AN SFL APPROACH TO TRANSLATION: THEMATIC ORGANIZATION IN TRANSLATIONS PRODUCED BY TRANSLATION STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT: *This paper is part of an ongoing research project – CORDIALL (Corpus of Discourse for the Analysis of Language and Literature) – developed at Faculdade de Letras, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, which adopts a systemic-functional approach to translation studies drawing on corpus evidence obtained through corpora and concordancing software. It analyses thematic organization in five translations of the online article "The New Prize", published in 2005, taking into account aspects both of the process and the product of translation. Data was collected in an experiment conducted at Faculdade de Letras (FALE), UFMG, in which five subjects translated the article and had their text production recorded through the software Translog. These translators were students of two introductory courses of translation (Tradução I and II), and their text production is comparable to that of novice translators. The translated texts were analyzed according to Halliday´s An Introduction to Functional Grammar (2004). The results are discussed from the perspective of patterns recurrent in text productions by novice translators in comparison to text productions by expert translators.*

KEY-WORDS: novice translators, thematic organization, process, and product of translation.

RESUMO: *Este trabalho é parte de um projeto de pesquisa em andamento, qual seja, CORDIALL – Corpus Discursivo para Análises Lingüísticas e Literárias, desenvolvido na Faculdade de Letras, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, que adota uma abordagem sistêmico-funcional para os estudos da tradução, baseando-se em evidências encontradas em um corpus analisado por meio de softwares de corpora e concordância. Analisam-se organizações temáticas de cinco traduções de um artigo on-line intitulado "The New Prize", publicado em 10 de setembro de 2005, levando-se em consideração aspectos do processo e produto tradutório. Os dados foram coletados em um experimento conduzido na faculdade de Letras (FALE), UFMG,*

no qual cinco sujeitos traduziram o artigo mencionado, tendo suas traduções gravadas no software Translog. Esses tradutores eram estudantes de dois cursos introdutórios de tradução, Tradução I e II, e sua produção textual é, portanto, comparável àquela de tradutores novatos. Os textos traduzidos foram analisados de acordo com An Introduction to functional Grammar, de Halliday (2004). Os resultados são discutidos de acordo com padrões recorrentes em textos produzidos por tradutores novatos quando comparados a tradutores expertos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *tradutores novatos, organização temática, processo e produto.*

1. Introduction

As pointed out by previous researches, such as Alves (2003), Alves & Magalhães (2004), Alves (2005), Campos (2005), and Buchweitz & Alves (2006), novice translators often concern themselves with linguistic and lexical rather than contextual aspects when they carry out a translation task. Besides, the products of their tasks are usually little durable target texts, that is to say, they generally produce texts which do not account for the specificities of the source texts and lack recursiveness and logic. Furthermore, the total amount of time is not well managed, and novice translators do not display a balanced pattern of time distribution among the three phases of the translation process: orientation, drafting and revision. In this paper, the time spent by translators and aspects of thematic organization and representation of processes are analyzed in texts produced by novice translators. We suppose that their choices and time spent to each phase and to overall task may account for the building of a coherent and cohesive text. The analysis is carried out building on Halliday´s *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (2004), which proves to be a very useful tool for this approach.

2. Theoretical Framework

Halliday (2004) states that the three metafunctions, namely, ideational, interpersonal, and textual, stand for the three types of meaning a clause can have. Nevertheless, the author claims that these metafunctions will depend on the meaning the speaker wants to assign to the situation in which he finds himself. If one considers translation, s/he will still face another issue: that of rendering a translation which will correspond to the source text in a way that it will not only change its content but also make

it intelligible. In addition, Alves (2005) and Campos (2005) refer to the fact that translators' cognitive rhythm does influence the final product of their translation, that is to say, a translation done by a novice translator may not always be consistent, since they spend much time in the process of drafting, leaving the text with many mistakes, and they do not spend much time either revising what they have written or reading before starting the translation.

3. Methodology

The corpus analyzed comprises an article taken from the online newspaper *The New York Times*. A data collection was carried out at LETRA, a center for Translation Studies at Faculdade de Letras, in Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais. The software Translog recorded every mouse and keyboard movements by the students accomplishing the task. By watching the reproduction of these movements, the subjects were asked to provide some reflections about their own performance. These verbalizations, called TAPs (think aloud protocols), were used in the analysis regarding the translators' capability to reflect upon the task. Moreover, the analysis and classification of thematic organization, metafunctions and verbal processes were based on Halliday's categories, among other authors, such as Martin (1997), Butt (2000) and Thompson (2002). After this procedure, the most problematic excerpts were selected and discussed, since they also accounted for and involved the most important issues on Themes and metafunctions.
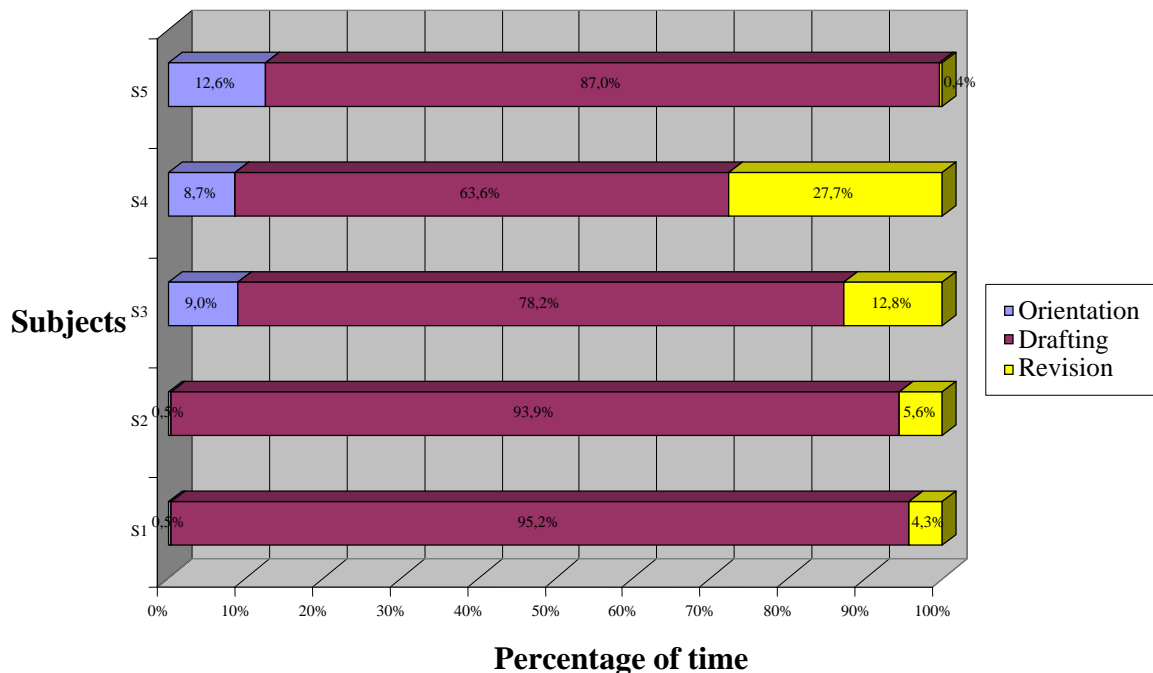
4. Data analysis and discussion

According to Alves (2003, 2005), Campos (2005) and Buchweitz & Alves (2006), the difference between novice's and expert translators' profiles is clear. Because of expert translators' experience, they present different cognitive rhythms, or different time patterns when they perform translation tasks. These authors investigated both types of translators and found out that novice translators spend more time to perform a translation task, which indicates that they do not concern themselves with issues of time and concentrate their time in the drafting phase. Figure 1 shows the total amount of time spent on the tasks.

Figure 1: Total Time – Comparison of the five subjects
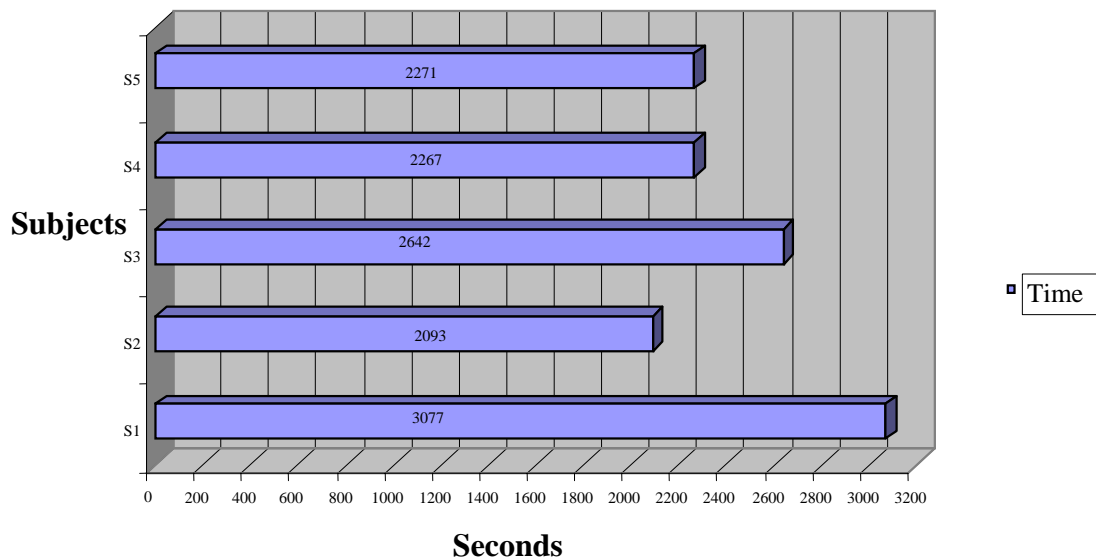
Regarding time distribution among the three phases, in the case of subjects 3 and 4, there was a balanced distribution of time in the three phases, making their profile similar to that of an expert translator. This does not happen with subjects 1, 2 and 5, who concentrate their time in the drafting phase, which may point out that they engage more efforts on lexical and word-to-word aspects than on issues of structure and/or cohesion and coherence.

According to the relative time displayed in Figure 2, it is possible to identify the profiles which are more similar to that of a novice translator, that is, those of subjects 3 and 4.

Figure 2: Relative Time of Orientation, Drafting and Revision Phases – Comparison among subjects

Subjects	Orientation	Drafting	Revision
S5	12,6%	87,0%	0,4%
S4	8,7%	63,6%	27,7%
S3	9,0%	78,2%	12,8%
S2	0,5%	93,9%	5,6%
S1	0,5%	95,2%	4,3%

Percentage of time

According to Halliday (2004)**,** there is a metalanguage that can be applied to depict the meanings of clauses or the use of certain words to express given experiences, interactive exchanges and messages. These are called ideational, interpersonal and textual functions, which can be described as the representation of one's experience, the doing of a deed and the construction of a message, respectively. Ideational function refers to the representation of processes, all the events that take place in someone's life, actions, thoughts, feelings and relations. Interpersonal meanings generally comprise statements, questions, offerings and commands. Textual meanings have to do with the narration of all these happenings in language. In other words, textual meanings seem to tell a story of what is happening and to organize the events in a chronological or hierarchical order. Furthermore, Halliday (2004) states that there is always an ideational element in the text. However, this element may be omitted or displaced, not to mention the cases in which it is not even existent. In the excerpt 'Benjamin Kleber was spending $ 3,39 a gallon', the subjects maintained the tense of the verb following the finite. It can be considered a problem in the logical system constraints on combinations of clauses. In the translations, not only the logical system was a problematic feature, but also the subjects' difficulty to master

collocation usage. Instead of choosing a verb that would correspond to spending, most of the subjects chose a similar verb in Portuguese, which is unusual in the Portuguese system. Concerning tense, they chose the past continuous, which is not the most accurate when the event is conceived for a Portuguese native speaker. Because of tense constraints in Portuguese, situations in which the action is punctual, such as to spend money, do not allow for applying the same tense as English. Therefore, the action had to be completed with a clause like the one that follows the analyzed, 'when he noticed an obscure decal on his minivan' take place. As can be seen in Figure 3, three subjects made the same choice:

Figure 3: Analysis of "Benjamin Kleber was spending"

	Subject 1	Subject 2	Subject 3	Subject 4	Subject 5
Pause	Ø	Ø	Ø	[11:96]	Ø
Source text unity	Benjamin Kleber was spending				
Target text unity	gastava	gastava	Estava gastando	pagava	pagava
TAP data	Ø	Ø	Ø	*tem duas coisas no passado acontecendo ao mesmo tempo*	Ø

It can be seen, therefore, that coherence and cohesive elaboration in translation may be troublesome. Besides, when the languages in question have not only different thematic structures, but also differences concerning taxis, translating poses as a very hard task. This happens because the clause carries a relation of parataxis, despite having a linking word that is usually applied in a context of subordination, that is, there is a coordinated action between the two clauses.

In the sentence 'that's stuck on the side of the gas flap', the Theme was dramatically modified by the subjects. Besides changing the Theme, they

also changed the ideational or experiential metafunction and the relational process, where a Carrier receives and Attribute was substituted for a Material Process, that is, a Process in which an Actor performs an action to reach a Goal. The problem generated by these changes were more complex. First, on the account of the ergative model, proposed by Halliday (2004), and considering that the clause is in the passive voice, if it were interpreted as a Material Clause, there should be an agent to the clause, such as the factory (in the context of the article); hence, the Medium would be the sticker, which is represented by the pronominal 'that'. Thus:

[Medium] That is [Process: Material] stuck by (the factory) [Agent]
[Carrier] That [Process: Relational] is stuck [Attribute]

Applying this model to a translation approach, in the case of the Portuguese language, there is a major problem: the verb to this passive voice could only be the verb 'to be' in the sense of having a quality, 'ser'; not as a state like in 'estar', because then it could not be permanent. That is the reason why some of the subjects did not use the verb 'to be' avoiding the problem of having an Attribute 'ser'. In English, the event is represented only by the verb 'to be' in the third person singular ('is'). Consequently, if this model were applied to Portuguese, the verb 'ser' would necessarily be present in a sentence where there is an agent, and in this circumstance it would not be a relational process; conversely, the verb 'estar' would well serve to a relational process, since it is the verb used to depict relational processes. Figure 4 shows the choices made by the subjects:

Figure 4: Analysis of "That's stuck on the side of the gas flap"

	Subject 1	Subject 2	Subject 3	Subject 4	Subject 5
Pause	∅	[01:31:17]	[19:31]	∅	[19:76]
Source text unity	That´s stuck on the side of the gas flap				
Target text unity	Que está colado ao lado do tanque	Estava preso ao lado da tampa	Que fica Grudado ao lado da tampa	Pregado do lado da boca do tanque	Colado ao lado da abertura do tanque
TAP data	∅	∅	∅	∅	∅

Here there is a problem of Theme and logical metafunction. The clause 'It remains hard to find, to say the least' makes clear, there is a difference between Portuguese and English thematic organization. At this point, the subjects changed the ideational meaning of the clause to an interpersonal one, because in Portuguese there is not a pronoun that would serve as reference to the Subject introduced in the Rheme corresponding to the pronoun 'it' of the previous clause. For this reason, novice translators displaced the Subject interpreting the pronoun 'it' as a commentary Theme. One of the subjects seems particularly not to understand that the sentence is about the fuel, and thus he asserts that the difficulty is not to find the E85 fuel, but why it is hard to find E85. In addition, the subjects add interpersonal and commentary Themes to express the reporter's opinion when he says that E85 was at least hard to find. This, again, makes clear that there is a problem concerning the logical metafunction, since the Theme is substituted for elliptical or interpersonal Themes, which demonstrate the subjects' lack of consciousness about it. This certainly affects the cohesive chain of the whole text.

Figure 5: Analysis of "It remains hard to find, to say the least"

	Subject 1	Subject 2	Subject 3	Subject 4	Subject 5
Pause	[12:14]	∅	[27:32]	[19:31]	[40:31]
Source text unity	It remains hard to find, to say the least				
Target text unity	Pode-se no mínimo dizer que ainda é difícil encontrá-lo, e isso se deve, em parte	Ainda é difícil de encontrar, para dizer o mínimo, em parte porque	O E85 ainda é difícil de ser encontrado, no mínimo porque	É no mínimo difícil de entender porque	Ainda é no mínimo difícil encontrá-lo, em parte porque
TAP data	*Ah é, que tinha... "to say at least".*	*Coloquei é difícil de encontrá-lo*	*No sentido de que assim, difícil é o mínimo, né?*	*Acho que é correspondência 1:1, né?*	*porque que é difícil de entender a partir da segunda sentença*

Finally, there is a problem of Theme, logical and experiential metafunction. The mini-clause 'staggering', which means a Subject on a relational clause, is an important instance of parataxis, since it is an independent interrupting clause. As for thematic organization, it is a clause without a Theme, for a minor clause can be built from ellipsis, since there is a paratactic relationship between the sentences. Moreover, if 'staggering' does not correspond to a process, since it is not a verb, and if one considers that it is a relational process, this expression would thus represent a circumstance. When we analyze the translations, most of the subjects did not understand that the expression referred to the value of the price Benjamin Kleber had paid to fill his 1998 Plymouth Voyage last Sunday. By doing so, novice translators attributed the circumstance to Benjamin, to whom the speech is attributed in the next clause. Besides, if the clause is unfolded as 'That´s staggering', for instance, it can be seen that there is a relational process. That was misunderstood by

subject 3, who chose another verb as a correspondent translation to the process 'staggering', that is, 'trembling', which is a behavioral process.

Figure 6: Analysis of "staggering"

	Subject 1	Subject 2	Subject 3	Subject 4	Subject 5
Pause	[48:21]	[01:27:21]	[01:08:39]	[26:06]	[25:81]
Source text unity	'staggering'				
Target text unity	espantado	inquieto	tremendo	Isso é um roubo	Impressionante
TAP data	∅	∅	∅	*eu mais fiquei agarrado foi esse "staggering"*	*"impressionan pode ser vári coisas."*

5. Conclusion

As already seen in other researches, the text production of novice translators is little durable. It also carries many problems of orthography, concordance, cohesion and coherence. If we analyze the texts produced by them according to Halliday's SFG (2004), we notice that their choices while translating have many problems because of their unawareness of how the meaning of the text can change because of some of their choices. In addition, novice translators pose a very erratic cognitive pattern, which can be seen in the tables of time spent in orientation, drafting and revision phases.

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APPENDIX

The New Prize: Alternative Fuels

By DANNY HAKIM

Published: September 10, 2005

DETROIT, Sept. 9 - A week ago, Benjamin Kleber was spending $3.39 a gallon at a gasoline station in Maryland when he noticed an obscure decal on his minivan.

"It's this sticker about the size of a business card that's stuck on the side of the gas flap that I never really paid attention to," said Mr. Kleber, a 25-year-old electrical engineer for a government contractor. The decal said he could be using E85, a fuel cocktail that consists mostly of grain alcohol, or corn-based ethanol, with a splash of gasoline.

Production of ethanol fuel, much of it blended in small doses with regular gasoline, has doubled to more than three billion gallons in the last half decade. This year, propelled by rising gasoline prices, E85 is finding new life as an alternative fuel.

It remains hard to find, to say the least, in part because many oil companies have no desire to put a competing product in stations that carry their banner. But the number of stations offering E85 has nearly doubled since January, to more than 460, mostly in corn-growing states like Minnesota. And because of incentives included in recently passed energy legislation, and the fact that E85 is now about 40 to 50 cents cheaper than a gallon of regular gasoline, E85 backers are expecting the surge to accelerate.

Being an engineer, Mr. Kleber had heard of E85. And after spending $58 to fill his 1998 Plymouth Voyager with regular unleaded last Sunday - "staggering," he said - he went home and began to do some research. He discovered that a station nearby sold the fuel for $2.67 a gallon. At current prices that could save him more than $14 a fillup.