Review

Hatim, Basil (2020) *Communication Across Cultures: The Linguistics of Texts in Translation*

Review by Raymond Wai-man Ng

Translation is translating culture. That is a conclusion I have drawn from my experience as a translator between English and Chinese, and a general description I give to my students of translation. Indeed, what else other than translating and translation could best exemplify communication across cultures? That is probably one of the reasons why Basil Hatim gives such a title to his book under review, on text linguistics with a specific focus on translation between English and Arabic. The overall aim of the book, however, is to bridge 'translation theory, contrastive linguistics and discourse analysis' (p. 1), which the author claims has been wanting. Such a need is strongly felt upon completion of reading and understanding the rhetorical conventions of the Arabic language and culture. The intended impact is believed to be a call for more attention to text linguistics and in general systemic functional linguistics in rendering between, but not limited to, written or spoken English and Arabic, and language teaching in general (p. 4), which I take the liberty to interpret as referring to first-language and foreign language teaching. Based on the author's comprehensive overview of all chapters in the preface (pp. 2–3), I highlight main points and observations for each chapter, with an overall response towards the end of this review.

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As Hatim elaborated in his preface, the first five chapters aim to establish a theoretical foundation. While chapter 1 advances a model deliberating the interrelationship between discourse, genre, text, and register (p. 15), chapter 2 reinforces the notion of text in context. To be more specific, from a text linguistics perspective, the meaning (or functions) of a sentence has to be understood and analyzed (and then rendered into another language in the translation process) with reference to its co-text and context. In fact, in common with such systemic functional linguists as Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, pp. 6–7) and Thompson (2014, pp. 22–23), 'sentence' (and in later chapters, 'paragraph') as an orthographic notion gets more obvious as Hatim increasingly uses terms like 'element', 'chunk' and 'part' to refer to functional units in his samples. What stands out from this chunk of chapters is the third, because it (1) introduces intertextuality, one of the most important factors determining functions of a text unit which has been cited frequently in the chapters to follow, (2) maps the three Hallidayan metafunctions (i.e. ideational, interpersonal, and textual), under register as realization of mode, tenor, and field (fig. 3.2, p. 36), and (3) associates discourse with attitudes, genre with goals of communicative events, and text with rhetorical purposes. Moreover, it advances two major generic purposes of texts from two perspectives – to inform or to persuade from the perspective of purpose, and to monitor or to manage from the perspective of interaction (pp. 39–40). Further, the six questions posed on page 32 concern not only text linguists and language typologists, but also translators and language teaching practitioners. The six questions are recited as follows:

1) What are the criteria for judging one kind of language as appropriate or inappropriate for a given situation?
2) What is it that lends texts efficiency when used in their appropriate contexts?
3) What is it that lends texts effectiveness even when not used in their expected contexts?
4) In what way does our reaction to text-in-context appropriateness, efficiency or effectiveness in instances like these form part of our textual competence?
5) Are these critical skills teachable and learnable?
6) What are the ground rules for register variation, if such a contextual option exists at all?

While Hatim has in the rest of the book attempted to answer these questions based on the English language and Arabic language, it is through the answers – or, realistically speaking, the attempts to answer such questions – that contrastive text linguistics empowers the evaluation of texts of and translation

between any two languages. It would have been a great summary had there been a section towards the end of the book which revisits those questions with renewed inputs, of which the fifth interests me the most as a translation teacher, who, like many other colleagues, has been struggling to make assessment of translations more criteria-referenced.

From general text linguistics to specific text types explored in great details, chapter 4 and 5 introduce two major subtypes of argumentative – through-argumentation and counter-argumentation – and elaborate the typological contrast between English and Arabic in general preference for counter-argumentation and through-argumentation respectively. The discussion and quotation of *Naqd al-Nathr* (pp. 56–57), on top of representing Arabic views and practices of argumentation, prepare readers for a journey of inquiry into the text linguistics of the Arabic culture.

As new additions, chapters 6 to 8 present various textual analyses. Right after argumentation preferences demonstrated in English and Arabic have been discussed in chapter 5, Hatim has tactfully chosen to discuss sociotextual practices as strategies in writing and reading with a focus on discourse, genre and text and the application of such practices in analyzing hortatory and analyticalness in translations of argumentative texts. This paves the way for his call for openness to counter-argumentation, which has long been available in the Arabic linguistic repertoire, in original writing in Arabic and translation into Arabic (p. 78, p. 81). Such a courageous advocacy seems to violate Hatim's own emphasis on sociotextual practices, but it is a reflection of his genuine understanding of the sociotextual values of Arabic counter-argumentation, opposition to indiscriminate rendering into Arabic through-argumentation, and hope for open-mindedness in Arabic rhetoric. The establishment of the contrast between hortatory (the more managing text type) and analyticalness (the more monitoring) in chapter 6 receives a thorough metafunctional analysis in chapter 7 which serves as a solid proof of higher commitment and involvement of the producer of the hortatory, followed by a list of follow-up questions (pp. 96–97) which, though highly specific to the samples being analyzed, lends itself as an example of metafunctional analysis with a text linguistic orientation. Chapter 8 brings the focus of the reader to translation and rhetorical purpose, the latter of which manifests textuality in terms of situationality, intentionality, intertextuality, and informativity. Also, ideology of translation and translation of ideology are advanced as interacting perspectives in operation which affect the translation process. Towards the end of the chapter, Hatim presents an analysis of subtitle translation as a perfect application of theories discussed, coining the concepts of deverbalization and reverbalization, 'perfect' in a sense that the contextual, temporal, and spatial constraints of subtitling forces a comprehensive extraction of functions

(meanings) of the original subtitle and subsequent representation of the functions in the most appropriate form of the target language.

Along this journey of inquiry into the text linguistics of the Arabic culture, Hatim carefully ushers in more Arabic textual conventions and those forms which realize the functions of such conventions in his samples. Chapters 9 and 10 are twins in advancing the notion of cognitive or structural paragraphing as opposed to orthographic paragraphing and revealing Arabic grammatical markers for structural paragraphing. While chapter 9 points out the relevance of structural paragraph, topic-shift approach, and text type to the evaluation of translation, chapter 10 provides – besides argumentation that has made heavy appearance in previous chapters – narrative samples as illustration of the grammatical markers, demonstrating Hatim's intention to cover more text types. Another set of linguistic resources in Arabic is introduced in chapter 11 – the verbal and nominal sentence types – which are shown to be relevant to thematic progression. A point to note here is the author's suggestion to distinguish thematic elements from rhematic elements (fig. 11.3, p. 142), as opposed to the 'traditional' Hallidayan distinction between theme and rheme. This serves as another example of the text linguistic perspective in analyzing texts beyond word- and sentence-levels.

The discussion of thematic progression smoothly transits into that of cataphora in chapter 12, which explains that cataphora in Arabic represents a high degree of markedness in terms of informativity and its use is 'highly advise[d] against' in classical writings and restricted 'to the highly emotive or formal style of writing' (p. 155). The problem, then, facing translators when translating English cataphora into Arabic could be resolved with the Arabic verbal and nominal sentence types introduced in chapter 11. Chapter 13 develops on further distinction between argumentation associated with evaluative text function and exposition associated with non-evaluative text function by specifying choices of forms (for example, 'whether' and 'as a consequence') when translating from English to Arabic. Evaluativeness continues to be the theme in chapter 14, which offers a preliminary set of criteria for assessment of evaluativeness (pp. 175–180): lexical processes; ideation; deletion; sequencing; complexity of syntax; modality; speech acts; implicature; and address, naming, and personal reference.

From evaluativeness to directness, chapter 15 first points out indirectness as favored by Arabic news genre and is realized in the form of indirect speech. Therefore, translation of direct speech from other languages to Arabic requires attention to the function of that particular bit of the source text on whether the highly marked direct speech in Arabic should be employed. A way to get around is suggested: quasi-direct speech. From indirectness to politeness, chapter 16 introduces another functional dimension, on top of

text type, governing forms, that is, face, while chapter 17 others: orality, presentation, and aurality, in relation to argumentation types (summarized in the table on p. 232), as well as target audience.

The monitoring tone observed in the first 17 chapters comes to a switch to a managing tone in chapter 18, when Hatim gives a descriptive and analytical account of *The Saint's Lamp* based on transitivity and participants for the construction of a sense of alienation. Such an account leads to two questions: Is that switch in tone intentional? Is the fact that the original Arabic version of *The Saint's Lamp* has not been provided intentional? Chapter 19 moves on to another specific: irony, as a discoursal function as an example of distinct linguistic conventions in violating Gricean maxims. When it comes to translation of irony, Hatim provides the following generic guideline:

> Translation is a sign-for-sign act of transfer which does not necessarily entail (though by no means rule out) the need to preserve the very same pragmatic or register values of the source text. Attitude, however, is a different matter. Attitudes tend to be intrinsic properties of source texts and must be as far as possible be retained intact. (p. 265)

From translation to oral interpretation, chapter 20 argues that the guiding principles are the same for both translation and liaison interpretation, even though the latter involves very different operational processes. Hatim further recommends that liaison interpretation should be a basic component for translation training.

One impression one may develop along reading the tremendous works of Hatim is that translations into Arabic have not been generally satisfactory. That also holds true for translations from English into Chinese, with errors in aspects ranging from lexical choices to cultural conventions. From a macroscopic point of view, in terms of the constructionist approach to language typology (Croft, 2001 as cited in LaPolla, 2013), low-quality translation results from partial rendering of all functions realized by the source text into the target text. One set of such functions that has been ignored is exactly what the present title is trying to address – that of discoursal, generic, and textual functions – and these are governing factors that determine the forms (lexico-grammatical choice, micro-organization, and marcro-organization) in both the source text and target text. That is the reason why the set of criteria for assessment of evaluativeness on pages 175–180 appeals especially to translators and translation trainees: not only thanks to its usefulness on its own right, but also its possible extension to the assessment of other textual functions. Also, as mentioned earlier, although the six questions listed on page 32 seem to have been answered as the discussion moves on, it would have been of tremendous help if a final section had been devoted to summarizing the main

points advanced in the book in relation to the six questions, with an understanding that there would never be completely satisfactory answers to those questions as cultures continue to develop, which requires ongoing research.

About the Author

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