Parataxis, Hypotaxis, Style and Translation

Assi. Lec. Ghusoon Subhi Khalil
Department of Translation
College of Arts Al -Mustansiriya University

Abstract

Parataxis and hypotaxis are compound words that refer to two stylistic devices. They involve the arrangement of propositions one after the other in such a way that goes in line with the role that each proposition plays in speech or writing.

It is the purpose of this study to shed some light on these two devices by explaining the way in which they differ from each other, and what tools are used to achieve them. The study also shows a sort of comparison between parataxis and hypotaxis in terms of preference of usage in English and Arabic.

Moreover, some problems that may arise in translation are being reviewed. The paper ends up with some conclusions that may be of use to those interested in this field.

1. Introduction

The terms '' parataxis" and " hypotaxis" are compound words. The former is made up of the prefix ''para-'' plus the noun " taxis", whereas the latter consists of the prefix ''hypo'' plus the same noun ''taxis''.
Merriam- Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (2005,11[th].ed) gives the following definitions: '' hypo-'', ''hyp-'': '' A prefix, Greek hypo- meaning: under, beneath, down, less than the ordinary or norm.'' (612).

''para-'', ''par-'': '' A prefix, Greek para- meaning: beside, alongside of, beyond, aside from.'' (897).

''-taxis'': '' arrangement, or ordering.''(1281).

'' parataxis'': '' The placing of clauses or phrases one after another without coordinating or subordinating connectives.'' (900).

'' hypotaxis'': '' Syntactic subordination (as by a conjunction).''(613).

As for Matthews (2007:286-7), the following definitions are given to parataxis:

1. The ancient term for coordination, applied especially to that of clauses or sentences.

2. A syntactic relation between successive units marked only by intonation:

e.g. in *I am tired, I am hungry*, said with the same intonation as *I am tired and I am hungry*.

In its second definition, parataxis is so much similar to asyndetic coordination, in which coordinators are absent but could be supplied.

In the present study, it is to be noted, parataxis is being used to incorporate both definitions, i.e. , syndetic, as well as asyndetic arrangement and/or ordering of clauses and sentences alongside each other.

Another related term is (polysendeton); a sentence style which employs many paratactic conjunctions:

''We lived <u>and</u> laughed <u>and</u> loved <u>and</u> left.''

J. Joyce's, *Finnegans Wake*.

In most of his novels and short stories, Hemingway relies heavily on such basic conjunctions as "and" and "but", not only to link clauses, but even between phrases. The following two excerpts are taken from his novel *In Another Country*:

''We were all at the hospital every afternoon, <u>and</u> there were different ways of walking across the town through the dusk to the hospital. Two of the ways were alongside canals, <u>but</u> they were long. Always, though, you crossed a bridge across a canal to enter the hospital. There was a choice of three bridges. On one of them a woman sold roasted chestnuts. It was warm, standing in front of her charcoal fire, <u>and</u> the chestnuts were warm afterward in your pocket. The hospital was very old <u>and</u> very beautiful, <u>and</u> you entered through a gate <u>and</u> walked across a courtyard <u>and</u> out a gate on the other side.''

'' In the fall the war was always there, <u>but</u> we did not go to it any more. It was cold in the fall in Milan <u>and</u> the dark came very early. Then the electric lights came on, <u>and</u> it was pleasant along the streets looking in the windows. There was much game hanging outside the shops, <u>and</u> the snow powdered in the fur of the foxes <u>and</u> the wind blew their tails. The deer hung stiff <u>and</u> heavy <u>and</u> empty, <u>and</u> small birds blew in the wind <u>and</u> the wind turned their feathers. It was a cold fall <u>and</u> the wind came down from the mountains.''

This style, however, is more evident in Arabic literature than in English:

"كانت الست سنية عفيفي قد تزوجت في شبابها من صاحب دكان روائح عطرية، <u>ولكنه</u> كان زواجاً لم يصادفه التوفيق، <u>فأساء</u> الرجل معاملتها، <u>وأشقى</u> حياتها، <u>ونهب</u> مالها، <u>ثم</u> تركها أرملة منذ عشرة أعوام. <u>ولبثت</u> أرملة طوال تلك الأعوام................."

N. Mahfuz's *Zuqaq Al-Midaq*.

" لن انسى الماضي لسبب بسيط هو أنه حاضر ــ لا ماض ــ في نفسي. <u>وستكون</u> مغامرة الليلة ابتداء أفتتح به العمل، <u>وستكون</u> مغامرة دسمة، <u>وجرى</u> النيل كأمواج من الظلام تنغرس في جنباتها أسهم الضياء المنعكسة من مصابيح الشاطئ. <u>وساد</u> صمت شامل مريح، <u>ثم</u> دنت النجوم من الأرض عندما إقترب الفجر. <u>وقام</u> عن مجلسه <u>فتمطى</u> ثم سار على مقربة من الشاطئ نحو المكان الذي جاء منه."

(N. Mahfuz's *Al-lis wa al-kilaab*.)

It might be argued that the two new terms, i.e., coordination and subordination took the place of the traditional terms of parataxis and hypotaxis. This might be attributed to the fact that the prefix 'co- 'has some of the meaning of the prefix 'para- ', and similarly, both prefixes ' sub- ' and 'hypo- ' share some of their meanings. Yet, the terms are not totally synonymous. Coordination and subordination are looked upon as purely grammatical concepts, while parataxis and hypotaxis are not as such since they manifest semantic as well as stylistic characteristics.

It is worthy to mention that Larson (1984:275), prefers to use the two terms of ''addition'' and ''support'' to refer to the relation between communication units in the semantic structure so as to emphasize the fact that these are semantic relations and not purely grammatical ones.

2. Why parataxis and hypotaxis are problematic?

It is to be argued that both parataxis and hypotaxis are among the most complicated issues. This arises from the fact that the choice between one rather than the other is not a haphazard one; rather, there are certain situations where to use them. In fact, it might be said that there is some philosophy behind using them.

Part of the difficulty emerges from a semantic point of view. The semantic focus plays a decisive role in determining whether a clause is to be dependent or independent, for reliance is made on meaning in this regard.

Such a topic is considered one of the problematic fields for a translator due to the fact that English and Arabic differ in favouring the kind of junctioning, either parajunctioning or hypojunctioning. Here, a question is raised: is it a must to translate faithfully the kind of junctioning into the target language that has been used in the source language, or is the translator allowed to switch as far as the target language prefers this? It is to be noted, however, that the translator is unable to present a genuine piece of work if he has not ascertained what the target language favours.

It is to be stressed that the definition and concept of sentence is by itself problematic, for the simple fact that over 200 definitions exist in English. However, a workable one will be adopted. Emphasis will also be laid exclusively on the propositional relationship and hierarchy between clauses.

3. Para junction /Hypo junction and Style

If translation is to succeed, the style in which the original text has been written should be taken account of. To achieve this, the translator has to possess knowledge of the kinds of sentences that he might face in translation, for style often depends on both the length of sentences as well as the degree of their complexity.

English sentences are classified into four types, depending on the number of clauses they contain: simple, compound, complex and compound- complex.

As for Arabic, sentences are not classified in the same way. Arab grammarians divide sentences into verbal and non- verbal (Aziz, 1989:11).

It is worth noting that both parataxis and hypotaxis involve the linking or enlarging of simple sentences. The question is which of the two processes is more powerful in written and / or spoken discourse?

In writing, we usually put our main ideas into main clauses and the subordinate ideas into subordinate clauses. It is argued that by using compound sentences, consisting of two or more main clauses, equal emphasis is given to equal thoughts but unity is rather weakened, and coherence as well. Between the clauses of a compound sentence, which are said to be related just as separate sentences are related, there would be, then, no logical advance; two ideas, or two expressions of the same idea, would simply be placed side by side. In most cases of parataxis, the equality of the clauses is evident both grammatically and semantically. If the writer's aim, then, is to achieve such a balance; he might resort to parataxis per se. Such being the case, equal prominence is given to every conjoined clause and/or sentence. According to Larson (1984:284), the relationship of conjoining can occur ''not only between propositions but also between propositional clusters, between semantic paragraphs, between episodes, and so forth.''

By using complex sentences, on the other hand, the situation will be different. The thoughts will be put in order of their importance. The most significant idea will receive the primary emphasis and thus complex sentences become more unified and coherent as well as logical than compound sentences. Hence, hypotaxis appears to be more powerful than parataxis for this reason.

Paradoxically, some are of the opinion that one should not always prefer hypotaxis to parataxis:
'' It must not be supposed that subordination is always better than co-ordination – that is, it might be preferable to express a string of ideas in one main pattern rather than in two or three. We might very well wish to put two or more ideas on a level.''(Roberts, 1962:216).

It might be believed that balance as well as parallelism in textual structure is best achieved through the usage of paratactic constructions. In this regard, Greenbaum, etal (1990:459), have gone so far as to say that ''coordination is a rhetorical pattern that seems to be widely attractive''.

Although it might be thought that these two types of clause relationships are used alternatively, it is more normal to find both types in any text of whatever length. '' It is particularly rare to find a text with subordination but without coordination'' (Ibid: 460).

As a matter of fact, neither choice is better than the other, i.e., neither too long sentences, nor too short ones are preferred. A sentence that goes on too long may become quite boring and hard to follow. If on the other hand, a text is composed of short sentences alone, the result will be a monotonous piece of

work. What a skillful writer should aim at is to include different kinds of sentences in his writings so as to achieve the best effect on his readers. The bottom line is that writers need to be able to incorporate a variety of sentence structures into whatever they are writing. Investigating these two methods of building a text enables us to see how different writers have used these two styles to tell very different stories.

Some writers, like Hemingway, prefer to use parataxis to make all of his sentences carry the same weight, and to make every part of the sentence seem equally important. Short sentences, or, in fact, sentences linked more by parataxis rather than hypotaxis are often considered to be typical of his style. To him, sentence length plays an important stylistic function. According to Hatim and

Munday (2004:24), Hemingway's preference for shorter sentences and avoidance of subordinate clauses is fundamental not only to his style but also to the view of the world that is being depicted. The translator needs to pay particular attention to preserving the features of the source text so as not to go out of the way and might convey the opposite effect to what is intended. A remarkable degree of sensitivity, therefore, is required of the translator to such stylistic idiosyncrasy.

Other writers might use a rather sophisticated mix of independent and dependent clauses in order to convey the complex attitudes of their world. More often than not, the choice between parataxis and hypotaxis is motivated by stylistic considerations. It is best to have a text in which parataxis is being used along with hypotaxis:

'' It is the flexible use of both devices that endows a text with variety of expression on the one hand, and with a well – ordered presentation of information on the other. The combination also enables one to achieve a high degree of complexity within a single, unified whole.''(Greenbaum, etal, 1990:460).

Since language is the primary means of social interaction, it is then, undoubtedly rich to enable human beings to serve their roles or functions in life. It is no wonder, then, that language is multi – faceted; being rather simple at times, and quite complex at other times.

While it might be thought that complex sentences belong merely to the most formal styles of written English, similar instances of complexity may in fact be found in spoken utterances in informal conversations as well. Hence, it is not to be believed that complex sentences are exclusively used in written discourse, while rather simple sentences are found in spoken discourse.

As far as Arabic is concerned, the situation is rather different. This is attributed to the fact that Arabic does not exhibit the same classification of sentences found in English. As a matter of fact, it seems that Arabic is much

more characterized by parataxis than by hypotaxis. Arabic discourse, in contrast with English, seems to be more paratactic than hypotactic;

'' Arabic authors use a great deal of coordination, and very little of the subordination which is so highly valued in English persuasive writing. Arabic modificational syntax is also characterized by the paratactic juxtaposition of items'' (Johnstone, 1987:85).

[As a matter of fact, a quick review of the basic paratactic particles in Arabic (cf. Cantarino, 1975: 11-59) can show that their number exceeds their English counterparts].

Unlike parataxis, hypotaxis in Arabic is said to be considered a new phenomenon that appeared either as a result of English impact on Arabic, or as a sign of the development or complexity of intellect;

'' It seems that the early Semitic language contained no long sentences, but was characterized by the phenomenon of parataxis, which means that the sentences were short, and were linked with each other through(al-waw)……By time, Semitic languages began to exhibit long sentences, which seemed a little complicated than before.''(Hijazi, 1973:147).

4.Parataxis, hypotaxis and Translation

Since each language has got its own linguistic system, it is quite necessary for the translator to be aware of such differences that may exist between the source and target languages so as to present the readers with a sound and accurate translation that does not sound awkward or odd to the speakers of the target language.

For a translation to sound natural and precise, the translator has to make use of all the genuine sources of the target language, and not to render the exact structure found in the text under translation, for this may result in enforcing the target language with structures that do not exist in it. A simple instance is the following sentence:

Because it rained, we cancelled the picnic.

This sentence has been given to a number of students in the department of translation; most of them translate it into:

بسبب المطر الغينا الرحلة

It might e argued that the word (بسبب) is not genuine in literary Arabic, but has emerged as a result of English impact on the Arabic language. In fact, there is a simple particle that can be used in such contexts. It is the particle (الفاء) which replaces the English particle (because). Using this particle yields a genuine Arabic sentence:

امطرت فالغينا الرحلة

[It should be mentioned, however, that the second rendition is more genuine than the first rendition, yet, the latter is not wrong or unacceptable.]

More often than not, the conjunction in an English sentence is absent and a comma is put instead:

She stood silent, her head slightly on one side.

In translating such a sentence into Arabic, usually a conjunction is inserted as in:

وقفت وِرأسها مائل قليلا الى احد جانبيها

This goes in conformity with the argument that Arabic prefers much usage of paratactic particles, to a degree that almost every two sentences and/or clauses are to be linked together via parataxis. To illustrate further, consider the following example:

" وعاود قلبه الخفقان العنيف، وإلتهب وجهه إحمراراً، وِذابت نفسه وجداً وقلقاً وإنفعالاً.. وِكان إنتهى من حلق رأس الشاب، فِراح يمشطه دون أن ينبس بكلمةٍ، وِفكره لا يستريح من إضطرابه. ثِم نهض حسين كرشة وأعطاه نقوده. وِقبل أن يغادر الدكان إكتشف أنّه نسي منديله فِرجع مسرعاً إلى البيت. وِجعل يتابعه بعينيه من موقفه، فِلاح لعينيه مرحاً نشيطاً سعيداً، وِكأنه يرى فيه هذه الصفات لأول مرة."

(N. Mahfuz's *Zuqaq Al-Midaq.*)

However, many instances of modern Arabic literature exhibit the usage of implied junctioning , or asyndeton. The following excerpt is a good evidence of this case:

"لم يتغير شئ كأنه تركها بالأمس. الحجرة المستديرة، النصبة النحاسية، الكراسي الخشبية ذات المقاعد من القش المفتول، الزبائن القلائل المعروفون الموزعون في الاركان، يحتسون الشاي ويعقدون الصفقات."

(N. Mahfuz's *Al-lis wa al-kilaab.*)

This instance of the absence of paratactic and/or hypotactic relations between all but the last Arabic constructions makes it possible, at times, to adopt asyndeton, with the aid of punctuation, in translating similar English instances:

He stood; hand in pocket, pipe in mouth.

وقف(و) يده في جيبه(و) غليونه في فمه.

It is to be noted, however, that a single English sentence can have a number of Arabic renditions. To illustrate further, consider the following example:

 ''Being unable to remove the chain, I jumped over and knocked vainly for admittance.''

(E. Bronte's, *Wuthering Heights*).

Once again, this sentence has been given to students of translation; this is how they render it into Arabic:

(وعندما شقّ عليّ إنتزاع السلسلة،وثبت وطرقت الباب طلباً للدخول ولكن دون جدوى)
(لانني وجدت نفسي غير قادر على إنتزاع السلسلة،...............................)
(لمّا وجدت نفسي غير قادر على فتح السلسلة،...............................)
(وبسبب فشلي في فتح السلسلة، ....)
(وإذ عدمت حيلة في نزع السلسلة، ....)
(حين وجدت نفسي غير قادر على إنتزاع السلسلة،...............................)

It appears that all the above translations are directed towards hypotaxis ignoring the fact that Arabic – to some extent – tends more towards the usage of paratactic constructions. As a matter of fact, two, or even more approaches could

be followed in translating this sentence. First, it can be rendered into parallel structures via the usage of a number of coordinating conjunctions:

لم استطع نزع السلسلة فوثبت وطرقت الباب طلباً للدخول ولكن دون جدوى.

Some translators, however, may have a tendency towards starting their sentences with the main clause, rather than the subordinate clause. So in this case the translation will read as follows:

وثبت وطرقت الباب طلباً للدخول دون جدوى فقد أعياني نزع السلسلة.

Other translators, though, may have a rather different approach in which both constructions, namely, parataxis and hypotaxis are combined in one way or another. This, again, is a matter of stylistic idiosyncrasy, not only on the part of writers alone, but also on the part of translators as well.

The issue of the difference in the preference of parataxis and/or hypotaxis in both languages does not end at this point. Rather, some minute differences might be detected within the same type of junctioning. Some coordinating conjunctions in both English and Arabic agree in some way in their semantic implications. (And), for instance, agrees with (wa) to some extent. It will be of interest to mention that (wa) is considered the most commonly used conjunctive particle. Due to its frequency of use, in addition to the manifold meanings it conveys makes it a bit unreproducable in English unless some elaborations are made on the Arabic constructions which exhibit the dense usage of (wa). In fact, (wa) has far greater semantic implications than (and) (cf. Cantarino, 1975:12-20). In the same way, (or) agrees with ('aw), and (but) agrees with (lakin). However, there are certain differences which have to be taken account of. Aziz (1989:214)

mentions that (and) has a conditional implication which is not a feature of (wa), and he cites the following example:

Move but one step <u>and</u> I will shoot.

Normally Arabs would not say:

تحرك خطوة واحدة فقط واطلق النار.

Rather, they opt to use a conditional particle:

إن تحركت خطوة واحدة فقط فـأطلقت النار.

This rendition, in fact, shows an instance of a somewhat unique case of changing English parataxis into Arabic hypotaxis. It gives good evidence that the translator should always be aware of such differences so as to end up with a good piece of work that is both acceptable and natural in the target language.

In modern Arabic, it is to be noted, greater flexibility and freedom in usage, as well as purely stylistic considerations make it possible to witness the usage of ''expanded compounds'', in which there is an expanded sentence or a compound that has been further expanded via adding new elements, either through parataxis or hypotaxis or both. Cantarino (1975:385) argues that'' using such expanded constructions can now be considered characteristic of present- day

literary Arabic. The excessive use of them by some authors contributes to the creation of rather long and complicated styles.''

Conclusions

Parataxis and hypotaxis are two highly important processes of creating semantic as well as stylistic relations between parts of a text in such a way that unity is arrived at. Within parataxis, the notion is of the grouping together of parallel structures where all paratactic elements are on a par with each other. As for hypotaxis, it is the relation where one element becomes part or embedded or a constituent of another element. Hence, the elements are on different levels.

Languages differ in their frequent usage of parataxis and hypotaxis. It might be true to some extent to say that Arabic often tends to use paratactic constructions much greatly than the hypotactic ones, where written English would use both devices, but tends to use hypotaxis more frequently. Spoken English, on the other hand, tends to employ parataxis. As such, translating these constructions would not be an easy matter. Good sensitivity is required on the part of the translator not only of the language preference, but also of the stylistic identity of the original writer. The translator is asked, then, to try to make a balance between target language preferences - so as not to enforce it with forms or structures alien to its usage – and faithfulness to the original style intended by the writer.

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