STYLED, CONTEXT AND TRANSLATED NARRATIVES: A SOCO-
SEMIOTIC PROFILE FOR STUDYING STYLE IN TRANSLATED
NARRATIVES

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Abstract

A translated narrative has both its structure and texture creatively reproduced in the decoding-
reencoding processes. These processes of intersemiotic and interlingual transformations yield
variable results influenced by language-in-context, as the broadest environment of translation, and
prompted by the level of the typological and semiotic distance between texts. Translation is thus an
act of communication that is separate (contextually and discursively) from, while it is still dependent
(grammatically) on, the original writing. Here, the translator’s style is an “imprint” that is
simultaneously compelled by the creativity of the literary translation act and the existence of the
targeted reader in a new socio-semiotic context (Baker, 2000; Hasan, 1986/2011, 1989; Hatim &
Mason, 1997; Malmkjær, 2004; Matthiessen, 2001). In response to Baker (2000), the present study
aims to theoretically revisit the issue of style in narrative translation in a comparative view that takes
into consideration the multiple contexts and meta-contexts of the acts of creation and translation.
This comparative intersemiotic view ventures to address the complexity of narrative meaning
recreation in these new acts of communication along the multi-stratal systems of language and
narrative and in the light of the narrative, stylistic and socio-semiotic views of discourse and
meaning.

Keywords: style; semiotic distance; narrative translation; meta-context; narrative system

Narratives, as texts, achieve textual and structural unity through their linguistic patterns. Translated
narratives, however, have both their structure and texture creatively reproduced as they undergo the
decoding-reencoding processes carried out by the other “writing hand”. New stylistics is thus created.
Literary translations, in fact, have kept translation scholars occupied with the notion of ‘style’ along
two lines: the style of the creative writer, and the linguistic patterns and resources used against the
socio-cultural backgrounds from/to which (s)he translates (Baker, 2000). And because writing can
never be impersonal, the translator’s style becomes an “imprint” determined by at least two competing
forces—the creativity of the literary translation act and the existence of a targeted implied reader
positioned in a new socio-semiotic context (Baker, 2000; Halliday & Hasan, 1985; Hasan, 1989;
Malmkjær, 2004; Matthiessen, 2001). For this act, an exploration of “the issue of style … from the
point of view of the translator rather than the author” is fundamental for uncovering embedded ideologies. ‘Style’, as used here, is “a matter of patterning” which is explained as “preferred or recurring patterns of linguistic behaviour” (Baker,
2000, pp. 245, 262, Italic added).

Studying style in the light of the contexts of creation and interpretation—the terms are Hasan’s—can thus be viewed as a response to
Baker’s call (2000) to adopt a comparative stylistic
approach to literary translations as creative rather than reproductive acts. Reading the translator in
context consequently implies a need to draw links on the contextual level, i.e. from above, in relation to the addressed text and reader, while attempting the linguistic, stylistic decipherment of meaning requires a bottom-up approach. Nonetheless, translation stylistics, Baker maintains, lacks methodology.

The present study partly aims to revisit the methodological issue of this comparative stylistic view. Delimiting its scope to style in translated narratives, the study more pertinently seeks to frame an operational profile orchestrated on an interface of structuralist-functional premises. The classical narrative composite of story and discourse (content
and form) is approached here, in a functional sense, as an integration of mutually influential sides of the narrative coin. The study attempts to illuminate, in narrative translation terms, the “rather obscure” relationship between the “logical (meaning)
structures and grammatical “surface” structures” in context. Narrative, with its different modes and styles, is a semiotic structure with a form and substance for both content and expression
(Chatman, 1978; Toolan, 2001; van Dijk, 1975). These proposed constitutions might thus be better aligned in a more accessible manner to a stratified functional system treating both form and content
semiotically. Along these lines, adopting an
integrative approach to translated narratives in the light of the spectrum of structuralist, functional, and socio-semiotic views may aid in illuminating the obscurity of the relationships that breed unique and distinctive narrative texts within each context.

Narrative: a stratified semiotic system

Structuralist grammar of the narrative
In structuralist narrative poetics, story is “a chronologically-ordered deep structure of all the primary and essential information concerning characters, events and setting, without which the narrative would not be well formed” (Toolan, 2001, p. 16). The abstractness and structuredness of the information of the story suggests that we are presented with semantic content that is gradually formed as the text evolves. The word ‘story’ here means an “autonomous structure” that can be reproduced and transposed in different modalities (Chatman, 1978; Pavel, 1973). Structuralists’ attempts at uncovering the grammar governing narrative structure have followed the syntagmatic structural model proposed by Propp (1928/1968), which traces the chronological order of events and underscores the significance of ‘function’ as a generic unit to the totality of the plot. Claude Lévi-Strauss, for instance, undertook a decompositional analysis of myths adopting a paradigmatic structuralist approach to probing into the higher-order patterns of meaning beyond the mere semantics of any linguistic expression (Brooks, 1992; Toolan, 2001). In this vein, structuralists assign greater functionality to characters as actants in playing paradigmatically a vital integrative role assigning unity to the syntagmatic units and transcending their meaning (Pavel, 1973).

Barthes’ model (1975) reveals the multi-levelled nature of the semantics of narrative, accentuates the interconnectedness of the three levels, viz., functions, actions and narration, and highlights the transcendental role of this hierarchy. Yet, up to the highest level of narration (discourse), the narrative, like language, is still a self-contained code—a code that ‘receives’ meaning from, and can be interpreted within, the ‘external world’ during the actual acts of reading and interpretation. The external world is retrieved, and thus “other semiotics” need to be called upon.

Such proposals suggest that the structuralist narrative is purely semantics, logic proper. Little or no explicit acknowledgement is given to a direct influence of the linguistic structure on the development of this narrative meaning, nor is there any acknowledgement of the role of context in shaping or configuring its elements. Meaning (story) takes precedence over its transforming modalities, and language, both as form and meaning, merely supplements the integration and distribution of the semantic units with no actual signification.

A functional view of the structuralist narrative strata

Opening the narrative code to external interpretations along the Barthesian language-narrative homology requires an understanding of how the narrative, with its hierarchical and interdependent nature, creates meaning within the higher semiotics of context. In functional words, this is a unique sort of meaning with a history created logogenetically, i.e., “progressively from the beginning.” in texts that are “language … functional in some contexts” (Halliday, 1992, p. 360; Halliday & Hasan, 1985, p. 86).

Halliday (1992) delineates intrastratal and interstratal relationships in language, viz. instantiation and realisation respectively, and foregrounds the fundamental roles they play, both syntagmatically and paradigmatically, in creating meaning. Language is both an instance (in the form of a text) and a system (whose grammaticalised intrastratal relations collaborate as they interface metaredundantly (i.e., in a dynamic realisational relationship) to create meaning in text (Halliday, 1992). Language, as a semiotic system, connotes as it realises the semiotic patterns of the higher level of the context of culture. Correspondingly, meaning creation (semogenesis) in the narrative semiotic system may also connote within culture. Hasan includes this transcendent, metaredundant nature of narratives under the hierarchical interrelationships within the semiotic system of verbal art (Halliday, 1992; Hasan, 1989). Hasan (1989) maintains that narrative meaning is effectuated by resources along a tri-stratal semiotic system, and that it is at the level of symbolic articulation that the literariness of the text is attained and “the meanings of language are turned into signs having a deeper meaning” (p. 98). Metaredundantly, this level realises the higher-level of theme, and is realised by the lower-level, verbalisation.

THEME ▼ (SYMBOLIC ARTICULATION ▼ VERBALISATION)

In Hasan’s system, there does not seem to be an acknowledgement of any precedent structured semantic content (story) independent of its discourse. Rather, Hasan contends, fable is a creation resultant of the way the “story is ‘discoursed’ … [and] the patterns of the language function” (1989, p. 91). A stratified meaningful narrative text thus connotes variably within different socio-cultural contexts at the level of theme, while it is being realised by the second-order meaning created by the patterning of patterns at the symbolic articulation stratum (Hasan, 1989). Hasan’s view of the contextualised narrative meaning corresponds to her rejection of the structuralist sense of the text as an autonomous, self-motivated unity “divorced from the concerns of [its] community” (1989, p. 110).
Figure 1 demonstrates Hasan’s view of the metaredundant stratified nature of verbal art (1989) which is seamlessly integrated with the semiotic system of language.

Yaktine’s text: Structuralist morphemes within the semiotics of the functional theme
As a way of reconciling the structural-functional views, the Moroccan narratologist, Yaktine (1989/2005, 1989/2006), perspicaciously bases his views on the story-discourse interrelationships within the socio-cultural contexts. Yaktine proposes three levels of narrative construction and synchronises the structural autonomy of the narrative with functionalist views. Therefore, each narrative comprises a story, discourse and the high-order level of text, with ‘story’ referring to the structural minimal morphological components, the raw material that takes up different discourses, and ‘discourse’ (parallel to Barthes’ narration) referring to the manner of narration, a higher-order level giving a structural unity to these discrete units. Nonetheless, Yaktine (1989/2005), aligned with Hasan (1989), proposes that it is the integrative, structuring power of discourse (in its narratological and stylistic senses) that unifies the morphemes of the story.

Discoursing thus entails giving the narrative meaning a particular representation, and mediating the interaction between the narrative deep structure and the external, contextual entities. Communicating the narrative does not end with the narration interaction, though; intertextual and sociological interactions still occur within, not beyond, the narrative system, thereby promoting a communication between the living agents—the writer and reader(s)—at the text level. The text, therefore, becomes “a currency” (the term is Hasan’s) with a dynamic nature allowing multiple readings, and, hence, multiple external narrative structures, subsequent to the singular internal structure produced by a completed writing task. Yaktine’s text presumably occupies an area starting at Hasan’s symbolic articulation and extending inclusively to the theme. This consequently allows for locating these productive agents (the writer and reader) within Hasan’s ‘context of creation’ and ‘context of interpretation’. Table 1 may thus pave the way to carefully accommodating the proposed processes of narrative reading and re-writing. The relative distribution of the strata in the table is guided by their original definitions.

Table 1 Different perspectives of language-narrative homology

| Language system | Narrative System | (Barthes, 1975) | (Yaktine, 1989/2005, 1989/2006) | (Hasan, 1989) |
|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|-------------------------------|--------------|
| Phonemes        | Functions       | Story          | Verbalisation                 | <<<          |
| Lexicogrammar   | Actions         | Discourse      |                              | Symbolic articulation |
| Semantics       | Narration       | Text           | Theme                         |

Translating the narrative and intersemiotic mapping of meaning
It thus becomes imperative to be enlightened by a semiotic approach to translation in order to take our visualisation of the narrative meaning reproduction further. Translation is a process taking place within and between semiotic systems of all kinds, and a transition from one system to another involves two stages of intersemiotic translation. Narrative is unequivocally an organic semiotic system, notwithstanding the variant modalities to which it is transformed. Language is another semiotic system, and narrative discoursing (transforming or mapping) consists of creating the narrative meaning (Barthes, 1975; Chatman, 1978; Hasan, 1989; Matthiessen, 2001). We may thus assume that the narrative text undergoes two interactive processes of translation: 1) intersemiotic, transforming the narrative content into linguistic means and vice versa, in writing and in reading respectively; and 2) interlingual,
transposing/recreating the transcendence of meaning of first-order and second-order levels between languages. And as long as languages diversify and the level of their typological and semiotic distances fluctuates, these processes and their results vary correspondingly. Language-in-context forms the broadest environment of translation, and translation takes place within different meta-contexts, where acts of translating and reading/listening to the transposing/recreating the transcendence of meaning of first-order and second-order levels between languages. And as long as languages diversify and the level of their typological and semiotic distances fluctuates, these processes and their results vary correspondingly. Language-in-context forms the broadest environment of translation, and translation takes place within different meta-contexts, where acts of translating and reading/listening to the translation occur (Hasan, 1986/2011; Matthiessen, 2001). Hatim and Mason’s (1997) conception of the act of translation elucidates the issue further: translation is an act of communication that is separate (contextually and discursively) from, while it is still dependent (semantically) on, the original writing.

The amalgamation of three factors, namely, stratification of both language and narrative, refractions at the decoding and encoding levels, and multiple contextualisations, entitles each translated narrative to be conceived of as a unique, separate narrative text. Each translation of a given narrative thus converges with the other versions only at the lower-level semantics of the content (story), while simultaneously diverging at the higher levels generated by the discourse. Building on Hasan’s visualisation of the relationship (Figure 1), Figure 2 provides a tentative sketch of the proposed convergence and divergence caused by the synthesis of these three factors. It also envisages the proposed dipartite nature of narrative translation.

CONCLUSION
The above discussion opportunistically accommodates the proposed profile within an intersection of areas among poetics, narratology, stylistics, and translation studies. With each translation act, a new narrative text is produced, sharing the same basic semantics of the story and entertaining the language-verbal art relationship. This occurs within a meta-context in which it is read and re-written. This meta-context incorporates both a context of interpretation (with a new external narrative structure), and a context of re-creation (with the created external narrative structure being internalised within the new narrative in writing). Each translator practises specific refractions of the original through his/her sociosemiotic prisms, both as a deep reader (refraction act 1) and then as a selective co-author (refraction act 2). Therefore, viewing the texts in the light of the notions of semiotic distance and typological distance may shed more light on the realisational mechanisms of creating higher-order meanings. Each translated narrative therefore undergoes the two acts of translation—intersemiotic and interlingual—with a de-automatised recreation of the patterns, and hence variably connoting narratives.

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