

Languages have various resources for giving unity to a text apart from thematic structure and information focus. For a text to be a unified stretch of language, for it to "hang together" both conceptually and linguistically, it also needs to be coherent and cohesive. *Coherent* because it must have continuity of sense and *cohesive* because the sentences that make up the text must be linked to each other to make up a unified whole. In this Chapter we shall examine some of the grammatical devices that writers have at their disposal in both English and Italian to make a text coherent and cohesive and how these concepts are related to translation; in Chapter 7 we shall consider the relationships that exist between lexical items within the same language and across languages both in and out of context.

## 6.1. Coherence and Cohesion

As we saw in Chapter 2, people communicate not in grammatical units, but in semantic units. The basic distinction between a grammatical unit and a unit of meaning is that the former refers to a formal level of language (how sentences are organised into texts) and the latter to a functional level (how people put language to meaningful use). Although a single sentence of a text is almost always a complete grammatical unit, it is seldom semantically complete. It gets its meaning either from the situation in which it is set (the context) or from the other linguistic elements surrounding it (the co-text). We have already discussed how these factors come into play when the translator has to choose between translating *Alt* as Stop or Halt, or *Pronto* as Hello or Ready? (Chapter 3). Let us now look at a further example:

"Please don't do that while I'm trying to work", she begged.

Do and that may, on the one hand, refer to the extra-linguistic situation or *context*: for instance, to a persistent habit the addressee has of whistling to himself, which is not explicitly stated in the surrounding text. On the other hand, the referent may be recoverable from the linguistic environment or *co-text*.

True to his nature, James started whistling to himself as soon as she settled down to her work. "Please don't do that while I'm trying to work", she begged.

Here, *do* and *that* clearly refer back within the co-text to started whistling to himself. In the former case interpretation is said to be *exophoric* since reference is made to the context *outside* the text; in the latter it is *endophoric*, reference *within* the text. Endophoric reference may be further sub-classified into *anaphoric* (backward) and *cataphoric* (forward) reference since the linguistic units of a text occur in succession and may thus either precede or follow their linguistic referent. These types of reference and their relevance to translation will be examined more closely in the section on "Reference" below (6.5).

The above text constitutes a meaningful and integrated whole for two main reasons. It is pragmatically *coherent* in that it reflects real-world experience: people whistling to themselves while one is trying to work tends to be irritating and the reaction of the disturbed party is logically in tune with what might have been expected. It is *cohesive* in that certain elements of meaning can only be interpreted with reference to others within the co-text. The requirement for coherence, therefore, is that a text should hang together conceptually: in other words, it should make sense and not consist of a jumble of sentences. The requirement for cohesion is that a text should be interrelated grammatically and lexically: in other words, it should contain linguistic devices that link elements within the co-text through relations in meaning.

Together coherence and cohesion contribute towards creating textuality: that property of texts which distinguishes it from a random sequence of unconnected sentences. They turn separate clauses and sentences into connected discourse, signalling the relationships between ideas, and making obvious the meaning the speaker or writer is trying to communicate. An understanding of *how* a text hangs together, how it constitutes an integrated whole (how it coheres in terms of coherence and cohesion), is essential information for translators in interpreting the ST and recreating its overall communicative purpose in the TT. Written communication in particular entails a high degree of interdependence between the organising and the linking of ideas. The translator therefore needs to be familiar with ways of organising the content clearly (coherence) and connecting ideas and information across sentences to develop a topic (cohesion).

## 6.2. Coherence

Coherence, as we said earlier, refers to the organisation of meanings in relation to one another. The elements of a text correspond to the natural, real-world order of events or sequences. Although various meaningful sequences are possible depending on the function of the text, there must be a logical transition from one sentence to another for a text to be coherent and achieve its overall purpose.

They can be time ordered sequences (narrative texts):

### *Civico Museo Navale Didattico*

*Al Museo Navale diedero vita il 18 marzo 1922 i marinai milanesi in congedo dell'Unione Marinara Italiana – ora primo Gruppo Marinai d'Italia – «in primis» il Contrammiraglio Filippo Camperio e il Comandante Federico Jarach, che raccolsero e ordinarono nella sede della «villa reale» cimeli e modelli navali donati dalla Marina, da arsenali, da compagnie di navigazione, da privati, oppure acquistati. Con rogito notarile 16 aprile 1932, tale raccolta veniva donata al Comune di Milano e assumeva il nome di Civico Museo Navale Didattico. Essa in precedenza era stata sistemata nei sotterranei del Castello Sforzesco, dove rimase sino al novembre 1952 per trasferirsi poi nelle sale e gallerie dell'ex-convento olivetano di via S. Vittore, nel medesimo complesso architettonico dove ha sede pure il Museo Nazionale della Scienza e della Tecnica. A tutto il 30 settembre 1969 le raccolte museologiche annoverano 3422 numeri registrati. Taluni numeri raggruppano due o più pezzi.*

(Milano. Musei, Pinacoteche, Raccolte d'Arte,  
Ente Provinciale per il Turismo Milano. Edizione italiana, 1986)

This museum was founded on March 18, 1922 by a group of retired Milanese seamen belonging to the Italian Seaman's Union – now the first Seaman's Group of Italy, notably Rear Admiral Filippo Camerio and Captain Federico Jarach, who collected and arranged in the "Villa Reale" relics and model ships donated by the navy, shipyards, shipping companies and private individuals, or purchased. Through a notarial deed dated April 16, 1932, this collection was donated to the Municipality of Milan and became the Museo Navale Didattico. Formerly situated in the cellars of the Sforza Castle, in November 1952 it was transferred to the premises of the former Olivetan monastery on Via S. Vittore, the same architectural complex that houses the National Museum of Science and Technology. On September 30, 1969 the museum had 3,422 items, some of them consisting of two or more pieces.

(Milano. Museums, Picture Galleries, Art Collections,  
Azienda di Promozione Turistica del Milanese. English edition, 1990)

or they can be ordered according to a cause-effect sequence:

*È diventato difficile definire i compiti del giornalista. Si veda con quanto imbarazzo logico lo fa la recente sentenza della Corte Costituzionale, che gli nega il diritto della riservatezza circa le sue fonti di informazione. Il succo della sentenza è che la situazione del giornalista è diversa da quella del sacerdote e dell'avvocato, perché a quest'ultimo qualcuno va ad offrire un'informazione riservata a tutela del proprio onore o della propria coscienza, mentre al giornalista qualcuno va ad offrire un'informazione affinché diventi pubblica. Se così stessero le cose, bisognerebbe domandarsi se è incriminabile un giornalista a cui un criminale va a riferire un'informazione riservata che lui, il giornalista, decide di non pubblicare. La mancanza di pubblicazione esimerrebbe il giornalista dal suo dovere di palesare la fonte? E cosa accade se il complice di una rapina va al sacerdote e, pentito, gli consegna metà del malloppo perché sia restituita alla vittima? Se il sacerdote va a consegnare il malloppo alla polizia è tenuto a rivelare la propria fonte? Eppure il fatto è ormai pubblico, e la giustizia ha interesse a individuare i complici non pentiti, e a recuperare l'altra metà del malloppo. Dunque non è la pubblicità del fatto che rende diversi i vari ruoli.*

(Umberto Eco, "E tu che fai? Faccio notizia", *L'Espresso*, 22 febbraio 1981)

It has become difficult to define a journalist's duties. Consider, for instance, the awkward logic followed by the Constitutional Court in its recent judgement, in which it denies him the right to keep his sources confidential. The gist of the judgement is that the situation in which a journalist finds himself differs from that of a priest and a lawyer. People go to the latter two to give confidential information in order to safeguard their honour and conscience, while they go to a journalist with information so that it may become public. If this were so, the question would have to be asked whether a journalist can be prosecuted for deciding not to publish confidential information that a criminal has given him. Would the fact that the journalist does not publish the information exempt him from his duty to reveal his source? And what happens if an accomplice in a robbery goes to the priest and, repentant, hands over half the loot so that it may be given back to the victim? If the priest goes to hand in the loot to the police is he bound to reveal his source? Yet the fact has by then become public, and the law is interested in identifying the unrepentant accomplices and recovering the other half of the loot. Thus, it is not publicising the fact that makes the various roles different.

or they can be ordered according to argumentative discussion

*L'estinzione dei dinosauri non ci scandalizza e ci appare magari in armonia con qualche misteriosa legge naturale che presiede alla nascita e alla morte delle specie; per i dinosauri, certo, è stata una calamità e le grida d'allarme sulle ferite che l'evoluzione tecnologica e industriale ha inferto e continua a inferire al nostro equilibrio ecologico sono ridicole se temono che una petrolchimica possa uccidere il grande Pan, ma forse non sono tanto ridicole se temono, più semplicemente, per la nostra sopravvivenza e per la nostra salute.*

(Claudio Magris, "Al capezzale del Grande Bosco che muore",  
*Il Corriere della Sera*, 15 marzo 1986)

The extinction of the dinosaurs does not perturb us unduly; it even seems in harmony with some mysterious natural law which governs the birth and death of all species. It was no doubt a disaster for the dinosaurs, the cries of alarm at the wounds that technological and industrial development has inflicted and continues to inflict upon the balance of our ecological system are ridiculous if they fear that an oil refinery might kill the great Pan. But these cries are perhaps not so ridiculous if, more simply, they express fear for our survival and our well-being.

In all these cases sentences appear in a fixed order to ensure clarity of meaning. The sequence of coherence relations generally remains constant from ST to TT, and thus the same order is likely to be upheld in translation. However, when the logical transition is *not* clear the translator must privilege the functional over the formal aspect and clarify it. Unless lack of coherence is a deliberately intended feature of the ST, the translator will have to work out the logical connection in the sequence of sentences and make it explicit in the TT. Translators are very often called upon to translate badly-written texts. It is an inescapable fact, however, that while incoherence in a text written by the original author will be ascribed to that author, the responsibility for any incoherence in a translated text will be laid solely and squarely at the translator's door.

*Cos'è un'autocritica della lingua? Semplicemente questo, a mio parere: guardarci un po' allo specchio (sia pure metaforicamente) quando pronunciamo certe parole con troppa facilità o precipitazione annesse al nostro vocabolario, forse anche a causa dell'ossessionante bla-bla che ci sovrasta e circonda. Oppure, con un rapido esame di coscienza, controllando (nell'atto di pronunciarle) se proprio siamo sicuri di quel che vogliamo dire o, inversamente della loro rispondenza a quel che noi stessi intenderemmo dire.*

(Giovanni Giudici, *L'Espresso*, 25 gennaio 1981)

What is language self-criticism? Simply this, in my opinion: having a look at ourselves in the mirror (even if metaphorically) whenever we utter certain words too lightly or hastily – words that have been tagged onto our vocabulary, among other things, perhaps, as a result of the incessant babbling that goes on all around us. Or we could take a swift look at our conscience just as we're uttering the words to check whether we are really sure of what we want to say, or whether the words themselves are actually saying what we mean.

Essentially, the translator's task is to decide what the writer is aiming to *achieve* with the piece of discourse and what he or she does in fact achieve. The text should be evaluated according to its functionality, therefore, which means its overall communicative purpose.

### 6.3. Cohesion

The coherent organisation of ideas in written communication is closely connected to the way meaning is related across sentence boundaries either implicitly or explicitly. The possibilities that exist in language for setting up relations that make a text hang together are called *cohesive devices*. Whenever some element in the text is dependent for its interpretation on another, a cohesive tie is set up between the presupposing and the presupposed items. These ties can be either grammatical or lexical and may span long passages of intervening text. By forming a network of references, cohesive ties make a text a unified whole. The occurrence of various cohesively-related items in a text leads to a cohesive chain and the closer the relationship between different chains in a text, the more cohesive and coherent the text. Although the conceptual relationships of coherence (cause-effect, temporal, etc.) are most probably universal and very similar in Italian and English, the cohesive devices that activate and signal such relationships are likely to differ from language to language.

Grammatical cohesion denotes the surface marking of intersentential semantic relations. It includes such cohesive devices as *reference*, *substitution*, *ellipsis* and *conjunction*. The relevance of grammatical cohesion to translation lies in the fact that different languages have preferences for certain sets of devices for creating textual cohesion over others. Let us now look at some grammatical devices in English and see how they contribute towards textuality, paying particular attention to those devices which often prove troublesome to Italian/English translation.

### 6.4. Reference

Referential and deictic links are the backbone of text cohesion. Reference items in English include *personal pronouns* (he, she, it, they, etc.), the *definite article* (the), *deictics* (this, that, these, those, here, there, etc.), and such items as *same*, *different*, *other*, *else*, *such*, etc. The following texts illustrate these types of reference in both English and Italian.