Quality in consecutive interpreting

A relevance-theoretic perspective

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Given the lack of sensitization to the multi-dimensional concept of *quality*, and given the versatility of the concept of *relevance*, the present investigation attempts to examine the premise that Relevance Theory (RT) can function as a standard or a benchmark for maximizing and/or optimizing quality in CI. Whilst the theoretical part relies heavily on Ernst-August Gutt's seminal work *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context* (2000), the practical part draws on some empirical data obtained from trainee-interpreters' recorded sessions at the Hashemite University (Jordan) in order to provide a relevance-driven account for some semantic, syntactic, and cultural difficulties and problems in CI. The study arrives at the main conclusion that the degree of quality in CI largely depends on the degree of relevance achieved by the interpreter's TL version, i.e., quality in CI would rise exponentially with the degree of relevance achieved by the interpreter's TL version. The study also concludes that the pragmatic RT can be considered a reliable instrument, a reliable frame of reference, or a reliable screening system that can ensure both relevance-building and a correspondingly concomitant quality-building in CI, i.e., RT can possibly fine-tune the interpreters' performance in the booth.

Keywords: maximizing and/or optimizing quality, relevance theory, consecutive interpreting, interpretive use, interpretive resemblance, degrees of relevance, cognitive environment, context

1. Introduction

It can be claimed that the core of any communication process lies in the basic theoretical assumption of the Relevance Theory (henceforth RT), the influential theory of linguistic interpretation, championed by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (1986). In fact, the wording of the RT is sufficiently flexible to be applicable to different genres of communication, not excluding *interpreting* (see e.g. Setton 1999; Derrida 2001, and Vianna 2005). The amount of literature on RT is somewhat vast – advocates of this theory have made important contributions to our understanding of a wide spectrum of issues, especially those that tend to receive

scant attention in interpreting, translation, and semantics. RT not only looks more beneficial to interpreting, but it also appears powerful enough to account for all the phenomena encountered in the field of interpreting, the reason why this theory has been adopted in this study.

Quality can be said to be a multi-dimensional concept which can be approached by a variety of tools. In this respect, Pöchhacker (2004: 153) states that "quality is acknowledged as an essentially relative and multi-dimensional concept which can and must be approached with different evaluation methods from a variety of perspectives." There are also interacting variables that make quality a complex notion. In this vein, Pöchhacker (ibid.: 153) neatly puts "quality appears not as a self-contained topic but as a complex, overarching theme in which all aspects of the interpreter's product and performance- textuality, source-target correspondence, communicative effect, and role performance- play an integral part." (cf. also Snelling 1989; Gile 1995, and Shlesinger 1997).

Indeed, the notion of *quality* in Interpreting Studies has relatively been under-explored, and systematically ignored by semanticists, interpreters and pragmatics scholars; unlike, for example, the case of discourse connectives. Given the lack of sensitization to the issue of quality, the recent burgeoning of studies has fleshed out frameworks that touched upon this topic indirectly through analyzing the emerging and contrasting approaches to the institution-alization and professionalization of interpreting (e.g. Mikkelson 1996; Bell 1997), accreditation (e.g. Ozolins 2000: 26; Avery 2003: 101–8), assessment tools (e.g. Roberts 2000: 105–114; Kaufert and Bowen 2003: 263–266), interpreter's role (e.g. Wiegand 2000: 208–211; Angelelli 2003: 15–26), and training (e.g. Oda and Diana 2000: 178–182; Watts and Straker 2003: 166–168).

Not losing sight of the fact that there are sharp differences between transla-tion and interpreting, it is believed that Ernst-August Gutt's relevance-theoretic account of translation, i.e., *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context* (2000) can be the springboard for the current study. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to show that Gutt's relevance-based account of translation can be usefully extended to the analysis of interpreting. More specifically, this paper will argue that the translation concepts developed within the RT framework (e.g. relevance, interpretive resemblance, interpretive use, etc.) may well give a better explanatory account of quality in CI in particular. Thus, quality in interpreting is defined here and explained in relevance-theoretic terms. In other words, the present paper will attempt to demonstrate the applicability of the RT in maximizing and/or optimiz-ing quality in CI. The exception here is that the process of CI may be considered thornier and more intricate than the process of translating, due to the multitude of factors and constraints influencing it (cf. House 1981, Blakemore 1987, and Chesterman's 2000: 69).

The *versatility* of the concept of relevance means that it can condition all interpreting actions; that is, whatever technicalities obstruct the interpreter's actions, and whatever norms and conventions are at work, the output that results from the interpreting process can be filtered through the principle of relevance. Based on this, the premise that underlies this paper is that RT can function as a standard or a benchmark for maximizing and/or optimizing quality in CI on the grounds of achieving relevance, i.e., CI can generally be conditioned by the concept of relevance, which can assist the interpreter in the daunting task of making choices. To elaborate more, the perceived value of relevance provided by the target language utterance should be, more or less, the same as that provided by the source language utterance in order to enable the hearer to grasp the speaker's meaning; that is, achieving higher degrees of relevance requires succeeding in getting a tight grip on the intended meaning through sharing the source language speaker the same cognitive environment he/she has, which would warrant the conveyance of, not only the explicatures of the message, but also its implicatures.

In fact, the utterances produced by the interpreter are "not simply to express the same ideas that someone expressed, but [to offer] those ideas as an expression of what that person expressed" (Gutt 2000: 209–210). In a nutshell, achieving relevance can genuinely be regarded as a pre-condition for achieving quality, and so, the degree of quality is bound to fluctuate depending on the degree of relevance achieved, i.e., relevance can be viewed as a key determinant of quality, which is expected to grow exponentially with the degree of relevance achieved. In the following part of this paper (i.e. Section 2 below), some basic relevance-theoretical tenets, germane to this study will be introduced (for a fuller exposition of RT see Sperber, D. and Wilson, D. 1985, 1986; Sperber and Wilson 1986, 1988, 1995, 2004; Blakemore 1992; Reboul 1989; Gutt 1988). In the second part, a discussion will be presented as to validate the formulated premise of the study.

2.   Relevance-theoretic background

Gutt (2000) contends that translation can be accounted for within the RT of communication developed by Sperber and Wilson (1987). Indeed, the RT differentiates between *interpretive* and *descriptive* use of language, which is rooted in human psychology: human beings have two different ways of entertaining thoughts – they can entertain them as being true of some state of affairs (*descriptive*), or by virtue of the interpretive resemblance they bear to some thoughts (*interpretive*). In other words, language is used *descriptively* when it stands for some truth-conditions, owing to its propositional form being true of that truth-conditions; whereas, it is used *interpretively* when its propositional form stands for another propositional

form, owing to a resemblance in content between the two. Thus, a configuration of *interpretive resemblance* is born out, due to the fact that the propositional forms share a subset of their analytic and cognitive implications (i.e. their *explicatures* and *implicatures* which should be deduced in parallel) in the given context (Wilson and Sperber 1988: 138; 1997).

The notion of *interpretive resemblance*, contrary to the disconcerting concept of equivalence, does seem to be one of the most appealing, constructive, and innovative notions in RT. According to Gutt, most kinds of translation can be analyzed as varieties of interpretive use, which constitutes the point of departure of Ernst-August Gutt's *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context* (2000). To this effect, Gutt (2000: 127) argues that translation is an "interlingual *interpretive use* of language [my emphasis]", that is, the target language text (TLT) should *interpretively* comply with the source language text (SLT) "in respects that make it adequately relevant to the audience – that is, that offer adequate contextual effects" (ibid.: 107). He additionally says that any given translation ought to be delivered "in such a manner that it yields the intended interpretation without putting the audience to unnecessary processing effort" (ibid.: 107).

To avoid putting the TL audience to unnecessary processing effort, the RT views utterance interpretation as an *inferential process*, whereby the audience infers, by combining the stimulus with a set of contextual assumptions, the intended meaning of the communicator (cf. also Wilson and Sperber 1993: 1). For this to happen, the audience must use the context envisaged by the communicator; otherwise, the stimulus may be misinterpreted and the communication may fail. A context is a psychological construct; it is a subset of the hearer's assumptions about the world. In RT perspective (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 132–142), context would ultimately require the whole volume of our cognitive environment to be the context of the interpretation of a single utterance (cf. also Fauconnier 1985). Thus, a context in this sense is not restricted to information about the immediate physical surroundings or the preceding utterances; rather, it may involve the future, scientific breakthroughs or religious beliefs, anecdotal memories, general cultural assumptions, beliefs about the mental state of the speaker, etc.

RT calls the situation when the audience uses the intended contextual assumptions a *primary communication situation*, and the second where the audience uses a more or less different set of contextual assumptions a *secondary communication* situation (Gutt 2000: 76). Accordingly, the inferential processing not only determines 'what is meant' by a speaker in a particular context, but also 'what is said' or explicit: a point of view which Carston (2002: 19) terms "The Underdeterminacy Thesis." In short, the *inferential processing* is not restricted to implicit content, but also has a significant bearing on explicit content, i.e., it has a significant bearing on the *implicatures* and *explicatures* (for more details see Carston 1999: 105; Gutt 1992, 1998).

By the same token, interpreting can be seen as the act of communicating an informative intention that *interpretively* resembles the SLT as closely as possible under certain conditions. Hence, the principle of relevance in interpreting should be seen as a presumption of *optimal resemblance*: the interpreting is "(a) presumed to interpretively resemble the original […] and (b) the resemblance it shows is to be consistent with the presumption of optimal relevance" (Gutt 1991: 101). In other terms, interpreting should resemble the original to the degree of providing adequate cognitive effects, and it should be molded in such a fashion that the intended interpretation can be recovered by the audience without extra processing effort. Thus, the interaction and/or amalgamation of *optimal resemblance* and *optimal relevance* can be regarded as the solid underpinnings of (optimal) quality in interpreting.

3.   Methodology

In order to test the robustness of our relevance-theoretic approach to quality in CI, we invite consideration of examples drawn from four-year students' recorded material of the CI course taught at The Department of English/The Hashemite University for the second semester of the academic year 2006–2007. The obtained empirical data constitutes the testing ground of this study. The reason why consecutive, not simultaneous, interpreting has been chosen can be accounted for by the fact that the subjects are trainee students, and so CI can relatively be considered more convenient and easier than the latter. The variables of note-taking, the possibility of determining or pondering over the segment of interpreting beforehand, and the comparable lavish time span at the trainee's disposal, which are though lacking in the simultaneous type, have also motivated this choice. Another variable that was taken into account is the relative ease and comfort associated with CI in comparison with the simultaneous type, which impinges positively upon the subject's confidence, since those are university interpreting students who never ceased to ask for encouragement for every interpreting task they are assigned with.

For the purposes of this study, the class of the second semester of the academic year 2006–2007 was chosen, with a total of 25 subjects. The involvement of students' interpreting work was purposeful, as professional interpreters are more likely to have mastered the conventions of the language, and so, they tend to quickly recall whole structures and expressions stored in their memory. Thus, the inclusion of students' output was intentional as to show how things work in real-life situations, since those trainee- interpreters have no access to stored, automatic solutions. This situation is believed to push the trainee-interpreter to act on his/her own as to overcome the interpreting problems, and thus, this will expose the

extent to which interpreters deviate from the linguistic principles, which propel them to handle recalcitrant problems in ways may be different from that resorted to by professional interpreters.

The SL recorded material was taken from: TV news bulletins, TV documentaries, and one of King Abdullah's II speeches delivered in 2007 at the joint U.S Congress. The SL material was chosen for the following reasons: one essential characterizing feature of this material is that it represents formal English, and thus, all selected examples have been drawn from formal discourses. Another reason is that the subjects showed decent familiarity with such topics in the warm-up class activities. A third reason is related to fact that the speaker's accent and speech rate (or fluency) were quite similar; that is, each of the speakers displayed an accent that is elaborate and intelligible to any non-native speaker of English, and delivered his/her material at a normal or intermediate speech rate or pace. The subjects made six three-minute interpreting recordings at the language laboratory, which is fitted with the most up-to-date digital interpreting booths. This covered two recordings from King Abdullah's 2007; two from documentaries (one on historical treaties and the second on global economic growth); and, one from a TV news bulletin report (on the Iraqi elections). Having a total number of six interpreting recordings provided a solid groundwork from which random examples have been drawn for this study. It is crucial to point out that the subjects have previously been trained on the technique of note-taking, and so they were allowed to utilize this luxury.

4.   Discussion

At the outset, it is important to point out that CI is a fallible process, that is, errors can be traced even in the output of experienced interpreters performing under perfect working conditions.

4.1   Relevance-driven quality in semantic properties

Indeed, the interpretation of any given utterance should be the result of interaction between the speaker's stimulus and the intended contextual assumptions in order to be able to distinguish between the different aspects of meaning, and consequently, in order to obtain some discretion in the "jungle of meaning" (Gutt 2000: 140).

A *secondary communication situation*, i.e., interpreting an utterance on the basis of different contextual assumptions, is a typical interpreting error that was made by 21 subjects (84%). This can be accounted for by the fact that the subjects seem to have envisaged a different context, i.e., they seem to have declined to

envisage the SL speaker's context, which enticed them to produce inadequate *interpretive resemblances* that noticeably derail from the relevant contextual effects. To elaborate this, let us consider the following illustrative example taken from King Abdullah's speech:

(1)   I must talk about peace **replacing** division, war and conflict that pour such disaster for the region and for the world.

The underlined utterance in the above example was interpreted in different ways, thus showing how the subjects' choices varied in reflecting the required degree of relevance. The following are some of the most salient *relevance-disconcerting choices* provided by the subjects:

(1a)   سلام **يأخذ مكان** الفرقة
salamun ya'khudhu makana al-furqahati
peace takes the place of division

(1b)   سلام **محل** الفرقة
salamun maḥalla al-furqahati
peace in the place of division

(1c)   سلام **بدل** الفرقة
salamun badala al-furqahati
peace instead of division

(1d)   سلام **يغّير** الفرقة
salamun yughayyiru al-furqahata
peace changing division

The element /*replacing*/ can be relayed into Arabic by many valid *contextually-relevant* counterparts, as the choices (1a–d) can reveal. However, lack of precise envisionment of the relevant SL context seems to have led to these inaccuracies. The first and last choices (يأخذ مكان ya'khudahu makana, i.e., takes place / يغّير yughayyiru, i.e., changing), for example, deviate considerably from achieving relevance, as they are far away from maintaining the encyclopedic meaning provided by the SL lexical item, i.e., the subjects seem to have missed the relevant communicative clues of the SL context, which led them to deduce the *interpretive meaning* on the basis of wrong contextual assumptions. In other relevance terms, some of the subjects' interpreting work can be criticized for failing to convey the context-dependent explicatures and implicatures. Hence, the interpreter should word the SL utterance in a way that the audience could understand it not only *descriptively* like the case in (1b and 1c) محل mahalla (i.e. place) and بدل badala (i.e. instead) respectively, but also *interpretively*, no matter how different their

background might be from that of the SL audience. An *interpretive use* of the given SL context should enable the trainee-interpreters to yield a contextually-relevant TL interpreting such as محل يحل yaḥullu maḥalla for replacing. To obtain a clearer picture at the micro-level (i.e. word-level), let us observe Examples 2 and 3 below, taken also from King Abdullah's speech:

(2)   And people around the world have been the victims of terrorists and extremists who used the **grievances** of this conflict to **legitimize** and encourage acts of violence.

(3)   And people around the world have been the victims of terrorists and extremists who used the **grievances** of this conflict to **legitimize** and encourage acts of violence.

Miscalculating the contextually-relevant meaning and being taken on the surface value, i.e., restricting the analysis of such a propositional form to the descriptive frontiers, 19 subjects (76%) interpreted **grievances** (Example 2) and **legitimize** (Example 3) as أحزان 'aḥzān (i.e. sorrows) and يسمح yasmaḥ (i.e. to allow or permit) respectively. These options seem to have been drawn from the encoded meanings alone, without attempting to probe the inferential meaning, i.e., the contextually-relevant meaning, on the grounds of the already provided communicative clues, which is supposed to lead to a saturation in the interpretation process. To a certain degree, these options achieve partial relevance, and subsequently yield partial quality. Thus, for example, choices like ويلات wayylāt (i.e. grievances) and يحلل yuḥallil or يجيز yujīz (i.e. legitimize) may constitute empirically practical *relevant* equivalents, since each combine the two aspects of meaning (the descriptive and interpretive), let alone employing the proper linguistic codes that would assist in building *relevance-driven* TL versions and subsequently quality TL versions. To have a relevant interlingual lexical equivalent, it is sometimes crucial for interpreters to depend on the proper use of the code, and so, if the interpretation led to misunderstandings, the cause would automatically be labelled as a *coding mistake*, that is, an error on the interpreter's part, who might have understood the *relevant meaning* offered by SL context but mishandled the choice made in opting for a relevant linguistic code that can reflect the flawlessly understood *relevant meaning*.

    Obviously, the employment of proper (i.e. relevant) linguistic codes or signs is integral part to contextually-relevant interpreting, and for achieving higher degrees of relevance, and, as a natural corollary, for achieving higher degrees of quality in the TL. Example 4 and 5 in the following excerpt, taken from King Abdullah's speech, can shed more light on this issue:

(4)   Thousands of people have paid the highest price, the loss of their Lives…Thousands more continue to pay this **terrible** price for their loved ones who will never return

Prior to a search for the proper or relevant linguistic signs and to be consistent with the principle of relevance, we should make reference to the SL context. Considering the SL context, **terrible** here means **high** (price). This lexical item was interpreted as شنيع shanīʿ /سيئ sayyaʾ (i.e. bad/awful) by 22 subjects (88%), which is indicative of how these improper lexical choices or *improper interpretive meanings* undermine the originally intended message, i.e., the contextually-relevant meaning. These choices can achieve no more than a 'brittle' relevance and an ensuingly a 'brittle' quality. This can partially be ascribed to the erroneous employment of the linguistic codes that play a key role in constructing relevance-based TL interpreting. Another example, which can demonstrate how the improper/irrelevant use of the code can be devastating to the very core of relevance itself, and subsequently, to the very core of the *quality* of the message, can be observed in Example 5 below:

(5)   In this **room** there are representatives of American families and Jordanian families who have lost loved ones.

Twenty subjects (80%) interpreted the underlined example above literally as غرفة ghurfah (i.e. room). This option is funny but sad in Arabic. Had the subjects looked at this word *interpretively*, and had they conceived the right context intended by the SL communicator, they would have used other linguistic codes that may well express the message with higher degree of relevance, such as مكان makan or محفل maḥfal (i.e. hall or place). Obviously, the erroneous interpretive choice غرفة ghurfah (i.e. room) fails to achieve any acceptable level of lexical relevance, and, by default, any acceptable level of quality, as it paints a cognitive picture that considerably differs from that given by محفل maḥfal or مكان makan (i.e. hall or place). In different contexts, the word *room* may be interpreted *descriptively (not interpretively)* as غرفة ghurfah but in this particular context, this choice is more far away from achieving the required cognitive effects that are extricably bound up to establish TL relevance, and a concomitant satisfactory degree of quality. Indeed, the interpretive meaning محفل maḥfal or مكان makan (i.e. hall or place) constitutes the stylistic or connotative aspect of the given lexical item, which can be described in terms of sociolinguistic characteristics like 'register' and 'dialect'. In fact, optimal relevance does take on board, register and dialect, as basic *relevant constituents* in the entire fabric of meaning. In this example, the *interpretively-deduced meaning* مكان makan (i.e. place) represents a satisfactory degree of relevance, whereas the *interpretively-deduced meaning* محفل maḥfal (i.e. hall) can be said to achieve optimal relevance.

The following examples, taken from King Abdullah's speech, can further illustrate this point, i.e., the point of register and dialect.

(6)   Any further **erosion** in this situation would be serious for the future of moderation and co-existence in the region and beyond.

(7)   Have we all lost the will to live together in peace **celebrating** one another's strengths and differences

(8)   As public confidence in the peace process has **dropped**

(9)   History shows that long-time adversaries can **define** new relationships of peace and corporation.

The interpretations provided by the subjects for the examples above exhibited a disparity of register, or rather exhibited the use of convoluted registers, as some of the interpretations included, *ultra-formal choices* (e.g. Example 6, تعريه taʿriyah / حثٌ ḥath for erosion 72%); some included *colloquial dialectical choices* (e.g. Example 8, يقع yaqaʿ for *dropped* 76%); and, some included words that expressed *different stylistic nuances* (e.g. Examples 7 & 9, يحتفل yaʿtafil for *celebrating* 84% and يعرف yaʿrif for *define* 76%, respectively). The employment of a word that does not have the encyclopaedic entry which contains the required information can lead to a *relevance mismatch*, and as a result, to a 'battered' quality. Though it is true that synonymous words, more or less, mean the same thing by the virtue of the fact that they make the same contribution to the truth-conditions of an utterance, they make slight differences that result in significant semantic differences, and consequently, in a staggering degree of relevance, and, in tandem, a staggering degree of quality.

The difference, however, may well lie in connotation, as each word is mentally represented by a distinct concept, and that each concept has its own encyclopaedic entry. The options تعريه taʿriyah / حثٌ ʿath given in Example 6 for *erosion* are inadequate choices relevance-wise, as these are the *descriptive meanings* of a term that are only used in pure scientific discourse in Arabic, especially when the talk is about the erosion of iron or soil, which subsequently provides different cognitive effects. A much more relevant option for *erosion* would be the *interpretive meaning* تدهور tadahwur (i.e. worsening) as the word وضع waḍiʿ (i.e. situation) in Arabic cannot be described in terms of تعريه taʿriyah / حثٌ ḥath (i.e. induction/erosion), and swaying from these contextually-relevant options lead the TL audience to misinterpret such terms.

4.2   Relevance-driven quality in syntactic properties

The principle of the necessary degree of relevance is by no means limited to the *meaning* of words alone, but it can be extended to structures. This can be best illustrated by this type of interpreting problem. In cross-linguistic transfer, it is sometimes undesirable to tamper with certain syntactic properties of the SL speech, such as word order and syntactic categories. There are also cases where sentence structure should be kept invariant in interpreting. The following examples, which were taken from King Abdullah's speech, may serve to show the potential importance of sentence structure in interpreting:

(10)   **There was tremendous hope** for a new area. **There was tremendous hope** that people would be brought together. **There was tremendous hope** that a final and comprehensive settlement of all the issues would be achieved.

(11)   **It must be a peace** that will free young Palestinians to focus on a future of progress and prosperity. **It must be a peace** that makes Israel a part of the neighbourhood. It must be a peace that enables the entire region to look forward with excitement and hope…

The above examples (10 and 11) exhibit syntactic repetition which occurs twice or thrice within a single section of speech. In these examples, each repetitive element undoubtedly relates closely to the general topic of that particular section of the speech. This repetitive component may not only function as a stylistic feature, but also as a discourse-building device that can contribute to the overall cohesion and coherence of the speech. The use of parallelism is a fairly typical feature of both English and Arabic, particularly in persuasive discourses. In the three examples above, the repetition of certain syntactic patterns are obviously deliberate in order to create special effects such as 'persuasiveness', 'sound symmetry', 'rhythm' and 'syntactic robustness.' Sperber and Wilson (1986: 222) point out that these structural parallelisms "reinforce the hearer's natural tendency to reduce processing effort by looking for matching parallelisms in propositional form and implicatures." The subjects in the above examples did not seem to have caught the speaker's ostention (i.e. stimulus) for repeating a certain syntactic structure, and thus, they provided interpretations that robbed his speech of the dynamism stemming from such syntactic structure. The reason why the interpretations did not achieve this cognitive effect is because they introduced changes to the sentence structure, which produced less contextually-relevant structures, weak *interpretive resemblances* and subsequently *weak (optimal) relevances*.

While King Abdullah II uses a string of sentences which entertain the same sentence pattern as to express ideas of parallel importance, the subjects in the the two examples (80%, 76%, respectively) combined these pair-wise into single sentences with conjoined complements in the Arabic versions as follows (the Arabic coordinator and its counterpart are boldtyped below):

كان هنالك أمل كبير لحقبة جديدة ولتقريب الناس من بعضهم البعض وللتوصل لتسوية شاملة ونهائية لجميع القضايا

kana hunalika 'amalun kabīrun li-ḥiqbatin jadidatin wa li-taqrībi 'al-nāsi min ba'ḍihim al-ba'ḍi wa lil-tawaṣṣuli li-taswyyatin shāmilatin wa nihā'yyatin li-jamī'i al-qaḍāya

There was tremendous hope for a new area; for bringing people together; and for achieving a final and comprehensive settlement of all the issues would be achieved.

يجب أن يكون سلام من شأنه أن يحرر الشباب الفلسطيني كي يحظى بمستقبل مزدهر ومشرق ويجعل اسرائيل جارا حقيقيا وأن يمكن المنطقة برمتها ان تنظر الى المستقبل بكل حماس وأمل

yajibu 'ann yakūna salamun min sha'nihi 'ann uḥarrira al-shababa al-filisṭiniya kayy yaḥẓa bi-mustaqbalin muzdahirin wa mushriqin wa yaj'ala isrā'īla jaran ḥaqiqiyan wa

ʾann yumakkina al-manṭiqata bi-rummatiha ʾann tanẓura ila al-mustaqbali bi-kulli
ḥamāsin wa ʾamalin

It must be a peace that will free young Palestinians to have a prosperous and bright future **and** makes Israel a real neighbour **and** enables the entire region to look for the future with excitement and hope.

The employment of such a 'pairing technique' resulted in incongruence with the principle of relevance, as the provided interpretations constitute cases of fragile *interpretive resemblances* and fracturable *(optimal) relevances* viz-a-viz the SL speech, and thus, a quality that is as poor as the relevance achieved itself. Innocuous as this syntactic change may look, it makes such a difference to the interpretation of the entire speech. So, the fact that King Abdullah II presents these ideas independently through the employment of the same syntactic structure definitely provides certain communicative clues. This syntactic use allows the hearer to view each sentence as an independent statement that is as powerful as the preceding or the following one. It also allows for the possibility that each one might be echoing the opinion of a different group; that is, it might be intended to represent what different people collectively thought about peace at these times. This interpretation shows that King Abdullah II was not repeating himself, and so, any sought relevance-driven quality interpreting in the TL should be based on a sound *inferential process* that would enable grasping the SL speaker's stimulus and his/her intended contextual assumptions. Only then it would be possible to recover these emphatic effects and overtones in TL version.

By contrast, the kind of syntactic coordination used by the subjects declines to provide the contextually-relevant clues necessary for such an emphatic interpretation. For example, the conjoined assertion *there was tremendous hope for a new area, that people would be brought together and that a final and comprehensive settlement of all the issues would be achieved* cannot readily be interpreted as a reflection of the emphatic power inherent in the underlined syntactic stretch (10): *there was tremendous hope for a new area… there was tremendous hope that people would be brought together… there was tremendous hope that a final and comprehensive settlement of all the issues would be achieved.* As a result, the interpretation loses the emphatic flavour of the original. The same commentary applies to Example 11 as well. So these examples can clearly show how the change in the syntactic properties in interpreting can lead to the loss of subtle, but nevertheless, important contextually-relevant clues to the intended message. In the examples just considered, these communicative clues could probably be retained quite simply in most cases by maintaining the relevant syntactic properties themselves, that is, by using a cluster of non-conjoined sentences, i.e., merely by using parallel structures.

Another source of syntactic problems arises from *ellipsis*. Some sentence patterns, exclusive to English, tend to employ covert syntactic cohesive devices. As we know, resemblance in communicative clues should involve resemblance in semantic representation between interpretation and the original. However, there may be other linguistically encoded information that does not emerge in the surface structure, not because this information is contextual; but rather, because it is not truth conditional at all. One type of these words that fall within this class is *discourse markers* or known by some scholars as 'pragmatic connectives' (cf. Blakemore 1987). The main job of discourse markers is to *narrow down* the number of possible interpretations of an utterance by determining how the proposition expressed is intended to be relevant. Let us consider the following example (12), which was taken from King Abdullah's speech, as to see how resemblance in the clues they provide can be important for quality in CI. Curly brackets have been used to indicate where *ellipsis* has taken place:

(12)   Thousands of people have paid the highest price, { } the loss of their lives.

This example is interesting because of the syntactic peculiarity it displays. This structure is grammatical in English but not in Arabic if rendered literally. As a result, relevance cannot be achieved as such without violating the Arabic grammar. More importantly, apart from being ungrammatical, such a literal imitation of the English structure in Arabic would not retain the cognitive effect it holds as the SL structure does. It seems intuitively clear that if the invisible discourse marker (i.e. the elliptical item), is nothing special in English, then we should not give this matter any special attention. If we were to paraphrase this sentence without the use of the covert marker, we are more likely to arrive at a swayed rendering like the one which was provided by 19 subjects (76%), i.e., دفع ملايين الناس الثمن الباهض فقدان حياتهم dafaʿa malayīnu al-nāsi al-thamana al-bāhiḍa fuqdāna ḥayatihim (i.e. thousands of people have paid the highest price for the loss of their lives), which has resulted in a substantial semantic distortion and, as a result, a staggering degree of relevance. Had the subjects recovered the *relevant* covert syntactic linker or discourse marker, i.e., وهو wa-huwa (i.e. that is) or المتمثل al-mutamaththili (i.e. which is), they would have averted such a contextually-irrelevant rendering. Hence, when the two paraphrases are compared to each other, it can be realized that the TL interpretation differs from the SL, as it offers wrong contextual assumptions, thereby failing to deliver the needed degree of relevance and subsequently a parallel degree of quality.

Thus, in the case of the Arabic version, the pronoun huwa (i.e. that is) is essentially anaphoric, which introduces a logical consequence that is likely to contribute to the truth conditions of the utterance in which it occurs, thereby asserting the existence of a logical syntactic link between the two parts of the utterance. This pronoun is crucial in Arabic in order to obtain the propositional

form of the utterance. To be unaware of this fact means missing out a clue that could have assisted in producing a propositional form that can achieve (optimal) relevance, instead of putting the hearer to unjustifiable mental effort. In the SL utterance, this assertion is represented by zero linker, which gave rise to the 'consequential' interpretation of the utterance. When the subjects processed this utterance, they missed such an important clue, and, consequently, they failed to construct an argument with highly accessible contextual assumptions resembling the original. This could not possibly be an oversight; rather, it could be indicative of the difficulty in handling peculiar syntactic structures that require specifying their relevance-related relationships.

To further illustrate ellipsis, let us consider the following example taken from a TV documentary on historical treaties:

(13)   Once it was said that all roads in Europe led to Rome. It was in Rome that the road to a united Europe began. Today the borders are open and many currencies affusing into one, but fifty years ago this was just a political dream. On March the 25th 1957 that dream started down the road to reality. On that day, the leaders of six European nations signed the treaty of Rome, {   } the foundation of today's European Union.

Similar to Example 12, Example 13 displays how a speech without discourse markers or links is a senseless concatenation of ideas. As we said earlier, discourse markers are very useful pointers to elucidate the relationship between one idea and another. They may also differ across languages in terms of use, function and frequency, as is the case with English and Arabic, which exhibit significant differences in this respect. The meaning and function of a discourse marker can be determined by the speaker's train of thought, or sometimes by the speaker's intonation. It is in the interpreter's vicinity to recognize and analyze these factors properly, and to decide whether or not the implicit discourse marker needs to be flagged up (cf. Gillies 2005: 147). A quick glance at the last two sentences of this example indicates that there is no explicit discourse marker between "*On that day, the leaders of six European nations signed the treaty of Rome*" and "*the foundation of today's European Union*." The speaker, however, has spent the whole paragraph arriving at this conclusion (that is, which is) so there is a discourse marker, and interpreters are well within their rights to take a notice of it as such.

This evident notation would give the interpreter the choice, when he/she relays the speech: either to recreate the discourse marker implicitly as well through correct intonation, if the language in question sanctions this, or to recreate the discourse marker explicitly, if the interpreter feels the need for it. According to Arabic reasoning, such a discourse marker cannot remain implicit, and the English structure should be reproduced in extenso in order to create a *contextually-relevant*

version in the TL, a fact that was never reflected in the subjects' interpreting work, as most of them provided interpretations (92%) that missed out the intended contextual assumptions, and, consequently, the relevant communicative clue(s) (i.e. the discourse linker in our case) as in

وفي ذاك اليوم، فقد قام قادة ستة دول أوروبية بتوقيع معاهدة روما الأساس للأتحاد الأوروبي الحالي

wa fi dhaka al-yawmi faqad qāma qādatu sittati duwalin 'ūrūbbyyatin bi-tawqī'i muʿahadati rūma al-ʾasāsi lil-ʾittiḥādi al-ūrūbbi al-ḥāli

On that day, the leaders of six European nations signed the treaty of Rome, the foundation of today's European Union

where the Arabic linking expression والتي تعدّ wal-lati tuʿaddu (i.e. which is considered) should be inserted between the word روما rūma (i.e. Rome), and the word الأساس al-ʾasāsi (i.e. the foundation), as to create the right *contextual clue* that would lead to the right *interpretive resemblance*, and as a natural corollary, to achieve optimal relevance, which, by default, would achieve a higher degree of quality in the rendering process.

4.3   Relevance-driven quality in interpreting culture-bound expressions

Figurative extensions are culture-specific, and thus, can give rise to communication problems in interpreting. Metaphorical expressions can be a case in point here, especially if they are taken literally. The following example (14), taken from King Abdullah's speech, represents a case of *secondary communication situation* that led to a misinterpretation and to a relevance-stricken TL version:

(14)   Increasing numbers of **external actors** are intervening with their own strategic agendas, raising new dangers of proliferation and crises.

In Example 14 above, twenty two subjects (88%) interpreted the underlined part on the basis of contextual assumptions not envisaged by the speaker. This misinterpretation arises from a mismatch in context, that is, they have been interpreted against a context that is different from the one envisaged by the speaker, i.e., they have been interpreted against an irrelevant context. Accordingly, it comes as no surprise that the subjects' interpretations, too, found themselves in *secondary communication situations*, as they would unlikely succeed in communicating to the average Arabic hearer what was most likely an obvious surface meaning for the SL audience. As a corollary, erroneous interpretations like الممثلين الخارجيين al-mumaththilīn al-khārijayyīn (lit. external actors), المحركين الخارجيين al-muḥarrikīn al-khārijayyīn (i.e. external motivators), and اللاعبين الخارجيين al-lāʿibīn al-khārijayyīn (i.e. external players) were provided. Lacking the right contextual assumptions made it difficult to derive the right explicatures and implicatures. This can be explained by the fact that

the subjects may not have fair knowledge of English metaphors, coupled with a lack of sensitization to the cross-cultural differences, which may result in misunderstandings that would lead any Arabic audience to derive the wrong image. Given this situation, the subjects were compelled to grapple, particularly, with the problem of identifying the contextual assumptions and implications. These are not a matter of linguistics alone, but of inferences that have to do with culture as well. In short, the interpretations provided by subjects were not consistent with the principle of relevance, as they contrast sharply with the meaning of the SL communication act, and so, as a corollary, there was no room for achieving quality here.

In view of the discrepancy between the interpretation and its SL counterpart, this example shows that there is a significant difference in cognitive environment, which led to awkwardness in expression that crept in easily, due to SL interference. Context-conditioned adaptations should have been attempted, i.e., the interpreter may need to employ a different figurative expression that has the same frequency and currency as that of the SL one. Thus, if in the English culture *actors* can be used to mean those who tend to sabotage and vandalize, then the interpreter would need to substitute it accordingly. The legitimacy of such a substitution would be grounded on the assumption that this is a purely linguistic change, that is, the expression in the interpretation is chosen on the basis of the meaning component it shares with that found in the figurative extension in the SL structure. Despite the fact that this is a linguistic choice, the figurative meaning arises not from the linguistic code itself, but rather, from the associated meaning (i.e. the connotative meaning) stored in its "encyclopaedic entry" (Gutt 2000: 141). Therefore, the linguistic substitution should serve to provide the associated meaning, the contextually-relevant one, which constitutes the point of departure for the contextual information required.

The way the interpreter views the cognitive environment of the TL may well impinge upon interpreting decisions: it may impinge upon whether to adopt the *interpretive use* procedure or the *descriptive use* one. There are cases where the required degree of resemblance can only be achieved through the descriptive mode and vice versa. To check that the required degree of resemblance has been reached, the interpreter ought to watch both the likely benefits (i.e. the cognitive effects), and the processing effort needed on the part of the audience. As a corollary, the interpreter would face the situation where he/she should decide whether to embark on the task through direct or indirect interpreting. Observe the following example taken from a TV documentary on global economic growth:

(15)   **The cycle of crises is spinning faster** and with greater potential for destruction.

The metaphor in Example 15 above is clear, vivid, and befitting the part of speech in which it figures. Twenty subjects (80%) yielded the following literal rendering in the example above: تدور عجلة الأزمات بسرعة tadūru ʿajalatu al-ʾazamāti bi-surʿatin for *the cycle of crises is spinning faster*. This interpretation is somewhat inelegant, and would maintain a certain foreignness: the assumption here is that in Arabic the word عجلة ʾajalatu (i.e. cycle) does not collocate with the word الأزمات al-ʾazamāti (i.e. crises), and thus, this collocality not only would sound facetious or comic, but could also drop the image borne by the SL metaphor, thereby constituting an irredressable relevance-related loss. In other words, this collocality would lead to a flawed understanding of the message, and therefore, would count as an irrelevant piece of information. Relevance can here be increased by providing a familiar or conventionalized metaphor such as تدور دوامة الأزمات tadūru dawwāmatu al-ʾazamāti (i.e. the whirlpool of crises), which is, semantically speaking, as precise as the SL one. In other terms, this suggested contextually-relevant interpreting not only retains the denotative and connotative components of meaning displayed by the SL one, but also preserves its metaphorical power in the TL. There would have been a far greater loss if عجلة ʾajalatu (i.e. cycle) had been applied to الأزمات al-ʾazamāti (i.e. crises). Hence, the *whirlpool* image is extremely important in this interpretation, partly, because it achieves *optimal relevance* as well as a concomitant degree of quality since the strategic connection between *cycle of crises* and *spinning* is kept in Arabic through الأزمات al-ʾazamāti (i.e. crises), and دوامة dawwāmatu (i.e. whirlpool), and, partly, because the generalized convention in Arabic is that crises, conflicts, disasters are described in terms of whirlpool, which explains the existence of a large number of lexicalized metaphors along these lines. Such a relevance-motivated solution constitutes the *indirect mode of interpreting*, which is also a manifestation of the *interpretive use* of language (cf. Gutt 2000:168–201). For more illustration, let us take more examples, taken from TV bulletin news on Iraqi elections:

(16)   People certainly flopped to the polls in the Kurdish North of the country and without enforcing Shiite areas too … **a steady stream of voters** was even reported in the Sunni city of Fuluja. But there was also violence as counting is underway. The electoral Commission in Baghdad which organized the Sunday's poll said: it could take ten days to tally the final results including votes of overseas voters.

This example (16) has been taken from a TV analysis report on Iraq when it had its first multi-party election just after the toppling of Saddam's regime. The turnout in this election had exceeded the 15% target, which the interim government had been aiming for, as more than eight million (60%) Iraqis have voted, according

to the Iraqi Electoral Commission. The underlined metaphor in Example 16 is rewarding in that it tends to convey certain implicatures that enabled creating a very positive conceptualization of voting. In relevance terms, these implicatures are derived as contextual implications, which, interpretively, would comprise the *cognitive effects*, the basis upon which relevance can be smoothly constructed in the TL. Indeed, this metaphor is not frequent in Arabic and that is why it has been rendered *descriptively* by 21 subjects (84%) as جدول جار من المقترعين jadwalun jārin min al-muqtariʿīni (lit. a running stream of voters).

However, the more frequent a metaphor is, the more of its interpretation is likely to be remembered. Being an infrequent metaphor in Arabic, or rather being a culture-specific metaphor, the subjects produced, based on the *descriptive use* of language, rather than the *interpretive use*, a metaphor that does not resemble the SL one in most contextual assumptions, and so the option جدول جار من المقترعين jadwalun jārin min al-muqtariʿīni (lit. a running stream of voters) is extricably bound up to induce different *cognitive effects* which, in turn, would give rise to a contextually-irrelevant TL interpreting, i.e., these different cognitive effects would give rise to a 'relevance-stricken' TL version, and, tantamountly, a 'quality-stricken' TL version as well.

5.   Conclusion

RT lends itself to universal application. Equally tappable and adaptable, RT has already proved to be as popular as the concept of *equivalence* in its heyday. Relying on the relevance-theoretic model fleshed out in this study, the present discussion has empirically analyzed a sample of semantic, syntactic, and cultural errors, encountered by novice trainees in CI. These errors were drawn from six interpreting recordings of genuine SL sources, and were selected according to specific parameters in order to support the argument that RT can function as a standard or a benchmark for maximizing and/or optimizing quality in CI. The study mainly concludes that *the degree of quality in CI largely depends on the degree of relevance achieved by the interpreter's TL version, i.e., quality in CI would grow exponentially with the degree of relevance achieved by the interpreter's TL version.* Thus, RT can be considered a reliable instrument in the evaluation of interpreting efforts and for fine-tuning the interpreters' performance in the booth, as it remains critical in decision-making, and indispensible for the delivery of the desired output. The thrust of the current investigation comes to show interpreters, and maybe pragmatic theorists, that the pragmatic RT can be considered a *reliable frame of reference*, or a *reliable screening system* that can ensure both relevance-building and a correspondingly concomitant quality-building in CI.

In relevance-theoretic terms, the study emphasizes that conceiving the intended contextual assumptions of the SL utterance in question, and developing sensitivity to the ostensive-contextual communicative clues is crucial for guiding interpreters in their search for *(optimal) relevance* in the TL, and for enabling them to predict and construct the required degree of relevance needed to interpret the utterance, which would, as a result, warrant a corresponding degree of quality. In addition to that the study has revealed that RT can provide educated insights into the intricacy of the process of CI itself, and into interesting solutions as well, not to mention, bringing to the interpreter's attention polar dichotomies, such as interpretive use/interpretive resemblance, interpreting descriptively/interpreting interpretively, contextually-relevant/contextually-irrelevant, cognitive effects/shared cognitive environment, etc.

Acknowledgments

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Résumé

Étant donné le manque de sensibilisation au concept multidimensionnel de *qualité* et la versatilité du concept de *pertinence*, cette étude tente d'examiner l'hypothèse selon laquelle la théorie de la pertinence peut fonctionner comme une norme ou une référence pour maximiser ou optimiser la qualité de l'interprétation consécutive. Bien que la partie théorique se fonde fortement sur l'œuvre majeure d'Ernst-August Gutt *Translation and Relevance : Cognition and Context* (2000), la partie pratique fait appel à certaines données empiriques obtenues à partir de séances d'enregistrement des interprètes en formation de la Hashemite University (Jordanie) pour fournir un compte rendu pertinent de certains problèmes et difficultés sémantiques, syntaxiques et culturels de l'interprétation consécutive. La principale conclusion de l'étude est que le degré de qualité en interprétation consécutive dépend largement du degré de pertinence que la version de l'interprète atteint dans la langue cible. En d'autres termes, la qualité de l'interprétation consécutive augmenterait de manière exponentielle avec le degré de pertinence atteint par l'interprète dans la version dans la langue cible. L'étude conclut également que la théorie pragmatique de la pertinence peut être considérée comme un instrument fiable, un cadre de référence fiable ou un système de contrôle fiable pouvant assurer le renforcement de la pertinence et le renforcement concomitant de la qualité

de l'interprétation consécutive. En d'autres termes, la théorie de la pertinence permettrait d'affiner les performances des interprètes en cabine.

Mots-clés: maximiser ou optimiser la qualité, théorie de la pertinence, interprétation consécutive, usage interprétatif, ressemblance interprétative, degrés de pertinence, environnement cognitif, contexte

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