

Auto/matic Translation¹ in Academic Discourse: The Case of Doctoral Dissertation Abstracts

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Abstract

The present paper builds on the metadiscourse (interpersonal and textual) strategies and rhetorical moves (situating the research, purpose, method, results, and conclusion) as underscored in some scholars' focus on cross-linguistic differences in academic discourse (Santos, 1996, Melander et al., 1997) to eventually link them to the translation activity. It, more specifically, takes randomly selected abstracts of doctoral dissertations defended between 2010-2015 at the University of Mostaganem and studies: (1) researchers' self-translations of French (as their working language) into English and Arabic; (2) their attested mis/use of automatic translation. Toward these ends, we posit, after a number of translationese, that candidates do not attribute enough importance to the semantic layer when working out their Target Language Texts (TLTs).

1. Introduction

Language as our initial scaffold for thought and reasoning (as believed by the advocates of the Language of Thought Hypothesis (LOTH))² needs to be stimulated in distinct contexts. The academic milieu is one of them. This one calls for a specific usage of language that would reflect learners understanding of what a researcher is supposed to do and how

¹. Here, we are concerned with both auto-translation (as the former appellation for self-translation) and machine translation.

². The American philosopher Jerry Fodor (1935-) put forward the LOTH which stipulates that thought is represented in a "language" (as explained in his book: *The Language of Thought* (1975)), and demonstrates that thought follows the same syntactic logic as language.

s/he can write a scientifically traceable and comprehensible piece of discourse. Researchers usually exert themselves on issues related to their field of interest. They try to fill the dearth witnessed in some research areas through research papers or when reading for their Doctorate for instance. Admittedly, part of the academic traditions of writing a Doctorate is to precede it by an abstract, un résumé, and ملخص. Connectedly, it is the aim of this paper to capture the interplay between these languages in the translation process through a corpus including 03 doctoral dissertation abstracts with a field variation (Littérature comparée et francophone, Sciences du langage, et Sciences des textes littéraires) and 03 working languages (French, English, Arabic).

Usually, PhD supervisors/examiners read and correct candidates' abstracts but scarcely examine the translated versions. Hence, some linguistic/translational mistakes and textual inconsistencies are likely to occur. These seem to vary from one language to another; from where the significance of teaching abstracts writing skills (as part of academic discourse genres) to doctorate researchers. In point of fact, there are different types of discourse. The *common* (generic interpersonal communication); the *formal* (specialized and rule governed communication); and the *academic* one. Yet, according to Bhatia (2002: 25-6), "To this date there has been very little research on a systematic investigation of what we mean by 'academic discourse.'" For him, "...the existence of such an academic core is often assumed, rather than investigated and established."

Elbow (1998, cited in White & Lowenthal 2011: 21) claims that:

For students to find academic success at the university, they must at some point master the dominant discourse unique to this setting. Like most discourse communities, in the university there are rigid conventions for language use, in choice of words, genre, and style. To be successful in the university, students must understand and be able to employ these conventions. Learning the dominant academic discourse in the university requires that students learn style shifting or what other literacy and linguists have termed code switching.

This means that students must know how to move from their common discourse to a more specialized one. At this point, I would suggest that coming to the stage of writing a dissertation; they should also know how to switch from French to English and Arabic, which is not sometimes fulfilled in an acceptable way.

2. Studies on Abstracts

Following Bhatia (1993:78), an abstract is a “factual summary of the much longer report, and is meant to give the reader an exact and concise knowledge of the full dissertation.” In fact, it was during the 90’s that the study of abstracts received full attention (Salager-Meyer, 1992, Nwogu, 1990, Santos, 1996). Besides, Melander et al.’s (1997) cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary analyses of abstracts (written in English and Swedish) from Biology, Medicine, and Linguistics are, perhaps, the best epitome of the growing interest for this specific genre. Genres can have two kinds of variations. The first is variation in a genre across *linguistic* and *cultural* boundaries; the second is *discoursal* variation in a genre across *disciplinary* boundaries. Here, we are mainly concerned with the first type. Furthermore, this one splits into *metadiscoursal* (which refers to writers’ commitment or tentativeness) and *rhetorical* moves. The former denotes language used to signal

the organisation of the text, and the latter to language used to signal the writers' "attitudes toward the propositional content of the text and toward their readers" (Crismore et al., 1993:40) Bhatia (1993) talks about 4 rhetorical moves that need to be provided by any abstract. These are the introduction (purpose), method, results, and conclusion. Salager-Meyer (1992) uses the same moves to assess the quality of Medical English abstracts but adds that of 'Case presentation' that should go with those of 'Case reports' and 'Data synthesis' in review article abstracts. Santos (1996) also proposes 'Situating the research' move which will be adopted in this paper (in addition to Bhatia's). By this, he means the delineation of a problem in the issue being investigated. Its main role is mainly to attract readers' attention.

3. Machine Translation in the Academic Field

During the 80's, a new teaching tool named "MT as a Bad Model" was implemented in translation classrooms.¹ This pedagogical method consisted in fostering learners with the necessary software and allowing learners to look at the syntactic and semantic inconsistencies that are likely to occur when we opt for MT in an excessive or a blind way. Since most of the MT systems translate rather literally, a lot of conclusions could be drawn from this exercise. Besides, the role of post-editing and revision acquires all its significance, here.

According to Higgins and Johns (1984:95), this strategy "...might provide a teacher with an interesting peg on which to hang a discussion of grammar, asking the students to spot the machine's howlers and account for them." Similarly, Ball (1989:54) endorses the importance of this pedagogical means

¹ Cf. Dr Ana Nino's "Machine Translation in Foreign Language Learning: Language Learners' and Tutors' Perceptions of Its Advantages and Disadvantages" *ReCALL: the Journal of EUROCALL* 21.2 (May 2009) pp. 241-258.

by claiming that “... withholding the source text and inviting the student to reconstruct it from the raw translation. ... This can be quite useful for drawing attention to half-forgotten points of grammar and usage.”

Interestingly enough, this comparative way of processing contributed in attracting learners’ attention to the differences branding languages as it constituted a quick means that helped them consolidate their L2 grammar and vocabulary. It could well be implemented in Master’s or Doctorate degrees programmes so that candidates become aware of the importance of revising their abstracts after having translated them using specific software.

4. The Corpus: Results and Discussions

For space limitations, the corpus will gather 03 Doctorates solely and assess the meta-discoursal and rhetorical moves of their abstracts. Note that French is the working or source language (SL) whereas English and Arabic are the target ones (TLs). The 03 options for which the candidates read are: “Littérature comparée et francophone”, “Sciences du langage”, and “Sciences des textes littéraires”.

a) Metadiscoursal Strategies

Interpersonal

Textual

1) **Fr. 1st person plural (nous)** Notre projet de doctorat a pour vocation principale d’étudier l’histoire...

Eng. 1st person plural (our) Our project of doctorate has the principal role to study the history...*

Ar. 1st person plural (مشروعنا)*... ... يهدف مشروعنا المتمثل في أطروحة الدكتوراه إلى استكشاف ودراسة تاريخ

2) **Fr...** depuis ses premières parutions dans les journaux jusqu’à sa consécration en format d’album.

Eng... since its first publications in the newspapers until its dedication in format of album. *

Ar.* منذ المنشورات الأولى في الصحف إلى غاية تكريسه ونشره على شكل البومات...

Table 1: Metadiscoursal Strategies in “Littérature comparée et francophone”

As regards the English version of the first sentence, the candidate presented an awkward literal translation in which a technique of *transposition* could have been of much help. This would have given “Our doctoral project” instead of “Our project of doctorate”. Additionally, the Arabic version contains a case of syndetic pseudo repetition in which “استكشاف ودراسة” come to substitute “...étudier / study”, by adding the verb “discover”. Semantic repetition, as an aspect of the many formal properties of Arabic texts, is a device which empowers sentences and/or phrases.¹ Reduplicating verbs, nouns, adjectives or adverbs, by resorting either to full or partial synonymy, bequeaths any stretch of words with a sense of *emphasis*.

Automatic translation is attested in the title: “Newspaper towards the album: the development of the Algerian comic strip of French expression”* by mapping it on “Du journal vers l’album: le développement de la bande dessinée algérienne d’expression française” Notice that no capitalization of the content words is attested, save for Algerian and French which seem to be automatically capitalized. What reinforces our belief that the summaries were done by a machine is the coloured strip seen on the 5 first lines of the Arabic version (See appendix); besides, the faithful translation manifested in the change in tenses from the present in French and English into the past in Arabic stops at this line. Now, we can notice that self-translation takes over. As far as the rhetorical moves are concerned, notice that situating the research is absent, the purpose and the method come successively one after the other but with an abrupt cut in which neither the results nor the conclusions are mentioned (as shown in table 2).

¹ Cf. J., Dickins, S., Hervey, I., Higgins, Thinking Arabic Translation, A course in Translation Method: Arabic to English, Routledge, 2002.

b) Rhetorical Moves

Rhetorical Moves in “Littérature comparée et francophone”

Situating the Research	0
Purpose	1
Methods	2
Results	0
Conclusion	0

Table 2: Presence/Order of Rhetorical Moves in “Littérature comparée et francophone”

a) Metadiscoursal Strategies

Interpersonal

Textual

Fr. 1st person plural (nous) (See appendix)

Eng. 1st person plural (we) we seek to clarify a representation that build some residents of this district, namely, that inhibit the “nursery” implies that one speaks French, that the practice (within the neighborhood), but that one is a real City (Hadri).”*

Ar. 1st person plural (nous) (See appendix)

Table 3: Metadiscoursal Strategies in “Sciences du langage”

The traces of automatic translation are clearly shown in the following abstract where many passages make no sense:

“This work focuses on...the area of nursery deemed “posh” apprehended in a post-colonial trying to identify through speech raised on it, the micro-social structure that produces the identity but also of otherness...we seek to clarify a representation that build some residents of this district, namely, that inhibit the “nursery” implies that one speaks French, that the practice (within the neighborhood), but that one is a real City (Hadri).”*

“...in which French is engaged in a process of upgrading the living space for some people becomes a territory of reference. Also acknowledge the weight of the representations. These representations highlight and maintain in force category/categorization and prioritization of social discrimination as mestgalmia...It also asks for the success of the urbanization process...”*

“The area of the nursery, taken from this point of view as... (and by extension society Maghreb), and re-asked questions in force then, the terms “urban” and “city dwellers” in that it admits the first and the second does not.”*

b) Rhetorical Moves

Rhetorical Moves in “Sciences du langage”

Situating the Research	2
Purpose	1
Methods	3
Results	4
Conclusion	5

Table 4: Presence/Order of Rhetorical Moves in “Sciences du langage”

This time, the researcher launches his ideas with the purpose of the study before moving to situating the research and explaining the method followed. As opposed to the first candidate, all of the rhetorical moves seem to have been exhausted in the sense that results and conclusions are clearly mentioned. The length is constant with 9 sentences in each summary.

a) *Metadiscoursal Strategies*

Interpersonal

Textual

Fr. Absence of the author/1st person plural (nous) (See appendix)

Eng. Absence of the author This *these* is about the

Works of the writer and *psychanalyste*...is different from the other writers of immigrants “*beur*” literature in France: because...he is not attached to his *origines* ...his attitude *towards* integration within *frensh* society.*

Ar. Absence of the author (See apendix)

Table 5: Metadiscoursal Strategies in “Sciences des textes littéraires”

Here, the length shows a certain fluctuation with 6 sentences in French, 2 in English, and 1 in Arabic (with an absence of punctuation). Even keywords have been truncated (6 in French, 5 in English, and 4 in Arabic). Additionally, what the Arabic version exposes is neither faithfully reproduced in the English nor in the French abstracts. Actually, the French version is more detailed and explanatory.

b) *Rhetorical Moves*

Rhetorical Moves in “Sciences des textes littéraires”

Situating the Research	0
Purpose	1
Methods	2

Results	3
Conclusion	0

Table 6: Presence/Order of Rhetorical Moves in “Sciences des textes littéraires”

As far as this abstract is concerned, the purpose, method, and results of the study appear from the outset. However, there is no hint at situating the research or to the conclusion. What is more captivating is that the method appears only in the original version. It is absent in both the English and Arabic ones.

Conclusion

While we agree and acknowledge the importance of abstracts in academic discourse, these remain meagerly scrutinized. Sadly enough, many of the discursal strategies and rhetorical moves get affected by non-proficient and, at times, ‘careless’ translations. Abstracts “are significant carriers of a discipline’s epistemological and social assumptions.” (Hyland, 2000:63) Therefore, candidates should be more alert to this very aspect. True, one writes his abstract when one has finished the whole work. This means that the researcher has already deployed much effort on itemizing and analyzing the different building blocks (chapters) of his work. We can guess that for the last aspect which is that of abstract writing, he will look for easy going solutions to cover it. Among these is automatic/machine translation. Yet, because its use is fraught with semantic limitations, the outcome is not always up to standard. The obtained versions are usually awkward especially when they are not post-edited and/or revised. This demeanour, we trust, stems from the pre-existing belief that examiners do not usually concentrate on the translated versions of their abstract; specifically when they do not master one of the TLs. However, it would be a blatant mistake to start a good job and end it poorly, from where the importance of underlining this very issue in academia.

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Appendix:

Titre, résumé et mots clés en arabe :

من الجريدة إلى الألبوم : تطور الشريط المصور الجزائري الناطق بالفرنسية
الكلمات الرئيسية: جريدة- الألبوم-شريط - رسم- رموز - السرد - الأيديولوجية

يهدف مشروعنا المتمثل في أطروحة الدكتوراه إلى استكشاف ودراسة تاريخ الشريط المصور
الجزائري الناطق بالفرنسية منذ المنشورات الأولى في الصحف إلى غاية تكريسه و نشره على
شكل ألبومات.

في الجزء الأول من عملنا ،سعيانا إلى تحليل التعاريف المختلفة للشريط المصور وظروف نشأته
في الجزائر وخارجها. في الجزء الثاني ، أسهبنا في الحديث عن الجوانب التصميمية و السردية
للشريط المصور الجزائري. الجزء الأخير يبحث في انتشار الأفكار النمطية والكليشيهات
وتوضيح لآيديولوجيات المختلفة ، من خلال مزيج دقيق من النص والصورة.

Résumé :

Ce travail s'intéresse à un des quartiers résidentiels de la ville de Mostaganem, le quartier de la Pépinière réputé « huppé » envisagé dans un contexte post-colonial en tentant de cerner par le biais de discours suscités sur elle, cette micro-structure sociale qui produit de l'identité mais aussi de l'altérité. Partant du postulat que de conduites linguistiques se dégagent des conduites sociales, nous cherchons à éclairer une représentation que construisent certains habitants de ce quartier, à savoir qu'habiter « la Pépinière » suppose que l'on maîtrise le français, qu'on le pratique (au sein du quartier), mais aussi que l'on soit un vrai citoyen (*h adri*).

Nous entreprenons une enquête sociolinguistique (avec entretiens et questionnaires) où nous essayons de comprendre ainsi à travers les discours de ceux qui en parlent, quelles représentations se dégagent et se construisent autour de ce quartier, mais aussi dans un second temps, il s'agit de nous interroger sur les stratégies discursives employées par les différents enquêtés questionnés à travers cette mise en mots de l'espace de résidence. Notre intérêt est donc de savoir si le quartier constitue une référence spatiale ou plutôt un territoire de référence et d'identification pour ses habitants.

L'étude montre que les habitants développent un sentiment d'attachement et d'identification par rapport à leur espace de résidence où le français est engagé dans un processus de valorisation de l'espace de vie qui devient pour certains habitants un territoire de référence. Aussi à souligner, le poids des représentations sous-tendues par un arrière plan historique : les familles qui se représentent nobles et « anciennes » dans le quartier rejettent celles représentées « nouvelles ».

Ces représentations mettent en avant et entretiennent en force des catégories/catégorisations de la hiérarchisation et de la discrimination sociale telle que *mestgalmiia, erubiiya, h dars* (Mostaganémois, paysans, citoyens) etc. L'on s'interroge de fait aussi sur la réussite du processus d'urbanisation dans les sociétés maghrébines.

Le quartier de la Pépinière, pris de ce point de vue comme (relativement) représentatif de la ville de Mostaganem (et par extension de la société maghrébine), interroge et re-questionne en force pour nous, les notions d' « urbanité » et de « citoyenneté » dans la mesure où il admet la première et exclut la seconde.

Mots-clés : quartier, représentations, *hadri*, *eruubi*, territoire, français, stigmatisation.

Summary:

This work focuses on one of the residential areas of the city of Mostaganem, the area of the nursery deemed "posh" apprehended in a post-colonial trying to identify through speech raised on it, the micro-social structure that produces the identity but also of otherness. Starting from the premise that linguistic lines emerge from social behavior, we seek to clarify a representation that build some residents of this district, namely, that inhabit the "nursery" implies that one speaks French, that the practice (within the neighborhood), but that one is a real City (Hadri).

We undertake a sociolinguistic survey (with interviews and questionnaires) in which we try to understand and through the discourse of those who talk about it, what representations emerge and are built around this area, but also in a second time to reflect on discursive strategies employed by different respondents surveyed through this set of words within a residence. Our interest is whether the area is a spatial or rather a territory of reference and identification for its inhabitants.

The study shows that people develop a sense of attachment and identification in relation to their area of residence in which French is engaged in a process of upgrading the living space for some people becomes a territory of reference. Also acknowledge the weight of the representations underpinned by a historical background: the families who are noble and "old" in the district reject those represented "new". These representations highlight and maintain in force category / categorization and prioritization of social discrimination as *mestġalmiia*, *erubiiya*, *H dars*, etc... It also asks for the success of the urbanization process in Maghreb societies.

The area of the nursery, taken from this point of view as (relatively) representative of the city of Mostaganem (and by extension society Maghreb), and re-asked questions in force then, the terms "urban" and "city-dwellers" in that it admits the first and the second does not.

Keywords: area, representations, H adri, eruubi, territory, French, stigma.

ملخص:

هذا العمل يركز على واحد من الأحياء السكنية في مدينة مستغانم ، و هو حي "البببنيار" المعتبر من الأحياء "الفاخرة" في هذه المدينة. نحن نحاول من خلال بحثنا فهم هذه البنية الاجتماعية الصغرى في مرحلة ما بعد الاستعمار لتحديد من خلال الخطابات الذي أثرت حولها ، كيف أنها تنتج الهوية ولكن أيضا الغيرية. بدءا من الفرضية أن الأسس اللغوية تنتج سلوكيات اجتماعية ، نسعى لتوضيح أن بعض التمثيل (الاجتماعي) عند بعض سكان هذا الحي يزعم أن السكن في هذه المنطقة يعني التحدث بالفرنسية و ممارستها (في الحي) ، ولكن أيضا أن نكون و ننتج سلوكا حضريا.

نجز بحث اجتماعي لغوي (مع المقابلات والاستبيانات) الذي نحاول من خلاله فهم ضمن خطاب أولئك الذين يتحدثون عن حبيهم ماهي التمثيلات اللغوية التي تبرز حول مكان الإقامة ، ولكن أيضا في منظور آخر نتساءل عن الاستراتيجيات الخطابية التي يستخدمها مختلف المشاركين من خلال هذا الاستطلاع حول و على مكان الإقامة. هدفنا يتمثل في ما إذا كان الحي هو المرجع الفضائي أو الفضاء المرجعي وتحديد الهوية لسكانه.

تشير الدراسة إلى أن سكان الحي يعملون على تطوير أحاسيس بنسب الهوية إلى مكان إقامتهم أين تشارك اللغة الفرنسية بالنسبة للبعض منهم في عملية "تبيين" لمكان الإقامة الذي سيصبح فضاءهم المرجعي. نشير أيضا إلى وزن التمثيلات (الاجتماعية) التي تركز على خلفية تاريخية : العائلات النبيلة و "القديمة" في الحي ترفض تلك المثلة "الجديدة" في الحي. هذه التمثيلات تسلط الضوء على تصنيفات التنظيم و في نفس الوقت التمييز الاجتماعي مثل "مستغلمية"، "عروبية"، "حضر" ، الخ. نحن نتساءل اذن عن نجاح عملية التحضر في المجتمعات المغاربية.

حي "البببنيار" من وجهة النظر هذه و(نسبيا) حيث يأخذ كمثل لمدينة مستغانم (و المجتمع المغاربي بصفة عامة) ، يعيد طرح الأسئلة حول مفاهيم وشروط "الحضرية" و "سكن المدينة" بحيث انه يعترف بالأولى و يلغى الثانية.

الكلمات الرئيسية : حي، تمثيلات ، حضري، عروبي، ارض، فرنسية، تمييز.

Résumé

Cette thèse a pour objet l'œuvre du romancier, psychanalyste et psychologue clinicien Karim Sarroub. Il s'agit de voir comment l'œuvre "sarroubienne" se démarque du reste du champ littéraire "beur" de par le détachement identitaire des protagonistes en étudiant la figure de l'immigré et la conception de l'intégration de l'auteur. Il est question, entre autres, de l'analyse du discours dans ces romans en vue de voir comment l'auteur passe du romanesque au discours. La thèse braque la lumière dans la première partie sur la représentation du premier espace identitaire objet du jeu d'opposition entre Orient / Occident, autrement dit entre Identité / Altérité, à savoir l'Algérie. Dans la deuxième partie, nous avons essayé d'explorer le deuxième espace, relatif à l'altérité, la France en l'occurrence. Dans la troisième partie, nous avons tenu à étudier la figure de l'immigré mais en tant que prétexte au romanesque, c'est-à-dire que nous avons montré comment les différents éléments du récit assument la fonction d'"articulateurs du discours".

Mots clés: Identité / Altérité / Intégration / Assimilation / Figure / immigré.

ملخص

موضوع هذه الرسالة هو علاقة الأعمال الأدبية للكاتب و المحال النفسي كريم سرروب بالأعمال الأدبية الأخرى التي تسمى بالأدب "beur" حيث تسلط الضوء من جهة على موقف هذا الكاتب من مسألة اندماج المهاجرين في المجتمع الغربي و مدى تعلقه بهويته العربية و الإسلامية و من جهة أخرى على تحليل الخطاب الأدبي في روايات هذا الكاتب من خلال السرد: الوصف و الأشخاص.

اندماج/ الهوية/ المهاجرين /الأخر.

Abstract

This these is about the Works of the writer and psychanalyste Karim Sarroub. It deals with the question of how this author is different from the other writers of immigrants « beur » literature in France : because of his roots since he is not attached to his origines (identity, culture) and because of his attitude towords integration within french society.

Key words: immigrants/integration /assimilation /identity/ other