

CONTRASTIVE RHETORIC AND LANGUAGE AS A SOCIAL SEMIOTIC

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1 Early Pragmatics

In the field of pragmatics, it is now generally accepted that the reception or production of optimally felicitous use of language necessarily requires that "some small but powerful set of general principles of inference to interlocutors' communicative intentions in specific contexts" is systematically invoked (Levinson 1981:481-2). In this respect, Paul Grice has made a valuable contribution, raising a number of exciting questions which have remarkably influenced our whole attitude to language use. According to Grice, meaning is not determined beforehand but is negotiated only while utterances are made. Indeed, meaning may well become fixed in the process, but all the way, this is informed by a variety of contextual factors, including hearers' cognitive processing abilities to infer meaning from context. Background knowledge and related assumptions feature prominently in these activities and, along with situationality and a range of co-textual clues, essentially form the context of an utterance.

The Gricean scheme hinges on the idea of the Cooperative Principle and on a set of Maxims which regulate how knowledge is conveyed when people imply, suggest or mean something distinct from what they 'say'. This is important since here the text user would not be seen as constantly committed to acting under conventionally established conditions, but is a freer agent. True, the text user is essentially someone who is "merely trying to communicate with a minimum of needless effort and disturbances" (Beaugrande & Dressler 1981:123). But, as the authors go on to argue, this is not always straightforward and producers'

intentionality itself may lead them to violate the maxims when it seems expedient.

Furthermore, conventionalized ways of speaking or writing are not internalized intact and called up everytime an occasion arises which requires their use. Nor is it helpful to promote the attitude that we are all engaged all the time in so-called 'cooperative' interactions whose ground rules we have an equal say in. In reality, interaction can be and often is socially strained by diverse social struggles and inequalities of power (Fairclough 1989). This leads to an element of creativity in the performance of text users which can be adequately accounted for only by a theory of 'action' envisaged in terms of 'social practice' (von Wright 1967).

2 Early Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics has traditionally provided pragmaticians with a point of departure in the search for a definition of context. Here, the quest has invariably been to find systematic correlates in language of a range of social variable. Hymes's (1962) model of speech events has pioneered this trend and is certainly one of the earliest approaches to the analysis of text-context interaction. Included in such a scheme are the basic variables Situation, Participants, Ends, Act Sequences, Key or tone, Instrumentalities or channel, Norms and Genre. However, as in most work in sociolinguistics, we are here presented with a catalogue of textual resources at the disposal of the individual to operate with; we are not yet explicitly told what to do with these resources once we begin to perform. As Thomas (1995: 188) points out, part of the generally static nature of the proposals we have here is the way the Hymesian framework is designed to cater for the more formal and ritualized type of event such as weddings, funerals, and other ceremonial settings.

3 Activity Type

A more substantive, indeed crucial, point regarding the viability of sociolinguistic frameworks such as that of speech events relates to these models not being fully equipped to handle the intrinsically variable nature of communicative behaviour. For example, in using variables such as those listed by Hymes, there is no way of telling, as Thomas puts it, "why is it that one person performs very differently from another in the 'same'

linguistic situation"? (p. 189). This element of individual creativity leads Thomas to propose the notion of 'activity type' as a more meaningful alternative. Levinson (1979:368) defines an activity type in the following terms:

A fuzzy category whose focal members are goal-defined, socially-constituted, bounded, events with constraints on participants; setting, and so on, but above all on the kinds of allowable contributions. Paradigm examples would be teaching, a job interview, a jural interrogation, a football game, a task in a workshop, a dinner party and so on.

Where the activity type model differs from other sociolinguistic frameworks is precisely in the powerful insight that context can both constrain and be constrained by the way individuals use language. Recently, critical linguists have wholeheartedly endorsed this position. Fowler (1981:21), for example, sees that:

There is a dialectical interrelationship between language and social structure: the varieties of linguistic usage are both products of socio-economic forces and institutions - reflexes of such factors as power relations, occupational roles, social stratifications, etc. - and practices which are instrumental in forming and legitimating the same social forces and institutions.

4 The Construction of Meaning

In her outline of the various theories of pragmatics and the basic notions propounded, Thomas (1995) subscribes to one basic premise, namely that pragmatics is motivated: ("people have reasons for speaking as they do") and that it is dynamic ("the way in which people use language is not solely a reflection of sets of social and contextual variables - people can be seen to use language in order to bring about change" - p. 183). This process of 'meaning making' thus derives its impetus from context and in turn feeds into the situations within which text utterances are embedded. In fact, it is to this interactive cycle that Thomas constantly appeals throughout her analysis. For example, 'conversational' (as opposed to conventional) implicatures arise only in particular contexts of utterance

and, when alternative interpretations of an implicature are perceived, "the context of utterance is such that one interpretation is very much more probable than others" (p. 88-89).

Operating with a continuum which has at one end events or activity types that leave little room for individual creativity, and at the other end situations where individual contribution can make or break, Thomas (1995: 190-2) lists a number of factors which are borne in mind in the specification of a given activity type. These are:

(1) The goals of the participants. It is interesting to note here that the focus of attention is on the goals of individuals and not the goals of events. As Thomas points out, the goal of a trial may be to come up with a fair verdict; this is different from the goals of, on the one hand, the prosecution lawyer and, on the other hand, those of the defense lawyer, two sets of goals which are different one from the other (to get vs. to ward off a verdict of 'guilty').

(2) Allowable contributions. This relates to the conventional nature of the do's and don'ts which constrain what can or cannot be said on certain occasions of language use (e.g. the prosecution is not allowed to refer to a defendant's previous convictions in a court of law).

(3) Adherence to the Gricean maxims. This relates to expectations and to how these can explain variation in the way conversational or conventional maxims are observed or not observed across activity types (e.g. the truth is hardly expected in media interviews with politicians, but is wholly expected in Confession).

(4) Adherence to interpersonal maxims. This relates to expectations and to how these can explain variation in the way interpersonal maxims are observed or not observed across cultures (e.g. the way the Modesty maxim is handled in Japan is different from British attitudes and, within the latter, it varies across activity types such as awards ceremonies).

(5) Turn-taking and topic control. What is at issue here is how these orchestration devices are exploited to control the interaction.

(6) The manipulation of pragmatic parameters. These relate to aspects of the interaction such as social distance, power, size of imposition and so on.

5 Modelling Context

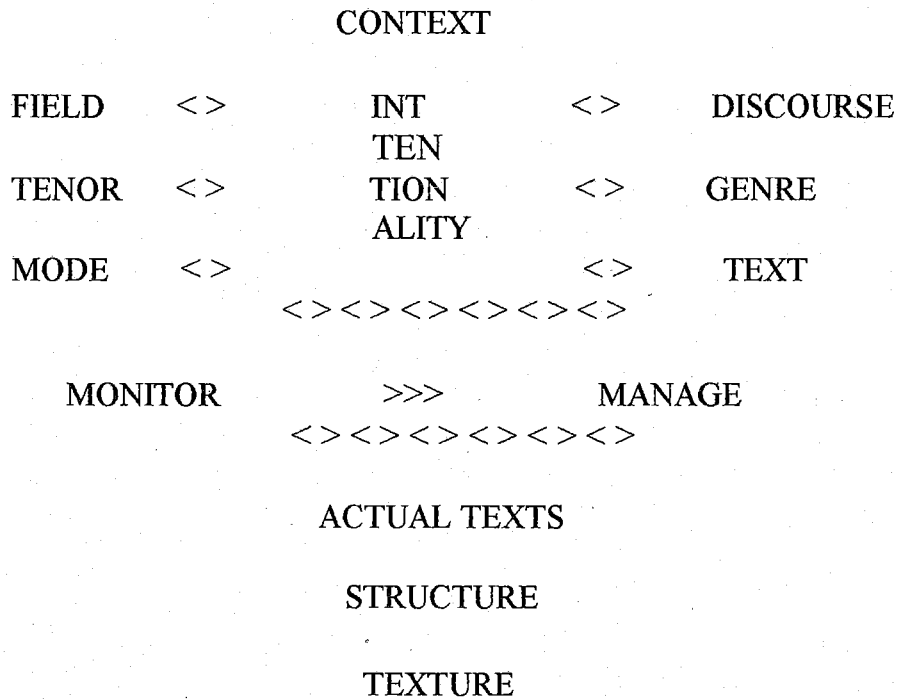
In the previous sections, the basic elements of implied meaning are outlined. The focus has been on the Gricean model of implicature and cooperative maxims, and on the various schemes which have emerged in an attempt to rectify some of the shortcomings exhibited by traditional pragmatic accounts. More recent interactive models make the point that, when it comes to pragmatic meaning in general and that of implicature or speech acts in particular, the context of the utterance is the last court of appeal. Operationally, the notion of context subsumes textual structures which go beyond the sentence and which take in entire sentence sequences and contextual configurations (e.g. the 'speech event' and the 'activity type').

All of this points to the urgent need to define the notion of textuality more procedurally and to take this as the framework within which pragmatics and other contextual dimensions can now be viewed. The process involved is one of context feeding off and at one and the same time contributing to the development of texts effectively, efficiently and appropriately (Beaugrande, 1980). It is now my aim to outline the elements of such a model and relate the various parameters to pragmatic postulates so far in the main relegated to what at times amounts to an empty use of the phrase 'in or out of context'.

I shall start with the image of an egg timer as a graphic representation of the way text and context interact. The upper half of the egg timer may be construed as 'context', and the lower half as 'text'. Purely as a convenience, I will commence with the very narrow conduit which allows the downward passage of the grains of sands from one cell to the other. In this area of contextual activity, we recognize what may be described at a macro-level as the intention to do one of two things with text utterances: either to 'monitor' a situation in a fairly detached, unmediated fashion, or to 'manage' a situation by attempting to steer the text receiver in a direction favourable to the text producer. This intentionality derives its impetus from the 'virtual' semiotics of text (as a sign attending to rhetorical purpose) and in turn simultaneously acts on 'actual' texts. As

concrete entities, these are structured and textured in particular ways, thus facilitating the link with those aspects of the register membership of the text specifically to do with 'mode'. Mode subsumes the 'instrumentalities' including 'channel' conventionally sanctioned as appropriate (e.g. the spoken vs. the written message). This initial phase in our model may now be represented thus:

Figure 1



Within mode as an aspect of register membership, there will be variations in the degree of proximity not only between text producer and receiver but also between the producer/receiver and the subject matter. We have all come across some people who speak like a book, thus displaying a fairly great physical distance. Such an orientation has implications for the way we textualize our utterances (theme-rheme, cohesion, etc. or 'texture' for short) and for how utterances are put together in sequences within a structural plan.

6 Socio-textual Practices

Monitoring (and sub-intentions such as engaging in description, narration, or straightforward exposition) and managing (implementing the intention to counter-argue or through-argue a point) are essentially enveloped by a higher-order set of intentions which address the need to operate within the conventional requirements of genre. This subsumes our ability to use those linguistic means of expression that are appropriate to particular occasions of language use and to the goals of the participants in them. Genre is thus bound up with textual proximity, with interpersonal meanings of power and solidarity and with institutional instructions of field, as this example shows:

Sample 1

'Do you really need to switch from sunglasses to those Acuvue(r) disposable contact lenses?'" asked Mum.

'I do' I replied.

In processing this advertising text, we encounter a number of pragmatic problems. First, there is the 'dissuading' speech act performed indirectly through a question (*Do you really need to...*). Second, there is the elliptical 'agreement' speech act (*I do*). Both these pragmatic readings, however, are possible only through invoking the dynamics of genre. Included here are factors such as the 'social occasion' involved, the 'communicative event' catered for and, most significantly, the conventional nature of linguistic expression sanctioned as an appropriate mode of thinking about and speaking in these occasions. Obviously, the form of words would be more fossilized in certain contexts than in others (e.g. *'I do'* as a marriage proposal acceptance). The cliched nature of such textual occurrences could, however, be made extremely dynamic when hijacked from their natural habitat and used incongruously elsewhere as in the present situation.

But for attitudinal expression to come through and take shape in actual language use, both texts and genres (at a virtual, semiotic, sign-level and, as we shall see, at the more concrete level of actual realization) would ultimately be intended to facilitate the way attitudinal statements are made. This is at a fairly high level of abstraction. In terms of the minutiae

of linguistic expression, on the other hand, texts and genres would be used to cater for specific aspects of attitudinal expression such as racism, feminism. Note how these discursual practices also link up with textual proximity (mode) and 'institutional' affiliation (field) as well as with interpersonal power-oriented distance or power-free solidarity. This may be illustrated by the following example:

Sample 2

GIRL 7 MURDERED WHILE MUM DRANK AT THE PUB

Little Nicola Spencer was strangled in her bedsit home - while her Mum was out drinking and playing pool in local pubs. (...)

The Sun 20 December 1986, cited in Clark 1992

Traditional pragmatic analysis of speech acts or implicatures would almost certainly fail to identify and accommodate the discursive attitudes relayed by these particular (and peculiar) lexico-grammatical choices. The report continues in this way, systematically exploiting the agentless passive and appending the kind of circumstantial clause, all the time shifting the blame from the male perpetrator of the crime and thus promoting the ideals of a sexist institution (Clark 1992).

These contextual requirements, which inform and are constantly informed by text user decisions, feed collectively into the way texts are put together (structure) and are made to hang together (texture). That is, context shapes and is in turn shaped by actual manifestations of cohesion and coherence and the egg-timer image relaying this two-way bottom-up, top-down interaction between textual response and contextual input is thus most appropriate. But, to focus on the level of textual realization, the three register variables of physical proxemity, social distance and institutional affiliations would eventually be all reflected in actual texts. So would the requirements of the three semiotic categories of text, genre and discourse. The lexico-grammar responds with specific forms of linguistic expression to the various elements of register membership and semiotic interaction. Take field, for example. Here, systems of transitivity will be mobilized through specific selections such as passivization or nominalization to implement the requirements of institutional affiliation. By the same token, the linguistic resources of mood and modality will be

optimally tapped to work in harness with field but specifically to serve levels of power and solidarity within interpersonal tenor. Finally, sentential and beyond the sentence realization of higher-order specifications render texts actually operational by utilizing the textual resources at the disposal of the language user. This is to enable us put to work the overall intention not only to produce a cohesive and coherent text, but also to pitch the text at the appropriate level of proxemic distance, social distance, etc.

One basic principle at work in realizing this diverse set of intentions is intertextuality. This may be identified at the level of actual texts, discourses and genres and at the more virtual level of signs. In what we see or hear, there will be images of concepts by which cultures operate (socio-cultural objects like "Asian restaurants" or "TV dinners"). These can indeed be cliched and rather dormant, but often they are brought in to take part in making higher-order attitudinal statements (discursive practices) and in propping up generic and textual structures that enable attitudinal expression to come through. Such a socio-textual form of intertextuality (or what Fairclough 1989 terms "vertical intertextuality") has to do with our ability to identify discourses, genres and texts and to operate within the parameters set by these semiotic macro-structures. But, communication is not always so stable. There will always be those textual occurrences which are highly dynamic and often expectation-defying, even norm bending, as the following example clearly shows:

Sample 3

LAURIE
TAYLOR
THIS WEEK'S COURSES

Getting the Most out of Your Photocopier - an introductory course by Gordon Carshalton, Emeritus Xerox Professor of Double-sided Copying, University of Tewkesbury.

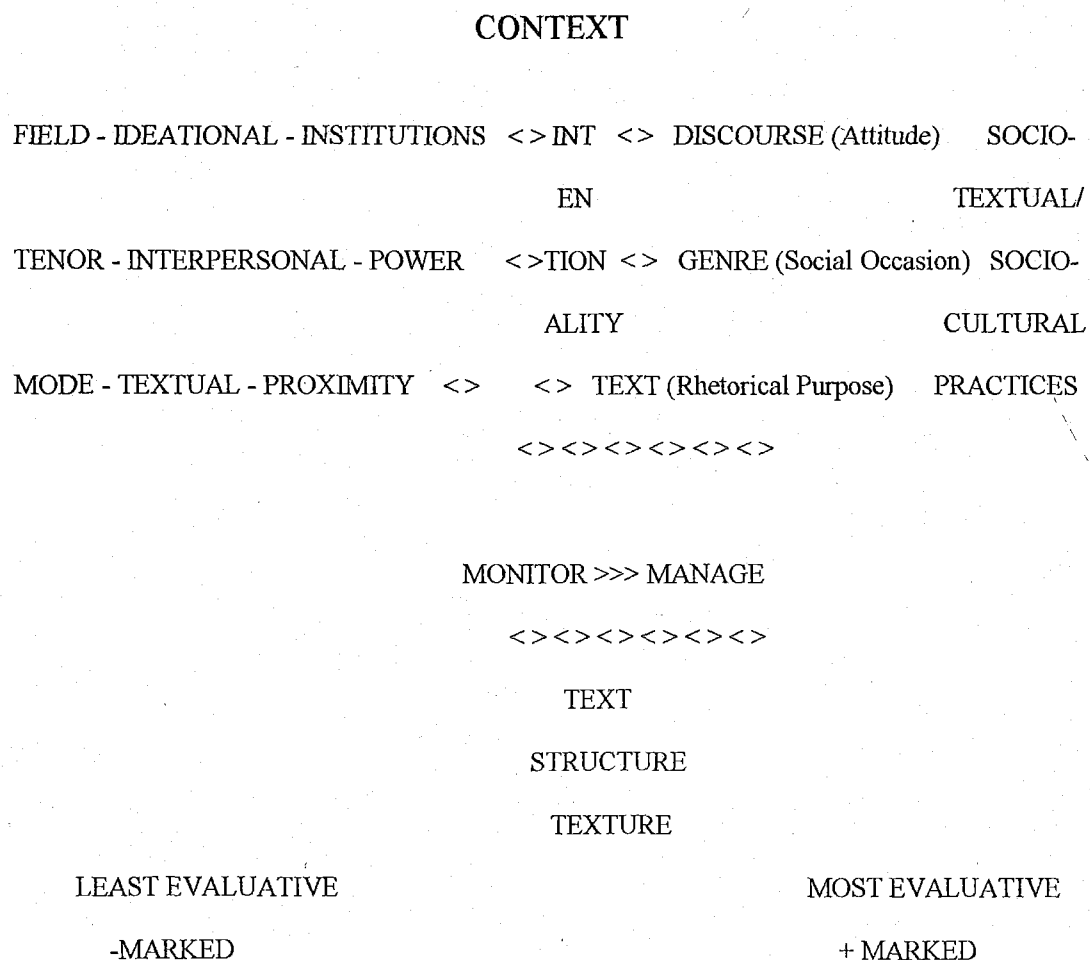
Seminar 1: Pulling off the bits of paper which stick round the rollers. (...)

Times Higher Education 1995.

Texts like this reflect the degree of turbulence in sign systems, opaqueness of intentionality and register hybridization. Furthermore, such

dynamism is invariably reflected in both the structure and the texture of the words we see or hear. The overall effect has to do with markedness which interacts with the other variable of evaluativeness yielded by monitoring and managing. Diagrammatically, the egg-timer image may now be extended to encompass texture and structure and to show the relationship between markedness and evaluativeness:

Figure 2



7 A Cross-cultural View of Socio-textual Practices

Texts, discourses and genres, then, are modes of writing or speaking deemed conventionally appropriate for given

- Rhetorical purposes (e.g. argumentation as a text type)
- Attitudinal/Ideological positions (e.g. racism as discourse)
- Communicative routines (e.g. the tourist guide as a genre)

It is the latter socio-textual structure of genre which will occupy us in the following discussion of cross-cultural pragmatics and the translator at work. Genres serve the norms and conventions recognized by communities of text users as appropriate 'fashions' of speaking or writing in and about given communicative 'events'. Genre integrity must thus involve:

- The communicative event in question
- The purposes of the 'participants' in such an event
- The formulaic kind of language sanctioned as the norm in such an event

Such defining characteristics, however, are not sufficiently restrictive. They allow for a diverse variety of 'styles' to qualify as 'genres': the novel or short story, Mills & Boon romance, the horror movie, the Western, the James Bond movie, the academic article, the book review, the editorial, the news report, the Letter to the Editor, the cooking recipe, and so on. Indeed, these are all valid genre structures, each with its own norms and conventions, communicative rules, participants' roles and goals, etc. Nevertheless, to be meaningful in a context of applied language use such as academic writing or translating, the category genre would have to be defined more narrowly, and more stringent criteria for what may be admitted as a genre would have to be worked out.

From a cross-cultural perspective, we suggest that genres worthy of consideration in domains such as the training of translators or academic writers would be those which present the language user with a 'gap' to bridge - a considerable cultural gap of some kind between what is acceptable in the target language (L2 norms) and preferences dictated by the source language (L1 norms). As used here, the term 'cultural gap' is

underpinned by a view of 'culture' which, as shown elsewhere (see, for example, Hatim 1999), transcends catalogues of socio-cultural objects (i.e. micro-signs to do with such categories as 'ecology', 'history') and focuses instead on socio-textual practices (i.e. macro-signs such as 'genre' or 'discourse').

To illustrate notions such as 'textual norms' and 'cultural gap' in evidence at this higher-order 'semiotic' activity, let us consider an example of what we take to be a typical 'tourist brochure' in English:

Sample 4

The reptile house has exhibits of many of the Arabian snakes and lizards. [...] A huge aviary, with a waterfall cascading down rocks into a small lake and river shows several species of local songbirds. [...] A long corridor leads back to the entrance past enclosures containing baboons.

A number of features characterize this kind of writing. From the perspective of language as a social semiotic, however, the use of the lexicogrammar to serve the requirements of genre is particularly noteworthy. The agency of the 'visitor' (who is the primary recipient/addressee/consumer of this kind of text) is handled in a particular manner which draws attention not to the entity 'visitor' as such (as would be the case in restoring full agency to the visitor by having him or her 'do things') but rather to 'what is being visited'. The latter focus on the 'objects' in the visitor's environment is served through resorting to such structures as the Passive as in

On the other side and scattered all around Rock Hyraxes can be observed in their favoured habitat.

A drastically different discursive game is played out in producing tourist brochures for languages such as Arabic. The agency of the 'visitor' is handled in a manner which draws attention not to 'what is being visited', but rather to the entity 'visitor' himself or herself. Full agency is restored and the visitor is presented as 'doing things'. This is seen in shifting the focus away from the 'objects' in the visitor's environment and towards the visitor through resorting to such structures as the Active as in:

yabda 'u az-za'iru jawlatahu bi-iktishafi qism az-zawaaHifi
 (The visitor begins his tour by discovering the reptile department)

That is, while the requirements of the genre 'tourist brochure' in English stipulate that the visitor be held constant (identity sidelined or even suppressed), and objects allowed to revolve around him or her, the conventions for Arabic demand the opposite: that the objects are held constant and the visitor allowed to revolve around them.

Such genre arrangements tend to convey their own discourse values: the extent to which certain cultures value the identity of the observer and recognize his or her full agency. Thus, while English tends to 'objectify' experience, Arabic 'subjectifies' and 'personalizes' experience. In commenting on the tourist guide data cited here, and the disparity of semiotic perspective outlined above, Beaugrande (2000) has this to say:

The English guide objectifies the zoo's contents as if these existed quite independently of any visitor, who is not even mentioned. Instead, the displays and rooms are expressed as Actors of Actions like 'having exhibits', 'containing species', and 'leading back'; the last of these is most obstinate in ignoring the visitor, who deserves to be at least the Object of the Verb. In direct contrast, the Arabic guide allots great prominence to 'the visitor', who performs Actions like 'beginning his tour', 'discovering the reptile department', and 'continuing his journey'. In English, the objects remain static and fixed; in Arabic, the visitor is dynamic and keeps moving around.

8 An Applied Linguistic Angle

In an insightful article on genre from an applied-linguistic and translation-theoretical perspective, James (1989) deals with generic manifestations such as the conventional formats of writing the haiku or the sonnet. Genre is also seen in terms of such types of writing as the 'report', fairly general 'organizational' activities within these modes of writing (e.g. the preparation part and the analysis part in articles describing scientific experiments), or more specific 'moves' (e.g. summarizing previous

research). But, as James suggests, whichever sense of genre we choose to adopt, one thing is certain: genres carry traces of their identity and through linguistic (lexical and syntactic) devices signal and insist on their textual integrity. For example, there will be markers of transition from one move or organizational activity to another, and the language of summarizing previous research will be qualitatively different from that used, say, in introducing present research in academic articles.

The emphasis in genre analysis, then, is "on the conventional, formulaic, routine labour-saving aspect of language use" (James 1989: 32). This is differentiated from what schemas, frames, scenarios or scripts plans do. It is also distinguished from what text types such as description, narration and argumentation do. According to James (32), this is not exactly what happens in genres: "Scripts [tend] to involve more than just the language used"; other non-verbal aspects are usually involved in structures like the restaurant-script (entering the place, eating, etc.). Furthermore, "Scripts have a broader scope than Genres in a sense which goes beyond the verbal/nonverbal dimension".

Thus, the real differences between genres and other kinds of macro-structures must ultimately lie in the 'semiotics' of the utterance act, the way utterances signify as 'signs', impose order on our perception, partition reality in different ways, cater for socio-cultural mores and above all become part of what we have called 'socio-textual' practices. We come to texts armed with a set of expectations to be confirmed or disconfirmed as textual evidence unfolds. This is strictly regulated by intertextuality which taps our knowledge of previously encountered texts. This is how text types evolve as templates which, while having so much in common with genre, are nevertheless distinct as systems of signification.

Reading skills are of course important in the preparation which students might receive within this approach. But as James (1989: 39-40) incisively observes,

Translation is what goes on in the space between reading the SL text and writing the TL text, and that therefore it is on this interface that we ought to be concentrating, and not on reading and writing as assumed preconditions for translation skill.

To return to our sample of the English tourist brochure (Sample 4 above), this has been handled extremely well by a translator who is no doubt aware of genre requirements in English and Arabic. The following is an example of how the visitor's agency is kept appropriately intact, yielding a parallel text which functions so well in the target language – Arabic.

Sample 5

English Source Text: *The reptile house has exhibits of many of the Arabian snakes and lizards.*

Arabic Target Text: *yabda'u al-za'iru jawlatahu bi-iktishafi qism al-zawaaHifi*

Back-translation: *The visitor begins his tour by discovering the reptile department*

[...] A huge aviary, with a waterfall cascading down rocks into a small lake and river shows several species of local songbirds.

Thumma yutabiCu al-riHla li yajida nafsahu dinna qafaSin haa'il tanHadiru fihi shallalaatu al-maa' Cala al-Sukhuur wa yaHtawi haadha al-makaan al-fasiiH Calaa anwaaC mukhtalifa min al-Tuyuur al-mugharrida

Then he continues the journey to find himself within a huge aviary, where waterfalls cascade on the rocks. This spacious place contains different varieties of songbirds.

[...] A long corridor leads back to the entrance past enclosures containing baboons.

Wa yutabiCu al-zaa'ir riHlatahu Cibra mamarin Tawiil yaSilu bihi ilaa Haythu tuujadu al-quruud

The visitor continues his journey through a long corridor, which takes him to where there are baboons

Conclusion

This paper was concerned with the need on the part of the translator and the advanced language user to negotiate text coherence within a pragmatics that is sensitive to the way we 'word' our utterances, strike a particular level of formality and serve particular social institutions. What is needed in such acts of negotiation is a pragmatics that builds into the analysis all these insights and matches them with the prerequisite that the lexico-grammar cater for given communicative events conventionally, relay attitudes discursively and remould this input into texts that are both cohesive and coherent. As part of this coherence, texts cannot be seen only in terms of their linear arrangement but as hierarchies which serve certain plans and within which certain elements enjoy more prominence than others do.

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