Chapter 5: Textual Equivalence – Thematic and Information Structures

1. John Le Carré’s novel *The Russia House* opens with the following three paragraphs (1989:17-18):

   In a broad Moscow street not two hundred yards from the Leningrad station, on the upper floor of an ornate and hideous hotel built by Stalin in the style known to Muscovites as Empire During the Plague, the British Council’s first ever audio fair for the teaching of the English language and the spread of British culture was grinding to its excruciating end. The time was half past five, the summer weather erratic. After fierce rain showers all day long, a false sunlight was blazing in the puddles and raising vapours from the pavements. Of the passers-by, the younger ones wore jeans and sneakers, but their elders were still huddled in their warms.

   The room the Council had rented was not expensive but neither was it appropriate to the occasion. I have seen it – Not long ago, in Moscow on quite another mission, I tiptoed up the great empty staircase and, with a diplomatic passport in my pocket, stood in the eternal dusk that shrouds old ballrooms when they are asleep – With its plump brown pillars and gilded mirrors, it was better suited to the last hours of a sinking liner than the launch of a great initiative. On the ceiling, snarling Russians in proletarian caps shook their fists at Lenin. Their vigour contrasted unhelpfully with the chipped green racks of sound cassettes along the walls, featuring *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *Advanced Computer English in Three Hours*. The sack-cloth sound-booths, locally procured and lacking many of their promised features, had the sadness of deck chairs on a rainy beach. The exhibitors’ stands, crammed under the shadow of an overhanging gallery, seemed as blasphemous as betting shops in a tabernacle.

   Nevertheless a fair of sorts had taken place. People had come, as Moscow people do, provided they have the documents and status to satisfy the hard-eyed boys in leather jackets at the door. Out of politeness. Out of curiosity. To talk to Westerners. Because it is there. And now on the fifth and final evening the great farewell cocktail party of exhibitors and invited guests was getting into its stride. A handful of the small nomenclatura of the Soviet cultural bureaucracy was gathering under the chandelier, the ladies in their beehive hairstyles and flowered frocks designed for slenderer frames, the gentlemen slimmed by the shiny French-tailored suits that signified access to the special clothing stores. Only their British hosts, in despondent shades of grey, observed the monotone of socialist austerity. The hubbub rose, a brigade of pinafored governesses distributed the curling salami sandwiches and warm white wine. A senior British diplomat who was not quite the Ambassador shook the better hands and said he was delighted.

Imagine that you have been asked to translate Le Carré’s novel into your target language. You have not yet read the whole novel – and you would normally read a text all the way through before you seriously get down to translating it. However, you decide that it might be helpful to ‘warm up’ to Le Carré by translating a few extracts to get the hang of his unusual style.

Translate the above extract into your target language and comment on any difficulties
involved in maintaining the flow of information in terms of thematic and information structures. You should pay particular attention to marked information structures in the third paragraph. How does Le Carré’s manipulation of English syntax foreground certain items of information? Can this be successfully conveyed in your target language?

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2. The following extract is from Swee Chai Ang, From Beirut to Jerusalem: a Woman Surgeon with the Palestinians (1989). This book gives a firsthand account of death and suffering in Palestinian refugee camps in war-torn Beirut in the 1980s. Ms Ang, a surgeon, volunteered to provide medical assistance to Palestinians and was with them during the Israeli invasion of West Beirut in 1982. She also lived through the appalling 1982 massacres in the Sabra and Shatila camps. Since then, she has returned repeatedly to Lebanon and the Occupied Territories to help Palestinians.

Israeli bomber planes were breaking the sound barrier in south Lebanon. Villages in the south, as well as the Palestinian refugee camps, were attacked. In May 1988, two thousand Israeli troops crossed into southern Lebanon. People in Lebanon told me: ‘The Israelis failed to stifle the uprising in the occupied territories, so they take it out on us by threatening to invade Lebanon again.’

It was a multi-pronged attack on the Palestinians in Lebanon. Saida and the south were bombed by Israeli aeroplanes, and shelled from the sea by Israeli gunboats. The Beirut camps were attacked from the mountains, not by the Israelis, but by anti-PLO forces. Shatila and Bourj el-Brajneh were shelled incessantly from the month of May 1988. Both camps were flattened; homes and hospitals demolished.

Shatila finally collapsed on 27 June 1988, followed by Bourj el-Brajneh a few days later. I got the news of the fall of Shatila in London, having just returned from a fund-raising trip in the Gulf countries. People all over the Gulf wanted to support the uprising and build hospitals and clinics to mend the wounds of the Palestinians. What can I say? Each time I think of Shatila, I still cry. It was nearly six years since I first met the people of Sabra and Shatila. My understanding of the Palestinians began with them. It was they who taught a naive woman surgeon the meaning of justice. It was they who inspired me to struggle incessantly for a better world. Each time I felt like giving up, they would strengthen me with their example.

(Swee Chai Ang 1989:299–300)

- the uprising: commonly known in the West as the intifada – the Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation in Gaza and the West Bank of Jordan.
- Saida: Lebanese town.
- PLO: Palestine Liberation Organization
- Bourj el-Brajneh: Palestinian refugee camp.
Imagine that you have been asked to translate the above extract for inclusion in a review of the book, to be published in one of the leading newspapers in your country. Various reviews of the book in English papers have suggested that the poignancy of Dr Ang’s narrative is enhanced by her unadorned style, by her awkward, artless prose which has the raw immediacy of everyday speech. Consider how this straight-to-the-point, free-from-rhetoric, ‘artless’ style is reflected in the simplicity of the thematic and information structures in the above extract. How does the contrast between this general feature and the build-up of emotion, culminating in marked thematic structures towards the end of the extract, enhance the emotional impact of the message? How successfully are these features reflected in your target version?

Στο νότιο Λίβανο, τα ισραηλινά βομβαρδιστικά έστησαν το φράγμα του ήχου. Χτυπούσαν νότια χωριά και παλαιστινιακά στρατόπεδα προσφύγων. Τον Μάιο του 1988, το νότιο Λίβανο τον διέσχισαν ισραηλινά στρατεύματα δύο χιλιάδων ατόμων. Ο κόσμος στο Λίβανο μου έλεγε: Οι Ισραηλινοί δεν μπόρεσαν να καταπνίξουν την επανάσταση στα κατεχόμενα και ξεσπούν επάνω μας απειλώντας να εισβάλουν πάλι στο Λίβανο.

Ήταν οργανωμένη επίθεση εναντίον των Παλαιστινίων του Λιβανός. Ισραηλινά αεροπλάνα βομβάρδισαν τη Σάϊντα και το νότο, και ισραηλινά πλοία χτύπησαν από τη θάλασσα. Τους καταυλισμούς της Βηρυτού τους χτύπησαν από τα βουνά, όχι οι Ισραηλινοί, αλλά εχθροί της ΠΛΟ. Τη Σάτιλα και την Bourj el-Brajneh τους χτυπούσαν ακατάστατα από τον Μάιο του 1988. Και οι δύο καταυλισμοί ισοπεδώθηκαν, και κατεδαφίστηκαν σπίτια και νοσοκομεία.

Τελικά, η μια κατέρρευσε στις 27 Ιουνίου και η άλλη λίγες μέρες αργότερα. Ακούσα τα νέα για την πτώση της Σάτιλα στο Λονδίνο, μόλις είχα γνωρίσει από ταξίδι συγκέντρωσης κεφαλάιων στις χώρες του Κόλπου. Ο κόσμος στον Κόλπο ήθελε να στηρίξει την εξέγερση και να χτίσει νοσοκομεία και κλινικές για να περιβάλουν τους Παλαιστινίους. Τι να πω; Κάθε φορά που σκέφτομαι τη Σάτιλα, κλαίει η ψυχή μου. Πάνε έξι χρόνια από τότε που συνάντησα τον κόσμο της Σάμπτα και της Σάτιλα. Η γνώμη μου με τους παλαιστινίους άρχισε με αυτούς. Αυτοί έμαθαν σε μια ανυποψία προσωπική και προσφυγική ζωή που την έννοια της δικαιοσύνης. Αυτοί με ενέπνευσαν να αγωνίζομαι ακατάπαυτα για έναν καλύτερο κόσμο. Κάθε φορά που σκέφτομαι να παρατηρήσω, αυτοί με τόνωσαν με το παράδειγμά τους.

* I couldn’t find out how Bourj el-Brajneh should be transcribed in Greek. I’m not sure I am pronouncing it correctly. I’m afraid it is the only one left in Latin characters.

The following text shows shifts in thematic and information structure in the Greek text:

- Israeli bomber planes were breaking the sound barrier [in south Lebanon] This was topicalized, to leave rhematic position for ‘breaking the sound barrier’ (=fierceness of war)]
- They were attacking Villages in the south, as well as the Palestinian refugee camps [were attacked was turned into active and emphasis was placed on the victims. (principle of end-
[In May 1988, two thousand Israeli troops crossed into southern Lebanon. Here the structure was shifted in such a way that the number of Israeli troops that crossed Lebanon were given rhematic position, showing the extent of the enterprise]. People in Lebanon told me: ‘The Israelis failed to stifle the uprising in the occupied territories, so they take it out on us by threatening to invade Lebanon again.’

It was a multi-pronged attack on the Palestinians in Lebanon. [Saida and the south were bombed by Israeli aeroplanes, and shelled from the sea by Israeli gunboats. This was turned into: Israeli aeroplanes bombed Saida and the south and Israeli gunboats shelled from the sea.] The Beirut camps were attacked from the mountains, not by the Israelis, but by anti-PLO forces (passive made active without changing positions of subjects/objects). Shatila and Bourj el-Brajneh were shelled incessantly from the month of May 1988. Both camps were flattened; homes and hospitals demolished (homes and gardens given rhematic position, passive preserved).

Shatila finally (preposed/thematized) collapsed on 27 June 1988, followed by Bourj el-Brajneh a few days later. I got the news of the fall of Shatila in London, having just returned from a fund-raising trip in the Gulf countries. People all over the Gulf wanted to support the uprising and build hospitals and clinics to mend the wounds of the Palestinians. What can I say? Each time I think of Shatila, I still cry [this was turned into ‘my soul cries’: fig. I feel very sad, ‘I still cry’ sounded a bit too tearful]. It was nearly six years since I first met the people of Sabra and Shatila. My understanding of the Palestinians began with them. It was they who taught a naive woman surgeon the meaning of justice. It was they who inspired me to struggle incessantly for a better world. Each time I felt like giving up, they would strengthen me with their example. (It was they who There IS such a structure in Greek, but it was avoided as too emphatic. Instead, an SVO structure was used [Greek is a free word order language and a pro-drop one, so SVO is not necessarily the unmarked option] and markedness was ensured through repetition of the personal pronoun Αυτοί...αυτοί...αυτοί..., which could have been omitted, in the first place: verb endings have pronominal use in Greek)

3. The Project for the New American Century is a neoconservative think tank that exercised considerable influence on US foreign policy between 1997 and 2006. Imagine that you have been asked to translate its Statement of Principles into your target language, for inclusion in a forthcoming volume of scholarly articles intended to critique American foreign policy under George W. Bush (2001-2009). The Statement, reproduced in full below, is available at http://www.newamericancentury.org/statementofprinciples.htm.

Statement of Principles

June 3, 1997
American foreign and defense policy is adrift. Conservatives have criticized the incoherent policies of the Clinton Administration. They have also resisted isolationist impulses from within their own ranks. But conservatives have not confidently advanced a strategic vision of America’s role in the world. They have not set forth guiding principles for American foreign policy. They have allowed differences over tactics to obscure potential agreement on strategic objectives. And they have not fought for a defense budget that would maintain American security and advance American interests in the new century.

We aim to change this. We aim to make the case and rally support for American global leadership.

As the 20th century draws to a close, the United States stands as the world’s preeminent power. Having led the West to victory in the Cold War, America faces an opportunity and a challenge: Does the United States have the vision to build upon the achievements of past decades? Does the United States have the resolve to shape a new century favorable to American principles and interests?

We are in danger of squandering the opportunity and failing the challenge. We are living off the capital – both the military investments and the foreign policy achievements – built up by past administrations. Cuts in foreign affairs and defense spending, inattention to the tools of statecraft, and inconstant leadership are making it increasingly difficult to sustain American influence around the world. And the promise of short-term commercial benefits threatens to override strategic considerations. As a consequence, we are jeopardizing the nation’s ability to meet present threats and to deal with potentially greater challenges that lie ahead.

We seem to have forgotten the essential elements of the Reagan Administration’s success: a military that is strong and ready to meet both present and future challenges; a foreign policy that boldly and purposefully promotes American principles abroad; and national leadership that accepts the United States’ global responsibilities.

Of course, the United States must be prudent in how it exercises its power. But we cannot safely avoid the responsibilities of global leadership or the costs that are associated with its exercise. America has a vital role in maintaining peace and security in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. If we shirk our responsibilities, we invite challenges to our fundamental interests. The history of the 20th century should have taught us that it is important to shape circumstances before crises emerge, and to meet threats before they become dire. The history of this century should have taught us to embrace the cause of American leadership.

Our aim is to remind Americans of these lessons and to draw their consequences for today. Here are four consequences:
• we need to increase defense spending significantly if we are to carry out our global responsibilities today and modernize our armed forces for the future;
• we need to strengthen our ties to democratic allies and to challenge regimes hostile to our interests and values;
• we need to promote the cause of political and economic freedom abroad;
• we need to accept responsibility for America's unique role in preserving and extending an international order friendly to our security, our prosperity, and our principles.

Such a Reaganite policy of military strength and moral clarity may not be fashionable today. But it is necessary if the United States is to build on the successes of this past century and to ensure our security and our greatness in the next.

When you have translated the text, comment on the ease or difficulty of maintaining the contrastive thematic choices of we and they and any resulting loss or shift in thematic patterning. You might also like to consider the various senses of we (inclusive of the American nation, exclusive to the group which drafted the Statement) and whether these senses can be maintained in your translation while retaining the repetition of the same pronoun as theme.

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