

Fronting in English
with Reference to Translation

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Abstract

Recent studies have focused attention on language according to use. The basic element of such a language is not the sentence but the text. Many linguists have dealt with texts from different aspects, among them is the study of text according to the theme–rheme notion which is speaker-oriented and given- new notion which is hearer-oriented.

Most of linguists agree that theme often stands for given whereas rheme for new. In English, when there is some departure from the norm, the departure is called markedness by the linguists. Consequently, fronting is realized when there is a marked theme not an unmarked one.

The term 'theme' that the researcher will adopt in this paper has an entirely different meaning in formal grammars, which has nothing to do with the long tradition of work on theme in Prague School linguistics and other functional traditions. The research will adopt the theme-rheme notion according to Halliday (1976), where the clause in all languages has the character of a message: it has some form of organization giving it the status of a communicative event. But there are different ways in which this may be achieved. In English, as in many other languages, the clause is organized as a message by having a special status assigned to one part of it. One element in the clause is enunciated as the theme, this then combines with the remainder so that the two parts together constitute a message (Halliday, 1976:37).

The translation of fronting is not an easy task due to the linguistic differences between the SL and TL, which may hinder the process of translation.

Thus, the translator has to do his best to convey, as far as he could, this salient feature to the TL in order to achieve the optimal equivalence, i.e. the functional equivalence which seeks the writer'/speaker's intention(s) and hence fidelity to the ST can be realized .

1. Thematic Structure: Theme and Rheme

Before dealing with the notion of fronting as a marked theme, it is relevant to present some background information pertinent to the notion in question.

The basic unit of language in use, according to Halliday (1970:160-1), is a text, and a textual component is the set of options by means of which a speaker or writer is unable to create texts. He (ibid) confirms that the clause, in this function, is organized as a message, what is known as a "thematic structure".

Therefore, the clause in English has two segments: "the theme and non-theme, or the theme and rheme" (Halliday, 1976:179).

The theme of a clause is the element which is put in the initial position. The following underlined elements are themes and what follows them is rhemes:

1. I can't help you.
2. Last week we bought a new house.
3. Great this winter was.
4. The man who is standing there is my friend.

From the utterances above, it has become clear that the theme is what the clause is about and, therefore, it has two functions (Baker, 1992:121):

1. It acts as a point of orientation by connecting back to previous stretches of discourse and thereby maintaining a coherent point of view.
2. It acts as a point of departure by connecting forward and contributing to the development of later stretches.

1.1 Information Structure: Given and New

Thematic structure has a strong relationship with the notion of information structure. This refers to the organization of text in terms of the functions "given" and "new" (Halliday, 1970:162. Halliday (ibid) maintains that the association of theme with given, rheme with new, is subject to the usual "good reason" principle of freedom of choice, but the theme will be associated with the "given" and the rheme with the "new" unless there is good reason for choosing some other alignment.

The distinction between given and new is not governed by the speakers as is the case of theme and rheme but by the hearer. To this fact, Baker (1992:144) confirms that thematic structure is speaker-oriented whereas informational structure is hearer-oriented. She (ibid) divides the message between speaker and hearer into two segments:

1. The first one conveys information which the speaker regards as already known to the hearer.
2. The second segment conveys the new information that the speaker wishes to convey to the hearer .

Then, she (ibid:145) argues that given information represents the common ground between the speaker and the hearer gives the hearer reference point to which s/he can relate new information.

On the other hand, Brown and Yule (1983:169) point out that new information, in English, is characteristically introduced by indefinite expressions and subsequently referred to by definite expressions. They (ibid) provide us with some examples of which one will be mentioned:

- a. Yesterday I saw a little girl get bitten by a dog.
- b. I tried to catch the dog, but it ran away.
(underlining is mine)

In the above example, Brown and Yule (ibid) add, "the dog" is the given.

Furthermore, Halliday (1970:163) says that given and new differ from theme and rheme, though, both are textual functions, in that "given" means here is a point of contact with what you know (and thus is not tied to elements in clause structure) whereas "theme" means here is the heading to what I am saying.

On the other hand, to deal with given and new in terms of the degree of acceptability, Allan (1986:81) affirms that "given typically precedes new" since it will be difficult for the hearer to process the new before the given.

Information structure, according to Halliday(1970:162), is expressed by intonation. He (ibid) further states that connected speech takes the form of an unbroken succession of distinctive pitch contours, or "tone group", each tone group represents what the speaker decides to make into one unit of information.

Finally, Aziz and Lataiwish (2000:39-40) maintain that the information carried by a sentence element may be given or new and they are both determined by the context of a sentence and are phonologically realized: new information carries a heavy stress, usually the intonation nucleus: whereas the element carrying given information has a light stress or no stress. They (ibid) give the following example:

Context: Where is Layla ?

She is in the kitchen.

In the example above, they argue, "she is" is given because it occurs in the context whereas "in the kitchen" is new because it cannot be retrieved from the context.

2. Fronting as a Marked Theme

Fronting, according to Quirk et al (1985,1377), "is the term we apply to the achievement of marked theme by moving into initial position an item which is otherwise unusual there". Markedness, in this definition, is a concept used by linguists to refer to departure from the norm. In this respect, James

(1980:110) affirms that marked theme can be simply achieved by transposing object, verb or even adverb to sentence initial position. He (ibid) says that the following examples have marked theme:

Beer/he'll drink for hours on end.

Sing/I can't very well.

Three times/She 's rung me this morning.

However, the following are some ways in which fronting can be realized in English.

2.1 Adverb Fronting

Emonds (1976:28) maintains that several kinds of adverbs may be fronted. When they are fronted, they are marked:

Rarely does John drink coffee.

Into the house the strange man entered.

There run the thief.

2.2 Fronting of Prepositional Phrases

There are some prepositional phrases that function as sentence adverbs which can be fronted as in the following examples:

In my opinion Jack will fail in the exam.

Among the teachers sat some students.

2.3 Fronting of Adjective Phrases

Emonds (1976:35) points out that adjectives that can function as the head of an adjective phrase are mobile and can be placed in the initial position:

Long and tidy, her hair played in the breeze.

Allan (1986:87), on the other hand, states that predicate adjectives can be fronted but he says that this expression is poetic, as in the following example:

Bright were the stars.

2.4 Fronting of Verb Phrases

Verb Phrase, according to Emonds (1976:31), can be fronted to express emphasis:

Mary once predicted that John would pass an exam, and pass one he now has.

He (ibid) confirms that the sentence above is derived from the following underlying structure:

Mary once predicted that John pass an exam eventually and he has passed one.

2.5 Noun Phrase Fronting

Noun phrase that functions as direct objects can be fronted as in:

What subject can't you understand?

History I just can't understand.

Her husband was killed by this criminal.

2.6 Left Dislocation

According to Allan (1986:93), left dislocation involves the fronting of a NP from within a clause and its replacement by a presumptive pronoun as in:

My sixth grade teacher, he had a big effect on me.

Spiders, I've always been afraid of them.

2.7 Inversion

Quirk et al(1985:1379)point out that fronting of an element is often associated with inversion. For example, the subject-operator inversion which has to do with yes/no questions as in:

Tom will pass the exam.

Will Tom pass the exam?

2.8 Wh-Fronting

Wh/questions, like yes/no questions, can be fronted in order to get emphasis. In both of these kinds of questions, the theme is the last marked one:

Where is he going ?

Why did they leave the party early?

2.9 Cleft Fronting

Allan (1986:90) affirms that the cleft consists of a formulaic onset of a third person subject pronouns as in the following examples:

It's an Alfa that Max has got.

In this example, the marked theme is "it's an Alfa" and not just "It".

The Cleft, he (ibid) adds, presents new information that, in the speaker's judgments, is contrary to expectation because it is contradiction to some information presents earlier. The information in the cleft is regarded as highly salient.

2.10 Pseudo-Cleft Fronting

In addition to the Cleft construction, Allan (1986:91) points out that Pseudo-Cleft can be fronted since it may bear new information and another focus further along in the utterance as in the following example (ibid):

Winter is when it's so unbearable.

3. Translation of Fronting Constructions

Translation, according to Catford (1965:20), is "the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL).

Catford, in the definition above, focuses on the concept of equivalence since it is considered the cornerstone of translation. He (ibid) makes an important distinction between formal correspondence and textual equivalence:

1. A formal correspondence is any TL category (unit, class, element of structure, etc.) which can be said to occupy, as nearly as possible, the same place in the economy of the TL as the given SL category occupies in the SL (ibid:27).
2. A textual equivalence is any TL text or portion of text which is observed on a particular occasion.... To be the equivalence of a given SL text or portion of text.

Equivalence is defined as the standard relationship between original and translation (Broek, 1978:30).

Hatim and Mayson (1990:5-6) believe that equivalence in translation is a relative matter. The term to them means reaching the closest meaning to the source text meaning. They argue that there is no complete equivalence in translation.

Furthermore, Baker (1992:10-11) argues that translation involves some problems due to the lack of equivalence and suggests that there is no one-to-one correspondence between orthographic words and elements of meaning within or across languages. She (ibid:17-18) believes that there is a wide range of factors that circumscribe the choice of a suitable equivalent in a specific text. These factors may be linguistic or extra-linguistic. She suggests strategies for dealing with problems of non-equivalence in some detail (see Baker, 1992 for more details).

The translator should find the optional equivalence in translating the features of fronting in the TL and in a way that could find the functional equivalence. This functional equivalence is after the writer's /speaker's intention(s).

Dealing with such texts, Aziz and Lataiwish (2000:44) argue that equivalence in thematic organization has to be chosen on the deeper level of unmarked/marked themes, since the theme in certain languages including English is often tied up with the structure of the sentence.

They (ibid) add that, in English, the speaker has little choice in determining his theme whereas the Arabic speaker can choose between the subject and the verb as the theme of a sentence.

Therefore, a deeper level, they continue, should be used where speakers in both languages are presented with a number of choices between the unmarked and the marked alternatives. For this purpose, the marked/unmarked choice may be explicated as in the following examples(ibid):

وصل القطار
القطار وصل

The train has arrived (theme given, end focus).
The train has arrived (theme new).

Consequently, "the marked arrangement in the two English sentences above is determined with the help of a given- new information carried by the theme and the rheme" (Aziz and Lataiwish,2000:44). Here, the focus is on the theme, they continue, "determines the new element whereas, in the Arabic sentence, the unmarked/marked pattern is determined by the element occupying the initial position. The verb in the unmarked theme and the subject in the marked theme are as by given –new information.

In what follows, some English examples will be considered with reference to translating the feature of fronting.

1. Scarcely does Smith come here .

In this utterance, the adverb is fronted as being the marked theme. The translator can convey this marked theme into the TL

successfully on the condition that the TL structure allows such kind of fronting :

قلما يأتي سميث إلى هنا.

If back-translation is made to the Arabic sentence, it will be :

Smith scarcely comes here .

قلما يأتي سميث إلى هنا.

This suggests that the English theme is marked whereas the Arabic one is not. The translator can overcome such difficulty, for example, by adding another synonymous item to "قلما" as in

قلما ونادراً ما يأتي سميث إلى هنا.

In this utterance, قلما ونادراً, can function as a marked theme. The translator avoids, by so doing , any loss in the translation.

2. The thief was arrested by the police.

In this utterance, the object noun phrase is fronted to express markedness. The translator should keep this structure in the TL and should avoid translating this utterance into

* اللص القي القبض عليه من قبل الشرطة

Or he changes the passive voice into active one:

الشرطة ألقت القبض على اللص

Whereas the marked theme is الشرطة and not اللص .

Therefore, he should translate it into

اللص ألقت القبض عليه الشرطة

This translation is adequate since it has the same marked theme as the ST has.

3. A man is in the house.

This English utterance starts with an indefinite noun (A man) which is the marked theme. Arabic, for its part, does not accept an utterance or a sentence starting with an indefinite noun. For this reason, the following translation is unacceptable in Arabic :

*رجل في البيت

In this utterance, رجل is the marked theme but it does not have the same marked theme as the English utterance does. By corollary, some inevitable loss may arise due to the linguistic differences between English and Arabic.

4. Terrible was the storm.

Here, the adjective noun phrase is the marked theme. The fronting of the adjective phrase, to some extent, is poetic. The translator should avoid translating this sentence into the normal unmarked construction as in

كانت عاصفة رهيبة

This sentence is neither poetic nor after the SL marked theme. Therefore, the translator should translate it into

رهيبة كانت العاصفة

This expression is often used in literary language and at the same time is an optional equivalent to the SL marked theme.

As a corollary, the translation of fronting from English into Arabic greatly depends on the structure of both SL and TL and the linguistic differences between the two.

Conclusion

Having tackled fronting as a marked theme in English and the translation of this important feature into Arabic, the researcher concludes that fronting is a term applied to the achievement of marked themes by moving into initial position an item which is otherwise unusual there.

Markedness is a concept used by linguists to refer to departure from the norm. There are many ways in which fronting can be achieved in English such as adverb fronting, fronting of preposition phrases, fronting of adjective phrases, etc.

The translation of fronting into Arabic is sometimes realized when the SL fronting construction has an equivalent fronting on in the TL, i.e., when the structures of both languages are alike. This may lead to the achievement of functional equivalence which is after the writer's/speaker's intention(s). On the other hand, non-functional equivalence may arise when the SL fronting construction cannot be conveyed to the TL due to the linguistic differences between the SL and TL, i.e., when the SL structure is different from the TL structure. As a result, some inevitable loss may occur in translation.

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