

We have up to now focused on pragmatic and stylistic aspects of discourse. In Chapter 3, that is, we discussed how to interpret and re-encode meaning in relation to the extra-linguistic environment – the context of situation and the context of culture, while in Chapter 4 we examined how to relate form to content in the translation process. It is now evident that the meaning of an utterance is not limited to what is expressed on the surface of the text but has to be interpreted according to the author's underlying intentions as activated in a given context. In this Chapter we shall be returning to a concept we came across in Chapter 3, that of *co-text*. A distinction was made between *context* and *co-text*: utterances need to be fully contextualised in terms of key features of both the situation (the context) and of the surrounding text (the co-text). So far we have considered the functional aspects of discourse, that is, language that is doing some job in some socio-cultural context. What concerns us here is the co-text, the way in which discourse is constructed above and beyond the sentence. In other words how are discourse structures created, and, more importantly for translation, how do the strategies used to develop unified and meaningful discourse differ from one language to another?

First, however, let us clear up some points of terminology regarding what is actually meant by *discourse* and *text*.

## 5.1. Discourse and Text

Both *discourse* and *text* refer to any stretch of language that has unity. This unity can come from the surrounding text or it can be interpreted according to the knowledge of the world outside language. Some linguists use *discourse* to refer to language as a piece of communication within the context of situation and *text* to denote the formal devices used for establishing connections between sentences in their co-text (Widdowson 1979:92-3, Leech and Short 1981:209-11). Thus, on a functional level an utterance is contextualised when it is set within the real-world environment (its *context of situation*) and on a formal level when it is linked to other sentences that precede and follow it in a larger unit (its *co-*

*text* or *linguistic context*). The same piece of language can therefore be considered from two different perspectives: seeing a piece of language as "discourse" means focusing on the pragmatic coherence that links utterances in communication; analysing the same piece of language as "text" involves focusing on the formal (linguistic and semantic) cohesiveness which links sentences.

A recent view of *text* and *discourse* envisages *texts* as particular instances of communication within a more general context of *discourse*: "Texts are ... manifestations of discourses and the meanings of discourses, and the sites of attempts to resolve particular problems" (Kress 1985:12). This is a useful terminological distinction to use with reference to translation since it provides an opportunity to see how particular instances of discourse may be realised in actual texts. It is, besides, complementary to the former text/discourse dichotomy.

## 5.2. Translating Texts

When we translate a text, we approach it as an integrated whole. The translation process entails much more than rendering the meaning of a sequence of isolated words, phrases or sentences into the TL. A text has unity and its meaning is interpreted not simply as a sum of the sentences or clauses that comprise it but as a combination of these to form a new, overall meaning. Translators need to be aware not only of relationships within the clause and sentences but also of how the text is organised as a whole, of relationships, that is, beyond sentence boundaries. It is the text, therefore, and not the word or sentence which is the basis for translation. Vocabulary and grammar are, of course, important to translation but they should be seen from a different standpoint: as components of a text within a context, whose meaning is to be decoded and re-encoded according to the overall text. The translation process starts from a given text, it analyses the text, and its final product is a new text in another language. This is why it is so important to read the whole ST before translating it.

The fact that translation is seen as a textual activity implies that translators need to activate their competence in analysing and organising discourse beyond the sentence in each of the two languages they are working with. Awareness of how communication takes place in the separate languages is a precondition for placing them in contact. Understanding how elements in the ST concur to produce a given meaning involves reading comprehension skills. But translation also requires writing skills if the TT is to read as a

meaningful whole. The interlingual skill that is called into play in translation is, of course, comparative text analysis: knowing how different languages use textual elements to produce the same overall meaning and effect.

In this and the following Chapters we shall be looking at problem areas in translation related to textual organisation. We shall therefore be paying particular attention to what constitutes a text, how it differs from a set of unrelated sentences and how to avoid destroying the meaning of a text by translating it into the TL as unrelated sentences. This Chapter will deal with the ordering of elements in clauses and sentences and its contribution to textuality; Chapters 6 and 7 will focus on aspects of coherence and cohesion in translation.

## 5.3. Thematisation

A text will generally be arranged in such a way as to focus the reader's attention on those parts of its content which are considered to be most important. The tendency to arrange sentences in such a manner as to draw attention to what is communicatively more important is called *thematization*. Not every word of every part of the text can have the same weight since this would make reading and understanding an impossible task. The information load would be too great for the reader to handle. The options available to a writer for arranging information in a text are not arbitrary, however, since they serve the communicative purpose of making writers' intentions and their discourse more readily comprehensible. The information contained in a text is therefore arranged in such a way as to carry the writer's message forward and to focus the reader's attention on some elements rather than on others. This process involves associating new information to the information that is already known or shared by the reader, because of either the preceding co-text or the situational context.

Thus each sentence, or better each clause, can be divided into two: information that is already known to the readers and new information. The choice of what information to put where depends both on writers' hypotheses about what the reader knows and on the way they wish to organise their text. The starting point of the message, that is, what the clause is going to be "about", is the *theme* and occurs in the initial part of the clause.

Consider these two sentences cited by Halliday (1985:39)

A halfpenny is the smallest English coin.

(i.e. I'll tell you about a halfpenny: halfpenny = theme)  
and

The smallest English coin is a halfpenny.

(i.e. I'll tell you about the smallest English coin: the smallest English coin = theme)

The theme, as we said, is context-dependent in that the reader already has access to the information offered in it. The remainder of the clause, called the *rheme*, functions as the new context-independent element. It holds the new information that is going to be given about the theme and therefore carries most of the sentence's communicative importance.

To take Halliday's example again:

A halfpenny is the smallest English coin.

(i.e. What about the halfpenny? It's the smallest English coin = rheme)  
and

The smallest English coin is a halfpenny.

(i.e. What about the smallest English coin? It's a halfpenny = rheme).

The theme/rheme distinction is a functional one, but in English it coincides with the ordering of subject and predicate. The theme, as we said, is the first part of the clause and has the function of "announcing" the starting point of the message. When it occurs in this expected part of the clause, the theme is considered *unmarked*. In English declarative clauses the unmarked theme for a main clause is the subject.

Eurotunnel will connect the road and rail networks of Europe.

English is often called a SVO language because the normal syntactic sequence in declarative clauses is *subject + verb + object* with the *adverbials* following on, to form SVOA. One cannot, for instance, say:

\*Happened an accident at work.

One has to say:

An accident happened at work.

Therefore the subject is normally the theme, the object is the rheme and the verb a transition between the two. When a sentence contains more than one clause, the theme/rheme division holds true for each clause.

In a yes/no interrogative structures, the theme is the operator:

Did Pamela get anything for her birthday?

and the *wh*-element in a *wh*-interrogative.

What did Pamela get for her birthday?

English relies to a great extent on word order and phrase structure to indicate grammatical function: a word in subject position, for instance, will have the function of a subject, and so on. This constitutes somewhat of a difficulty in Italian/English translation since there is much more flexibility in word order in Italian, a morphologically-inflected language. Compare the following:

*Interessante è la notizia del nuovo referendum.*  
The news about the new referendum is interesting.

*Parlano bene l'inglese.*  
They speak English well.

*Fra i passeggeri non c'era nessun italiano.*  
There were no Italians among the passengers.

Departures from the normal word order are possible when a writer wishes to foreground some information contained in the clause. Any such change fulfils a textual function and is not simply a matter of free variation. Functional modifications are considered *marked* and whatever is brought to the front of the clause is "promoted" to theme. English has a variety of syntactic devices by means of which the basic elements of a clause can be rearranged: fronting, inversion, clefting, pseudo-clefting, active/passive voice, left and right dislocation. These variants are referentially similar but textually different and offer text-producers a variety of means with which to structure their discourse. This is an important factor in translating.

Let us now look more closely at how different information can be foregrounded in English by means of changes in the order of clause elements, and its relevance to translation.

5.3.1. When an element other than the subject is placed at the beginning of a clause it tends to receive primary stress and is therefore given prominence. This is known as *fronting*. Fronting may, for instance, be used to echo an element that has already been given contextually.

Ralph has gone trekking in Tibet for fun.  
**Fun** you call it!

The most frequent type of marked theme in English is the adjunct.

**On a grey morning with seagulls swooping over the Thames**, Barry and his dog Tripper have secured a prime begging pitch – one end of Hungerford Bridge, the central London pedestrian link between the north and south banks. ... Commuters hurry past, dropping occasional coins in his black woollen hat. ... **Half-way across the bridge** stands David Tripp, aged 43, tunelessly playing a mouth organ.

But other elements can also be fronted:

**Eileen** he had not seen for years, but **Helen** he saw again yesterday.

Alternatively fronting may be used to give end-focus to another part of the clause. This is a common feature in journalism:

Poised for a sensational diplomatic triumph in Baghdad last night was ex-premier **Edward Heath**.

5.3.2. The fronting of a clause element is often associated with *inversion* in English. This can take the form of subject-verb inversion, as when place adverbials are transposed to theme position.

**There**, sitting at the entrance to the cave, was the guard.

When the fronted element is a restrictive or negative adverbial, there is inversion of subject and operator.

**Never before** had the roads been so treacherous.

**Only if the Government gives us an unequivocal assurance that it is legal to trade on Sundays**, will we support longer shopping hours.

5.3.3. Prominence can be given to a particular message by the division of the sentence into two clauses, each with its own verb. This can be done in English by means of devices called *clefting* and *pseudo-clefting*. In cleft sentences the anticipatory subject *it* is an empty theme followed by the verb *be* and is used to give focus to a part of the clause which would otherwise not be highlighted. It is a very flexible device since it enables various

elements of the clause to be foregrounded. Consider the following Italian and English examples:

*È con questi giovani che Carlo d'Inghilterra ha trascorso le ore più emozionanti della sua prima permanenza in Italia.*

**It is with these young people** that Prince Charles spent the most stirring time of his stay in Italy.

*In una tribù di poche centinaia di persone gli individui sono interscambiabili.*

**È in un mondo di miliardi di persone**, in cui ci sono più incontri, più esperienze sessuali, che l'individuo ha bisogno di essere "riconosciuto" come assolutamente unico, assolutamente inconfondibile.

In a tribe of a few hundred people, the individuals are interchangeable.

**It is in a world of billions of people**, in which there are more encounters, more sexual experiences, that the individual needs to be "acknowledged" as being absolutely unique, absolutely unmistakable.

5.3.4. The *pseudo-cleft* sentence makes use of the *wh*-clause as subject to foreground another clause element.

What counts today is what people want.  
*Quello che oggi conta è ciò che vuole la gente.*

5.3.5. A further way of foregrounding elements in a sentence offered by *left and right dislocation*.

Left dislocation indicates anticipated identification:

*Enrico lo rivide il pomeriggio del giorno dopo, uscendo dalla bottega di Zaira.*  
– Ciao, – le disse. Si sforzava di apparire disinvolto.

**Enrico** she saw the following afternoon, as she was coming out of Zaira's shop.  
"Hallo", he said to her. He tried hard to look relaxed.

*Musa ideale, modella abituale, compagna virtuale, la donna pare essere la protagonista vera dell'arte di ogni tempo: dalla seducente Venere di Milo alle più edificanti Madonne di Piero la Francesca, dalle procaci bagnanti di Renoir, alle estenuate maliarde di Klimt, non c'è sosta nel ruolo "passivo" che essa ha sostenuto, tutto sommato, di buon grado. Ma, quanto a fare l'arte, è tutt'altro discorso.*

(Fiorella Minervino, "Musa, modella, compagna, mai creatrice",  
*Il Corriere della Sera*, 19 marzo 1981)

As the ideal muse, habitual model, virtual companion, women seem to be the real protagonists of art in every age: from the seductive Venus de Milo to the more edifying Madonnas of Piero della Francesca, from Renoir's provocative bathers to Klimt's weary temptresses, they have never failed to play a "passive" role, and quite willingly on the whole. **But as for producing art**, that is quite a different matter.

*A proposito delle esigenze pratiche, va tenuto presente che la maggior parte delle attività umane si conserva e comunica attraverso la forma linguistica scritta ...*

It should be borne in mind with reference to practical requirements that most human activities are preserved and communicated through the written linguistic form ...

The left-dislocated elements set the point of departure for the whole sentence and are thus marked themes. It is a convenient means of providing contextual or shared information to which the rheme or new information may then be added.

Right dislocation refers to postponed identification: a kind of substitute theme is used initially in the clause and refers cataphorically to the delayed theme, which is dislocated to the right, to the end of the clause.

*Gustatelo qui il croissant caldo.*  
They were painted by me, these pictures.



Both left and right dislocation occur mainly in informal spoken discourse in both English and Italian:

*Le terre Zia Teresina le lascerà a me.*  
That film, it was awful.

*Volevano andare a Milano, loro.*  
It was awful, that film.

5.3.6. A further means of foregrounding certain elements in a clause is to exploit the potential of *end-focus*. According to the principle of end-focus anything that comes at the end of a clause will be interpreted as the focal element in written discourse. Writers can therefore juggle around with sentence elements so as to place semantically important information last, in end-focus position. Consider how the translator has succeeded in reproducing the end-focus Joyce gives the dead, which is crucial not only to the meaning of the story itself (*The Dead*), but also as the final word of the entire collection (*Dubliners*):

A few light taps upon the pane made him turn to the window. It had begun to snow again. He watched sleepily the flakes, silver and dark, falling obliquely against the lamplight. The time had come for him to set out on his journey westward. Yes, the newspapers were right: snow was general all over Ireland. It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen and, farther westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.

(James Joyce, *The Dead*)

*Un battere leggero sui vetri lo fece voltare verso la finestra. Aveva ripreso a nevicare. Assonnato guardava i fiocchi neri e argentei cadere di sbieco contro il lampione. Era venuto il momento di mettersi in viaggio verso l'ovest. I giornali dicevano il vero: c'era neve dappertutto in Irlanda. Neve cadeva su ogni punto dell'oscura pianura centrale, sulle colline senz'alberi; cadeva lieve sulle paludi di Allen e più a occidente cadeva lieve sulle fosche onde rabbiose dello Shannon. E anche là, su ogni angolo del cimitero deserto in cima alla collina dov'era sepolto Michael Furey. S'ammucchiava alta sulle croci contorte, sulle tombe, sulle punte del cancello e sui roveti spogli. E l'anima gli svanì lenta mentre udiva la neve cadere come scendesse la loro ultima ora, su tutti i vivi e i morti.*

(James Joyce, *I morti*, translated by Franca Cancogni)

5.3.7. The *passive voice* is an important instrument of communication and not merely an alternative form of the active. Whether a writer chooses to use the active rather than the passive or vice-versa will influence the meaning conveyed to the reader. In the active construction it is the doer of the action who is the subject. When it is not important to emphasize or even mention the agent, the doer of the action, then the passive is used.

Penicillin was discovered in 1929.

The writer is interested above all in conveying the fact that penicillin was discovered in 1929; who discovered penicillin is not relevant in this context. The passive is thus a common feature of such discourse genres as scientific and technical writing where the focus is on the *findings* and not on the *finders*, as well as in newspaper reporting where the agent is often not known.

Sickle cell retinopathy was studied in a Brazilian population of 63 patients.

A man was found murdered in his home yesterday afternoon.

Writers can choose to use either an active or passive construction depending on which part of their statement they wish to foreground: the passive places the information focus on a happening, whereas the active focuses attention on who or what causes the happening.

The choice between active and passive voice is also conditioned by the thematic structure of the text and its communicative dynamism (see 5.4. below). Compare the following two examples:

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

In the active sentence apples is in rheme position, whereas in the passive construction focus is given to Matthew. Translators would use the former if they were already discussing Matthew (the theme) and then wanted to go on to a new topic, namely, that he picked the apples (rheme). They would prefer the latter if they were talking about apples (the theme) and wished to point out as new information that it was Matthew who picked them (the rheme).

Notice also the difference in meanings in the following alternatives which contain both a direct and an indirect object.

- 1a. We gave the participants in group 1 the quiz.
- 2a. We gave the quiz to the participants in group 1.

These are both active forms but the meaning conveyed is different. Example 1a shows the normal English construction of sentences containing a direct and an indirect object. In Example 2a the indirect object is postponed and is therefore given end focus: this sentence structure stresses the fact that it was the participants in group 1 who were given the quiz and not the other group or groups.

The corresponding passive constructions are:

- 1b. The participants in group 1 were given the quiz.
- 2b. The quiz was given to the participants in group 1.

Thus, the indirect object becomes the subject in Example 1b, which is the normal passive form. In Example 2b the direct object is the subject and end focus is given to "the participants in group 1".

The difference in meaning conveyed by the two passive forms is closely related to the communicative dynamism of the text and translators need to bear this in mind when trans-

lating from Italian. Once again the choice of which form to select depends on the overall text and how the information contained in it is arranged.

The effect of using the passive is also to create an objective, impersonal style, which contrasts with the more personalized form of the active construction.

Recent studies have detected a very alarming trend in the accumulation of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in the waters of the oceans and their biomagnification to elevated levels in the tissues of such marine mammals as whales, dolphins and seals. The levels of PCBs found in the marine mammals are orders of magnitude greater than the levels found in terrestrial birds and mammals, including humans. In addition, it has been observed that the genetic make-up of marine mammals predisposes them to reproductive failure when exposed to even moderate levels of PCBs. There are about 1.2 million tonnes of PCBs in the world. Of that total, 31 per cent has been released to the environment (roughly 20 per cent is in the open ocean and 11 per cent in soil and terrestrial sediment). Sixty-five per cent of the world's PCBs are still in use, or in storage or deposited into landfills. If those PCBs are permitted to leak into the marine environment, then the extinction of marine mammals is inevitable. Although PCB releases into the environment are limited in most western countries, in developing countries such releases (particularly from phased out electrical equipment) are not well controlled. If the released PCBs entered the seas, they would probably prove sufficient to cause the extinction of a wide range of marine mammals, if not all.

(Joseph E. Cummins, "Extinction: The PCB Threat to Marine Mammals", *The Ecologist*, vol. 18, No.6, 1988).

"Nothing is real unless it is local": thus a characteristic snippet of wisdom from G.K. Chesterton and, in this sense, local government in many advanced countries during the twentieth century has become increasingly unreal and often nonexistent.

One might have supposed that most of the lessons of government in this period indicate a need for decreasing its strength and increasing its localisation. After all, its problems have not shrunk, they have grown, and grown to an enormous extent; and if we focus mainly on Britain, we see that nearly all the exercises of government in this period have proved to be demonstrable failures.

(John Papworth, "Non-Local Local Government and Local Power", *The Ecologist*, vol. 18, No.6, 1988).

5.3.8. Focus can be placed on the verb in English by means of the emphatic operators *do/did*. This kind of emphasis often implies a contrast, usually a refutation of a previous observation. It therefore relies on a previous statement in the co-text or on shared contextual information for its logical interpretation.

*Nel discorso Ciccotto la vinceva lui, e le donne grasse, che non escono e se ne stanno alla finestra a rinfrescarsi, ci dicevano sulla porta di tornare a trovarle la domenica dopo.*

*Ci tornavamo. Ma a nostro gusto, uno o due mesi dopo.*

(Cesare Pavese, *Le case*)

Ciccotto was always master of the conversation, and those fat women who don't go out and stand at the window to cool off told us at the door to come back to see them the following Sunday.

We did come back. But in our own good time, a month or two later.

Alternatively *do/did* may express emotive emphasis such as personal concern, reproach or even petulance, with no contrastive implications. These emphatic operators should be used sparingly in written texts for this purpose, however, as the overall effect might well sound over-emotional.

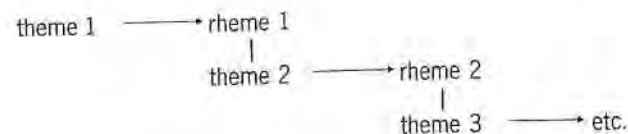
## 5.4. Thematic Progression

The theme/rheme division of a clause contributes to the development of communication since it serves to move the discourse forward. New information is converted into given information in successive clauses and as the text moves forward the known elements contribute less to the advancement of communication than the new ones. Together theme and rheme constitute the *communicative dynamism* of successive sentences in a text (Firbas 1964) with the theme carrying the lowest degree of communicative dynamism and the rheme propelling the communication forward. This functional organisation of the clause in terms of *theme* and *rheme* has come to be referred to as the *functional sentence perspective* or *FSP* approach (Firbas 1964, Danes 1974).

All texts move from theme to rheme in recognisable patterns. As the discourse progresses, previous themes or rhemes are re-employed to fit in with the overall thematic

structure and rhetorical purpose of the text. The choice and ordering of the theme and rheme in relation to superior text units (paragraphs, chapters) and the whole text is referred to as *thematic progression* (Danes 1974). One of the translator's aims is to interpret the thematic progression of the ST in relation to its overall meaning and function and then to reproduce it according to TL conventions in the TT. The most common patterns of thematic progression are described below. Examples a) to d) are from Danes (1974:118-120), while examples e) and f) are from James (1980:115-116).

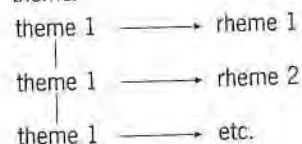
a) Linear thematisation of rhemes, the most basic and straightforward form of thematic progression.



The first of the antibiotics was discovered by Sir Alexander Fleming in 1928. He was busy at the time investigating a certain species of germ which is responsible for boils and other troubles.

The rheme of sentence 1 contains an element Sir Alexander Fleming which is taken up as the theme of sentence 2 (He).

b) Thematic progression with a constant theme: subsequent themes are related to the first theme.



The Rousseauist especially feels an inner kinship with Prometheus and other Titans. He is fascinated by any form of insurgency ... He must show an elementary energy in his explosion against the established order and at the same time a boundless sympathy for the victims of it ... Further the Rousseauist is ever ready to discover beauty of soul in anyone who is under the reprobation of society.