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Introduction

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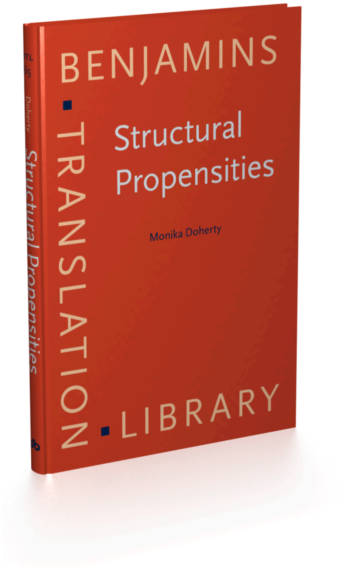

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Structural Propensities
Monika Doherty

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Structural Propensities: Translating nominal word groups from English into German

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Introduction

Idolatry

There are many traps awaiting the theorist who sets out to observe and interpret some part of the world. In "one of the most famous parts of his philosophy" (Russell 1945: 544), Francis Bacon distinguishes five idols which can mislead scientific thinking: they originate in human nature in general (*idols of the tribe*), in the individual scientist (*idols of the cave*), in views of the world inherent in language (*idols of the market place*), in traditional systems of thought (*idols of the theatre*) and in logical deduction which is not linked to empirical observation (*idols of the schools)*.

If our scientific object is the use of language itself, we risk being governed by these idols more than anyone else. Observing the use of language, we will always – in some way or other – rely on our own use of language, that is, be in danger of the *idol of the cave*. But focusing on the use of language calls in two more idols indirectly, as our investigation will always have to proceed from a special language and thus be bound to the *tribe* and the *market place* which use this language. Although we assume that we share our knowledge of this language and its uses with all other persons of the market place and tribe, we can never be sure of an identical understanding. The difficulties with our observational data are magnified if we look at other languages, and they seem to be insurmountable if the object of our scientific investigation is the 'simultaneous' use of several languages, as in translation.

One effect of this is the painfully protracted process of an "emerging discipline" (a title used by Alessandra Ricardi 2000/2001). A discipline emerging for almost half a century (the first two bibliographical volumes on "The Science of Translation", published in 1970/72 cover a period that begins in 1962) is certainly something unusual – even more so, as translation studies has not yet found its way into the Encyclopaedia Britannica, which does inform on other disciplines, like computer sciences or psycholinguistics, which also began in the 1960s/70s. While translation itself has been an issue for many centuries, evoking a wealth of fascinating questions and sophisticated comments (impressively exemplified in Delisle/Woodsworth 1995), translation studies as an academic discipline, aiming at a theoretical understanding of its object, has not yet found its place among the generally accepted disciplines.

However, the public neglect is not only due to the complexity of the object, it is related to the *idol of the theatre,* the lack of communication between the various schools of thought that deal with the many different facets of language. This problem of translation studies is to some extent inherited from linguistics itself, where the various 'theatres' are absorbed in rather sophisticated productions, presupposing an expert's background. Moreover, translation in the linguistic sense (rather than its genetic, mathematical, physical, or mechanical sense) is essentially linked to language use, and as the philological approach to language use has eventually been diversified in linguistics, literature and cultural studies, translation studies is not only linked to the various branches of linguistics – including psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, computer linguistics and philosophy of language – it is also related to a wide range of literary theories and culture studies. As Munday (2001) shows in his admirably transparent presentation of the major approaches translation studies has pursued during the last fifty years, cultural-political aspects of translation have recently attracted more attention than linguistic aspects. As it were, translation studies even covers aspects of translation that do not involve the use of language at all. There is, for example, the translation of specific design (as demonstrated by Peter A. Schmitt 1986, 1992, 1998), which comprises a great variety of translation problems arising from culture-specific forms of texts, concerning questions of layout, illustrations, graphic signs and the like. It is obvious that such non-linguistic aspects have to be dealt with by theoretical loans from other disciplines.

Chesterman (2002) considers translation studies a genuinely interdisciplinary endeavour, and a large portion of the interdisciplinarity of translation studies participates in the interdisciplinarity of linguistics. But the use of language for the purpose of translation is a topic in its own right and although it has its share in a great variety of other (sub)disciplines, it requires special concepts and methods for its scientific investigation. Yet to the extent that translation studies participates in linguistic questions and assumptions characteristic of the various subdisciplines of linguistics, it inherits a wide range of contentious issues and alternative views from different linguistic theories. Looking at the linguistic aspects of translation studies, we have to take sides in the linguistic debates of all the linguistic subdisciplines translation is related to and try to avoid the *idols of the theatre,* which prevent access to relevant research. Any decisions we make should improve our understanding of the special set of questions and assumptions characterizing translation in contrast to any other use of language. But this, as the diversity of theoretical approaches in translation studies suggest, is an almost labyrinthine challenge.

The basic problem of translation studies – and the one it shares with all linguistic subdisciplines – originates in "the problem of induction by simple enumeration", which, Russell (1945: 545) says, "remains unsolved to this day." Russell criticizes Bacon for not placing efficient emphasis on hypothesis and deduction. Observational data in translation studies – as in linguistics in general – is unlimited and, as Russell says, "Usually, some hypothesis is a necessary preliminary to the collection of facts, since the selection of facts demands some way of determining relevance" and "Often, when hypothesis has to be tested, there is a long deductive journey from the hypothesis to some consequence that can be tested by observation."

It is the framing of hypotheses and the long deductive way preceding the "testable", "replicable" studies (demanded by Toury 1995) which promote the unsatisfactory situation in translation studies – as in linguistics. The effect is visible in and aggravated by the idolatry of the various theoretical approaches prevalent in the area. Klein (1991: 104) uses Escher's impossible object as a simile for the mutual contempt between proponents of theoretical linguistics and empirically oriented linguistics. The two parties, he says, are united in their contempt of applied linguistics, which in their eyes include translation studies. Klein's critical paper ends in an appeal to linguists, who "should take the specific problems of translation more seriously and consider them to be an integral part of their job. This would not only help to solve these specific problems but also to solve the task of linguistics in general – the task to explain the human language faculty." (p. 123) The appeal, it must be said, has not had much resonance.

At the other side of the spectrum, there have, indeed, been several attempts at applying linguistic concepts in systematic studies of translation. Over the last fifty years or so, there has been a regular stream of linguistically-based approaches in translation studies - however narrow it may be when compared with the vast amount of theoretical literature on linguistic issues 'proper'. A major part goes into the intricate problems of machine translation, which has to deal with a great variety of highly detailed linguistic properties at all levels involved in the production of texts. However, as problems of implementation promote their own, most specific aspects of translation, machine-translation-oriented approaches have lost their original appeal to conventional translation studies. Although there is a considerable part of research devoted to machine (aided) translation – as can be seen, for example, in Kay/Gawron/Norwig 1994, Hauenschild/Heizmann 1997, Dyvik 1998, Teich 1999 etc. –, the main interest in translation studies has turned to more abstract models.

To some extent the prevalent models of translation mirror the changes in main stream linguistics: transformational grammar, which Nida attempted to adapt to translation studies (1964), was soon felt to be "not very useful, since translating is not a strictly mechanical or rule-governed activity, but a complex process for making critical judgements about a myriad of linguistic, cultural, and aesthetic matters (1986: 12)." "Capturing the 'spirit' of a text is", as Nida says, "in many cases the most crucial of all factors in translating. Whether the text is an article about computer technology or a hayku poem in Japanese, one needs to reflect not merely the words and sentences but the appropriate stylistic equivalences". (p. 13) As stylistic aspects were given more prominence, the concept of transformation was replaced by the less technical concept of *shift* (as used by Catford 1965), which underlies Vinay and Darbelnet's (1958) influential model about transfer patterns relating the linguistic expressions of an original to the expressions of its translation. Their concept of *transposition* bears some resemblance to strictly formal transformations, whereas their idea of *modulation* allows for semantic differences that go far beyond transformations proper. While the taxonomies of shifts developed for literary translations (as by Levý 1969, or Leuven-Zwart 1989) promoted ever more complex subcategorizations (Munday speaks of thirty seven subcategories in Leuven-Zwart's model), the arrival of speech act theory in linguistics promoted a theoretical and methodological reorientation in translation studies. Extending the objects of linguistic inquiries from syntactic and semantic onto pragmatic levels, in particular onto the various communicative functions of language use, and from the properties of sentences to those of texts or discourse also stimulated functional and text linguistic approaches in translation studies.

The models proposed along these lines were very abstract, stressing the importance of the communicative purpose (*skopos*) of translation (Reiss/Vermeer 1984) and of the various roles played by the participants of the communicative process (Holz-Mänttäri 1986). But the ways in which the various factors produce the translation shifts that can be read off from the linguistic structures of the original and its translation did not receive any systematic attention by the proponents of *skopos* theory and related approaches.

Nevertheless, there are linguistically-based approaches to translation which aim at connecting the functions of language use with a detailed structural view of the linguistic means involved. In this, the Hallidayean (1985) model of language and language use, *Systemic Functional Grammar,* plays a dominant role (in House 1977, 1997; Steiner 1991; Baker 1992; Hatim & Mason 1990, 1997; Teich 2003, to name some of the more influential authors). But there are also studies of translation concentrating on the use of certain linguistic means which present their findings within other theoretical frameworks. To mention just a few authors who include English in their studies: Lindquist (1989) studies adverbials in translations of English and American novels into Swedish, using the taxonomy set up in the most comprehensive grammar of English (Quirk et al. 1985); Hauenschild (1991) presents her findings on anaphora resolution within Gazdar et al.'s *Generalized Phrase Structure Grammar* (1985); Behrens (1999) concentrates on the translation of *ing*-participial attributes from English into Norwegian, and Fabricius-Hansen (1999a) discusses aspects of translational sentence splitting between English, German and Norwegian – both authors relate their findings to Kamp's *Discourse Representation Theory* (1994); Mats Johannson (2001) offers a contrastive study of clefts in English and Swedish texts and translations within Fillmore's *Construction Grammar* as adopted by Lambrecht (1994); Schmid (1999) focuses on word order in German and English within the theoretical framework of *Cognitive Grammar*, especially Langacker's theory of subjectivity (1990); Doherty (1996, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2005) looks successively at passive-like structures, adverbial clauses, discourse relators, cleft-like structures and the beginnings of sentences in translations between English and German, adapting the generative framework of *Government and Binding* and *Theoretical Semantics* as used in linguistic and psycholinguistic theories on information structure (for example by Abraham 1992; Drubig 1997; Büring 1997; Bader 2000, and others).

It is certainly no coincidence that studies like these appear in journals and series related to contrastive linguistics, corpus linguistics or machine translation. Such affiliations seem to support the suspicion that contrastive studies of translations do not belong to translation studies proper. Koller (1995), discussing the concepts of equivalence in translation studies and contrastive linguistics, says that the two disciplines are seen as focusing either on the uses or on the systems of language. He quotes Ivir (1974), who views translation merely as a source of observational data for contrastive analyses. But this is not necessarily so.

Although we cannot deny that any linguistic means is subject to certain conditions of use which may be related to its morpho-syntactic properties, the linguistic properties cannot be derived from the functional properties. The conditions for the use of active or passive, different word order, coordination or subordination, fully lexicalized phrases or pro-forms and the like cannot be read off from the syntactic-semantic properties of these means. They have to be studied in vivo, that is, in the various texts the linguistic elements occur in. And if we compare the conditions for the use of voice, word order, clefts, etc. in the texts of two languages, we will find ourselves in the centre of translation studies whenever the relation of equivalence is involved in the comparison. That is, translation studies and contrastive linguistics do not coincide, but overlap, and it is the overlapping part for which linguistic concepts and assumptions are required in translation studies.

But the fact that authors like the ones of the above studies adhere to different theoretical frameworks makes reading difficult for the outsider and limits mutual understanding or a unifying assessment of research results. The disparity is to some extent rooted in the different properties of the linguistic means compared. Even if an identical means, as for example voice, is studied, conditions for its use may be searched for at different linguistic levels. We could look at the differences between active and passive in terms of semantic roles linked to special case frames at the morphosyntactic level and focus on the language-specific conditions of lexical alternations. But different uses of voice may also be studied at the level of pragmatic conditions associated with the discourse related organisation of information. The language-specific conditions of word order can promote the use of alternative perspectives in original and translated texts. (A unifying approach to such grammatical and pragmatic aspects of the active-passive perspective in translations between German and English is attempted in Doherty 1996.) We can also neglect all the idiosyncratic details of individual examples and compare the use of voice in regard to its quantitative distributions in original or parallel texts, in monolingual or bilingual studies (as is demonstrated by Teich 2003, who looks at transitivity and voice, theme/rheme, pre- and postnominal modifiers and the like in translations between English and German).

Studying such linguistic means in translation is a frustrating experience, not only because of the sheer number of aspects that have to be taken into account, but also because of the intricate interaction between, say, voice and a virtually unlimited number of other means. But whether linguistic aspects are taken on implicitly or – despite all discouraging perspectives – explicitly, the greatest challenge which has to be met either way is inherited from the idols of the theatre in linguistics. Having worked within a certain theoretical framework for some time, it seems almost impossible to make oneself understood at any of the other 'stages'.

The incompatibilities manifest themselves to a large extent in the linguistic terminologies associated with different theories. Although most of the terms used reoccur almost everywhere, they participate in different conceptual systems and may carry widely divergent meanings. Unless we are familiar with the individual systems, we will not be aware of the conceptual differences between apparently similar terms – a phenomenon well-known in translation as 'false friends'. The differences may even include diametrically opposite interpretations, such as the concept of 'focus', which is related to new information or to (the most active part of) given information – the latter is prevalent in research work close to Artificial Intelligence.

The greatest conceptual divide between the various linguistic approaches occurs between functionalist and structuralist frameworks. As the terms 'structural' and 'nominal phrases' in the title of the book indicate, structural aspects will be in the centre of the issues taken up in the following. The choice of a structural rather than a functional criterion for the collection of data does not preclude a functional approach, though. Thus, collecting data about the translation of nominal phrases from English into German will involve all the structural aspects of such phrases in the two languages and a great number of noun phrase internal or noun phrase external cases of restructuring in the translations, but it will also involve the various functional aspects correlated with the structural differences.

For example, if a sentence like

(R1) *Bacon's inductive method is faulty through insufficient emphasis on hypothesis.* (Russell 1945: 544)

is translated into German as

(R2) *Die Schwäche von Bacons Induktionsmethode besteht darin, daß sie die Bedeutung von Hypothesen verkennt.*

we find a whole cluster of differences contributing to the restructuring of the original noun phrases in the translation. To describe these differences, we need a great variety of linguistic concepts related to the lexico-syntactic forms and their functions.

At the syntactic level, the subject has been lowered from a primary into a secondary function: it is now used as an attribute of a nominal head. The head, *Schwäche/weakness*, carries the meaning of the adjective *faulty*, that is, it corresponds to part of the predicate. The nominal phrase following the causal preposition in the original *insufficient emphasis on hypothesis* is extended into a clausal object following the pronominal adverb *darin*. Everything except for the noun *hypothesis* – which is used in the plural – is reformulated in the clause.

The syntactic differences are accompanied by semantic and pragmatic differences, and the crucial question is whether the translation is equivalent to the original, and if so, what are the language-specific conditions that could account for the equivalence between such widely divergent structures? The answers to these questions require a great variety of concepts related to the semantic-pragmatic functions of the formal means involved in the comparison. They comprise the various levels of propositional, (ideational/experiential) modal, attitudinal, and illocutive (interpersonal) meaning, their discourse (textual) functions and stilistic aspects, including features of register and the like.

For the sake of simplicity, some of the variables associated with these features can be preset at certain values and thus neglected in the taxonomy of translation data. Russel's history was first published in 1945, but the linguistic means used in the sentence quoted can be assumed to remain within the borders of neutral language use which the interested reader would also today consider as unmarked within the register of academic, written language. If the purpose (skopos) of the translation is to retain the functions of Russel's text as far as is possible in German, we can fix the global functions of the translation at a default value and concentrate on the local functions of the individual means – which, as the German version shows, comprise a highly intricate set of linguistic properties at the various levels of lexico-syntactic, semantic-pragmatic uses of language.

Regarding the local functions, the question about the equivalence between original and translation can be broken down into a set of questions concerning the equivalence of all their linguistic features as determined by the formal means at the various lexico-syntactic, semantic-pragmatic levels. And the question about the language-specific conditions that could account for the equivalence between divergent structures can be broken down into a set of questions concerning the role of each individual difference between the original and its translation.

Looking at the mere number of differences and thinking of their intricate interaction, the comparison of original and translated sentences like (R1) and (R2) seem to present an insurmountable course of obstacles. But if we add the local context to the original sentence, it will help us to identify the contextually relevant segments of the linguistic forms. Sentence

(R1) *Bacon's inductive method is faulty through insufficient emphasis on hypothesis.*

happens to be Russel's first statement in the concluding summary of his essay on Francis Bacon's role in philosophy. In fact, this sentence is returning to the initial assessment with which Russell opened the essay:

> *Francis Bacon (1561–1626), although his philosophy is in many ways unsatisfactory, has permanent importance as the founder of modern inductive method and the pioneer in the attempt at logical systematization of scientific procedure.*
> (Russell 1945: 541)

After having described Bacon's life and philosophical views in altogether nine appreciative critical paragraphs, Russell pronounces his verdict on what he considers to be the crucial weakness of Bacon's philosophy. The contextual analysis helps us to identify the statement *Bacon's inductive method is faulty* as a major discourse topic of the essay, and the adverbial *through insufficient emphasis on hypothesis* as the focus of Russel's comment about this topic. In the following sentences Russell elaborates his judgement:

> *Bacon's inductive method is faulty through insufficient emphasis on hypothesis. He hoped that mere orderly arrangement of data would make the right hypothesis obvious, but this is seldom the case. As a rule, the framing of hypotheses is the most difficult part of scientific work, and the part where great ability is indispensable.*
> (Russell 1945: 545)

Within the fixed parameters of translation purpose and register, we expect an equivalent translation to retain the discourse functions of (R1). Looking at the German translation in

(R2) *Die Schwäche von Bacons Induktionsmethode besteht darin, dass sie die Bedeutung von Hypothesen verkennt.*

we may be willing to say that this version is discourse equivalent. But if we were asked to assess the contribution of the individual structural shifts, we would quickly feel at a loss because of the great variety of features involved.

Fortunately, the assessment can be broken down into a series of shorter steps, starting from a structurally closer translation and working our way towards the version in (R2) through a set of paraphrases in which each paraphrase deviates from the preceding one in no more than one formal feature.

A structurally closer translation would be

(R3) *Bacons Induktionsmethode ist fehlerhaft aufgrund [des/eines] ungenügenden Nachdrucks auf Hypothese[n].*

(The brackets indicate grammatically necessary changes concerning the use of articles and number.) The paraphrase will be assessed as stylistically – if not grammatically – inadequate by most speakers of German.

The formally 'analogous' version, can be compared with a more acceptable paraphrase which extends the prepositional phrase of (R3) into a subclause:

(R4) *Bacons Induktionsmethode ist fehlerhaft, weil sie nicht genügend Nachdruck auf Hypothesen legt.*

We can then compare (R4) with a version containing the subclause of (R2):

(R5) *Bacons Induktionsmethode ist fehlerhaft, weil sie die Bedeutung von Hypothesen verkennt.*

and (R5) with a version containing the main clause of (R2) – except for the initial noun *Fehlerhaftigkeit/Schwäche:*

(R6) *Die Fehlerhaftigkeit von Bacons Induktionsmethode besteht darin, daß sie die Bedeutung von Hypothesen verkennt.*

Assessment of each grammatically adequate paraphrase concerns the appropriateness of the restructured part relative to its discourse function within the local (and global) context of the paraphrase.

In a less systematic way the paraphrasing method is, as a rule, part of the search for appropriate target language versions in the process of translation. (Toury 1995, 'tracing the emergence of a translation' reproduces Hartmann's 1980 example of an original document illustrating successive stages of a dozen or so English paraphrases leading from a German sentence to the final version of its English translation, 187ff.) The paraphrase method and the discourse-based analysis together can help us stabilize intuitions about equivalence and the share of each individual element in it. The method can also be used as a research tool in determining the language-specific conditions for equivalence between original and translation.

As the example demonstrates, the comparison of an original and its set of translation paraphrases will involve questions of discourse relevance and thus linguistic categories of information structure (theme/rheme, focus/background, topic/comment and the like) as well as the language-specific forms of its encoding (questions of rank, word order, explicitness and the like). The various theoretical views associated with these issues will be taken up by the first two chapters of the book. They will also present the basic assumptions concerning discourse appropriateness and language-specific structures, including a detailed discussion of the highly sensitive question of empirical data, intuition and objectivity.

The third chapter will concentrate on noun phrase internal differences between the original and its translation, the fourth chapter on noun phrase external differences and the fifth will take up appositions and sentence borders in translations between English and German. All sections will be presented with a critical eye on Bacon's five idols, attaching the highest degree of critical attentiveness to the idol of the theatre translation studies has inherited from linguistics.