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EXPLORING TOPICALISATION IN DISCOURSE

Abstract: Applying linguistic tools on a literary text, especially if such a text is a translation, opens possibilities for a range of readings and interpretations. This paper focuses on discovering traces of discourse and metadiscourse readings in chosen examples of usage of focus in order to establish whether it is possible to detect the presence of specific inter and intratextual layers, which clearly offer themselves for interpretation on the surface level.

Key words: metadiscourse, topicalisation, linguistic interpretation, fronting, focus

1. Introduction

The need for jotting down the precise border between specific research disciplines, and even sub-disciplines, nowadays seems unnecessary, even redundant. Very rarely would one find researchers who wholeheartedly defend the necessity for being true to a mono-disciplinary path in their research, thus claiming that otherwise the validity of results can always be taken with a great deal of reluctance. Moreover, multidisciplinary approaches are regarded as a must in various levels of not only linguistic research but also in translation studies. Nevertheless, one feels prone to set the final line of putting the product into one research category or the other. Still, is it always possible to draw a definite boundary and precisely pinpoint the research into either the linguistic or translational realm? The reluctance with which I personally try to avoid addressing such a problem will hopefully not be seen in this paper. It will merely try to exemplify the necessity of a subtle adjustment of one's attitudes and needs in relation to understanding a reading of a translation based on purely linguistic, moreover, particular discourse issues.

2. Methodological overview

In order to prevent misunderstanding, which one may experience by deciding to introduce scanning as a technique for reading the introduction, I will try to justify my reasons for choosing this not so overwhelmingly used approach to research.

Namely, the research is primarily based in the idea of shedding some further light on specific discourse issues which cannot always be taken in consideration when dealing with the translational process. The most obvious choice of surface structure



for research has been the use of topicalisation as a specific discourse marker, which every protagonist has been using for different purposes. Nevertheless, the problem that emerges almost immediately is how to approach the actual researched text.

Brown and Yule (1983: 24) discuss the problem of viewing a text as a discourse from perspectives of different approaches. They cautiously present the sentence-as-object view, not wanting to mould the readers opinions in advance, but the very idea, which lies in a Chomskyan generatively influenced postulate that sentences exist as individual entities independently of the person who utters or writes them, seems a bit too far-fetched for them, for they decide to put this and all the like approaches into a text-as-product view group. The obvious focus on the written word regardless of all the other processes which have been precursors for the actual appearance of it and the very underlying strategies and different types of intended or unintended meanings are somehow left aside. Brown and Yule (1983) also depict the approach towards discourse as a process in which the linguistic form is not seen and, therefore, explained as a static object, but as a means of expressing intended meaning in progress. This simple juxtaposition can also be transferred onto a translation, and the decision which way to interpret that sentence lies solely in the hands of the translator.

At the same time, the analysis of the target-language users has also been researched in terms of the same written discourse dichotomies, viz. coherence/cohesion and thematic structure and thematic progression (Braecke, Geluykens and Pelsmaekers, 1997); Mauranen, 1996). One realises that the influence on functional approaches cannot be neglected. Still, the focus on just one side of the coin may end in results, which are calling for further scrutiny.

Still, there has been a need felt to apply posits of topicalisation to the translation process as well. Birner and Ward (1998: 225) suggest that both inversion and preposing are used more often for putting the discourse-familiar information in preverbal position than one usually supposes.

Research agrees on two main functions of preposing, even though a number of different discourse functions can be found in reference books, the first being usage of anaphoric deictic markers □ this, that, these, such □ or echoing the previous information, and the second being expression of contrast. Contrasting is the point of agreement with most of the researchers dealing with preposing (cf. Leech and Svartvik, 1994: 200ff; Birner and Ward, 1998: 40f; Givón, 2001: 225). The contrastive pragmatic effect is evident cross linguistically. Sornicola (1994: 4637) emphasises the fact that in many languages spoken in Europe fronted constructions have contrastive values. Molnár (2002: 153) posits that contrastiveness is important for proper use of marked constructions such as left dislocation and topicalisation.

In her extensive contrastive English-German study of translation, Doherty (2002: 109) dedicates two chapters to issues of topicalisation, for she regards them „a very economical device to highlight the textual relevance of a discourse element“, and she adds that one of the main usages they have is for securing the easy focus identification. Utterly aware of the fact that there should be a high degree of correla-

tion between the two languages, Doherty strictly focuses on differences which are results of specificities of German syntax, i.e. German word order in particular.

Therefore, the question which this research has asked is which types of topicalisation, a device so frequently used in English, will one find in a translated text, and which purpose(s) will they be used for? There has been a sense felt that the results should prove that examples would not be used only for cohesive or contrastive purposes, but also to convey more intricate messages, deeply rooted in the very core of discourse and metadiscourse readings.

3. Corpus analysis

Before presenting some of the most common instances of usage of focus in the corpus researched, I will try to explain the core validity of the corpus used. At first glance, it seems quite unusual to use translated text as the basis for research. Still, such a text presents an extraordinary basis for research which goes beyond the ordinary sign deciphering of the translated code. It is close with posits of metadiscourse, where writers try to guide their readers' perception of a text by using a number of specific discourse features. Language exists in interaction, in mutual understanding of the spoken or written data from both sides in the communication channel. Therefore, as Hyland (2005: 3) claims „in a dynamic view of language as metadiscourse [...], we negotiate with others, making decisions about the kind of effects we are having on our listeners or readers“. Therefore, any disruption of the linear system ought to be understood as a way of rewriting and overwriting codes, sometimes overtly present and more often left for personal deciphering.

The disruption of linear order can be deduced visually, through the notion of focalisation.

Payne (2011: 367) distinguishes between „two general approaches to the term focus: focus as a pragmatic status of one element of every clause [...] *focus of assertion* and focus as a special pragmatic status assigned only to some elements in certain *pragmatically marked clauses*“.

On the other hand, focus has wider usage, from form-based topicalisation, i.e. preposing of clausal constituents to Clancy's (1980) understanding of topicalisation as a scalar discourse notion, where every nominal participant is topical to a certain degree. For the purpose of this paper, the term topic is going to be discussed using the Prague School linguists' understanding of it as a clause level pragmatic notion.

First, let us give a brief overview of topicalisation used in direct speech according to constituent order variation, i.e. clause-internal fronting, left-dislocation and fronting.

As expected, the majority of examples present fronting of an adverbial.

„In Adbazaar I got rich and married.“ (D, 152)

„And from that day everything started to go wrong.“ (D, 152)

„There you see what kind of people there are!“ (D, 174)

The necessity for pinpointing the very moment or place and discriminating it visually from the rest of the text can only be interpreted as such on the surface level. Even though fronting in English has the same effect and usage as it does in Serbian, the underlying meaning of such an utterance bears a cultural dimension as well. Namely, when presenting a narrative, spoken or written, the unwritten rule is to mention as many deictic data in order to justify the true nature of the narrative. Therefore, in the first example, the proper noun denoting the name of the place actually serves as the proof that the man had been rich and married; the exact point at the timeline presented to us in the second example infers that there must have been good times in the life of the narrator; and a simple adverbial directs the hearer to envisage the point of no return for the speaker.

„There, it was from this grandmother that she inherited her beauty, her figure, her eyes...“ (D, 210)

Taken out of context, this sentence has one reading only. But, by analysing it as a part of a narrative, which it is, the sentence opens different paths for interpretation. Namely, the first word can be both interpreted as an adverbial and as a conjunct. If interpreted as an adverbial, *there* opens a possibility of an interpretation of a place adverbial, i.e. adjunct, pointing the place of origin, or a comment on whole of the aforementioned narrative, thus playing the role of either a conjunct or a sentence adverbial. Such an approach is common in explanation of discourse referentiality either as manipulability (Hopper and Thompson, 1984) or discourse deployability (Jaggar, 1988). The position of the extraposed prepositional phrase and its function and usage should suggest the second interpretation. Still, deeper analysis, especially involvement of target language cultural analysis in connection with the very narrative, leaves the ambiguity open. This is an excellent example of a possible peril of interpretation of sentences in a purely Chomskyan tradition, and shows us the constant necessity of including other possibilities of interpretation, especially when dealing with such a sensitive issue which a translated text definitely is.

In her research of spoken American English, Piotrowski (2009: 1) identifies four types of cleft constructions: it-cleft □ „It’s an apartment that I want to rent.“; wh-cleft □ „What I want is a good apartment to rent.“; reverse wh-cleft □ „An apartment is what I want to rent.“; and there-cleft □ „There’s an apartment that I want to rent.“. Her findings show that the most common construction in spoken English are reverse wh-clefts. The findings are important, for she emphasises the fact which has not been taken into consideration in traditional grammar books, i.e. that the fronted element is used both for emphasis or correction of the statements on the part of the users and for reference to participants who are highly relevant to the preceding text. Still, the analysis of the corpus reveals the disproportion between the two. The occurrence of clefting within spoken discourse can be taken rather as an exception than a rule.

„What stars and clouds, what wonders there are in those two fields!“ (D, 211)

The purpose of usage of a wh-cleft construction is for affective reasons, the very example being more than challenging for analysis. Nevertheless, due to an ut-

terly subjective reading of the utterance, the need for such an interpretation in the line of its usage within the discourse and the depiction of personal characteristics of the character who utters those words has been felt. Should it be interpreted as a sigh of a prisoner who knows that certain things will never be in his grasp again or a true wonder of one who patiently waits for his chance to experience the outer world? Even the outstanding knowledge of syntax would not suffice for reaching a definite answer. Why? For it is in these very sentences, and others which are like them, that interpretation depends solely on the individual reading of the deep underlying sentiment and knowledge of the world on the part of the speaker.

The corpus analysis shows sporadic occurrences of extraposition or left-dislocation □ Piotrowski's it-cleft type of sentences □ which presents a surprising fact if the results are not compared with those of usage of topicalisation in the narrative part of the text.

„It's only you I'm telling.“ (D, 184)

„All right, it's not the one I mistakenly □ let's say “mistakenly”-
thought it was, all right, but it's someone else you couldn't imagine it
being.”(D, 184)

What is important is the fact that it is only the noun phrases that are extraposed, no instance of extraposition of prepositional phrases has been noted. The first example carries another discourse role, that of the negation of the subject complement, which is the primary role of the utterance. Again, trying to be true both to the author and the target language, the translator has to negotiate between the offered interpretations and possible overtiness of intended meaning. This very negotiation diverts us again to metadiscourse readings within a linearly presented text.

As far as the other types of clefts are concerned, the corpus provides a very limited number of examples of them, which is in utter contrast with the hypothesis lying under the choice of the corpus, it being there would be ample examples present for making the results of this small-scale research valid.

„Why, I believe that is what we are all of us defending!“ (D, 181)

The utterance, spoken by the judge and used as a last attempt to save Kamil from being sent to prison, emphasises the innocence of the accused. Still, the Validoes not seem to understand the overtiness of the statement, and he treats it as a straight-forward linear utterance. It is useful discourse-wise, to suppose the true reason for such an approach towards interpretation. Still, one would have to embark on literary, or even philosophical, considerations of employment of discourse strategies, and the course of this paper does not lead in that direction..

Focalisation is present through usage of truth-value focus (or verum focus). Payne (2011: 368) posits that it is a type of a marked focus, where the scope involves the truth value of the entire focus.

„It does sometimes happen that someone gets hold of a file or a chisel, so
as to get out of here more easily, but if you think we're going to give them
to a prisoner ourselves, you're out of your mind!“ (D, 213)

The translator likes to use this type of emphasis whenever the length of the original sentence requires some pointing of either anaphoric or cataphoric origin. The choice of focalisation and absence of usage of modification, which would be the obvious choice of the source language text, shows the translator's dedication to remaining true to the target language fluidity and understanding of the flow of narration discourse, regardless of its actual current representation, written or spoken.

The aforementioned examples all belong to a class of citations. In a monograph about importance of exploration of different types of citations, Cappelen and Lepore (2007: 10) strongly argue in favour of including such types of metalinguistic discourse in language studies, and they provide an extensive list of items as a proof of why one should take their postulates into consideration: understanding metalinguistic discourse, opacity, the language-world connection, the notion of what is said, compositionality, the semantics-pragmatics distinction, and the nature of indexicality. Understanding the nuances of the implied meaning in a translated text always requires employment of various pragmatic strategies, both by the translator and the reader. Still, the usage of citations in this very novella can only be interpreted in line with specific discourse functions of the narratives, inner narratives and overt and mixed citations. Whenever a narrator wants to warn the readers that there is a possibility of existence of an underlying interpretation of a statement, he infers it within the different types of statement he uses.

Let us now consider some examples of topicalisation and focalisation in narratives.

As expected, the examples of extraposed adverbials dominate all the other examples in number and in frequency.

„As with every affliction, it was the first days in the Damned Yard that are the hardest and the most painful.“ (D, 166)

„It was not until the afternoon that they resumed their conversation.“ (D, 169)

„It was only then that the unfortunate woman was maddened with grief.“ (D, 176)

„It was only several years later that she did marry, choosing, to everyone's surprise, a Turk.“ (D, 176)

„It was only the fat one who spoke.“ (D, 205)

There are instances of left-dislocation consisting of noun phrases, simple and complex, prepositional phrases and adverb phrases functioning as adverbials, noted. Semantically, they present no problem for interpretation, so their presence in the paper can be justified as an illustration of the diversity of structures used for modification within the extraposed part. Nevertheless, the functions they perform within statements are purely pragmatic and should be understood as means of drawing attention to issues which are later to be used as turning points in paragraphs. For the ordinary native English-language speaker, following Andrić's train of thought in translation proves challenging. The same point can be made if one is reading the text in the source language. Therefore, if there is a chance of misunderstanding or misinterpretation present, the translator turns to topicalisation, thus making it also a clarification point in the mental processing of the discourse.

The presence of wh-clefts in the narrative part of the text has also been noted.

„What stood out most were the large sockets, sunken and dark as bruises, of his blue eyes, moist and shining.“ (D, 169)

The skill of the interpreter and her endeavour to be true to the original word order produces sentences which one usually reads more than once in order to connect the embedded parts into one linear thought, for example to draw a vivid mental picture of a description of someone's eyes. The ordering of embedded phrases leads the reader to and fro to the overall depiction of the narrator's image of the most prominent features of the character's countenance. The reference to two juxtaposed pictures, those of eyes which are dark and bright at the same time, and the order of presentation of phrases, underline inferred sentiment that it is the light of the person which should prevail. Such an analysis is a surface one, mainly pragmatic, even though one can argue that it can stretch a bit reaching stylistics. The inclusion of definable referential definite article and possessive pronoun made us choose the first possible type of reading.

Again, as it is the case with citations, there are instances of truth-value focus present in the narrative part of the text too.

„When he did succeed in falling into a proper sleep, which was always deep and sound as long as it lasted, without dreams, without consciousness of him self or the world around him, his sleep engulfed his neighbour on the right and his thoughts about him too.“ (D, 171)

These examples illustrate the presence of obvious multitude of choices which are to be made by the translator. Critics usually focus on what they think are negative sides in translation, the lack of or too much effort put in realisation of equivalence □ a term, which, by definition, has a specific meaning for most of the persons who are using it, even though they would mainly claim that they apply generally accepted meaning in their research. The apparent problem of following such long narratives is overwhelmingly present in almost all the texts written by this author. His need for interweaving stories within a story, which is to be deciphered by his readers, is something that is put as a challenge in the course of every contact with his texts. Still, through the usage of linguistic tools, so natural in the translator's native language and so enormously helpful in following the linear order of the sentence, one is prone to accepting majority of the illustrated examples as authentic English sentences, not the translated ones. The usage of different syntactic means makes the discourse vivid and rhythmic. At the same time, topicalisation paves a path for the future reader in deciphering all the minute particularities, which are inevitably inserted, either overtly or covertly, in the core of the text.

Let us end this overview by presenting one particularly illustrative example of problems with the use of topicalisation as both a discourse marker and a path-finder aid.

„Standing upright, in his splendid ceremonial dress, on the deck of the ship coming into Civitavecchia, and looking at the motley array of the papal army and church dignitaries aligned by protocol, Cem thought quickly and clearly, as we think only at



moment when we have moved from one place where we have been living and have not yet stepped into the next.“ (D, 200)

The necessity of building up the overall atmosphere by usage of fronted adverbials, which are put in the relation of coordination, with insertion of embedded small clauses again functioning as adverbials in the form of prepositional phrases, seems an obvious choice when one analyses Andrić's style. The insistence of the translator to follow, almost to the letter, the original word order of the sentence usually puts readers into position of going back and forth and building their own image of the actual setting. An attempt to decipher the meaning through linear analysis is not possible here. Still, the length of embedded phrases makes us wonder whether the readers in the source language feel the same lack of patience, or even distress, when they read this vast amount of information neatly structured and moulded? I guess not, for the mere fact that it is this very author who is used as a matrix for the high quality written discourse. Still, this is an example that in the researched corpus, there is no equivalence present with the research results of Doherty (2002: 80), for here we rarely come across instances of what she calls „metamorphosis □ reordering, reframing, recategorizing, etc“. The translator, in her wish to stay true to the original text, has been able to transfer fully not only the morphosyntactic and syntactic level of the source text, but also the aura of inner struggle of the character who anticipates the uncertainty of the situation he has been put himself in.

4. Conclusion

The traces left by any discourse, be it spoken or written, can be visible throughout the text researched. There are different strategies used by the translator, those of problem-solving, decision-making, avoidance, adjustment, etc. Therefore, translation is not a linear process, which inevitably means that the text has to undergo the process of rewriting, thus becoming the basis for consideration in terms of metadiscourse. Syntax requires presence of fixed word order and any divergence from such a rule ought to be understood as marked focus used for various discourse-motivated reasons. Givón (1991, 1995) emphasises that structural complexity, poor frequency and cognitive salience characterise marked elements. They present the reason why it takes us much longer to grasp the meaning, for the mental effort used for deciphering the code is greater. Dryer (1995: 108) supports Givón's characterisation and emphasises the importance of expectations on side of readers as a positive or negative proof that that word order types can be considered a type of pragmatic markedness. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Dryer (1995: 127) ends his discussion by concluding that „any attempt to define 'pragmatic markedness' in universal pragmatic terms cannot succeed“.

The network made by inclusion of different angles of looking at the problem called interpretation of specific discourse fragments, i.e. instances of topicalisation, shows that it is possible to consider the newly-produced text as the basis for the

research. The carefully woven grid of finely arranged threads justifies focusing on issues which are not traditionally researched. Namely, it is usually the source language texts that are used for research, not the target language ones. The idea to do things the other way around, not plausible at first, proved fruitful. There definitely exists a need for structural, linguistic analysis of the translated text as a solid entity of its own, for what else can it be?

The width of the scope of usage of terms discussed has been enabled by serendipity, which has been felt from the moment I embarked in addressing the problem. Namely, the overall popularity of the word discourse and its numerous derivatives open possibilities for new approaches to researching elements of a text, applying all the linguistic tools at hand. There is no pretext of claiming that some or any of the findings of this research should be generalised. The research should be merely understood as one purely personal path for addressing the problem of analysis of particular linguistic issues. Therefore it is open for discussion and further analysis and some deeper re-evaluations and restructuring.

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ISTRAŽIVANJE TOPIKALIZACIJE U DISKURSU

Rezime

Primjena jezičkih alatki na književni tekst, pogotovo ako je to prevod, otvara mogućnosti za raznovrsna čitanja i interpretacije. Ovaj rad se usredsređuje na pronalaženje tragova diskurzivnih i metadiskurzivnih tumačenja odabranih primjera korišćenja fokusa radi ustanovljavanja mogućnosti prenošenja posebnih inter i intratekstualnih slojeva koji su sasvim jasno primjetni pri interpretaciji na površinskom nivou.

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