

The Importance of Translation Corpora in Teaching Writing: Aspects of Cohesion and Coherence

Wisseem Touati, Ecole Normale Supérieure, Constantine

Abstract

The current study attempts at investigating the importance of translation corpora in teaching writing for E.F.L. classrooms, mainly at the university level. Teachers may help learners to carry out cross linguistic comparisons between the Arabic and English languages by means of translation corpora and also develop insights about matters of cohesion and coherence in both languages for the sake of producing good writings, especially when learners become more conscious about their selection of cohesive devices, and correct their mistakes autonomously. Translation corpora may serve a useful teaching material in written expression classrooms.

Key Words : Writing Skill, Translation Corpora, Cohesion, Coherence

ملخص

نحاول من خلال هذه المداخلة دراسة أهمية المدونات الترجمة - المدونات المتوازية- في تحسين مهارة الكتابة لدى طلبة اللغات الأجنبية، وبالتحديد طلبة الإنجليزية، وذلك من خلال الإجابة على التساؤل الآتي: كيف يمكن استغلال المدونات الترجمة في تحسين مهارة الكتابة لدى طلبة اللغة الانجليزية أثناء العملية التعليمية؟

يمكن للطالب أن يحسن مهارة الكتابة عن طريق فهم أوجه اختلاف اتساق النصوص و انسجامها في كل من اللغة العربية و الانجليزية ، و ذلك من خلال المقارنات التي يجريها عند تحليل المدونات الترجمة ومن ثم اختيار أدوات الربط المناسبة في اللغة الانجليزية و تفادي الأخطاء كاستعمال كلمات دخيلة من اللغة الأم (العربية) تخل انسجام و اتساق النص الذي يكتبه بالغة الانجليزية.

Introduction

The introduction of the LMD system in the Algerian university brought up a wave of reforms to the teaching/ learning syllabi of different fields. The department of English in Constantine, Algeria, was among the first to adopt this system by 2003 and hence a revision in the programs of teaching English as a foreign language was of crucial importance, since new modules were inserted and the need to provide efficient teaching and learning was a pertinent target of teachers.

It is quite reasonable to assume that a foreign language learner must manipulate the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) necessary to language mastery, but it is also quite fascinating to think about how to integrate these skills for the sake of a better teaching/learning of English as a foreign language. This can be merely the interest of any teacher willing to perform his/her task efficiently by searching for nodes where the different subjects he/she tutors band and why not introduce new ideas and strategies that facilitate the teaching/learning process.

I personally experienced a need to integrate the subjects I teach with each other or with others tutored by colleagues to raise my students' awareness about the different possibilities they can have to solve their learning problems or answer some of the questions that may strike their minds, and most importantly to stimulate their awareness about the importance of the cognitive knowledge they acquire while they process the input, mainly in modules where learners are supposed to produce pieces of written discourse as written expression or translation.

Vacca et.al. (2006:370) highlight that " Tie in writing with the entire curriculum content area activities may provide the experiences and topics that can give direction and meaning to writing ". An area where a teacher can tie in writing is translation. A question that raises here would be how could translation be exploited in teaching/learning English effectively ? A possible answer would be the skillful exploitation of the teaching/ learning materials as translation corpora which may serve as a key to cohesive and coherent writing by comparing and contrasting English and Arabic cohesive devices that attribute the text the property of texture.

I. Writing, Cohesion and Coherence

Writing is more than taking a paper and a pencil, it is " thinking with a paper and a pencil " Vacca et.al. (2006: 366). From simple to more complex structure writing, the learner jumps a springboard to prove his existence; for he becomes able to understand what others write and be understood as others read what he writes. While the learner may prove efficient in explaining a specific point during class discussion, he may not be so in writing due to the complex principles that govern this process as O'grady et.al. (1996 :591) confirm :

The contrast between speech and writing comes into sharper focus when we consider that spoken language is acquired without specific formal instruction, whereas writing must be taught and learned through deliberate effort. There are entire groups of people in the world today, as well as individuals in every literate society, who are unable to write while spoken language comes naturally to human beings, writing does not.

Writing as a skill and a process does not come naturally to humans and its best actualization is the final product which has the property of texture, i.e., a text.

For Halliday et.al. (1976:01), " the word text is used in linguistics to refer to any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that does form a unified whole ". Basil et.al. (1990 :193), in other words, say that the text hangs together when its elements are related both at the surface and conceptual level, i.e., in terms of cohesion and coherence.

Newmark (1988) stresses the great importance devoted to cohesion and coherence in discourse analysis because " its main concepts are cohesion- the features that bind sentences to each other grammatically and lexically- and coherence- which is the notional and logical unity of a text "

Newmark (ibid. : 54). However, matters of cohesion and coherence are not the concern of discourse analysis only. Scholars as Baker (1992) studied them under the heading of textual equivalence in translation and even concluded that " each language has what we might call general preferences of certain patterns of reference " Baker (ibid. :183), and reference is one of the main cohesive devices.

It is noteworthy to highlight, then, the importance of such concepts in E.F.L. classrooms where learners must be aware of their role in writing because they are the key to fluent writing. Students can produce good writing by the conscious and voluntary selection of the appropriate cohesive devices as reference, substitution, conjunction, ellipsis...etc.

One way to select the appropriate cohesive device while writing is the cross-linguistic comparisons learners carry out, because by comparing and contrasting, the learner becomes aware of the similarities and differences of his/her native language and the foreign language he learns and so will be able to knit a cohesive and coherent text voluntarily through the deliberate selection of the appropriate devices.

Fries (1945 :09, stated in Johannsson 2000) posits that efficient materials in language teaching are based on comparison between the language to be learned and the learner's native language, and since matters of cohesion and coherence in writing serve as new macro-linguistic questions in contrastive linguistics, translation materials which include texts written in a given language with their translation proved to be a good resource for establishing cross-linguistic relationships as James (1980 :178) confirms : " we conclude that translation equivalence, of this rather rigorously defined sort, is the best available TC for CA", i.e., it is the shared ground which offers a basis for contrastive linguistic studies to detect differences between languages in order to use them in solving teaching/learning problems and syllabus design.

II. Teaching Materials , Translation Corpora and the Writing Skill

The definition of a corpus encloses both its form and purpose. The word 'Corpus' is used to refer to " a collection of naturally occurring examples of languages consisting of any from a few sentences to a set of written texts or tape recording which have been collected for linguistic study " Hunston (2002 :02).

(ibid.) explains different types of corpora for different purposes of linguistic studies .

Cross linguistic research, i.e., contrastive linguistics and translation studies share a common resource which is a corpus for analyses of languages. However, there is confusion concerning the terminology which is used to designate a corpus. Since our concern is on source texts in one language and their translations into one or more language, we will state the difference in terminology concerning this type of corpus. In contrastive linguistics, corpora that consist of a series of source texts aligned with their corresponding translations are called 'Translation Corpora'. In translation, however, they are called "Parallel Corpora". We selected the term 'Translation Corpora', because the scope of our research is subscribed under contrastive linguistics more than translation.

Corpora is an example of teaching materials that may be of great use in EFL classrooms. The use of corpora is of great use in the field of languages because we may reveal how the similarities (as equivalent concepts) are mouldered in different ways by different languages, the multitude of information provided with translation corpora about languages is invaluable. Not only researchers are provided by more solid empirical data about language than previously intuitionbased data, but learners as well. A bilingual corpus is richer in information about the language than a monolingual corpus ; the principles underlying its analysis are concerned with language use and not language as a mental construct.

Translation corpora, i.e., parallel Corpora, started as Guidère explains (2002, <http://accurapid.com/journal/19mt.htm>) " the idea of using parallel corpora is not new, it dates back to the early days of machine translation, but it was not in practice until 1984 (Martin Kay 1993) ".

Johansson in his article entitled 'Contrastive Linguistics and Corpora, University of Oslo (2002)' points out that the study of translated texts by means of corpora was advocated by Baker (1993). The field of translation represents an important application of translation corpora both at the theoretical and practical levels.

Guidère (2002) stresses the importance of translation corpora because bilingual corpora are richer in terms of information about the language than monolingual corpora. He (ibid., pp 39-51) states :

parcequ'il apporte des informations sur des equivalences

en situation, renseignant aussi sur les possibilités du système de la langue mis en contact avec un autre système différent.

Translation corpora reveal specific features about how equivalences are differently encoded in languages. They can be exploited in foreign language learning/teaching as teachers help learners study the similarities and differences between languages by themselves to avoid mistakes as negative transfer and acquire authentic language features as standards of textuality which include cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, situationality, intertextuality and informativity. Cohesion and coherence are closely tied because the former leads to the latter, an illustration of which is the use of conjunction and ellipsis to tie up elements of texts by using linking words and omission of repeated items to create nodes between composition parts. E.F.L. learners must be capable of selecting the appropriate linking word, when to omit a word and when to avoid repetition. This can be best acquired and mastered with the possession of some theoretical knowledge about these concepts, especially in both English and Arabic to avoid the influence of any negative transfer or misunderstanding while writing.

Conjunction and ellipsis are examples of devices that characterize both the English and Arabic languages. They can be taught cross-linguistically by means of translation corpora to help learners detect how they are differently or similarly encoded and develop awareness about principles that help them produce good writing.

Among the differences between English and Arabic concerning these two concepts, and mainly ellipsis, are the terminology and function. While in English ellipsis of the subject involves grammatical omission, i.e., it is left unsaid and "unsaid implies 'but understood nevertheless' " Halliday et.al. (1976:142) as in:

They swam opposite ways round the island *and began* to explore under the water

In Arabic, however, the subject is not said to be ellipted, but rather latent or hidden.

Conjunction, a shared concept between Arabic and English, is also represented differently as revealed by translation corpora :

The rose bush trembled *and* began to open

اهتزت شجيرة الورد ثم بدأت تنفتح

By highlighting these differences, the E.F.L. learner may develop insights about the different linguistic systems he knows and use them to avoid mistakes and produce good pieces of written discourse.

Among the objectives of an analysis of elliptical coordinations in English, based on sections of the Brown Corpus and the American Component of the International Corpus of English (ICE) is why certain elliptical coordinations are favored more in some written genres than others. Meyer (<http://assets.cambridge.com>) states that the analysis revealed that subject ellipsis constituted 98% of all instances of ellipsis in coordinated clauses in fiction, because the narrative action is carried forth in coordinated sentences which have the names of characters involved in the narrative action and subsequently will become candidates for ellipsis. Such studies are of great usefulness to learners because they produce different pieces of different types of discourse, and more than that, a translation corpus of specific types of discourse provides them with concrete examples about how cohesion (and coherence), restricted in this study to ellipsis and conjunction, are represented differently.

If focusing on matters of cohesion and coherence theoretically is beneficial to learners in writing, providing them with concrete examples would be far better for them to develop their writing skill.

In the academic year 2008-2009, I voluntarily put emphasis on matters of cohesion and coherence for second year LMD students in the department of English, Mentouri university of Constantine, Algeria. At the beginning, I placed stress on such matters by the end of the first semester because the translations students provided at early stages were not long extracts of discourse. However, I found this quite beneficial as I noticed an improvement in the students' writing skill, and this was confirmed after mark extraction from archives and comparison between results the first and second semester. The following tables reveal a slight development after emphasis on conjunction and ellipsis.

III. Practical Conclusions about Cohesion, Coherence in Writing**III.1. Students' Scores Before and After Emphasis on Matters of Cohesion and coherence**

| | Number of students | Scores below 10 | Scores above 10 | Average score of the group /20 |
|----------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|
| Group 1 | 26 | 14 | 12 | 9.84 |
| Group 2 | 24 | 06 | 18 | 11.90 |
| Group 3 | 26 | 13 | 13 | 10.00 |

Table 01 : Students' Scores in The First Semester

| | Number of students | Scores below 10 | Scores above 10 | Average score of the group /20 |
|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|
| Group 01 | 26 | 12 | 14 | 10.00 |
| Group 02 | 24 | 04 | 20 | 12.58 |
| Group 03 | 26 | 04 | 21 | 11.46 |

Table 02: Students' Scores in The Second Semester

It is obvious that there is a clear development in results after theoretical emphasis on matters of cohesion and coherence. But this is not sufficient, training sessions in using translation corpora are needed in order to improve the students' writing skill.

Alex Gilmore (2009) carried out an investigation on the use of online corpora in writing classes. It was revealed that the participants in the study were significantly able to improve the naturalness of their writing after only a 90-minute training session and "that the majority of students found these online sources beneficial". Gilmore (ibid. : 363).

If a 90-minute training session was sufficient to improve students' writing, regular training sessions would be far more beneficial to help students do so by investigating questions as error correction, cohesion and punctuation.

III.2. Analysis of cohesion/ Coherence differences in Arabic - English Constructions

In the following, we will provide examples of text parts extracted from Arabic- English translation corpora written by Ahmed Djebbouri, Laurence Kassab and Hala S. Mahiou (2000), where matters of cohesion are significantly different and may serve as a key to successful writing if analysed by learners and discussed in classrooms.

❖ **Example one :** Djebbouri et. al. (2000 :100)

تأثر محفوظ بكل من : توفيق الحكيم، و عباس محمود العقاد، و ابراهيم المازني. و من الكتاب الغربيين تأثر بالبير كامو و كافكا. و قد قام سلامة موسى بتشجيعه و نشر قصصه الأولى في مجلته : المجلة الجديدة.

Mahfouz was influenced by [*Arab writers*] Toufiq al-Hakim, 'Abbas Mahoud al-'Aqqad, and Ibrahim al-Mazini. *He* was *also* influenced by western writers such as Albert Camus and [*Franz*] Kafka. He was encouraged by salameh Mousa, who published Mahfouz's first stories in his magazine, al-majalla al- jadeeda.

It is obvious that punctuation in English, mainly the comma, replaces the use of و in Arabic. The ellipted subject in Arabic is clearly stated in English '*he*'. The colon which is used twice in Arabic is completely absent in English.

❖ **Example Two :** Djebbouri et. al. (2000 :100)

عمل منذ سنة 1934 إلى سنة 1981 موظفا حكوميا ؛ و طوال هذه الفترة كتب العديد من الروايات، و القصص القصيرة، و المسرحيات.

Mahfouz worked as a public officer from 1934 to 1971 during which he wrote numerous novels, short stories, and plays.

In this example again, the ellipted subject in Arabic (grammatically, it is said to be latent) explicitly appears at the beginning of the English sentence 'Mahfouz' and then as a personal pronoun 'he'. The semicolon in Arabic is absent in English as 'during which' serves to link the two sentences. This reveals how cohesion is differently expressed in both languages and hence coherence is encoded differently as well.

❖ **Example Three :** Djebbouri et. al. (2000 :122)

أما في بلاد ما بين النهرين و منذ العصور السومرية فلم يكن قتل الأسرى أو العبيد جائزا، لأن سكان المدن السومرية المتحاربة كانوا من أصل واحد.

Since the summerian era in Mesopotamia, however, killing captures or slaves was not permissible, because the people of Sumerian warring cities were homogeneous.

Another important element in textual organization which has a relationship with cohesion is theme/rheme organization. While in Arabic the adverb of place 'Mesopotamia' serves the theme of the sentence, in English the rheme is the adverb of time 'the summerian era' instead.

❖ **Example Four :** Djebbouri et. al. (2000 :146)

و كانت لهم طرق عدة للتحنيط. و لا تزال المومياة المصرية حتى اليوم تحافظ على نضارتها، و مازالت المواد المستعملة سرا من الأسرار.

Egyptians had many ways for embalming. Their mummies still retain their freshness, and mummification substances are still a secret.

This is a good example of how the two languages have different patterns of textual organization. The choice of a specific word influences the whole structure. The choice of *Egyptians* in English instead of reference 'they'

influenced the structure of the next sentence where the phrase '*Egyptian mummies*' is absent and replaced by reference instead.

❖ **Example Five :** Djebbouri et. al. (2000 :154)

وجد الفينيقيون أن الكتابة الهيروغليفية هي كتابة تصويرية معقدة
فسعوا إلى تبسيط الكتابة.

Phoenecians found that hieroglyphics were complexed
pictorial writings. They tried to simplify writing.

The absence of a coordinating conjunction in English as opposed to Arabic is replaced by the period (.). This reveals that each language has specific preferences of text structure and cohesion markers as punctuation or linking words, because not only words may replace words but punctuation marks may replace words as well.

Translation corpora may serve a good option available to teachers, especially in cases of feedback necessary on students' written work. Translation corpora encourage greater error processing and minimize the teachers' workload, especially if he/she faces difficulties in best using limited time and resources inside and outside the classroom.

It is noteworthy to point out that some of these resources may be freely available online. Students may use them before their redrafting stages of writing by first analysing similarities and differences and then attempting to improve and correct their writings by making them more natural.

This kind of inductive learning is likely to produce the conditions necessary to language acquisition, because the learner himself is encouraged to diagnose and cure his particular problems as Williams and Burden (1997, stated in Gilmore 2009 pp.465) say :

This way of dealing with error correction is more in line
with contrustivist theories of learning from developmental
psychology, which sees individuals as active participants
in the construction of their own personal meaning from the
experiences they have.

The active participants in this context may be of a specific type, i.e., learners who are more visually oriented, less tolerant of ambiguity, more analytical and logical. However, using translation corpora regularly to compare and contrast aspects of cohesion and coherence may even develop

these qualities for students who are less tolerant of ambiguity, less analytical and logical.

Conclusion

Translation corpora may serve a good resource for a writing approach and error correction, especially for time-limited classes and busy teachers, because they help reduce their workload by providing learners with the support they need since they correct their mistakes autonomously with less remarks in the margins.

References

1. Gilomre, A. (2009) : 'Using Online Corpora to Develop Students' Writing Skills', *ELT Journal*, pp. 363-372.
2. Baker, M. (1992): *In Other Words*, A Coursebook on Translation, London and Newyork, Routledge.
3. Guidère, M. (2002); 'Towards Corpus Based Machine Translation for Standard Arabic', *Translation Journal*, volume 6 n°. 1, (<http://accurapid.com/journal/19mt.htm>)
4. Halliday M.A.K. and Hassan R. (1976): *Cohesion in English*, Longman Group Ltd.
5. Hatim B. and I Mason (1990): *Discourse and The Translator*, Longman Group U.K. Ltd.
6. Hunston, S. (2002): *Corpora In Applied Linguistics*, Cambridge University Press.
7. James, C. (1980): *Contrastive Analysis*, Longman Group.
8. Johansson, S. (2000): 'Contrastive Linguistics and Corpora', *Languages in Contrast* n03, October (2000). (www.hf.uio.no/german/sprik).
9. Meyer, C. F.: 'Corpus Linguistics and linguistic theory', (<http://assets.cambridge.org>).
10. Newmark, P. (1988): *A Textbook of Translation*, Pearson Education Limited.
11. O'grady, W. and Dobrovolsky, M. and Katamba, F. (1996): *Contemporary Linguistics*, Copp Clark Pitman Ltd.
12. Vacca, J. A.; vacca, R T.; Gove, M. K; Burkey, L. C.; Lenhart, L. A.; Mckee, C. A. (2006): *Reading and learning to read*, Pearson Education, Inc.
13. المفيد في الترجمة والتعريب : أحمد جيوري وآخرون، ط1، 2000، دار العلم للملايين، بيروت-لبنان.