



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Marked and Unmarked Thematization Patterns: A Comparative Analysis of Opinion Articles Written by American Columnists and Their Persian Translations

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Thematization is the process of arranging theme/rheme patterns in a text. It is considered the mental act or process of selecting particular topics as themes in discourse or words as themes in sentences. This study aimed to find out how the translators organize their themes into marked and unmarked ones and how these organizations are related to the original texts. This paper examined thematization strategies in English opinion articles and compared them with their Persian translation. To this end, one of the leading newspapers in the United States, The New York Times, was chosen. The texts were given to a professional translator to be translated and then rated by an expert rater. Based on the qualitative and quantitative analysis of textual features and marked and unmarked themes of 6 opinion articles, their Persian translations were selected. The findings revealed that thematization patterns can help the translators in better transforming the message to the target language. The results for the marked and unmarked thematization patterns were relatively the same in the original texts and their translations.

Keywords: Thematization Patterns, Marked Themes, Unmarked Themes, Theme and Rheme, Systemic Functional Grammar.

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Introduction

Theme/rheme plays a major role in organizing the message and in enabling it to be communicated and understood clearly (Halliday 1994, 37). Whatever is chosen to be the first place, will influence the hearer/reader's interpretation of everything that comes next in the discourse since it will constitute the initial textual context for everything that follows (Alonso & McCabe, 1998).

Theme/rheme analysis is an area that has attracted the attention of some translation scholars. The basic premise is that sentences consist of themes, which present known, context-dependent information, and rhemes, which present new, context-independent information. Because they represent new information, they are rhemes rather than themes which push text development forward.

According to Halliday & Matthiessen (2004), theme is the element which serves as the point of departure of the message. When theme is conflated with the subject, it is called unmarked theme, and when a theme is something other than the subject, it can be referred to as marked theme.

Thematization is considered the mental act or process of selecting particular topics as themes in discourse, or words as themes in sentences. Thematization is one of the subcategories of textual analysis. Textual analysis is the analysis of the text in terms of its textual features or its texture.

Newspapers are probably still the most read text types today, in hard copy or online. Newspaper editorials as a kind of opinion texts are different from the other types of news discourse in that they are supposed to present evaluations and comments about the news events already reported in the newspapers.

An increasing volume of studies carried out by various scholars (Caldas-Coulthard, 1996; Fairclough, 1989, 1995; Fowler, 1991; Hall, 1982; Hodge & Kress, 1993; Van Dijk, 1988a, 1991, 1993) has demonstrated that news, due to its nature, cannot be a totally value-free reflection of facts. News production process comprises selection, interpretation, and presentation of events to audiences; thereby, news are constructing reality in a manner that is corresponding with the underlying ideologies of the news producers and presenters. News imposes a structure of values on whatever it represents; therefore, it produces meanings which construct ideological representations of a society (Fowler, 1991).

Taking the importance of thematic structures in creating a more cohesive text into account, it requires shedding more light on the role of thematicity in translation. This means observing what happens to the theme types and how they are tackled by translators when the text goes through a translation process.

Any unmotivated and unreasonable change into thematic structures may cause difficulties in conveying the intended meaning of source text's author and then get

readers into great troubles because thematic structures and progression may be quiet different among various languages.

To Barzegar (2008), Markedness does not greatly vary in English themmatized constructions compared to Persian equivalents and there are some differences between the marked and unmarked translations of English themmatized sentences concerning their effect on the audiences. The results of Jallilifar's (2010) research on theme indicated overall similarities in both journals regarding different types of theme and patterns of thematic progression. But there were significant differences in the number and the context of the usage of different patterns of thematic progression in the introduction.

The Objectives of the Study

The investigation aims at comparing the English opinion articles and their Persian translations with regard to the use of marked and unmarked themes, and the research question is:

To what extent are opinion articles written by American columnists and their Persian translations different with regard to the marked and unmarked themmatization patterns?

This study is devoted to characterize themmatization patterns or theme/rheme organization in the sample of English newspapers and their translations into Persian.

Themmatization Patterns

According to Lotfipour Saedi (1991), the texture of a text can be characterized by textual features of a. Themmatization strategies; b. Schematic structure; c. Paralanguage, and d. Cohesion (cited in Yarmohammadi, 1995).

Halliday states: "the 'textual' component in the language is the set of options by means of which a speaker or writer is enabled to create texts". (Halliday 1994, 161) One key choice in the textual configuration of discourse is that of what will appear in theme position; indeed, for Halliday (1985, 53), "the textual function of the clause is that of constructing a message" and the theme/rheme structure is the "basic form of the organization of the clause as message". In the organization of discourse, an important concern is which participant, process or circumstance will be chosen as the ideational point of departure for the message. According to Bell (1991), themmatization patterns organize the initiation of the clause and act to direct the attention of the receiver of the message to the parts the sender wishes to emphasize.

While explaining something to another person, whether in speech or writing, we try to organize what we say in a way that makes it easier for the reader to understand (Bloor & Bloor, 1995). The structuring of language as a message is realized in the thematic structure of the constituent clauses of a text.

Halliday (1985, 67) explain that thematic progression is of crucial importance to the internal relation between sentences in the text. Thematic progression contributes to text coherence in that it lets us know what the text is about and where the text is going to. By analyzing the thematic structure of a text, “we can gain an insight into its texture and understand how the writer made clear to us the nature of his underlying concerns” (Halliday, & Matthiessen, 2004).

Theme and Rheme

Theme/rheme analysis is an area that has been the center of some translation scholars’ attention (see Grzegorek 1984; Newmark 1988; Bell 1991; Baker 1992; Halliday 1994).

The topic is a non-structural discourse category which describes what the text is about (Brown & Yule, 1983). Given information is the information that can be predicted or it is which belongs to the knowledge shared by both listener and speaker whereas new information is the information which is contextually non-retrievable and says something about the given information (Prince, 1981). According to Halliday (1994), the grammatical subject is the one that of which something is predicated. Also, Halliday (1994) distinguishes three different kinds of subject:

1. The grammatical subject which is defined above,
2. The psychological subject which is the concern of the message,
3. The logical subject which is the doer of an action.

But Halliday (1994) used three equivalent terms for these expressions. He used *subject* for grammatical subject, *theme* for the psychological subject, and *actor* for the logical subject.

One of the limitations on speaker/writer is that they can produce only one word at a time. They have to choose a beginning point. This point will influence the hearer/reader’s interpretation of everything that follows in the discourse since it will constitute the initial textual context for everything that follows (Brown & Yule, 1983).

Markedness

In Linguistics, Markedness refers to the way words are changed or added to give special meaning. The unmarked choice is just the normal meaning.

The marked theme is considered as a cover term consisting of different classifications like Topicalization, Left-dislocation, Cleft, and Pseudo-cleft sentences. According to Grzegorek (1984), a thematic structure is communicatively marked when it does not follow the sequence from the old to the new information. It is obvious that an unmarked theme shows a grammatical subject that forms the point of departure while the marked theme employs a technique that fronts other

information. The marked theme uses three main context frames for this purpose: Conjunctive/Modal Adjunct and Conjunctions, Prepositional and Adverbial Phrases, Subordinate Clauses, and Nonfinite Clauses (Gosden, 1992). According to Eggins (1994), the term “Unmarked” simply means ‘most typical/usual’, while “Marked” means ‘atypical’/‘unusual’.

Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, 65) believe that “As a message structure, therefore, a clause consists of theme accompanied by a rheme; and the structure is expressed by the order-whatever is chosen as the theme is put first.” Alice Davidson (1980) suggests that the more marked the construction, the more likely that an implicated meaning will be which the utterance is intended to convey (Cited in Brown & Yule, 1983).

Simply put, the unmarked member of any pair is the most natural, the most frequent, the simplest, the more basic, the logically prior, the more universal, the first learned, the one implied by the marked member; the one understood, unstated, taken for granted, ordinary, usual, etc.

Translation and Thematization

Translating is a process of transforming a text originally in one language into an equivalent text in another language. Catford (1965, 20) states that “translation is the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)”.

The most important point for source text thematic analysis is that the translator should be aware of the relative Markedness of the thematic and information structure. What is marked varies across languages.

According to Hatim and Mason (1990), translators have to take into account thematic structures of the original text to keep the intentions and implications of text producers. Larson (1984) explains translation as transferring the meaning of the source language into the target language by way of the form of the first language to the form of the second language and by way of semantic structure.

The possibility of applying Systemic Functional Theory to translation research lies in the fact that translation itself is a meaning-realization process which involves choices of different language resources while Systemic Functional Grammar provides us with a way of describing lexical and grammatical choices from the system of wording that enables us to see how language is being used to realize meaning (Fang, 2008). Ventola (1995) states that there is no question about the usefulness of the analytical devices-thematic structures, but these tools are not expected to function in the same way in various languages. Contrastive Linguistics has paid some attention to these differences. But an area that is relatively unexplored is what happens to the text’s thematic organization and their thematic progression when the text goes through a translation process. She suggests that “what is needed

by is a more thorough investigation of the theme/rheme issues and the role they play in creating textuality and cohesion in the translation of texts” (1995, 102). Researches have shown that thematic structure, organization, and progression are not quite the same among various languages. With respect to this notion, Matthiessen (2004) asserts that “for example, in Japanese, as in Tagalog, the interpersonal theme is realized positionally by initial position; and the same is true about textual themes. Japanese, in contrast to Tagalog, tends to place topical theme early in the clause, after textual and interpersonal themes, but in line with Tagalog, Japanese may mark topical themes segmentally by a ‘postposition’ such as *wa* or *mo*”. (Matthiessen 2004, 550)

Systemic Functional Linguistics

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory, founded by Halliday views languages as a social semiotic resource people use to accomplish their purposes by expressing meaning in context. “For SFL, a language is ‘a system of meanings’. That is to say that when people use language, their language acts, produces, or more technically, constructs meaning.” According to Weil (1844 as cited in Wang, 2009) the theoretical principles underlying the study of theme/rheme are derived mainly from the Systemic Functional Linguistics. “In the Systemic Functional approach to language study, each sentence encodes not just one, but three meanings simultaneously, and these meanings are related to the three different and very basic functions of language.” (Butt *et al.* 2003, 6)

Within SFL the *clause* is the main constituent by which language is communicated. “The clause is the fundamental meaning structure in our linguistic communication with each other” (Butt *et al.* 2003, 33). A clause can be described as “any stretch of language centered on a verbal group” (Thompson 2004, 17). In Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), texts are viewed as social processes and the context of a text is manifested through language, especially on the level of lexico-grammar. In the view of SFG, the clause is the basic linguistic unit which can be divided into three constituent parts: (i) the process itself; (ii) participants in the process; (iii) circumstances associated with the process. These parts construct the frame of reference for interpreting our experience of happening, doing, sensing, meaning, being and becoming. The most prominent unit in Functional Grammar is clause rather than sentences.

Literature Review

Various scholars have in recent years contributed to the study of the textuality of texts by analyzing their theme, thematic structure, and thematic progression in text across different languages to find out how academic texts unfold thematically. Hasselgard (2004) worked on thematic structures in 1200 sentences in English and

their translation in Norwegian. She founded that there were significant differences between these two languages regarding the grammatical structure of sentence openings. Moreover, Jallilifar (2009) applied the research on *Thematic Development in English and Translated Academic Texts*. He investigated thematic development and progression in English academic texts and their translations in Persian. The corpus was selected from the first three pages of the first chapters of nine English Applied Linguistics books and their translation versions. Applying Halliday's (1994) Thematic Organization and McCabe's (1999) Thematic Progression, the study revealed significant differences in the original texts and their translations regarding thematic schemes. They concluded that both authors and translators must be conscious of these tools in order to use them effectively and create more cohesive texts. Zhou (2006) worked on the theme construction of Chinese language showing some grammatical dissimilarity with English. Working on interpersonal metafunction, she tried to show whether advertisement texts in Chinese and English journals engender similarities in interpersonal metafunction or not. Results indicated that the modal themes were not prevalent across both corpora, and so the advertisement texts did not engender similarities in interpersonal metafunction across the two languages. Jallilifar and Khedri (2011) scrutinized thematic development and progression in English academic texts and their translations in Persian. Applying Halliday's (1994) Thematic Organization and McCabe's (1999) Thematic Progression, they analyzed sample academic texts selected from the first three pages of the first chapters of nine English Applied Linguistics books and their translation versions that were representatives of Applied Linguistics books taught in the Iranian universities at undergraduate and graduate levels. Analyses of original texts and their Persian counterparts indicated that there were significant differences between the two text types regarding thematic development and progression especially in terms of unmarked and multiple themes.

Ventola (1995) contends that "the analysis of theme/rheme structures in the clauses and the thematic progression helps us to see whether the text is unsuccessful in its realizations" (p. 98). Analysis of texts and their translations in other languages in terms of thematic structures would enable one to see how texts unfold in different languages at the micro-structure level. She adds that sometimes readers may find texts fuzzy since they consider some odd thematic structures that are not typical of the target language. The fault in these texts is very often placed on the author's failures of argumentation and rhetorical skills; it is presumed that the author's logic is not functioning well and his/her argumentation and rhetoric are seen to fail. But often the original argumentation is clear and well-structured rhetorically in the source text; it is the translation that fails and distorts the argumentative and rhetorical patterns.

Methodology

Materials

The data of this research came from the opinion column of an important newspaper: The New York Times, from the United States and their translations into Persian. Of the 60 articles collected from the online archives of this newspaper, 6 texts were finally chosen for the analysis since there was a need to control the different variables involved in the writing of the texts and the translations thereof. First, a careful selection was made among the texts collected from the newspapers in order to choose those written by Americans (as Native-English speaking writers) and those translated by Iranians (as English-to-Persian translators). In order to have a focused analysis of the texts, and prevent the biased vision of the texts, the choice of topic was controlled in this research. The selected opinion articles cover the following topics: health and environmental issues.

Procedure

The texts were analyzed for identification of thematization patterns in English newspapers and their translations into Persian. In general, both qualitative and quantitative Data Analysis were employed in this study. Qualitative analysis was carried out in order to identify and categorize thematization patterns. Quantitative analysis, on the other hand, was conducted to determine the occurrences of the marked and the unmarked themes in English persuasive texts and their Persian translations.

In order to carry out this study, the following steps were taken: The first step was to choose the 6 opinion articles among 60 articles. The articles were chosen based on specific topics; i.e., health and environmental issues. Then the articles were given to a professional translator to be translated, afterwards the translated versions were given to another professional translator to be revised. The next step was to read the original English newspaper texts and identify the sentences containing the marked and the unmarked thematic sentences. The next step was to read the Persian translations of the texts translated by Iranian translators to find the suggested equivalent sentences.

Halliday's (1970) SFG was used as the framework of the study. According to Halliday (1985) theme is classified into the following types: MTs and UMTs. In the declarative clause, a theme that is something other than the subject is referred to as MT. The most usual form of MT is an adverbial group or propositional phrase. Least likely to be thematic is a complement, which is a nominal group that is not functioning as subject (something that could have been subject but is not). If the theme of the clause is Unmarked, then the theme is normal. UMT means mapping of

the theme on to the subject. The subject is the element that is chosen as a theme unless there is a good reason for choosing something else.

Then, all data were grouped with their Persian equivalents. Then, each group was reviewed and the data were analyzed by comparing and contrasting the original sentences and their suggested equivalent sentences. Next, the frequency of each marked and unmarked thematic text was computed and the results were presented through tables and charts. After that, t-test was employed to compare and contrast the obtained frequencies to see statistically significant differences. In sum, the data were analyzed using the SPSS 16.0 (Statistics Package for Social Sciences). In order to make a valid comparison and judgment on the marked and the unmarked themes extracted from translations, t-test was applied. The data were calculated with computational analysis. Having done all the procedures, and gathered all the data, the researcher checked the outcomes in order to find answers to the question posed in this research.

Results

The Frequency of the Marked Thematization Patterns in the English Persuasive Texts and Their Persian Translations

This part represents the results for the marked themes in the English original texts and their Persian translations and investigates whether it is statistically significant or not. The results were tabulated and a general explanation about the results follows Table (1).

Table 1: The Frequency of the Marked Themes (MT) in the English Persuasive Texts and Their Persian Translations

	Frequency of MT	Average	Std. Deviation	T	SIG
English Texts	6	6.17	2.041	0.793	0.446
Translated Texts	6	5.17	2.317		

Table (1) indicates the frequency of the marked thematization patterns in the English persuasive texts and their Persian translations, it also shows whether it is statistically significant or not. The averages indicate that the Marked Themes in the Persian translations (6.17) were more than the Marked Themes in the English original texts (5.17). The difference between the two averages was characterized by the t-test. The result of the t-test was equal to 0.793. The Sig= 0.446 indicates that the difference between English persuasive texts and their Persian translations with regard to the marked thematization patterns were not statistically significant.

The Frequency of Unmarked Thematization Patterns in the English Persuasive Texts and Their Persian Translations

This part represents the results for the Unmarked Themes in the English original texts and their Persian translations and investigates whether it is statistically significant or not. The results were tabulated and a general explanation about the results follows Table (2).

Table 2: The Frequency of the Unmarked Themes (UMT) in the English Persuasive Texts and Their Persian Translation

	Frequency of UMT	Average	Std. Deviation	T	SIG
English Texts	6	11.67	7.789	0.116	0.910
Translated Texts	6	11.17	7.195		

Table (2) indicates the frequency of the unmarked thematization patterns in the English persuasive texts and their Persian translations. It also shows whether it is statistically significant or not. The averages indicate that the Unmarked Themes in the Persian translations (11.67) were more than the Marked Themes in the English original texts (11.17). The difference between the two averages was characterized by the t-test. The result of the t-test was equal to 0.793. The Sig=0.910 indicates that the difference between the English persuasive texts and their Persian translations with regard to the unmarked thematization patterns were not statistically significant.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, the researcher intended to analyze whether the marked and the unmarked thematic sentences were similarly realized in the English persuasive texts and their Persian translations or not. In this regard, one question was posed: To what extent are opinion articles written by American columnists and their Persian translations different with regard to the marked and unmarked thematization patterns? and after analyzing the data, the following results were obtained.

Based on the results reported in Tables (1) and (2), the frequency of all the marked and the unmarked thematic sentences was somehow the same in both the English versions and their Persian translations. The researcher used t-test for more assurance about these differences. As the t-test indicated, the differences were not statistically significant. Therefore, the marked and the unmarked thematic sentences were similarly realized in the English persuasive texts and their Persian translations.

The present study is in total contrast with Zhou's (2006) research. She worked on the theme construction of Chinese language showing some grammatical dissimilarity with English. The present study showed that there were not any significant differences between the marked and the unmarked sentences of the English texts and their Persian translations. This study also is in total contrast with the results of Jallilifar and Khedri's (2011) research on thematic development and

progression in English academic texts and their translations in Persian. Their research indicated that there were significant differences between the two text types regarding thematic development and progression especially in terms of the unmarked and the multiple themes while in the present study the differences between the original English texts and their Persian translations were not statistically significant. The present study is in total contrast with Jallilifar's (2009) research. His study reveals significant difference in the original texts and their translations regarding thematic schemes while in the present study there were no significant differences between the original English texts and their translations. But researchers in both studies concluded that both the authors and the translators must be conscious of these tools in order to use them effectively and create more cohesive texts. The current research is somehow in total contrast with Hasselgard's (2004) research. She found that there were significant differences between English and Norwegian languages regarding the grammatical structure of sentence openings while the researcher in this study concludes that, there are no significant difference in the English persuasive texts and their Persian translations. The findings of Ventola's (1995) research contributed some evidence to support the view that the thematic structure is a useful and important tool in translation.

As a result, it is recommended that translators consider the transfer of the thematic structure in translation after conveying the message. They also should get mastery over the grammar and structure of both source and target languages, especially in terms of thematization patterns.

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الگوهای معنایی فرایند مرتب‌کردن الگوهای آغازگری و پایان‌بخشی در یک متن به‌شمار می‌روند. الگوهای معنایی عمل یا فرایند ذهنی انتخاب موضوعاتی خاص به‌عنوان آغازگر در گفتار یا کلماتی به‌عنوان آغازگر در جملات در نظر گرفته می‌شوند. هدف از تحقیق جاری پی‌بردن به این موضوع بود که مترجمان چگونه به سازمان‌دهی زمینه‌های خود به‌صورت نشانه‌دار و بدون نشانه می‌پردازند و اینکه این سازمان‌دهی‌ها چه ارتباطی با متن اصلی دارد. این مقاله به بررسی راه‌کارهای معنایی در مقالات انگلیسی می‌پردازد و آن‌ها را با ترجمه‌ی فارسی آن‌ها مقایسه می‌نماید. به‌این منظور، نیویورک تایمز، یکی از روزنامه‌های پیشرو در ایالات متحده‌ی آمریکا، انتخاب گردید. متون استخراج‌شده به یک مترجم حرفه‌ای برای ترجمه ارائه گردید و سپس یک ارزیاب متخصص آن را ارزیابی نمود. براساس تجزیه و تحلیل‌های کمی و کیفی و ویژگی‌های متنی و زمینه‌های نشانه‌دار و بدون نشانه شش مقاله و ترجمه‌ی فارسی آن‌ها انتخاب شد. یافته‌ها حاکی از آن است که الگوهای معنایی می‌توانند به مترجمان در انتقال بهتر پیام در زبان هدف کمک کنند. نتایج مربوط به الگوهای معنایی نشانه‌دار و بدون نشانه در متون اصلی و ترجمه‌ی آن‌ها نسبتاً مشابه بوده است.

واژه‌های کلیدی: الگوهای معنایی، زمینه‌های نشانه‌دار، زمینه‌های بدون نشانه، آغازگر و پایان‌بخش، دستور زبان نقش‌گرای نظام‌مند.

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