Language, Discourse and Translation

in the West and Middle East

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LANGUAGE, DISCOURSE AND TRANSLATION
IN THE WEST AND MIDDLE EAST

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Volume 7

Robert de Beaugrande, Abdulla Shunnaq and Mohamed H. Heliel

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Foreword

The papers contained in this volume started out as presentations at an International Conference on Language and Translation held at Yarmouk University in Irbid, Jordan, in April 1992, and attended by representatives from some forty countries. In tribute to the interest in promoting international communication, as vigorously advocated at the conference, we have worked over the written contributions submitted to us some months after, seeking to enhance their clarity, unity, and readability for a wide audience of students, teachers, and other professionals, such as had come to Irbid: translators, translator trainers, newspaper editors, broadcasters, military personnel, language academicians and professors, dictionary compilers, teachers of English as a foreign language, and teachers of subjects taught in English in schools and universities within the Arab world. Correlating our efforts was made somewhat easier during the times when Robert de Beaugrande was visiting professor at Yarmouk University in Irbid, and later at the University of Alexandria, Egypt.

Several steps seemed important for this work. For the convenience of readers unfamiliar with the Arabic language or with other languages from which samples were drawn, we have given idiomatic English translations and, where appropriate, concise interlinear translations. For the readers unfamiliar with the Arabic script, we have also carefully transcribed Arabic examples into the Roman alphabet according to the usual standard, shown on the table on the next page. The terminology of the contributions was also unified, and care was taken to provide technical terms with explanations in plain language. Finally, we worked to ensure that all contributions would be in a uniform and idiomatic English style designed for convenient reading, both in academic settings and in language-related professions.

This unity might offer a useful background against which the issues and their intricate relationships can stand out more clearly. The opening section of the volume weighs some overarching frameworks for approaching issues bearing on discourse and translation. Robert de Beaugrande suggests that the old dichotomy in linguistics between 'language by itself' and 'language in use', and the 'formalism' this dichotomy has encouraged, are now yielding to a dialectical unity between language and use ('discourse') and encouraging a 'functionalism' that is much more conducive to dealing with issues and problems in real-life discourse, such as the modes of 'control' applying to

discursive transactions including translation. Ian Mason explores the pervasive influences of ideology and culture on translating, even when it is done by professionals and sponsored by prestigious international organizations, e.g., when documentation of a 'primitive' non-European culture in Mexico is translated and shifted to a European perspective. Wolfram Wilss propounds a 'knowledge-based' cognitive ambience, which he considers essential for modern translation theory and practice. Asim I. Ilyas proposes to replace the usual typologies that have just two or three supposedly opposite types with a typology that recognizes multiple parameters and that can be used to situate actual translated texts.

The second section addresses several aspects for making comparisons among translations and their cultural contexts. Adapting a term from Halliday's work, Mohammed Farghal proposes to delimit 'ideational equivalence' as a correspondence between 'ideas', alongside the more familiar criteria of 'formal equivalence' depending on whether linguistic forms are correspondingly arranged, and 'functional equivalence' depending on whether corresponding communicative actions are performed. Adnan Abdulla examines some fine points of style that arise most vitally in literary translating, where the effects of stylistic choices, e.g., an Arabic term echoing the Holy Quran, can be extremely significant. Said El-Shiyab airs some conventions of paragraphing, regarding which the sensibilities of English speakers differ from those of Arabic speakers.

The third section features the many-sided implications of the contact between Arabic and English. Muhammad Saraireh castigates the non-strategic practice of using inconsistent terminologies when moving between English and Arabic, notably in textbooks for technical areas such as astronomy or medicine. Hosny A. Wahab A. Aal, himself an editor at the Middle East News Agency in Cairo, and Yousef Bader both explore the repercussions of English upon Arabic news media and upon the practices of journalists, most noticeably in the welter of quasi-literal coinages or transliterations that seem odd in the cultural contexts of Arabic (e.g. 'jumhuuriyyaatu ʾalmawz' for 'banana republics'), but also in more subtle factors as the structures of clauses and sentences. Wahab A. Aal sets down a set of concrete recommendations for sweeping reforms. Abdulla Shunnaq examines the role of newscasts in explicitly 'monitoring' events by just telling what happened while implicitly 'managing' the events by staging them to suit political or institutional policies, especially when major conflicts such as the Gulf War are at stake. Ibrahim Khidhir Sallo escorts us into a university setting with his scrupulous presentation of data on Arabic-English code-switching in Iraq, where some of the more prestigious faculties, such as medicine, are still taught in English despite government initiatives to encourage wider uses of Arabic.

The fourth section deals with some problems in lexicology and grammar,

which are more familiar terrain for many linguists. Tying into the concerns of the previous section, Showqi Ali Bahumaid expresses deep concern for the pervasive problems facing Arabic terminology on the contemporary scene, using examples from linguistics. Mohamed Helmy Heliel focuses on the thorny problems of handling verb-particle combinations, which may differ in a wealth of details that arise during idiomatic translating between English and Arabic. Bassam Frangieh and Solomon Sara tackle the imposing 'semantic diversity' of 'faᶜᶜala' forms, which are Arabic verb forms derived from basic forms by doubling a consonant 'radical', sometimes with a predictably corresponding meaning, e.g., to make an action transitive or ergative (for 'hafiẓa', 'memorize' versus 'haffaẓa', 'make someone memorize'), and sometimes with less predictable meanings (for 'dabiqa', 'stick, adhere' versus 'dabbaqa', 'catch with bird lime'). Clive Holes takes the usual English-Arabic dictionaries to task for their unthinking adherence to traditions, some of them obscure or literary, instead of to the needs of dictionary users and to the conventions of contemporary discourse. He heralds a new approach made feasible by the language data assembled and displayed in enormous computer corpuses of actual spoken and written texts, and sets forth a project for extending this approach, which has already led to highly successful monolingual dictionaries, over to bilingual dictionaries.

Following up on Holes' practical concerns, the fifth section turns to issues of interest to language teachers, including proposals and demonstrations from two quite different settings in the Middle East: Iran and the 'Gaza Strip' (soon, we hope, to be Palestine). It is intriguing to see that both settings share similar problems, such as a general uncertainty among English teachers about whether translation should be a major pedagogical tool and how far literature should be a dominant discourse domain for studying or translating. Both papers present a case for more active, realistic, and student-controlled uses of translation in the language class, such as compiling a translated version of a video play for joint class performance (Ziba Zohrevandi) or constructing dialogues about everyday situations like shopping for shoes (Hassan Ali Abu-Jarad).

In the final section, some geopolitical outlooks are brought to bear once again. Brigadier General Mustafa Jalabneh, formerly head of the translation division of the Royal Jordanian Armed Forces and now its Director of Education and Military Culture, describes the needs of the military and the qualifications its translators should have. René Haeseryn, editor in chief of the publications of the International Federation of Translators, provides a useful overview of the work of the Federation, and highlights some recent initiatives in the Arabic-speaking world. Finally, Robert de Beaugrande deliberates on the 'discursive practices' of consultations, conferences, and proceedings, and

proposes some ways to make them more appropriate to the needs of host environments and of the professionals who are likely to be the audience of listeners, readers, or discussants. He suggests that conventional academic decorum is too stratified, and that active efforts are called for to develop discourse strategies that favour more equal and constructive participation.

This volume has undergone a rather lengthy gestation, during which its countenance has been much transformed. It has impelled us to think and rethink as we sought to reflect on the role of conferences and proceedings. Some fruits of our reflections are offered here, but we have become keenly aware how far we still have to go, and how often we are still obliged to content ourselves with brief signals and hopeful signposts planted across a vast terrain.

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Acknowledgements

The following table shows the transliteration used for Arabic consonants.

Arabic letter	Arabic letter name	Transliteration
ا	alif	a
ب	baaʔ	b
ت	taaʔ	t
ث	thaaʔ	th
ج	jiim	j
ح	ḥaaʔ	ḥ
خ	khaaʔ	kh
د	daal	d
ذ	dhaal	dh
ر	raaʔ	r
ز	zaay	z
س	siin	s
ش	shiin	sh
ص	ṣaad	ṣ
ض	ḍaad	ḍ
ط	ṭaaʔ	ṭ
ظ	ẓaaʔ	ẓ
ع	ʕayn	ʕ
غ	ghayn	gh
ف	faaʔ	f
ق	qaaf	q
ك	kaaf	k
ل	laam	l
م	miim	m
ن	nuun	n
ه	haaʔ	h
و	waaw	w
ي	yaaʔ	y
ء	hamza	ʔ

The vowels in Arabic are written as dots or strokes above or below the consonants. As identified by their Arabic names, we transcribed fatḥa as 'a', fatḥa ṭawiila as 'aa', kasra as 'i', kasra ṭawiila as 'ii', ḍamma as 'u', and ḍamma ṭawiila as 'uu'.

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Part I. Theory, Cognition, Ideology

Cognition, Communication, Translation, Instruction:
The Geopolitics of Discourse

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Abstract

The critically unequal distributions of resources in the world today are found not just in industries and raw materials, but also in access to knowledge through discourse. To promote human equality, the goal of supporting free access should be expressly recognised as a major concern in the design of international language policies and programmes.

A. Translation versus the 'science of language'

Translation has long held the uneasy status of a conspicuous and widespread practice with no explicit consensual theory (cf. Vermeer, 1994; Wilss, this volume). The same activity seems at once utterly commonplace and utterly inscrutable. People have been translating since the earliest contacts among cultures, but, aside from a few aphoristic or programmatic statements, the nature and methods of translating have received little attention until modern times. Doubtless, the pervasive presence of translation has helped to render it inconspicuous; and the recognition of its full importance could raise uncomfortable questions about the general theories and proceedings in the study and instruction of language.

Still, the practice of translation was surely a seminal experience that originally motivated people to study language. As long as you remain within the bounds of

your native language, you are unlikely to see anything curious or noteworthy about it. Its organisation seems 'natural' and obvious, as if language could be no other way, and the relation between the 'message' or 'meaning' and the language resources for 'expressing' it seems transparent. But when you have to move between your own language and another one, this relation becomes problematic, and has challenged language scholars to grasp and define it since ancient times.

It might be thus expected that studies of language would centre on translation, but, for various reasons, this has seldom been the case. Since its inception in this century, much of modern linguistics has counselled scholars to envision the individual language as a separate, abstract system of forms organised in its own terms, with each form standing in an 'arbitrary' relation to its meaning. The active confrontation of two or more languages is not congenial to this vision, which might well imply that translating is a doubly 'arbitrary' activity: taking a set of forms, going to their meanings, and then fitting the latter to an apparently quite disparate set of forms.

Moreover, modern linguistics vowed to study 'language in and for itself' (Saussure's 'langue') apart from language use ('parole'). In retrospect, this decision is increasingly regarded today as premature, and its implications have certainly been problematic. One implication was that this abstract language system was most essentially and distinctly embodied in its **forms** (what units there are and how they are shaped and arranged in structures) rather than in its **functions** (what people do with language and its units or structures). Since translating is a way of doing things, it tended to be envisioned on the margins of linguistic theories conceived mainly along formal lines.

Conversely, translation could be envisioned at the very centre of linguistic theory: in the problematic relation between language and meaning, or, as is often said, between **form** and **content**. In this vision, translation could be seen to occur not merely when a person 'transposes' a 'source language text' into a 'target language text', but in the far broader sense of when a person *transposes any content either into any form, or from one form into another form.* Here, the familiar term 'translating' for an ordinary discourse practice would be appropriated to label a complex of relational processes, but the gain in genuine insight is uncertain. The entire interface between cognition and communication would be a process of 'translation' between a 'cognitive code' and a 'linguistic code', and further 'translation' would occur whenever one way of 'saying something' is adopted to replace any other. We do encounter this broadened sense episodically in modern linguistics, e.g. in Sapir's (1921: 138) 'conceptual classification of languages' by 'the translation of concepts into linguistic symbols'; or in J.R. Firth's (1968: 77f, 198) comment that people perform 'translation within the same language whenever we enter into the speech of

someone else or our own past speech'; or in Jakobson's (1971: 261) conjecture that 'the meaning of any sign is its translation into a further alternative sign'.

Evidently, the admission of 'translation' as a domain for study can bring up thorny questions about scope and method. If we limit the term to its everyday sense, we may see it as a specialised and sporadic activity, a marginal or parasitic phenomenon in comparison to the total timeless, abstract system of the single language; and studying it seems a trifle narrow. If we broaden the term to include all mediation between alternative formal systems or structures via sharable 'meanings', we may see it as omnipresent in the design both of a single language and of several languages; and studying it seems dauntingly broad.

It is thus not unduly surprising that a 'science of translation' long remained on the borders of modern linguistics, the 'science of language'. Dramatic advances have had to wait until the dichotomy was relaxed between abstract language ('langue') versus language use ('parole'), and until functionalism could consolidate its position vis-a-vis formalism and become a dominant trend, witness for instance new journals like *Functions of Language* at Benjamins Press (cf. Beaugrande, in press; in preparation). A host of unproductive theses have needed to be cleared away, e.g., that all study should be confined to 'purely linguistic' phenomena; that the 'levels' of language should be described in strict separation; that formal or 'distributional' studies should make no appeals to meaning; that a firm distinction should be maintained between 'linguistic' versus 'extra-linguistic meaning'; and so forth (cf. survey in Beaugrande 1991).

Today, the term 'translation science' no longer sounds quixotic or paradoxical. Its academic ambience is not confined to linguistics, but encompasses neighbouring disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, ethnography, and computer science (cf. Snell-Hornby et al. [eds.] 1994). Even so, our 'science' is perhaps still a bit too language-centred to navigate some of the wider aspects of translation as a human activity. I shall accordingly suggest an alternative outlook based on a more general model of cognition and communication (fully developed in Beaugrande, in preparation).

B. Language and discourse as control systems

My proposal is to regard human cognition and communication as control processes. This concept of 'control' is broadened to explore the issue of how the human mind relates to the 'real world' of experience. The 'classical realism' in Western thought has assumed that the world is simply 'out there' and that its traces are faithfully collected by perception and stored in cognition. In this outlook, the mind is directly 'driven' by the sensory data of experience, and the 'subject' confronts the 'object' in a direct two-way control relay (Fig. 1). Since
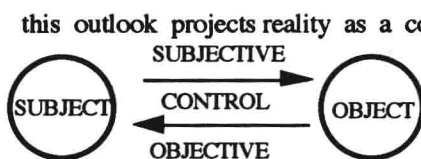
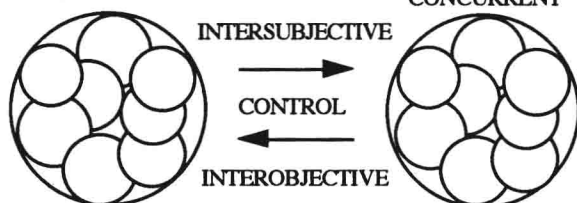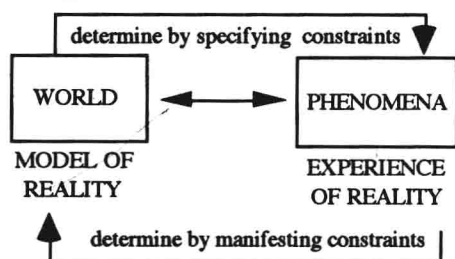this outlook projects reality as a constant for everybody, different versions
of the world can only be accounted for
as deviations from the one 'correct' or
'true' version. In the 'post-classical'
outlook gaining adherence today,
however, the human mind addresses
not reality but a **model**
of reality it actively
constructs. Instead of
taking it for granted that
everyone has the 'same
reality', we now address
the problem of how and
how far different peo-
ple's models of reality

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

may converge or diverge. Instead of envisioning the subject confronted and
'driven' by a world of free-standing objects, we envision the complex interaction
of 'subjective' and 'objective' processes leading to the **intersubjectivity** among
the world-models within a community of subjects, and to the **interobjectivity**
among experiences with concurrent models of the object on separate occasions
(Fig. 2); the fact that only 'intersubjectivity' is a current term so far points up the
persistence of the 'realistic' notion that objects are single-natured and self-evident.
In place of the traditional notion of the mind 'reflecting reality', we now assume
the mind to build a model that both 'controls' reality and is 'controlled' by it. The
model of reality (the 'world') controls by *specifying constraints*, i.e. suggesting
what sorts of objects and events are the ones more likely to be encountered; the
experience of reality (the 'phenomena') controls by *manifesting constraints*, i.e.,
by supplying the concrete details for each occasion (Fig.3). Logically, this pro-
cess may appear circular in that
the model and the experience
presuppose each other. But opera-
tionally, the process is properly
dialectical in the sense that each
side is actively defined and
constituted by the other.

Fig. 3

Another heritage of 'Western
realism' has been to conceive
knowledge in terms of **content**.
And the outlook just depicted -
implies that the content of reality is the set of objects and the set of facts about

these objects, which the subject is supposed to 'learn'. Hence, Western schooling widely treats each 'subject matter' as a block of content to be steadily absorbed with complete accuracy. Focus is routinely given to 'facts' and 'truths' and to their absolute opposition to 'fictions' and 'falsehoods', rather than to the human activities and performances of constructing knowledge and believing or disbelieving it. After such an education, many adults go through life with a jumbled mosaic of bits of knowledge rather than with a coherent picture of how it all fits together.

My proposal here, in contrast, would be to '**bracket**' content and focus on **design**, i.e., on the strategic organisation of a given domain. Design does not merely represent the 'form' as opposed to the 'content' (as in the conventional dichotomy), but addresses the general dynamic organisation of a domain in terms of how complicated, clear-cut, and so on it might be, whatever contents or forms may be implicated on specific occasions.

Here, the activity of 'knowing' consists in 'exerting control': by using experiences as occasions to delimit, assign, and store significances that can later be re-used or modified. This process correlates perception with stored knowledge by determining what aspects are the relevant ones. To decide that something is a 'true fact' is not just to accredit a snapshot of reality, but to assign to a complex experience the role of a '**control centre**' in one's model of reality, a vantage point for seeking consensus with other people's models.

Undeniably, the most decisive means for assisting and steering the mutual control between mind and reality is **discourse**. Some authorities have indeed suggested that language is the only means of 'thinking' — that you don't have a 'thought' until you say it (cf. Sapir 1921). It might be more insightful to propose that the control which can be exerted by discourse is *more active, deliberate, and detailed* than could be exerted by cognition apart from language. Whether cognition can 'exist' at all apart from language is an artificial question if the functional interface of the two is the normal condition of both knowledge and expression; the vital question is how much control discourse can exert and whether it can do so to support free access to knowledge. And, as I have argued in some detail, there is good evidence from both theory and practice that this access is not usually served to any degree approaching the full potential of discourse (Beaugrande, in preparation).

In my most recent model, translation can be defined as the exertion of control through discourse in two or more languages for accessing the knowledge selected by the original text producer. The notion of 'control' requires careful differentiation here, however, according to its sources and applications; many practising translators may well feel various pressures over which they wish they had more 'control' in the everyday sense (cf. section D).