

## **Linguistic Theory and Translation Practice: the impact of thematic shift on semantic and functional aspects of the translated text**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The research sets out to investigate linguistic choices made in translated texts, particularly the possible applicability of linguistic notions and methodologies to furthering the understanding of, and providing solutions for, various translation problems. It has, moreover, a specific interest in investigating the impact caused by the transfer of the thematic structure of the source language text (ST) into that of the target language (TT), due to the potential consequences of thematic shift on a translated text. Professional experience has indicated that thematic shift may also be due to a lack of awareness by many translation practitioners, especially those working from English into Vietnamese, of the importance of thematic selection in English texts in general.

A sample of more than forty translated texts and their originals, selected from an archive of some two hundred pairs of informative texts, are used to illustrate the most common issues found in English to Vietnamese translation. The texts range across many areas of Australian government services from resettlement issues, housing and education to common health issues, with a particular focus on mental health.

The research first explores various linguistic notions and discusses the most common issues in translation. It proposes a departure from the controversial notion of ‘equivalence’ and adopts the concept of similarity and difference in translation. It examines and applies various analytical tools in text analysis for translation purposes, such as register, discourse, metafunction and genre analysis. Eventually it rests with textual metafunction analysis, the notion proposed by Halliday, and the language component responsible for organizing and constructing the metafunctions, namely, ideational and interpersonal, into a message. Theoretical notions from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) such as Theme and Rheme, as well as thematic structure are discussed, and the linguistic resources used to realize Theme in both languages are examined.

Text analysis shows that any changes made to the TT within the domain of textual metafunction are significantly marked. Moreover, not maintaining the thematic flow results in some disconnection to the thread of sense, thus potentially changing the meaning of giving the text and preventing it from fully satisfying the purpose set out in the original. While successfully reflecting the global structure of the original, the TT is not necessarily able to harness the flow of information, nor maintain the text coherence.

The major findings of the research have both theoretical and practical implications. The study demonstrates that linguistics plays a significant role in translation studies as it can provide the latter with theoretical notions, as well as a metalanguage for discussion on translation issues. Linguistic concepts and techniques, especially those investigative tools designed by linguists from the SFL tradition, are particularly useful in relation to text analysis. Of further importance is the confirmation that thematic choice is textually and contextually motivated, and that different choices of Theme can create different meaning. Hence, it is recommended that translators pay greater attention to the management of the flow of information in the original, as it is evident that the

interpretation and reproduction of meanings made through the thematic choices in the original text, significantly impacts upon the effectiveness of a translation.

**KEYWORDS:** health information texts, impact of thematic shift, systemic functional linguistics, textual metafunction, thematic structure analysis, translation studies.

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