> more difficult choice to give the reader the right perspective on events – shifts linked to discourse types (present perfect to topicalize certain news, past tense for the narrative, or in academic texts)



- IT *imperfetto* for EN past tense & iterative marked forms WOULD & USED TO + the progressive past tense -> seeking a general contrast (past & present states or habits – used to), repetitive action (would + dynamic verbs), iterative meaning (unmarked, past tense).
- Used to appropriate in narrative texts -> “best to opt for the past as the narrative tense with occasional use of would to foreground the iterative nature of the actions and events” (Ulrich 194). Alternatively, iterative meaning w marked form & continuation w/ the simple past



- EN progressive past tense for the IT *imperfetto*, at times better rendered by the simple past tense (narrative & descriptive)
- Sometimes, past tense after the progressive past: permanent feature v temporary action/event; narrative carried forward v slowing down for the reader to catch up or take time
- Simple & progressive past tenses v *imperfetto*: simple aspects when actions are dependent, progressive aspects when actions are independent
- Past perfect: action completed before a known time or event in the past



- EN tends to avoid sequences of past perfect
- Indirect discourse: importance of consistency in the use of tense & aspect
- Reporting verb in the present or present perfect tense v in the past -> backshift (verbs & expressions of time & place)
- From EN into IT: the conditional remains unchanged in indirect discourse
- Future-in-the-past & conditionals in a past frame
- No backshifting when the time reference of the original discourse is valid at the time of reporting, especially in the presence of timelessness or universal truth