SEMANTIC EQUIVALENCE AND STYLE

NINA NOWAKOWSKA

Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

The initial assumption of the present proposal is that of the superiority of generative theories over other linguistic models. I also believe that the choice of an adequate theory of language description provides the correct framework for contrastive analyses. However, it seems that very few of the existing generative grammars have aimed at descriptions which would reflect the full grammatical and semantic complexity of natural languages. In particular most of the grammars proposed so far have failed to account for the language of poetry.[1] To amend the situation it is necessary to reconsider the three definitional postulates accepted by the first authors of generative theory

1. the grammar is the theory of linguistic competence,
2. the grammatical rules consist in relating meanings to sounds,
3. the grammar is a mechanism of sentence generation.

This is not the proper place to attempt a full historical perspective.[2] It suffices to note that all the successive models proposed by Chomsky have been intended to describe utterances whose well-formedness does not exceed referential literalism. Most of the generative semanticists, on the contrary, keep to the assumption that all intentions governing language use should be formalized by the theory. The empirical superiority of the latter alternative seems to me unquestionable. Such choice, however, necessitates the acceptance of the postulates which although pertaining to the same superquestions of linguistic science, are substantially different in contents from those assumed by Chomsky.

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[1] Poetry is for me a two-way ambiguous term, roughly between 'aesthetic product' and 'metalingual potential'.

[2] For a review of generative grammars from the viewpoint of their applicability to the description of the poetic language see Nowakowska (1975).

First, the notion of competence must include the functional relevance of language of which it was unlawfully deprived by Chomsky.

Secondly, it seems most desirable to adopt the Hallidayan conception of meaning as indistinguishable from language functions, such as (a) ideational (referential) function, (b) interpersonal (modal) function, (c) informational (textual) function.

Thirdly, the linguistic structures of true significance in view of the above facts are texts rather than sentences.

Accordingly, the grammar must contain next to the formal components, such as the logical base and transformations, at least three semantic subcomponents, each responsible for providing a different type of semantic description, as well as a subcomponent that would take care of well-formedness assessment, e. g. relative to a given set of presuppositions. For the reasons made clear in Jackendoff (1972), I follow this author in rejecting the methodology of the isomorphic character of all semantic information, which is characteristic of the writings of the generative semanticists. Consequently the semantic subcomponents, constituting the interpretive part of the grammar, are each characterized by their specific formalism as well as by their distinct input structures of either purely formal or of syntacto-semantic quality.

As regards contrastive analyses, both of the current hypotheses seem to be tenable within the accepted framework, i.e., we may as well conceive of a contrastive grammar of Krzeszowski type, as of the grammars whose rules and output structures are to be confronted. In either case, however, it is obligatory to provide mechanisms for confronting all kinds of devices and structures in two or more languages, not merely their grammatical and referential equivalence.

I survey below, very briefly, two facts whose full explanation would be unlikely within other framework than the text grammar of functional competence whose important aspects are the descriptions of three types of meaning.

EXAMPLE 1

4) *Let us go through certain half-deserted streets,*
....

8) *Streets that follow like a tedious argument*
   (T. S Eliot: "The love song of J. Alfred Prufrock")
   Chodźmy przez jakieś na pół wyludnione zaułki
   ....
   Uliczki ciągną się jak nudny wykład
   (translated by Władysław Dulęba)

Note that the second occurrence of *streets* in the English original is clearly delimited in reference, which is due to the relative clause modification, but also, at least in one of the readings, because of the coreferentiality. It has been customary to constrain coreferential nominals in English grammars in one way only, namely by the preposing of the definite article. Textual repetition, however, which seems quite regularly to perform the delimitative function in languages that lack article systems, could not have been predicted as an independent surface device by sentence grammars. It is interesting to observe that the Polish translator, having disregarded the significance of the repetition for the modal interpretation of the passage, has automatically reduced the likelihood of informational equivalence in that the devising of textual coherence is far weaker in the Polish text than in the original.

While the above instance was to obviate the necessity of the textual analysis in providing the modal framework of the utterance, as well as to illustrate its relevance for the information content, the second example is focussed more directly on the informational function relative to reference.

EXAMPLE 2

1) *April is the cruellest month, breeding*
   Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
   Memory and desire, stirring
   Dull roots with spring rain.

5) *Winter kept us warm, covering*
   Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
        (T. S. Eliot: "The waste land")
   Najokrutniejszy miesiąc — kwiecień. Wywołuje
   Z ziemi umarłej gałąź bzu. Kojarzy
   Pożądanie z pamięcią. To on budzi
   Korzeń leniwy pierwszym deszczem wiosny.
   Zima przed chłodem strzegła nas i kryła
   Śniegiem niepamiętliwym ziemię, i żywiła
        (translated by Andrzej Piotrowski)

The restrictions on English word order bring about the necessarily ambiguous informational content of the first clause, between the stylistically 'neutral' succession of theme and rheme, and stylistically 'marked' foregrounding of the rhematic (focal) *April*. [3] Naturally either of the readings depends on distinct phonological interpretations. The Polish translator has chosen to disambiguate the clause already at the level of syntactic surface structure. Appa-

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[3] In fact the problem is fairly complicated. Under the first reading the new information ascribes 'the highest degree of cruelty to the thematic April'. Such interpretation seems to be supported by the metaphorical status of 'cruelty of months'. Thus the second interpretation might appear rather unlikely. The reason that I uphold also this alternative is that I do not treat the surface clause as the minimal unit of thematic structuring. The information conveyed by the morpheme *-est* of *cruel* is rhematic in one of the S's underlying the clause, irrespective whether *cruellest* itself functions as theme or rheme in other S's underlying the same clause.

rently the damage done to the original is little, the more so that the chosen alternative borrows from the potentials provided by the target language in an ingenious way. Nonetheless the respective structures in Polish and English are not fully equivalent.

There are more instances in the Polish text where the textual information of the original remains unaccounted for. Eliot consciously exploits versification as a device of thematic structuring. The nominals opening lines 2 - 6 seem to fuse the syntactically regular rhematic function with the function of theme, relative to the preceding and following contexts respectively. In the Polish text thematization by versification is inconsistent (cf. line 2), therefore the parallelism of structure and meaning is missing and, accordingly, the aesthetic effect is weakened.

I do not intend in the least to evaluate either of the above translations. Far more components of structure, meaning and sound must be considered in order that the textual equivalence could be assessed. The issue raised is simply that while confronting two languages, the linguist should not underrate other than referential functions, and that the grammar at his disposal, worked out within general theory of language, should enable him to make a full confrontation.

Translational procedure is a slightly different matter. If we assume that translation, in particular of poetry, inevitably causes a certain amount of destruction of the semantic structure, we may postulate that the loss ought to be minimized by proper balancing of the relevant components in the source and target texts. One can easily conceive of a good translation in which part of the referential equivalence has been sacrificed in favour of phonic effects, provided that the original also foregrounds sound before denotation. Similarly, specific means of devising coherence may constitute primary characteristics of the original poetic message; as seems to be the case in T. S Eliot.

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