



## The Role of Informativity in Translating Poetry (A Case Study of Emily Dickinson's *Slant of Light*)

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### Abstract

Informativity, being an essential component of text/discourse, plays a significant role in highlighting the intended meaning and finally contributes to the overall process of rendering a text cross-culturally. It has, however, been overlooked by translators in doing their jobs. In poetic translation, informativity plays a particularly significant role as it sheds light on the ungraspable traits of meaning.

This study tries to explore this aspect in a translation of Emily Dickenson's *Slant of Lights* to see where the translator fell short in this aspect with attempts to produce an alternative translation taking into consideration the various orders of informativity. For this purpose, a model of informativity is forwarded to pinpoint the weak points in the current translation of this poem and how these weaknesses are treated in the proposed translation.

The contribution of informativity is analyzed here in addition to its role in the comprehension and reproduction of the conceptual ordering of the source poem and the target one.

### Keywords:

Informativity , Informative Texts, Poetry Translation



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The study of text linguistics is of great importance. Informativity is one of the main categories of the text. Very often categories do not have proper elements in the text, they remain undetected. Each text should encompass information. Informativity is not restricted to the level of sentences, but to the text as a whole unit. Generally speaking, a text performs the task of conveying information to the recipient.

Beaugrande's (1977) states that "Informativity" has a valued importance in the process of conceptualizing the source poem by the translator, the reproduction of the target poem by the translator and the understanding of the target poem by the reader. Actually, the communication process in the informative poetic texts is of double task – translation (Al-Obaidy,2013:2).

Van Dijk (1977:191) states that a communicative situation requires two persons; one is actual, the other is hypothetical, i.e. a speaker and a hearer who belong to the same speech community, i.e. a group of persons with the same language and related conventions for interaction.

When translating a poem, the poet translator is constrained by a number of requirements. Specifically, s/he ought to:

- Meet the expectations determined by certain strategy to inform and influence the reader;
- Offer relevant information to the direct reader , and
- Facilitate the poem processing (Superceanu,2011:21).

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem:

This study argues that informativity is the essence of poetry translation. Situationality, coherence and cohesion are not to be disregarded, but what will definitely determine the acceptance of the translated poem is its high informativity.

The problem of informativity lies in the translator's failure to realize that the poetic text he is working on varies and has a different meaning with respect to the orders of informativity which may lead him to the trap of attempting to link what he takes as semantic tears; and the result is a confused status of informativity on the one hand, and a collapse of the relational / conceptual network of the source poem on the other. To put it differently, the translator is discontented with the high order informativity of an occurrence (third order). Therefore, the translator tends towards choosing a particular interpretation which is associated with a sort of adaptation to the subsequent occurrences so as to conform the coherence in the poem.



## 1.2 Aims of the Study:

This study aims to shed light on the role of informativity in poetic texts, identify, and exemplify the sources of this property through an integrated analysis model, which consists of insights from linguistics, discourse analysis and genre analysis.

## 1.3 Study Hypotheses:

The study hypothesizes the following:

- The receivers of informative poem assess and process the occurrences in a text according to their background knowledge.
- Receivers' sources of expectation of informativity depend heavily on the cognitive and mental processing of informativity in the source poem.

## 1.4 Data and Model of the Study :

The data of the study consist of Emily Dickinson's *Slant of Light* which is translated by "Suzan Al-Sa'ad" into Arabic. This translation is available online <sup>(1)</sup>, and has been read by 17816 readers . The translation is not accurate at all; it failed to convey the informative parts of the source poem. For the purpose of creating a new model for assessing the quality of informativity in the SL and TL, a new contrastive model has been incorporated to criticize the available translation and propose a translation as an alternative one keeping the poetic and informative features in the TL.

## 2-THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Beaugrande's (1980) Conception of Informativity

Informativity was defined by Beaugrande and Dressler (1994:139) as "*the extent to which a presentation is new or unexpected for the receiver*". They argued that informativity commonly applies to the content, but it can also be adapted for other language systems like the syntactic or the structural ones (Superceanu,2011:20). Thus, informativity is defined as a poem value with a set of properties which are: a) rarity, b) novelty, c) uniqueness, d) relevance: to access an increasing number of the affected readers (Coman,2004).

### 2.2 Informativity Orders

The informativity of a particular occurrence is its relative probability (predictability and likelihood) as compared to other alternatives .The lower the

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<sup>1</sup> - at <http://www.adab.com/world/modules.php?name=Sh3er&doWhat=shqas&qid=82109&r=&rc=1>



probability of an occurrence is, the higher its informativity will be (Beaugrande,1980: 103) .

It would be of sense to draw a distinction among the various degrees of informativity; thus, Beaugrande (ibid:105) shows low and high orders of informativity.

- *The lower-order occurrences* require an easy processing; the relevance of the occurrences to the previous part is non-problematic.
- *The higher order occurrences* require a deep processing in relating text parts and this seems problematic.

The latter case certainly entails a stronger consideration.

1. **The first – order** is the lowest level and refers to predictable information and obvious facts, which requires little attention from the reader; an option is being chosen in the upper range of probability. A low degree of interestingness value is associated here (ibid:106).

2. **The second – order** denotes to frequent and probable information, i.e. common facts. On the other hand, Second Order Informativity is resulted while choosing an option in the middle or lower-middle degrees of probability.

*"The usual criterion for textual communication is that a text should include at least some such occurrences so that first order ones could be upgraded and those of third order downgraded Beaugrande (ibid) "*

Beaugrande (ibid) uses this level of informativity as a linkage between the upper degree and lower one. In other words, downgrading is either:

- a) "A backward step" when the translator/processor returns to the previous occurrences to decode the present one.
- b) "A forward step" if he looks for an additional occurrences to form the decoding.
- c) "An outward step" if the translator / processor tries to search for the linkage outside the current context.

3. **The third – order**, the highest, refers to less probable information, unusual and infrequent occurrences at least from the reader' position (Beaugrande & Dressler,1994:141-144).In Third Order Informativity; occurrences are described as the outside range of more or less probable potential option. These are uncommon and very remarkable occurrences, and it is extremely difficult to understand and control it. This order causes problems for the reader/hearer in the



process of linking the new occurrence to the previous ones; a sort of unexpectedness, hence increasing the probability of failure.

Words, structures and expressions of the third – order are more remarkable than other orders. They require much attention and intensive processing from the reader, who has to be able to maintain the continuity of meaning in the poem in addition to the continuity between the content of utterances and the experience of the external world.

### **2.3 Resources of Expectations**

World knowledge and experiences are the main drivers of informativity orders. An analytical scan for poetic texts will reveal that informativity as a relative property understood differently in different contexts. In other words, informativity depends on the integral relevance between the information and the socio-cultural setting in a specific time and place (Vasas,2009:51).

Thus, the main expectations sources are: the context of situation, the language organization, the information organization and ordering.

In certain contexts a fact may be of a lower degree of informativity since it is predictable, but the same fact may be of a higher degree in other contexts; the source of expectations determines the other sources and ultimately the degree of informativity is the context, (i.e. The professional setting where certain conventions regarding informativity function) (Randall 1998:36).

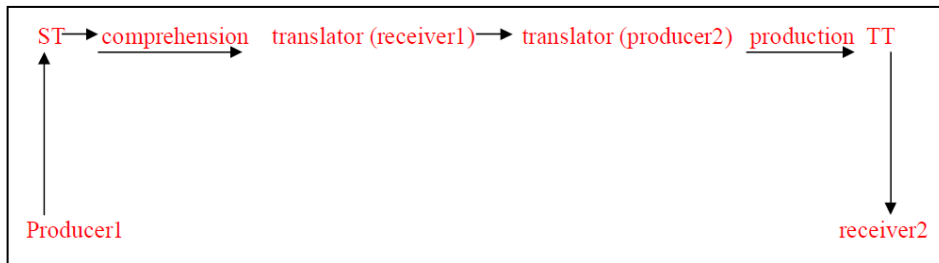
To sum it up, when a text contains determinate and typical relations, then we have first order. But if the textual relations are non-typical, informativity is shown at least in the second order. The contradiction of typical relations causes third order informativity.

## **3-PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **3.1 Model of Analysis**

In translation process, the translator of the ST is regarded as the reproducer of the TT; the ST is reproduced by a translator having a different socio-cultural setting. In other words, the translator can recognize the ST context, but may not be precise in identifying and appropriately manipulating.

Figure 1: Informativity and Translation (Al-Obaidy,2013)



The main factors that determine the degree of probabilities. This misjudgment may lead to a particular rendering resulting in a more or less various corresponding on the part of the reader (Lazăr,2009: 13-15).

The model of this study works according to the theoretical framework as follows:

- 1- The translator should recognize the three orders of the source poem; the semantic, cognitive and communicative layers of meaning.
- 2- The translator of the source poem will cognitively upgrade or downgrade the third order towards the (first order).
- 3- In the process of translation, the translator will first of all keep on the first order of the source poem (the semantic meaning) by certain cognitive steps of informativity :
  - a) Backwarding (cohesion)
  - b) Forwarding (coherence)
  - c) Outwarding (context of situations)
- 4- To retain the same effect of the source poem effect ; to achieve the principle of equivalent effect , the translator will either :
  - a) Upgrade the first order translation (*paraphrasing*) , or
  - b) Give a counterpart to the source poem third- order (*Communicative Equivalent*).

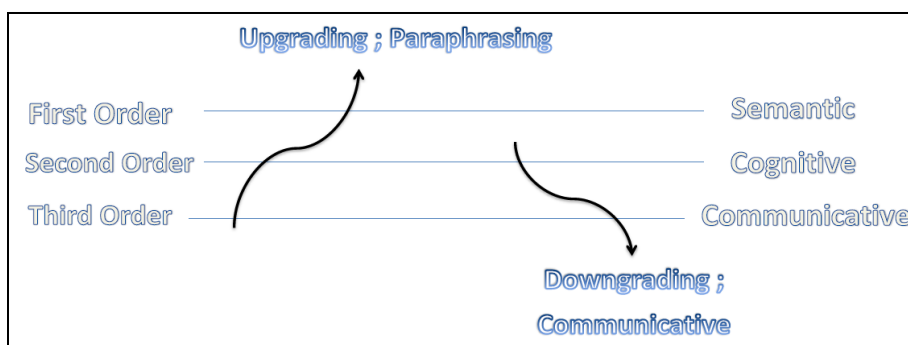




Figure 2: The model of the study

### 3.2 DATA ANALYSIS

The data of the study consist of Emily Dickinson's poem **there's a certain Slant of light**. This poem is very impressive and emotional in which Dickinson talks about hope. She could depict hope as a slant of light which is certain and (undeniable). A hope which is represented as a reflection of light up there in the dark sky is a sign of rebellion against injustice and unfair life. A light in the winter, which is mostly cold and dark in the west, was a metaphor for the new dream.

Dickinson in this poem uses a lot of informativity, particularly the third order one. She has violated the rules of spelling as in "Where the Meanings,.." in addition to the incomplete sentences: (it gives us –/ internal difference –)

The Arabic translation of this impressive and informative poem is available online at [www.adab.com](http://www.adab.com). This website gives for most of the Arab readers an access to the English poetry to read the poems of the famous English poets in Arabic. Unfortunately, this

Informative poem has been translated inappropriately.

#### SOURCE POEM

**There's a certain Slant of light,**  
*By Emily Dickinson*

There's a certain Slant of light,  
Winter Afternoons –  
That oppresses, like the Heft  
Of Cathedral Tunes –

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us –  
We can find no scar,  
But internal difference –  
Where the Meanings, are –

None may teach it – Any –  
'Tis the seal Despair –

#### TARGET POEM

هناك حفنة ضوء  
ترجمة: سوزان سعد

هناك حفنة ضوء  
في أمسيات الشتاء  
تغمّ القلب كما في الكنائس الغناء

تشعرنا بألام سماوية  
ولا تخلف وراءها الجروح  
بل تحدث تغييرا  
في ثنايا الروح

نحاول تجنبها بلا جدوى  
إنها الألم المصير  
نلتقطه كالعدوى



|   |  |
|---|--|
| An imperial affliction<br>Sent us of the Air –<br>When it comes, the Landscape listens –<br>Shadows – hold their breath –<br>When it goes, 'tis like the Distance<br>On the look of Death – | في أنفاس الأثير<br>حين تزحف تنصت التلال<br>وتحبس الظلال أنفاس الصوت<br>وهي حين تتسحب<br>كالنظرة الباردة على وجه الموت. |
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### Criticism and Analysis

From the very beginning of this translation, we can notice a deviation in translation where the title "*There's a certain Slant of light*" which means there is a clear and certain reflection of light up there in the sky. The title was at the level of the first order, but the translator shifted the translation towards the third order and used "*هناك حفنة ضوء – there is a handful of light*" which is inappropriate rendering; it doesn't sound natural in Arabic and doesn't give the equivalent meaning of the English poem.

To go further, the translator mistranslated the following stanza:

*There's a certain Slant of light,  
Winter Afternoons –  
That oppresses, like the Heft  
Of Cathedral Tunes –  
هناك حفنة ضوء  
في أمسيات الشتاء  
تغم القلب كما في الكنائس الغناء*

She focused on the rhyme of the original poem (light/ Heft+ Afternoons/ Tunes) and the equivalent rhymes in this stanza were (شتاء/ الغناء/ ضوء). The translation was totally literal, and neglecting role of informativity particularly the implicature of winter, which is dark and mostly associated with rain in the west. In other words, the appearance of light in the winter afternoon is rare and very occasional in those lands; Dickinson tries to give a metaphor for light reflection as a sign of rebellion against injustice. In turn, the translator could not reflect that connotation (third order) and stick to the first order.

"*هناك حفنة ضوء – There is a handful of light*" this expression is very awkward and inappropriate. The equivalent for "*Winter Afternoons*" was "*أمسيات الشتاء*" which is semantically inconsistent, because *امسيات* is a clear equivalent for *nights* and not





afternoon. So, this upgrading in the translation - which is inevitable- is not successful.

Another inappropriate upgrading in this translation is "تغم القلب" that oppresses" which is a sort of literal and word for word translation; the original poem has , from our own interpretation of the source poem, a set of significations , namely that these words have been used figuratively to mean : this reflection or the rebellion of right against the darkness is oppressed and no one has drawn his attentions to such phenomenon like "Cathedral Tunes" which are frequent and familiar , but no one realizes its beauty and values. Metaphorically, the use of "Tunes" is beneficial to resemble this situation with this slant of light. Unfortunately, the translator, who doesn't seem to be a real poet , couldn't convey the essence of the poem or tried to practice "an outward step" to get the intended meaning from the external world where he can find experiences she lacks.

Therefore, the use of informativity to simplify and upgrade the content is not always a useful strategy as it could damage the source intention.

Regarding some lexical and stylistic occurrences in this stanza, the translator couldn't solve the puzzle of using capital letters in the middle of the sentences as sort of spelling deviation. For instance, capitalizing "Slant" and "Heft" in the above sentences was deliberate to give a contextual density to this lexis. The role of informativity lies heavily here; it gives a rare and uncommon style of literary writing where these deviations are considered very informative, the translator, however, failed to conceptualize that new content of informativity and depended on the literal translation solely. The proposed rendering will be:

هناك برقٌ واضحٌ  
هناك في السماءُ ....  
يظهرُ في ظهيرةِ الشتاءِ ..  
مهمشاً ودونما أنتباه ...  
كأنه ترنيمة الكنائس الوقورة...

This translation is made according to the Arabic meter of Al-Razaj which consists of Mustaf'loon Mustaf'loon (مستفعلن مستفعلن)

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Heavenly Hurt, it gives us –  
We can find no scar,  
But internal difference –  
Where the Meanings, are –  
تشعرنا بالأم سماوية



ولا تخلف وراءها الجروح  
بل تحدث تغيرا  
في ثنايا الروح

Informativity has various forms; it is recognized as a sort of deviation, rareness, unexpectedness. These forms are very blatant in this poem of Emily Dickinson. The above stanza describes the phase of conflict between light and darkness. Dickinson says "*Heavenly Hurt*" as a sort of alliteration of the sound "H" to make the scene musical as if the body of sky has been violated by means of this newly-formed reflection of light. So, it is *heavenly hurt*. This structure is rare and has been formed to maintain the music of the poem where the verb "hurt" has violated the grammar (hurts, or hurt) to be informative, endless or timeless. The sound "h" has been tailed by the sound "s" in "gives" and "us" as assonances to the violation of air in the body of the dark sky. To put it differently, the light was the sword of rightness while the sky was the body of injustice. This extraordinary stylistic use of rhetorical structure has not been reflected with its informativity in the translation. The translator simply rendered it into *تشعرنا بالأم سماوية* – foregrounded "*Heavenly hurt*" / *over, it gives us*. She upgraded the structure of the source text and ignored its informative value i.e. he has used a backward strategy of linking the previous occurrences with the upcoming ones.

The translator keeps on the parallel structure of the poem; she could reduce her translation into four lines, in spite of the fact that the last line has been cleaved into two lines to preserve this parallelism (*But internal difference* – = *بل تحدث تغيرا / (في ثنايا الروح)*).

This parallelism maintains the informativity of the original poem. While the translator upgraded and paraphrased the source informativity "*but internal difference* –" which was incomplete and not well-structured, the translation completed the intended meaning instead of using (-). Consequently, this explication of the implicature is a sort of upgrading the level of informativity from the third order up to the first order.

The proposed rendering will be:

يطعن هذا الضوء صفحة السماء ...  
ويحمل الإيحاء...  
لكننا لا نلمس الندوب والآثار للجراح .  
وإنما ينتابنا شعورنا المغاير



يدخل في خوالج الأرواح  
الجرح هذا يحمل الكثير من معانٍ ...  
لعلها....

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*None may teach it – Any –  
'Tis the seal Despair –  
An imperial affliction  
Sent us of the Air –*  
نحاول تجنبها بلا جدوى  
إنها الألم المصير  
نلتقطه كالعدوى  
في أنفاس الأثير

The translator uses literal and semantic approach in rendering the original poem. Some lines which include a non-literal meaning have been ignored as " *None may teach it – Any –*" where the co-text of the word "teach" here gives a different meaning "to describe" not " to teach" . The first line in this stanza has informativity in its word order "*None may teach it – Any –*" where the subject of this sentence has been capitalized and restricted between two hyphens to deny the possibility of potential description. In addition the subject has been backgrounded. However, all these informative hints in the poem have not been reflected in the rendering. The first line has been deleted and the second one has been wrongly paraphrased into *إنها الألم المصير*, which doesn't convey the accurate meaning. Eventually, the heavily dependent on literal translation causes a serious problem in the appropriateness of the poem as in: *An imperial affliction / Sent us of the Air* – where in Arabic we say that curses and afflictions are sent from the sky. But the translator falsely uses the literal method *في أنفاس الأثير* in which "أثير" is an equivalent to "Air" which disregard the cultural appropriateness in the source poem. (i.e. the translator focused only on backwarding steps and disregarded the current context of situations "outwarding and forwardings")

The role of informativity is very vital in the poem. As for translation, the translator should find out a way to create an equivalent preserving of the original informativity with its unique structure. The proposed rendering will be:

لا يستطيع المرء ان ينعته  
سيسرق البؤس من الجميع  
سيمسح اللعنة في سوادها من صفحة السماء....



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*When it comes, the Landscape listens –  
Shadows – hold their breath –  
When it goes, 'tis like the Distance  
On the look of Death –*  
حين تزحف تنصت التلال  
وتحيس الظلال أنفاس الصوت  
وهي حين تنسحب  
كالنظرة الباردة على وجه الموت

Emily Dickinson in this poem uses present simple in an intensive way (*comes, listens and goes*). This use of tense gives an impression that this event is repeated and very frequent; it might be gone but will be here again. In other words, the presence of this conflict is eternal and the rebellion is nondefeatable. This overuse of present tense is an informative structure and should have been reflected in the target poem.

The translated poem has, in a mistaken way, substituted the word "*comes*" by "*تزحف – creep*" and "*تلال – hills*" instead of "*Landscapes*". By doing so, the translator tries to focus on the musical structure in Arabic, but he could not do that.

The translator has omitted the third line which is (*'tis like the Distance*) where the highest value of informativity lies in; he avoided the informative pieces in the poem.

The last line is mostly dedicated to leave an effect on the side of the reader. In this stanza, "*On the look of Death –*" which is a musically compatible structure with "*hold their breath –*" has inappropriately been translated into: *كالنظرة الباردة على وجه الموت* which is far too often from the true meaning and not associated with the original informativity. The proposed rendering will be:

فيوم يأتي البرقُ هذا ثائراً  
سنتصت الآفاقُ ...  
وَتُمْسِكُ الظلالُ بالأنفاس من خوفٍ  
وحتى حين يسري الضوء للبعيد ...  
يبقي لنا شيئاً من الأمل ...  
يُصبحُ فيما بيننا والموتِ  
عالمٌ بعيدٌ ومسافاتٌ بلا حدود ...



## CONCLUSTIONS

Informativity is an essential part of the poetic text structure. These uncommon structures are mostly rare and having a valued informativity associated with its literal meaning. The role of the translator here lies in decoding the significations of such structures by means of backgrounding the information or forwarding them to build a new coherent-informative structure in the TL. This validates the hypothesis of the study that "The receivers of informative poem assess and process the occurrences in a text according to their background knowledge".

The translator can make use of informativity to give a well-structured and musical text in the TL by resorting to upgrading towards the third order of informativity or downgrading the poetic structure towards the literal and sematic meaning. This proves that the hypothesis "Receivers' sources of expectation of informativity depend heavily on the cognitive and metal processing of the informativity in source poem" is verified.

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## دور الإعلامية في ترجمة الشعر (قصيدة أميلي ديكنسون أنموذجا)

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### خلاصة البحث

تؤدي الإعلامية ، التي هي جزء أساس من خطاب النص ، دورا أساسيا في إيضاح المعنى المقصود للنص العابر للثقافات . غير ان هذا الجزء المهم قد تجاهله المترجمون في اثناء ادانهم لمهامهم الترجمية ، ففي الترجمة الشعرية تؤدي الإعلامية دورا محدد في تسليط الضوء على جوانب المعنى غير المباشرة . تحاول هذه الدراسة ان تكشف عن الإعلامية الكامنة في ترجمة قصيدة الشاعرة اميلي ديكنس (إنكسار الضوء) من اجل ملاحظة هذا الجانب الذي اخفق فيه المترجم . فيحاول الباحث اعطاء ترجمة بديلة تأخذ بالحسبان مستويات الإعلامية المتباينة ، ولهذا الغرض اختيرت "الإعلامية" بوصفها انموذجا للترجمة لتحديد نقاط الضعف في الترجمة الحالية لهذه القصيدة وكيفية معالجة نقاط الضعف هذه في الترجمة المقترحة .

تسلط هذا الدراسة الضوء على اسهام الإعلامية ودورها الفاعل في عملية الاستيعاب واعادة الصياغة للتدرج الذهني الموجود في النص الاصلي ومايعادله في النص المستهدف .

الكلمات المفتاحية : الإعلامية ، النص المُعلم ، ترجمة الشعر

### About the author

Dr. Ismail Abdul wahhab Ismail; he was born in the city of Mosul 1987. He had his (B.A. 2009, M.A. 2011 and Ph.D. 2016 ) degrees in translation and linguistics from the University of Mosul. He worked in the university of Zakho - Dohuk; University of Cihan – Erbil and Al-Hadbaa University College of Mosul. Now he is an instructor at Al – Ma'moon University/ College of Baghdad/ Department of translation. Dr. Ismail published a set of books and academic papers in the field of poetic translation scientific conferences.

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