

DECODING THE CULTURAL IDENTITY: A SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL APPROACH TO STANCE TAKING IN MULTICULTURAL INTERVIEWS

Aissa HAMZAOU

Université Chahid Cheikh Laarbi Tbessi. Tébessa. Algérie

ORCID : iD : [0009-0008-9753-6149](https://orcid.org/0009-0008-9753-6149)

aissa.hamzaoui@univ-tebessa.dz

Abstract: This study examines the cultural identity in interviews with the Algerian students enrolled in a PHD exchange program in the UK. The ultimate aim is to figure out how they culturally position themselves through maintaining, shifting or mixing their identity through studying the stance they take. To this end, a Systemic Functional Grammar framework that aligns itself with the socio-constructivist approach is projected upon the data (passages from the interview) to undertake tick descriptions of the linguistic choices in the interview with the PHD student Ghazouane Arselane about his translation of ‘Borges and the blind’, a novel written by Kilito, a Lebanese novelist. The results have shown that while he embraces the new culture, he also positively comments the culture of origin. His linguistic choices, particularly the use of adverb comments whenever he refers to any culture means that he tries to establish an intimate relationship with the listeners belonging to these cultures.

Keywords: Stance; Cultural Identity; Interview; Systemic Grammar; System

DÉCODAGE DE L'IDENTITÉ CULTURELLE : UNE APPROCHE FONCTIONNELLE SYSTÉMIQUE DE LA PRISE DE POSITION DANS LES INTERVIEWS MULTICULTURELLES

Résumé : Cette étude examine l'identité culturelle dans des entretiens avec des étudiants algériens inscrits dans un programme d'échange de doctorat au Royaume-Uni. L'objectif ultime est de comprendre comment ils se positionnent culturellement en maintenant, en changeant ou en mélangeant leur identité en étudiant la position qu'ils adoptent. À cette fin, un cadre de grammaire fonctionnelle systémique qui s'aligne sur l'approche socio-constructiviste est projeté sur les données (passages de l'entretien) pour entreprendre des descriptions cochées des choix linguistiques dans l'entretien avec le doctorant Ghazouane Arselane à propos de sa traduction de « Borges et les aveugles », un roman écrit par Kilito, un romancier libanais. The results have shown that while he embraces the new culture, he also positively comments the culture of origin. His linguistic choices, particularly the use of adverb comments whenever he refers to any culture, means that he tries to establish an intimate relationship with the listeners belonging to these cultures.

Mots-clés: Position; L'identité; Interview; Grammaire Systemic; Système

Introduction

Kramsh (1993) states that every time we speak we perform a linguistic and a cultural act which implies that culture is embedded within the spoken language. Accordingly, the position the writer takes towards the cultures into play (the interpersonal meaning from a systemic functional grammar which is the framework of this study) would be realized and therefore reflected their talks about the cultural components mainly when

they are interviewed about the literary works they had translated into the host language by an interviewer from the host culture. Thus, when the writer talks about culture(s), host and origin (local and global), he would mind his choice of words so that he takes the appropriate stance. This is due to the fact that translation is the activity that entails not only the transportation of texts from one language to another but also its relocation. (Gerding- Salas, 2000). This reflection would be clearer in the talk about the translated literary works as translation of literature requires also the transfer of culture. In this regards, in his translation, the author also translates the values (religious particularly), traditions, relations to time and space...etc. As a result, any interview with the author would include many sections where he provides answers about his history, linguistics backgrounds, his origins (place) as well as about his current linguistic repertoire and his functioning in the new culture, expressing his attitudes towards subject matters related to his culture of origin. It is there, then, where we can study the stance he takes towards cultures, hos and origin. The translator is willing to create a good new product in the target language that reflects the meaning of the source text (Willis, 1996). However, that language is a system of signs that is shaped by the social and cultural context in which it is used (Duranti, 1997), the translator might not be objective as the contexts in which the source text and the translated text are different. Furthermore, Language is not just a tool for communication, but is also a cultural artifact that reflects the beliefs, values, and practices of a society(ibid). Therefore, subjectivity will be entrenched to include also these cultural components.

As far as this subjectivity is concerned, the students who study in the UK are no exception as studying in a foreign country requires cultural adjustment. (to adjust to the new culture). The Algerian students who graduated from the UK have gone through this process of adjustment due to the pressure they face to conform to the new culture (Berry, 2005). While they are supposed to be ambassadors of their culture (referred to as local in this presentation), their cultural identity might be jeopardized during this process as they may need to cope with the demands of the context (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001), leading them to necessarily express a positive attitude towards the host culture (the British) and probably a negative one towards the culture of origins (Algerian/ Arabic) Berry (1997). Accordingly, it is significant that this research, which falls under the scope of discourse analysis, concerns itself with examining the position the writer takes towards the culture of origin and the culture of the host country while they are interviewed about a literary works they had translated. The significance lies in the fact that the interview about the literary work invoked a talk about the of the components of the writer`s culture of origin and thus it will yield significant contribution to how one can construct his identity while mobilized to a global multicultural context. To delve into this era of research, we set forward the following research questions: Which linguistic choice he made at the level of the comment adjunct system to express his stance towards his culture of origin (the Algerian) and the British culture? Does the writer take a positive or negative stance towards any of the cultures (host and origin)? To answer these questions, we formulated the following hypotheses: In terms of the linguistic choices, we hypothesize that the Ghazouane draws more on the subjective assessment system. In terms of the stance Ghazouane takes, we hypothesize that interviewees who are new to a multicultural context express a negative stance towards the culture of origins and a positive one towards the host culture during the interview. To achieve the purpose of the research, however, the objectives of this research are vested in: Identifying the themes of the

interview. I.e. the components of the interviewees cultural background talked about during the interview. Identifying the linguistic choices that the interviewee made along the comment adjunct system. Figure out the stance he took towards his culture of origin and the host culture.

1. Literature review

According to systemists (Halliday, 1978; Egin, 2004 ; Bloor and Bloor 2014 ; Thompson ,2014), Language is functional and it fulfils three metafunctions simultaneously : the experiential, the textual and the interpersonal. Particularly, “The clause is a multifunctional construct in the grammar, one that realizes three different metafunctions: textual, interpersonal- proposition or proposal- and experiential.” (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004, p 588). As Halliday (1997) approaches language as a social semiotic practice, we can understand and explain how each function of these can be realized linguistically if we look at language “as a **text** and a **system**, as a **resource**- a choice among alternatives ... as a **structure**” (Halliday, 2004. p. 19). In connection to this, it is the system that qualifies language as meaning potential. I.e., the possibility to make choice along the system to fulfil a sub-function of the three metafunction (or meaning). For example, stance taking which is a sub-function of the interpersonal meaning can be realized linguistically through the interaction of many systems, including the comment adjunct system shown in figure below:

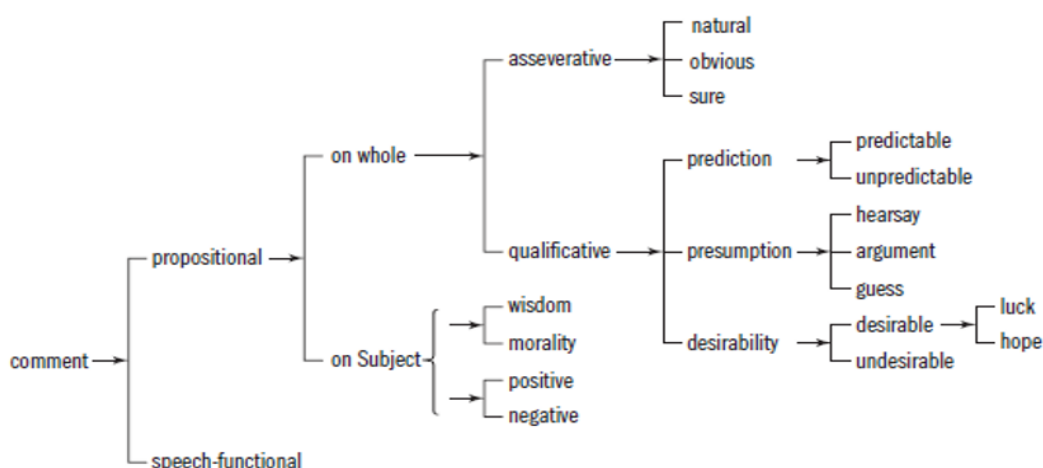


Figure 1: Halliday and Matheussin (2004)

The figure shows how language users draw on the system of comment adjunct to express their attitudes to the subject matter. As can be seen on the figure, the user can choose among alternatives along the system, realizing different functions. For example, he can express either a positive or negative attitude when he chose to talk about the subject matter. As far as identity is concerned, the comment adjunct system can be used to explain how language resources are deployed to construct identity in texts, expressing a positive or negative attitudes towards themselves and towards the other. Pavlenko and Biackledge (2004) highlights that the construction of identity through language is dynamic and fluid. This includes stance taking when negotiating identity by interviewees in multicultural multilingual settings. Thus, interviewees in such context my exploit the semiotic resources to make appropriate choices to take positive or negative stance (Halliday et al), aligning with or distancing themselves from the host culture within the interview settings.

2. Research methodology

The study draws on the qualitative approach which seeks to explore the interviewee responses qualitative systemic functional grammar framework as a tool for data analysis and as a framework for interpretation. This framework is projected upon an interview with Ghazouane Arslane, a Algerian PHD student in the UK who translated of Kilito's novel 'Borges and the blind' from Arabic to English. The interview is available online (see the link to the interview in reference number one). In order to accomplish this study, three steps are fulfilled. First, the interview is observed and read carefully and the interviewer questions are used to figure out the meaning (the experience) being talked about. Then, the passages in which Ghazouane talks about a cultural component are extracted. Finally, these passages are analysed according to Ghazouane's exploitation of the comment system (explained above) to figure how he made use of language to express his stance towards his culture and the host culture.

3. Findings

The results obtained through this study are organized to the cultural components in the interview and the systemic choices used to express a stance towards them.

3.1 *The Themes Towards which Ghazouane Takes Stance.*

Observing the interview with Ghazouane, we identified four themes that constitute part of his cultural background. Each theme of these is related to one of the components of his cultural background. The first theme we observed in the data is Ghazouane's attitude towards Kilitos and towards the Maghreb in general. The second and the third themes are successively Ghazouane's attitude towards the foreign language and culture and towards classical Arabic poetry and its significance in Arabic literature. The last theme however is his attitude towards non Arabs accessibility to the inner life of the Arabs inner culture.

3.2 *Systemic Choices along the Adjunct Comment System.*

The language choices that Ghazouane made to express his attitude towards the previous themes are summarized in table 1:

Prepositional Comments	Speech Functional Comments	Presumption <i>Subjective Assessment</i>	Prediction <i>Objective Assessment</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perhaps - Incredibly - Namely - Effortlessly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Precisely - Suddenly - likely - Certainly - still very much - immediately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Perhaps -That I said -It goes without saying -I would say -In the case of Kilito's essay -I hope -why I believe -I think -I'm still surprised -Let me add 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Less -Note -perhaps -a discussion -As a bilingual person -At this -Is it by coincidence -to some extent, -it means -At any rate -Was it possible -In a way -after all
7 = 58,33%	6 = 41,66%	11 = 45,83%	13 = 54,16%

Table 1. Summary of Systemic Choices along the Comment Adjunct System

Table 1 shows that Ghazouane draws more on propositional comments (58,33%) than on speech functional comments (41,66%) to express his stance. Going further through comment system, he draws more on predictions (54,16%) than on assumptions (45,83%). This means that the stance he takes towards the experience (the cultural component) is more objective than subject. This is further discussed in the following points, organized according to the cultural component talked about in the interview.

-Theme one: Ghazouane's attitude towards Kilitos and towards the Maghreb in General

Ghazouane uses adverbial comments to express his attitude toward Kilito and the Maghreb. Being objective towards the subject matter, which is his belonging to the Maghreb, through the use of the adverbial comment 'after all, on one hand and subjective while inviting the interviewer to listen to him while talking about kilitos and the Maghreb in general using 'let me add', Ghazouane appears to take a positive stance towards his language and his culture.

-Theme two: Ghazouane's Attitude Towards the Foreign Language and Culture

Ghazouane made use of modal verbs like "cannot" and "must," which express necessity and obligation, highlighting the importance of learning a foreign language to get access a foreign culture. This means that he advocates the translation of the literary works to foreign cultures. Yet, Ghazouane takes a neutral stance towards the foreign language and culture as he is objective while assessing both. This is reflected in the use of the objective modal assessment 'One cannot escape'.

-Theme three: Ghazouane attitude towards classical Arabic poetry and its significance in Arabic literature.

Ghazouane takes a positive stance towards classical Arabic poetry and its significance in Arabic literature. The linguistic choices in the text effectively convey the author's admiration for classical Arabic poetry and the unique challenges it presents for translation and interpretation. E.g. the use of the adverb comment "incredibly" positively emphasizes the vastness and richness of the classical Arabic poetry corpus. This highlights the importance of this body of work within Arabic literature. The author's choice to describe themselves "as a bilingual person" establishes their credibility and authority on the subject.

- Theme four: Ghazouane attitude towards Non Arabs accessibility to the inner life of the Arabs inner culture

Ghazouane used the subjective propositional assessment 'I think' to invite the non-Arab reader, though implicitly, to learn Arabic to access some meaning that are not translatable. This subjectivity is further emphasised using the adjunct comments 'Namely', in a way and in varying degrees of course. I.e. Ghazouane is trying to invite the global to discover the local and thus spreading the local culture to a global context.

4. Discussion

That culture is embedded within the spoken language as stated by Kramsh (1993), the analysis of the interview yielded significant results regarding what cultural components constitute Ghazouane's cultural background, how Ghazouane used language to take stance towards his culture and towards the host culture and what stance he has taken (positive or negative). In this regard, from a systemic point of view, language users use the semiotic resources that language system affords to represent experience, to establish relationship and to bring these two functions together in a coherent text (Halliday et al). Accordingly, the experience of living in a new multilingual and multicultural context including the cultural dimensions of this experience such as the construction of the cultural identity as well as establishing connections with people in that culture can be encoded and decoded in texts such as interviews. Decoding the interview with Ghazouane, we found that despite the fact that Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) highlights that the construction of identity through language is dynamic and fluid, Ghazouane managed to preserve his identity in the multicultural multilingual context (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001) showing a positive attitude towards many components of his culture. Ghazouane's use of the linguistic choices shows that while he embraces the new culture, he also expresses a pride of belonging to the Arab culture. As far as the linguistic choices he made to express this positive attitude is concerned, the findings showed interesting results. Taking advantage of the fact that language is a system of signs that is shaped by the social and cultural context in which it is used (Duranti, 1997), the translator might not be objective as the contexts in which the source text and the translated text are different. However, Ghazouane's use of language systems strengthens his objectivity and therefore validates the positive stance he took towards his culture. For example, he used the modal assessment system at the level of the interpersonal meaning to express his positive attitude towards his culture. In so doing, he expressed a more objective than a subjective assessment towards both cultures despite the pressure and the demands of adjusting to the new culture (Berry, 2005). Therefore, it is apparent that Ghazouane has made appropriate choices that helped him express a positive

stance towards all cultures in contact, benefiting from the sources that language affords to adjust to the requirements of the new culture and to preserve his own one through expressing a sense of proud towards many of its components.

Conclusion

The stance that a language user can take when he moves to a new culture to adjust to the requirements of the host culture can be traced through the language choices he made during interactions. In this regard, the study has explored the linguistic choices Ghazouane made while interacting in an interview to find out how he takes stance despite the pressure of the need to adjust to the new culture (the British). To figure out which stance he has taken, his attitude towards some components is explored using the Halliday and Matheussin`s (2004) systemic functional grammar framework, particularly the comment adjunct system. The findings show that Ghazouane was objective while talking about his culture of origin and the host culture. Therefore, we recommend that other studies study how other PHD students maintain or shift their cultural identity.

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