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The Textual Metafunction as a Didactic Problem in Applied Translation Studies.

When it comes to teaching and learning translation, the textual metafunction poses a number of conceptual, terminological and procedural challenges. Most of the conceptual challenges arise in the context of extending the notion of linguistic structure beyond its traditional domain of constituency and dependency, and can thus to some extent be reduced to issues of linguistic representation. The terminological challenges are in part a function of the typological differences between the (native and foreign, source and target) object languages involved in the translation tasks being didactically simulated, but are also in part a function of the typological differences between the (linguistic and translatological) metalanguages that have become dominant in the academic cultures natively associated with those object languages. The procedural challenges are not reducible to a simple function of the conceptual and terminological ones, but are related to more fundamental differences between the forms that didactic or, in Bernstein's provocatively broader terms, "pedagogic" discourse takes in those academic cultures; in the present case, we are dealing with the mismatches between a German institutional setting (whose preferred form is the "methodische Einführung"), French students (who have been taught to expect an "initiation raisonnée") and Anglo-Saxon teachers (who are inclined to want to offer a "practical introduction"). The transculturality inherent in (didactically simulating, and pedagogically transmitting) the translation process provides a context within which to criticize these institutional preferences, acquired expectations, and unconscious inclinations.

On the basis of a corpus of French-English translations done under examination conditions by French-speaking students at the University of the Saarland, we present a statistical overview of the problems the students most frequently encounter in dealing with the textual-metafunction features of French texts that are to be put into English – in particular in relation to Theme-Rheme and Given-New structures – and list some of the conceptual and terminological difficulties their teachers have in recognizing and classifying these problems–attested marginalia include "word order", "sentence structure", "stress", "emphasis", and (the thoroughly opaque:) "text". Anglo-Saxon didactic empiricism apparently requires French-speaking students of French-English translation to auto-contextualize these (and many other) scribbled comments, as part of the process of their learning to culturally mediate between the continental and the cross-Channel. In the spirit of the Hallidayan attempt to reconcile Firth with Saussure-via-Hjelmslev, we offer a methodical, rational and practical alternative to the current classificational chaos.