# Reasons for Re-Paragraphing in the Translation Process

## An Ongoing Project

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*Abstract.* In this paper, we present ongoing research to establish an understanding of re-paragraphing in the translation process. By re-paragraphing, we mean changing paragraph structure or paragraph size and number in the target text; in other words, the decision to translate one paragraph into two paragraphs or vice-versa. We look into possible reasons from a syntactic point of view, and we suggest elements that would help set standards for translators to ensure a loyal transmission of text coherence.

## 1. Introduction

A paragraph is a universal concept in all languages; it is a textual unit with a topic and represents an idea in a text. In that sense, starting a new paragraph connotes a new idea. In this perspective, we aim to understand the reasons behind changes in paragraph number or paragraph division in a target text. As translation is the transfer of meaning from a source language to a target language, what comes to mind is transferring the meaning of words depending on the context, translating sentences, and adapting sentence structure in the process if deemed grammatically necessary due to syntactic and grammatical differences between languages. However, how does re-paragraphing contribute to transferring meaning when it comes to changing paragraph divisions? In a text, is changing paragraph structure or paragraph number considered necessary to ensure an accurate transfer of the meaning of a text, of its logical organization of ideas? We aim to find out a paragraph's role in the transfer of meaning and to explain if re-paragraphing is sometimes necessary for a successful translation. Even though re-paragraphing does not occur as much as changing the syntactic structure of a sentence, which happens for grammatical reasons, this shift is intended. It is considered a necessity to achieve 'naturalness' in the target text.

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In this paper, we will describe the concept of a paragraph and the different stages of paragraph analysis, and we will attempt to explain the reasons behind re-paragraphing using examples of re-paragraphing in Arabic translations. At this point of the research project, our objective is to have a general understanding of the reasons behind re-paragraphing regardless of text typology related to stylistics.

## 2.   The Notion of a Paragraph From a Translation Perspective

The common definition of a paragraph is a section of a written text covering a specific theme. Each paragraph should have an introduction, a development, and a conclusion of its own, marked by a line space and an indentation. This is the universal definition of a paragraph as found in dictionaries, which can be summarized as such:

> A distinct section of a piece of writing usually dealing with a single theme and indicated by a new line, indentation, or numbering.
>                                                           (Oxford English dictionary)

Some other definitions (Merriam Webster) add more precise details, saying that it is formed of a group of sentences or a single sentence that "forms a unit" and that has an introduction, development, or conclusion either directly, as in academic texts, or indirectly as in literary texts. The definition of a paragraph in Arabic is not different than the former definitions. In Arabic, a paragraph is defined as

> A part of discourse or a written idea that covers a specific theme of a topic in a book or an article.                            (al-Maany dictionary)

<div dir="rtl">جزء من كلام أو فكرة مكتوبة تتناول نقطة معيّنة من الموضوع كفقرة من كتاب أو مقال.</div>

We find the former summary of definitions of a paragraph does not succeed in defining the concept of a paragraph from a linguistic point of view to differentiate it from the concept of written discourse. The only distinction of a modern paragraph is the alinea and indentation for some paragraphs. Even though the word (or term) paragraph globally has the same meaning, the concept of a paragraph remains too general since it implies too many factors for it to be as global as its definition implies. A paragraph is a linguistic entity in a discourse. It is accompanied by an alinea or indentation, which makes a paragraph an essential factor in determining a text layout. It is related to cognitive sciences for its role in clarifying the logic between ideas in a text and creating a 'smooth transition' between ideas or events in a given text, connecting or separating ideas from each other. Since it does not necessarily have linguistic markers, the segmentation of a text into paragraphs depends on the author and what seems natural in a language, which is also a vague notion.

From a translation perspective, the division of paragraphs is related to text coherence, which makes the meaning of a paragraph from a psycholinguistic perspective the most relatable to the translation process and the translator's decision to change paragraph structure or paragraph division. Coherence is somehow a vague concept because, unlike cohesion, no linguistic markers define coherence in a text. The first step when translating a text is to read it in its entirety to understand how the author logically relates ideas and then transfer this logic into a target language. Therefore, coherence transfer is an essential part of the translation process. The understanding and, as a result, the transfer of text coherence depends on the translator's understanding of the text and of the topic in general (Le, 2004)

This, however, does not exclude the importance of syntactic analysis, especially cohesive devices used to start a paragraph, which are also indicators of coherence in some languages, such as Arabic.

To have a structured analysis of a paragraph, we will consider it, at this point of our project, as a larger version of a sentence and, therefore, apply syntactic analysis of sentences in paragraph analysis of a written discourse; we will then try to define elements that would help set standards for re-paragraphing in translation.

## 3.   Syntactic Analysis of a Paragraph: The Application of Transformational Grammar and Systemic Functional Grammar in the Translation of a Paragraph

In this syntactic analysis, we would compare the function of the source text and the source culture with the functions of the target text in the target culture. To achieve this, it is important to analyze a paragraph at the micro level (sentence order in a paragraph, intersentential relationships, and their involvement in the aesthetic form) and at the macro level (paragraph divisions and linguistic elements involved in marking the beginning of a paragraph).

At the micro level, analysis of connectors is essential to understand the relationship between sentences, such as coordination, subordination, or contrast. This micro-analysis of a paragraph is important in translating between Arabic and English because both languages have different norms in paragraph construction. In Arabic, building a paragraph with one long sentence with connectors is common. When translating such paragraphs into English, translators analyze connectors' role in building a paragraph with shorter sentences while maintaining intersentential relationships. See for example, Fig. 1.

In the example of Fig. 1, there is a two-sentence paragraph in English: the first is the statement of an example to support the following

And that is how, in worrying silence, the murder of the Paris schoolteacher Samuel Paty was used as a pretext for disbanding the Collective Against Islamophobia in France.  **It's as if**, day after day, far from extending the limits of freedom, the explosion in communication is creating disciplinarian societies that force us to shuttle back and forth between our places of confinement.

على هذا النّحو، جاء اغتيال صامويل باتي ليتّخذ، في صمت مُريب، كعِلّة لحلّ الجمعية المناهضة لمعاداة الإسلام في فرنسا، **كما لو أنّ** طفرة وسائل الاتّصال بدلا من التوسيع من نطاق الحرّيّات، تعمد يوما بعد يوم إلى إرساء مجتمعات نظاميّة تحتّم علينا مداومةَ التنقّل مِنْ وإلى مُحتشداتنا.

FIGURE 1

sentence, which is an argument (the sentence moves from a specific incidence to a general statement). The cohesion between both sentences is established with *It's as if*. In the Arabic equivalence, both sentences were translated into one sentence using the cohesive device <i>kamā</i>, used to coordinate two complete sentences to refer to the similarity between them (the literal translation is *as*). This change in the micro-construction of a paragraph is essential so that the reader can understand the author's intended coherence.

This structure of one-sentence paragraphs is common in Arabic, and transformational grammar (Chomsky, 1957) is a possible solution for translating one-sentence paragraphs. Since the comma, along with connectors, are often used as indirect sentence boundaries in a long Arabic sentence, they can give the translator hints on how to re-construct the meaning naturally, creating an appropriate number of sentences that would make the text readable in English while maintaining the source text's cohesion.

Another way to analyze a paragraph at the micro level is by applying systemic functional grammar (Halliday, 2014), especially theme-rheme organization.[1] In that sense, a paragraph is analyzed by theme-rheme sequence. In a paragraph, a theme is the topic sentence, and the theme is the supporting sentence. This type of analysis is internalized in the translators' text and paragraph analysis. Still, the theme-rheme organization of a paragraph changes when it is translated into two paragraphs, thus creating two topic sentences. Consider the example of Fig. 2, where the translation in English and Arabic have the same theme-rheme organization in two paragraphs but, in the French translation, both paragraphs were translated into one.

The Arabic and English versions have two topic sentences, while in the French version, both paragraphs were translated into one, the sec-

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1. Researchers such as Fareh (1988) and Aziz (1988) applied theme-rheme organization in the broader sense of paragraph analysis.

Cependant, quand la droite américaine s'en indigne, on est presque tenté de lui répliquer: n'est-ce pas vous et vos penseurs de Chicago qui avez installé l'idée que la puissance publique ne devait brider ni le pouvoir des entreprises, ni la fortune de leurs propriétaires, légitimés selon vous par le libre choix des consommateurs? Eh bien, ce «populisme de marché», vous en devenez aujourd'hui les victimes. **Le premier amendement de la Constitution américaine protège la libre expression contre une censure de l'État fédéral et des gouvernements locaux, mais pas contre celle des entreprises privées en situation de monopole. Leur «expression», c'est votre silence. Vae victis, en somme, et tout le pouvoir aux Gafam (2) lorsqu'ils vous font taire!**

When the US right expresses outrage, however, one is tempted to reply: wasn't it you and your Chicago ideologues who established the idea that government should not limit the power of business enterprises or the wealth of their owners, which (according to you) were legitimized by consumer choice? Well, now you're the latest victims of this 'market populism.'
**The First Amendment to the US Constitution protects freedom of expression against censorship by federal or local government, but not against that of private enterprises operating a monopoly. Their 'expression' has become your silence. Woe to the vanquished, and all power to the GAFAM (2) when they shut you up!**

لكن وعندما يعبّر اليمين الأمريكيّ عن سخطه على هذا الفعل، فإنّنا نبدو أميَل إلى أن نردّ عليه بقولنا: ألستَ أنتَ، بمعيّة مُفكّريك في شيكاغو، مَنْ وضع فكرةَ أنّ السلطة العموميّة لا يمكنها أنْ تحدّ من سلطة المؤسّسات الخاصّة ولا من ثروة أصحابها، وهو الأمر الذي شرّعتم له باسم حرّيّة اختيار المستهلكين؟ حسنا، هاهي «شعبويّة السّوق» وها أنتم اليوم أصبحتم من ضمن ضحاياها.

**يحمي التعديل الأول لدستور الولايات المتّحدة الأمريكية حرية التعبير من رقابة الدولة الفدراليّة والحكومات المحلّيّة، لكنّه لا يحميها من رقابة الشركات الاحتكاريّة الخاصّة. إنّ «التعبير» عنها (تعبيرهم عن الرأي) يعني سكوتَك. خلاصةُ الأمر: «لا عزاء للخاسرين»، ولغافام (2) مُطلق السّلطة في مَنْعك من الكلام!**

FIGURE 2

ond topic sentence being transferred into a supporting sentence. Even though this division does not happen often in the translation process, the possible reason would be cultural, the French reader would relate both paragraphs as part of one theme. Another example would be the following for a division of the Arabic paragraph into two, as in Fig. 3.

Figure 3 would be another example of translating one topic sentence into two topic sentences for socio-cultural reasons. The translator assumes that mentioning opponents of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan is important to the Arabic reader and, therefore, considers that the reader would find it more coherent if this sentence becomes the theme of a separate paragraph.

It becomes a continual and ever stricter state of emergency. Nothing is easier than identifying a target of hatred, shunned by all, and then continually extending the limits of censure and prohibition. **Opponents of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were labeled as Al-Qaida sympathizers; critics of Israeli policy as antisemites; and those who feel exhausted by the academic preachifying imported from the US as Trumpists or racists. In such cases, we no longer seek to contradict our adversaries but to shut them up.**

إنها لن تكون إلا حالة استثنائيّة تدوم وتتشدّد. ذلك أنّه ليس هناك ما هو أَيْسَرُ من تحديد هدف مكروه لا أحد يرغب في الظهور في صورة الشّريك له، ثم العمل الدائب على توسيع محيط الرقابة والمحرّمات.

**لقد تمّ وصْمُ المناهضين لحروب العراق وأفغانستان على أنّهم محامو تنظيم القاعدة— مناصرون لتنظيم القاعدة، كما نُعِتَ منتقدو سياسة إسرائيل بأعداء السّاميّة، أمّا من كانت الخطب الجامعية الوعظية المستوردة من أمريكا تثقلهم فيتّهمهم بكونهم من أنصار ترامب أو من العنصريين. لم يعد الأمر في مثل هذه الحالات متعلّقا بمناقضة رأي الخصوم بل بإسكاتهم.**

<div align="center">FIGURE 3</div>

## 4. How to Set Standards for Re-Paragraphing for Translation Purposes

To set standards for paragraph construction in a target text, we should define the linguistic elements involved in paragraph construction and their correspondence in different languages. If we consider the eight universals of discourse identified by Nida and Taber (in Steele, 1992, p.44), we consider the following essential to study cohesion and coherence in a paragraph:

- The marking of the beginning of discourse, which can be paragraph openings that are sometimes added as cohesive devices to mark the relationship with the previous paragraph).
- Temporal and spatial relations between events and objects.
- The identification of participants (theme in a topic sentence).
- The marking of logical relations between events (connectors at the micro level, punctuation marks).
- Highlighting emphasis.

From a linguistic perspective, we can use the aforementioned universals of discourse in the study of paragraph cohesion, which is the linguistic phenomenon concerned with the logic of a paragraph using explicit linguistic elements (Takagaki, 2008, p. 213). This study of paragraph cohesion can be at the micro level by analyzing connectors that explicitly show the logic between sentences, and at the macro level by analyzing cohesive devices that are sometimes used to highlight the logical arrangement of paragraphs in a text (paragraph openings). At the mi-

cro level, connectors that explicitly show the logic between sentences, and at the macro, cohesive devices that show the logical arrangement of paragraphs in a text (paragraph openings).

From a sociocultural perspective, the study of extra-linguistic elements that implicitly create coherence (Ibid.), which is the arrangement of ideas in an acceptable way according to the type of text and in a way that connotes a continuity of the thought process in a text can be achieved by identifying temporal or spatial relations between different elements and through the identification of participants.

Since textual organization does not have clear linguistic rules, paragraphs can be translated using the same structure of the source text without making linguistic mistakes. However, the final result would be a text that looks strange or unnatural because of the lack of the logical element. Translators, usually translating into their native language, are "subconsciously" aware of the syntactic and sociocultural elements that will make the text sound natural in the target language, even though there are no clear rules, and make changes in paragraph structure accordingly. This internalized knowledge comes from the knowledge of similarities and differences in marking the discourse universals present in paragraph construction. For example, Arabic has more paragraph openings than English, some of them untranslatable, such as $wāw^2$at the beginning of an Arabic paragraph. Therefore, a translator might add a paragraph opening in Arabic that transfers the original inter-paragraph relation or might not translate an Arabic paragraph opening into English. Temporal and spatial relations and other logical relations between objects and events are respected in translation to stay loyal to the author's intention. As for identifying participants and highlighting emphasis, we saw in previous examples that the translator might choose to get involved in text coherence for socio-cultural reasons so that the ideas' connections are more logical. This involvement results in changing paragraph division and is target-reader oriented.

## 5.  Conclusion

The study of a paragraph in general and a contrastive study of a paragraph for translation purposes, in particular, is complicated for many reasons. The main reason is the multidisciplinarity of paragraph analysis, which includes linguistic, logical, and visual aspects of thematic representation. Another reason lies in the translator's role as a loyal and 'detached' transmitter of information; the size of the original text has to be respected. Therefore, unlike the understandable and acceptable changes in paragraphs at the micro level for syntactic reasons, changes

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2. *Wāw* is originally a coordinator that means (and), but that is used to create paragraph cohesion.

in the number of paragraphs must be for logical and cognitive (socio-cultural) reasons.

A change in the number of paragraphs is a deliberate action in the translation process, not only to add a logically natural sequence of ideas (part of the transmission of the author's logical plan in a target language) but also to create emphasis where the translator feels needed, usually for socio-cultural reasons (part of the translator's involvement in text creation). This paper was a presentation of an ongoing research project in which we hope to achieve a detailed contrastive analysis of paragraph structure to explain and set standards for the act of re-paragraphing in translation.

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