Descriptive Linguistics and Translation Studies: Interface and Differences

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Part One: Difference in equivalence: An exercise in translational contrastive linguistics

1. Introduction

The two papers that make up this discussion derive from two seminars presented at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Utrecht, 15-16 April, 1998. I am grateful to the University and to the Platform Vertalen & Vertaalwetenschap for making my visit possible and to Ton Naaijkens and Cees Koster for inviting me to air my views among their colleagues. It was for me an opportunity to receive invaluable feedback from the participants in the seminars, and I thank them for making me think again about a number of issues. These papers, then, are not identical to those presented at the seminar, but are, I hope, the better for the differences.

My musings may be seen a step towards developing a sound theoretical basis and a methodology for carrying out research on the borderline between descriptive linguistics and translation studies.

2. Terminological preliminaries

Descriptive linguistics may be fairly simply defined as ‘the description and analysis of the ways in which a language operates and is used by a given set of speakers at a given time’ (Robins 1964/1989: 4). When two such descriptions are carried out and set against one another, the effort may be termed ‘historical linguistics’ if the descriptions concern the “same” language at different points in time, and ‘comparative’ or ‘contrastive’ linguistics if the descriptions are of two different languages at the same point in time. The descriptive effort is a prerequisite for theorising in both the diacronic and the synchronic branch of the discipline, and in linguistics in general (Comrie 1981/1989: 229):
Work on linguistics, of whatever branch or whatever theoretical persuasion, requires reliable descriptions of languages, indeed reliable descriptions of a wide range of languages, if any progress is to be made by linguistics as the unified study of language as a general phenomenon.

The two terms ‘comparative’ and ‘contrastive’ may imply different foci. ‘Comparative’ may suggest a concentration on similarities between the languages, and it is the term Catford (1965: 20) uses in his famous and much maligned statement: ‘The theory of translation is concerned with a certain type of relation between languages and is consequently a branch of Comparative Linguistics’. Catford is here about to move on to a discussion of how to set up equivalences, and these must probably be considered closer to the similarities-end of the spectrum than to the differences-end.

‘Contrastive’, on the other hand, may suggest a concentration on differences, and has been used to indicate studies carried out in order to predict difficulties for language learners (see for example Lado, 1957). However, both Toury (1980: 20 ff) and Fisiak (1980: 1) define ‘contrastive linguistics’ as a discipline concerned with both the differences and similarities between linguistic systems, and it is important to be aware that each term, ‘comparative’ and ‘contrastive’ can be and is used by different theorists with either wide scope (compare and contrast) or narrow scope (compare or contrast, respectively).

In this discussion of the relationships between descriptive linguistics and translation studies, I want to use the terms to set up a distinction between two different, though closely related types of study of texts and their translations: “Translational contrastive linguistics” uses translational data in order to highlight differences between systems in two languages which appear closely relatable to one another (difference in equivalence). “Translational comparative linguistics” uses translational data to bring to light relationships between languages which might be less conducive to observation by descriptive linguistic means alone (equivalence in difference). Obviously the bracketed designations here echo Jakobson (1959) of which more below.
2. Theoretical preliminaries

As Toury (1980: 19-20) points out, ‘the relationships between disciplines dealing with related matters have always been of interest to students of all the disciplines involved’. The relationship between descriptive linguistics and translation studies has been heavily discussed by both translation scholars and descriptive linguists -- although it is worth pointing out that discussion has not infrequently included the question of whether the two disciplines are, in fact, concerned with related matters at all.

From the point of view of translation studies, Toury states boldly that (1980: 29): ‘an exhaustive contrastive description of the languages involved is a precondition for any systematic study of translations’. The description enables the theorist to foresee possible relationships between terms/texts/text-parts in the two languages, and it is necessary to do this (a) to justify relating certain Target Text parts to certain Source Text parts and not to certain other Source Text parts and (b) before the significance of the actual relationships between the (parts of) the Target Text and its Source Text can be understood.

From the point of view of descriptive linguistics, the relationship with translation studies has been discussed by, among others, Roman Jakobson, according to whom it is impossible to do comparative linguistics without examining the mutual translatability of the languages concerned. He advocates that linguists constantly scrutinise translation activities (1959: 233-4):

Equivalence in difference is the cardinal problem of language and the pivotal concern of linguistics ... No linguistic specimen may be interpreted by the science of language without a translation of its signs into other signs of the same system or into signs of another system. Any comparison of two languages implies an examination of their mutual translatability; the widespread practice of interlingual communication, particularly translating activities, must be kept under constant scrutiny by linguistic science. It is difficult to overestimate the urgent need for, and the theoretical and
practical significance of, differential bilingual dictionaries with careful comparative
definition of all the corresponding units in their intention and extension. Likewise
differential bilingual grammars should define what unifies and what differentiates the
two languages in their selection and delimitation of grammatical concepts.

The juxtaposition of these two declarations raises a worrying spectrum, however: if translation
studies presupposes comparative/contrastive linguistics, and the latter, in turn, must rely on the
former, how can either project get under way? I shall return to this issue in due course.

Meanwhile, Jakobson’s statement raises two points which deserve particular attention in the
current context. First, he highlights the fact that linguistic science must formulate its findings in
terms provided by its object of study: The theorist’s language (the language of the theory) is
either the same as the language under study, or it is another language, but a language
nevertheless. The language of the theory of language is, we might say, peculiarly contaminated.
Other sciences are not afflicted in quite the same way: medical science is not, as it were, writ in
blood. Jakobson’s apparent proposed solution to this dilemma seems to be to scrutinise as many
forms of language as possible: both semantics and syntax are vastly enriched, he suggests, by
being considered from a comparative perspective.

Jakobson is not alone in his faith in translational activity as data for linguistics. As Fillmore
(1997: 5) points out, in comparing the sentence, “The farmer kills the duckling” with its
translations into other languages, Edward Sapir (1921) ‘was able to put on display the wide
number of ways in which concepts and relations get lexicalized and grammaticized in the world’s
languages’.

Secondly, it is worth noting that Jakobson appears to suggest, and Sapir appears to assume
translatability and that there are concepts and relations which can remain stable under variation in
surface form. It is easier to assume this for some concepts and relations than for others, I think,
and in Section 3 below, I shall look at a concept which appears to positively invite the
assumption. I shall hope to illustrate that in cases where it can be assumed that languages share a concept, at least at a basic level, differences in detail (in this case differences in the circumstances in which the concept can be realised) may, nevertheless, exist, and that one may become peculiarly keenly aware of these when studying translations. Other concepts and relations, as we know, seem forbiddingly culture specific, but in the case study in the second part of my discussion I shall want to suggest that comparative translational linguistics lends itself very well to illustrating that similarities tend to lurk where only differences are apparent.

The point to be made now is, however, that the assumption of translatability and of something that remains stable under variation in surface form is an assumption which translation studies shares with comparative linguistic study of the kind Jakobson advocates: to consider two texts to be related as Target Text to Source Text clearly implies both translatability and that the two texts relate to (some of) the same concepts and relations at least at some points. At Toury (1995: 33-5) puts it:

Regarding a text as a translation entails the obvious assumption that there is another text, in another culture/language, which has both chronological and logical priority over it ... [and] ... the assumption that the process whereby the assumed translation came into being involved the transference from the assumed source text of certain features that the two now share. ... Finally, adopting the assumption that a text is a translation also implies that there are accountable relationships which tie it to its assumed original, an obvious function of that which the two texts allegedly share and which is taken to have been transferred across the cultural-semiotic (and linguistic) border.

So the two disciplines have this much in common, at least. They differ, however, in several important respects.
First, what tends to be different is the object of study. In a broad sense, of course, both are concerned with language; but an important difference lies in the mode of language which is under study. For the linguist, at least traditionally, the object has tended to be the language as system, and the examples of the object under study have tended to be individual sentences isolated from co-text and context. Sapir was not so callous as to confront each informant with a farmer in *medias res* and ask them to describe what they saw; he gave them instead the (in)famous sentence and asked them to introspect a translation.

For translation scholars, this method of proceeding can appear unsatisfactory. Snell-Hornby (1988: 14-15), for example, considers the approach (as employed by Catford 1965) ‘dated and of mere historical interest’. She castigates Catford for using ‘isolated and even absurdly simplistic sentence’ from which, she says, ‘he derives “translation rules” which fall far short of the complex problems presented by real-life translation’ (p. 20).

It is interesting in this connection to see Fillmore annotate his own remarks about Sapir’s sentence with the following reference to the unnaturalness of that sentence (1997: 5, note 2):

> the unnaturalness of Sapir’s sentence is evidenced by the fact that I am among the large number of linguists who quotes the sentence with “killed” rather than “kills”, as I, myself, did in the earlier versions of this lecture, including the version published in *Semiotica*. I had somehow unconsciously wished to work with a sentence that lent itself to some level of natural contextualization.

Secondly, Snell-Hornby objects to the method of elicitation used in studies such as Sapir’s and Catford’s. As she points out (1988: 20), the opinions of bilinguals and translators about translation equivalents may differ:

> As anyone with experience in translation knows all too well, the opinions of the most competent translators can diverge considerably, and the above suggestion [from
Catford: *The discovery of textual equivalents is based on the authority of a competent bilingual informant or translator* is - for a rigorously scientific discipline - hopelessly inadequate.

These days, contrastive linguistics can, of course, ensure against some of the inadequacy Snell-Hornby reflects on by using large, machine-readable so-called parallel corpora to search for equivalents. This, arguably, makes the method sounder empirically for two reasons. A large corpus gives us access to many different translators’ choices of equivalents; and instead of introspecting on sentences in isolation, these translators will have worked with real texts. Snell-Hornby, however, is of the opinion that (p. 22):

> equivalence is unsuitable as a basic concept in translation theory: the term *equivalence*, apart from being imprecise and ill-defined (even after a debate of over twenty years) presents an illusion of symmetry between languages which hardly exists beyond the level of vague approximations and which distorts the basic problems of translation.

She advocates that the search for equivalence between parts of text be replaced by a more text-holistically oriented research methodology (p. 35):

> Whereas linguistics has gradually widened its field of interest from the micro- to the macro-level, translation studies, which is concerned essentially with texts against their situational and cultural background, should adopt the reverse perspective: as maintained by the gestalt psychologists, an analysis of parts cannot provide an understanding of the whole, which must be analysed from “the top down.”

Toury (1995: 87) comments on the impracticality of this proposal, as well as on its theoretical validity:
much as one would like to regard the text as an ultimate unit, the mapping of a translation onto its assumed source is impracticable unless both texts are broken down, often drastically. Nor is this necessity devoid of theoretical justification. After all, no act of translation is conceivable without serial operations.

And nor, we might add, is any act of textual analysis. To establish relationships between a Target Text and its Source requires analysts to establish units of each which are relatable to one another in some principled way, and in order to set this operation in train, analysts must rely at some basic level on their understanding of the relationships between the two languages concerned, just as translators take such an understanding as the basic starting point for their translating activity. In other words, to either compare Target Text and Source Text, or to translate a text into another language presupposes an assumption that it is possible to map aspects of one language onto aspect of the other, even if, as Snell-Hornby points out, we cannot assume complete symmetry between the two.

I think that what comparative/contrastive linguistics can perhaps learn from translation studies is to check the results of its “bottom-up” analyses of lexical and systemic cross-linguistic differences and similarities against results obtained from translational cross-textual analyses focusing on those same items, and it is this that I should like to illustrate in the practical parts of my two papers. At the end the second discussions, I shall return to the theoretical issues raised here.

3. An exercise in translational contrastive linguistics

Let us try as hard as we can to circumvent the problem Snell-Hornby raises about the assumption that languages can be systematically related one to the other, point for point, by selecting for examination the realisation in two languages of a concept which it is hard to imagine that any language could function without, and one which has, in fact, been subject to a great deal of

Deixis is a category which we can probably assume to be realised in all languages; it is hardly conceivable that there could be a language whose speakers did not engage in (Lyons 1977: 637):

the location and identification of persons, objects, events, processes and activities

being talked about, or referred to, in relation to the spatiotemporal context created

and sustained by the act of utterance and the participation in it, typically, of a single

speaker and at least one addressee.

This location of persons etc. in relation to the immediate situation of speech is realised through (Fillmore 1975: 39) ‘those formal properties of utterances which are determined by, and which are interpreted by, knowing certain aspects of the communication act in which the utterances in question can play a role’; and these aspects of the communication act include the identity of the people taking part in the communication situation (person deixis); the place or places in which these individuals are located (place/spatial deixis); the time at which the communication act takes place (time/temporal deixis); social relationships between participants (social deixis); and reference by means of ‘lexical or grammatical elements ... to some portion or aspect of the ongoing discourse’ (Fillmore 1975: 70) (discourse deixis).

Each of these types of deixis exist in good, fairly equal, and even relatively well calibratable measure in both English and Danish, languages which are so closely related that word-for-word translation is reasonably easily achievable most of the time, even though the resultant texts may
be somewhat unnatural and not grammatically flawless, from the point of view of the Target Language. It would therefore not be unreasonable to predict that the translation of deictic terms between the two languages would create very few problems. Here, I shall concentrate on testing out this prediction with reference to the translation of place deictic terms from Danish into English only, and, within place deixis, with reference to just one pair of contrasting terms, namely the adverbs *her* and *der* for Danish, and the corresponding English pair, 'here' and 'there'.

According to Fillmore (1975: 40), this pair of adverbs, together with the demonstratives 'this' and 'that', are ‘the most obvious place deictic terms in English’. 'Here' is [+Proximal] while 'there' is [-Proximal] (Fillmore, 1982: 48). The Danish equivalents of 'here' and 'there', *her* and *der*, mirror this contrast, so the comparative picture is very simple:

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In their deictic function, these terms are locative adverbs, and of *her* and *der* as locative adverbs, Allan *et al* (1995: 347) say that they answer the question corresponding to ‘Where/Where to’, and that they correspond to ‘here’ and ‘there’, respectively, just as the model above suggests.

However, this identity in the here/there - *her/der* systems in terms of the proximal parameter does not guarantee unproblematic translation, partly because as Fillmore (1985: 35-36) points out, 'elements which are prototypically deictic may also have non-deictic uses'. And in some of these uses, of course, the translation may not be as suggested by the model above.
In Danish, *der* can be used (Allan *et al.* 1995: 160) ‘as a formal subject and as subject in impersonal constructions’. In some such constructions, *der* still corresponds to ‘there’ in English, they say, as in the following examples:

- **Der findes løver i Afrika.** There are lions in Africa
- **Der er ikke bjerge i Danmark.** There are no mountains in Denmark.
- **Der mangler 10 kroner.** There are 10 kroner missing.

But the function here is said to be to ‘postulate the existence, or non-existence, of the real subject in the predicate position’. The locative function, and deixis, is not mentioned, and nor are examples such as the following:

- **Der var saa deiligt ude paa Landet; det var Sommer,**

These are the two opening clauses of H.C. Andersen's story *Den grimme Ælling* (1844) ('The ugly duckling'). I want to concentrate, in the first instance, on the first clause.

This type of construction it realises seems not to be the same as the one in the examples just above; at least it is clear that it cannot be translated with ‘there’ into English: *'There was so lovely out in the country’, and, in fact, the clause causes its several translators some difficulty.*

Here is a small sample:

- **Anon:** How beautiful it was in the country! It was summer time;
- **Corrin:** It was glorious out in the country. It was summer.
- **Dulcken:** It was glorious out in the country. It was summer,
- **Haugaard:** It was so beautiful out in the country. It was summer.
- **Keigwin:** Summertime! How lovely it was out in the country,
- **Kingsland:** It was so lovely out in the country! It was summer:
- **Lewis:** It was so delightful in the country. The air was full of summer;
- **Peulevé:** Summer had come and it was so lovely out in the country.
- **Spink:** It was so lovely out in the country! It was summer
The construction in question is, as I said, not represented in the grammar edited by Allan et al, but the translators’ choices strongly suggest that it is comparable to the types of impersonal constructions in which English uses ‘it’ as a formal subject, and where Danish can use det. Among these, as we know, and as Allan et al (1995: 160) point out, clauses referring to weather conditions are particularly common.

The nearest Allan et al (1995: 161) come to the construction we are interested in occurs, in fact, in a section in which they compare der with det, where they provide the following example, among others:

**der/det er varmt i Italien**  
It is hot in Italy

In this type of impersonal construction, they say, der and det ‘seem to be interchangeable’, which suggests that they think it makes no difference which is chosen, in which case it should of course not be a cause for concern that der in our Andersen sentence is translated by ‘it’, the systemic equivalent of det, by all of the translators. It is also true that Andersen could have begun:

*Det var saa deiligt ude paa Landet; det var Sommer,*

But he did not do that; he began *Der var saa deiligt ude paa Landet; det var Sommer,* and I would like to believe that this choice was motivated. Whether it was or not, though, it is a fact that Danish offers a choice in constructions such as this one, and where a language offers a choice, there tend to be semantic consequences of the selection of one of them. The question, in this case, is what would have been the consequence of selecting det instead of der. And here, the
translations, if we look a little further into them, offer interesting clues. Let us look, first, at the original, which I provide below, followed by near-word-for-word translation in which I have left the terms under investigation in Danish and numbered the instances of their occurrence. Two of these, numbered (5) and (8), are instances where *der* occurs in a compound adverb. There is also one un-numbered instance where *der* is clearly a pronoun; this is given in the translation as ‘which’ (underlined). Finally, there is an expression in bold type face which I shall come back to.

Der var saa deiligt ude paa Landet; det var Sommer, Kornet stod guult, Havren grøn, Høet var reist i Stakke nede i de grønne Enge, og der gik Storken paa sine lange, røde Been og snakkede ægyptisk, for det sprog havde han lært af sin Moder. Rundtom Ager og Eng var der store Skove, og midt i Skovene dybe Soer; jo, der var rigtignok deiligt derude paa Landet! Midt i Solskinnet laae der en gammel Herregaard med dybe Canaler rundt om, og fra Muren og ned til Vandet voxte store Skræppeblade, der vare saa høie, at smaa Børn kunde staae opreiste under de største; der var ligesaa vildsomt derinde, som i den tykkeste Skov, og her laae en And paa sin Rede; hun skulde ruge sine smaa Ællinger ud, men nu var hun næsten kjed af det, fordi det varedes saa længe ...

(1)*Der* was so lovely out in the country; it was summer, the corn stood yellow, the oats green, the hay was raised in stacks down in the green meadows and (2)*der* walked the stork on his long, red legs and talked Egyptian, for that language had he learnt from his mother. Around field and meadow was (3)*der* large forests, and in the middle of the forests deep lakes; yes, (4)*der* was indeed lovely (5)*derude* in the country! In the middle of the sunshine lay (6)*der* an old manor house with deep canals around it, and from the wall and down to the water grew large dock-leaves which were so high that small children could stand upright under the largest; (7)*der* was just as wildsome (8)*derinde* as in the thickest forest, and (9)*her* lay a duck on her nest; she had to hatch her small ducklings out, but **now was** she nearly bored with it, because it took so long

Compare this passage with the translations:

**Anon:**
How beautiful (1)it was in the country! It was summer time; the wheat was yellow, the oats were green, the hay was stacked up in the verdant meadows, and the stork strutted about on his long red legs, chatting in Egyptian, the language he had learnt from his mother. The fields and meadows were skirted by thick woods, and in the midst of the woods lay a deep lake. Yes, (4)it was indeed beautiful in the country! The sunshine fell warmly on an old country house, surrounded by deep canals, and from the walls down to the water’s edge [i]there grew large burdock-leaves, so high that children could stand upright among them without being seen.
This place was as wild and lonely as the thickest part of the wood, and on that account a duck had chosen to make her nest there. She was sitting on her eggs, but the pleasure she had felt at first was now almost gone, because she had been there so long.

**Corrin:**
(1) It was glorious out in the country. It was summer. The corn was golden yellow, the oats were green, the hay was stacked up in the green meadows and the stork walked around on his red legs chattering in Egyptian, a language he had learned from his mother. All around the fields and meadows there were woods and in the midst of these woods were deep lakes. Yes indeed, it was glorious out in the country!

Standing there in the sunshine was an old manor, surrounded by a deep moat, and from its walls right down to the water’s edge grew great dock leaves, which were so tall that small children could stand upright under the tallest of them; it was as wild here as in the thickest wood. And a duck was sitting there on her nest, hatching out her little ducklings. But she was getting tired; it was taking such a long time.

**Dulcken:**
(1) It was glorious out in the country. It was summer, and the corn-fields were yellow, and the oats were green; the hay had been put up in stacks in the green meadows, and the stork went about on his long red legs, and chattered Egyptian, for this was the language he had learned from his good mother. All around the fields and meadows were great forests, and in the midst of the forests lay deep lakes. Yes, it was really glorious out in the country. In the midst of the sunshine there lay an old farm, surrounded by deep canals, and from the wall down to the water grew great burdocks, so high that little children could stand upright under the loftiest of them. It was just as wild here as in the deepest wood. There sat a duck upon her nest, for she had to hatch her young ones; but she was almost tired out before the little ones came;

**Haugaard:**
(1) It was so beautiful out in the country. It was summer. The oats were still green, but the wheat was turning yellow. Down in the meadow the grass had been cut and made into hay stacks; and there the storks walked on their long red legs talking Egyptian, because that was the language they had been taught by their mothers. The fields were enclosed by woods, and hidden among them were little lakes and pools. Yes, it certainly was lovely out there in the country!

The old castle, with its deep moat surrounding it, lay bathed in sunshine. Between the heavy walls and the edge of the moat there was a narrow strip of land covered by a whole forest of burdock plants. Their leaves were large and some of the stalks were so tall that a child could stand upright under them and imagine that he was in the middle of the wild and lonesome woods. Here a duck had built her nest. While she sat waiting for the eggs to hatch, she felt a little sorry for herself because it was taking so long.

**Keigwin:**
Summertime! How lovely it was out in the country, with the wheat standing yellow, the oats green, and the hay all stacked down in the grassy meadows! And there went the stork on his long red legs, chattering away in Egyptian, for he had learnt that language from his mother. The fields and meadows had large woods all around, and in the middle of the woods there were deep lakes.

Yes, it certainly was lovely out in the country! Bathed in sunshine stood an old manor-house with a deep moat round it, and growing out of the wall down by the water were huge dock-leaves; the biggest of them were so tall that little children could stand upright underneath. The
place was as tangled and twisty as the densest forest, and (9)here it was that a duck was sitting on her nest. It was time for her to hatch out her little ducklings, but it was such a long job that she was beginning to lose patience.

Kingsland:
(1) It was so lovely out in the country! It was summer: the corn stood yellow and the oats green; down in the green meadows the hay had been stacked; and the stork was walking about (2) there and chattering in Egyptian, for he had learnt that language from his mother. Round the fields and meadows (3) there were vast woods, and in the midst of the woods were deep lakes - yes, (4) it was really lovely out in the country! Right in the sunshine (6) there lay an old manor-house with deep canals round it, and great dock-leaves grew from the wall down to the water - they were so tall that small children could stand upright under the biggest of them. They grew like a wild and tangled wood. A duck was sitting on her nest (9) there: she was waiting for her little ducklings to hatch out, but she was rather tired of it now because it had lasted so long.

Lewis:
(1) It was so delightful in the country. The air was full of summer; the corn was yellow; the oats were green; the haystacks in the meadows looked like little hills of grass, and (2) there the stork strutted about on his long red legs. All round the open fields were woods and forests, and within these were deep cool lakes. Yes, (4) it was really delightful in the countryside. And (6) there, in the bright sunshine stood an old manor house surrounded by a moat. Great dock leaves grew from the wall as far down as the water; some of them so big that little children could stand upright underneath them. In their shade, you might think yourself in a tiny secret forest of your own. (9) This was where a duck sat on her nest (9) there: she was waiting for her little ducklings to hatch out. She was becoming rather tired of sitting there, though, for the ducklings took so long to come.

Peulevé:
Summer had come and (1) it was so lovely out in the country. The wheat stood yellow, the oats green, and the hay was stacked down in the lush meadows, (2) where the stork walked around on his long red legs, jabbering away in Egyptian, for that was the language his mother taught him. Big woods surrounded fields and meadows, and in the middle of the woods deep lakes were hidden away, yes indeed, (4) it was lovely out in the country. In the drowsy sunshine stood an old castle with deep moats all around, and from the wall and down to the water huge dock-leaves were growing, and some of them were so tall that little children could stand upright underneath. It was as tangled and matted in (8) there as in the densest forest, and right (9) there a duck was sitting on her nest. Her little ducklings would soon be hatched now, but she was getting bored, because it took so long.

Spink:
(1) It was so lovely out in the country! It was summer: the corn stood yellow and the oats green; the hay was stacked up in the grassy meadows; and (2) there went the stork on his long red legs, jabbering away in Egyptian, which was the language he had learnt from his mother. All round the fields and meadows were large woods, and in the middle of the woods (3) there were deep lakes. Yes, (4) it was lovely (5) there in the country! Standing in the sun was an old manor-house with a deep moat round it, and from the wall down to the water’s edge grew great big burdocks, which were so tall that little children could stand upright under the largest of them. The place was as wild as the densest forest, and in (9) there a duck was sitting on her nest. She was busy hatching her little ducklings, but was getting rather tired of it because it was taking so long.
The source text presents a typical literary text opening. It begins with a passage of description of a place in the distance, vis-a-vis the narrating voice, as indicated by the predominant use, often in theme position, of *der* as a place-deictic location adverb; but it culminates in a sudden shift from distant to proximate with a closing in on a central place/character, the duck on her nest. The narrating voice has now shifted to the location that is being described. It is now no longer ‘there’, it is ‘here’. This shift is powerfully reinforced by means of the use of the past tense form of the verb corresponding to ‘to be’, *var*, together with the temporal adverb of the immediate present, *nu*: effectively ‘now was’, the tense which presents as present the point of view of a character being told about in the past tense. The narrating voice locates itself in the same place as the duck, ‘here’, and creates empathy with her (Lyons, 1977: 677; Adamson, 1994).

I want to argue is that the very first word of the Source Text, *Der*, is a place deictic adverb of location, not just a formal subject in an impersonal construction where it is interchangeable with ‘det’ without any alteration of effect or meaning. In making this argument, I want to compare the vantage-points in ST with those of the TTs, which, because they are in English, have to forego the use of ‘there’ in this clause, in clause-initial position.

What is special about the clause-initial position in both English and Danish is that it gives the focal or starting point for what is to be told -- what Halliday calls ‘theme’ (Halliday 1985: 39). In the ST-portion under discussion, the form *der* occurs 9 times, including the one occurrence as a pronominal. Of the remaining eight, four are in theme-position (I disregard connectives). Each of these introduces a clause which marks out a focal place, and situates it in relation to the position of writer and reader. They all enforce the
-proximal point of view, as do the remaining, non-thematic instances of locative *der*. Finally, the point of view shifts, by *her*, to the duck, from whose point of view the narrative voice’s past is ‘now’. In the ST, the pattern looks like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>RHEME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) <em>Der</em></td>
<td>(2) <em>der</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) <em>der</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) <em>der</em></td>
<td>(5) <em>derude</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) <em>der</em></td>
<td>(8) <em>derinde</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) <em>her</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the translations, there are generally no such strong contrasts between -proximal and +proximal:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>RHEME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anon:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) <em>it</em></td>
<td>(4) <em>it</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[I]<em>there</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) <em>This place</em></td>
<td>(9) <em>there</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>RHEME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corrin:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) <em>it</em></td>
<td>(3) <em>there</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) <em>it</em></td>
<td>(6) <em>there</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(7) <em>here</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(9) <em>there</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>RHEME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dulcken:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) <em>it</em></td>
<td>(4) <em>it</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6) <em>there</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) <em>there</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) <em>Here</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>RHEME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Haugaard:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) <em>it</em></td>
<td>(2) <em>there</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4) <em>it</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5) <em>there</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[I]<em>there</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(9) <em>Here</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>RHEME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keigwin:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) <em>it</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) <em>there</em></td>
<td>(4) <em>it</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) <em>here</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>RHEME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kingsland:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) <em>it</em></td>
<td>(2) <em>there</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) <em>there</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4) <em>it</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6) <em>there</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(9) <em>there</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If we remove those items which function as translation equivalents of *der*, but which cannot be translated into English as forms which can have deictic function, the contrasts look like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>RHEME</th>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>RHEME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anon:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Corrin:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[I]there</td>
<td></td>
<td>(3)there</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7)This place</td>
<td></td>
<td>(6)there</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9)there.</td>
<td></td>
<td>(7)here</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dulcken:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Haugaard:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6)there</td>
<td></td>
<td>(2)there</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7)here</td>
<td></td>
<td>(5)there</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9)Here</td>
<td></td>
<td>[I]there</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Keigwin:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Kingsland:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2)there</td>
<td></td>
<td>(2)there</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9)here</td>
<td></td>
<td>(3)there</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(6)there</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(9)there</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lewis:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Peulevé:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(1)it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(2)where</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(4)it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(8)there</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(9)right here</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>would now</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ST moves from [-proximal] to [+proximal], predominantly through themes and consistently by means of *der* until the strongly marked, proximal *her* occurs. It creates empathy with the duck with *was now*. Anon moves from [-proximal] with [I]’there’ (if this instance is deictic) to [+proximal] with the thematic ‘This place’, back to [-proximal] with ‘there’, and to empathy with *was now*. Corrin begins [-proximally] with ‘there’ (3) and (6), moves close with ‘here’, but distances the duck with ‘there’. Dulcken is [-proximal] to begin with, but turns [+proximal] with ‘here’ in theme position. Haugaard is [-proximal] until he reaches the duck with ‘here’. Keigwin is [-proximal] first, then [+proximal]. Kingsland remains [-proximal], but gives us the ‘was now’ paradox. Lewis begins [-proximally], but becomes [+proximal] with ‘This’. Peulevé begins [-proximally] but is decidedly [+proximal] with ‘right here’ and empathetic with ‘would now’. Spink remains [-proximal].

The patterns look like this, with thematic features in italics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ST</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>Ke</th>
<th>Ki</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>der</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>der</td>
<td>THIS PLACE there</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>HERE</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>RGT HERE</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>der</td>
<td>was now</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>HERE</td>
<td>HER</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>THIS</td>
<td>would now</td>
<td>there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>derude</td>
<td>der</td>
<td>der</td>
<td>HER</td>
<td>now was</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I think it is clear that in none of the translations is the -proximal/+proximal contrast as strong as in the ST, if we grant that all the instances of *der* which I have singled out are deictic. If we don’t, the picture looks like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ST</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>Ke</th>
<th>Ki</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>der</td>
<td>THIS PLACE</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>there</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>derude</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>HERE</td>
<td>HERE</td>
<td>HERE</td>
<td>was now</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>RGT HERE</td>
<td>there</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>derinde</td>
<td>was now</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>HERE</td>
<td>THIS</td>
<td>would now</td>
<td>there</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HER</td>
<td>now was</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The occurrence of the +proximal remains more marked in its context of -proximals in the Danish than in the English texts, even though we have now removed any obstacles to retaining the pattern in the English texts. Arguably, the translators have failed to notice the contrast in the Danish; arguably, they have failed to notice it because their attention has been distracted by the unavailability of the potentially deictic form in the first, clause-initial position in the English text. It is interesting to speculate that Haugaard, who is the only Danish translator, is one of two candidates for the position of strongest contrast provider, though. Perhaps he has a stronger sense of the contrast in the Source Text.

In all of the translations, then, there is a less strongly marked contrast between *there* and *here* than there is in the original between *der* and *her*. This is at least partly because there are fewer instances in them of a form that can function to indicate -proximal deixis, before the narrator turns proximal when he gets to the duck. I think that what these translation provide is evidence, albeit indirect evidence, for a deictic reading of the Source Text’s initial and fourth *der*. 
It is in fact possible to support this reading through a more traditional line of argument (though notice that the reading is not provided for by the comparative English-Danish grammar I am using):

In what we might call atmosphere-contexts in Danish, the choice between her and der always exists, whereas it does not exist in the case of pure weather statements (det regner/sner; 'it is raining/snowing'). Since both constructions: det er varmt/koldt/kedeligt herinde/derinde ('it is warm/cold/boring in here/there') and der/her er varmt/koldt/kedeligt der/herinde ('there/here is warm/cold/boring in there/here') are possible in Danish, it is tempting to assume that the selection of one is in some way meaningful, and the most likely difference seems to be that selecting the place adverb creates a focus on where the condition obtains, while selecting the dummy-'det' creates a focus on the condition itself. This suggests to me that der/her is deictic in this construction, and, therefore, in the Danish source text. Some further considerations strengthen this hypothesis:

If, in Danish, you ask of a person who is away in another place how he or she likes that place, then that person can say Her er dejligt ('Here is lovely'). And if you ask how it was in that place, say ten years ago, the person, still in that place could say Her var dejligt ('Here was lovely'). If you ask the person after their return how they found the place, they could say, as in the story, Der var dejligt ('There was lovely'), and if you ask them, now that they are no longer in the place, what the place is like, they can also say Der er dejligt ('There is lovely'). Ergo, speakers can select either her or der, depending on their position relative to the place being referred to. It is difficult to find a non-deictic explanation for this distinction. I conclude that the first element in the Danish ST under consideration is place deictic, whereas the translation equivalent, 'it', of that element in the TTs, whether in first position or not, is obviously not deictic.
The argument just presented obviously makes no use of translational data. It is, however, made more convincing, in my view, when it is supplemented by the translational data, which illustrates particularly poignantly the consequences of selecting one rather than the other term: that is, the translations illustrate, in a sense, what the Source Text would have been like had Andersen used *Det* instead of *Der* to begin his story, that is, the contrast between the Danish text and the English translations highlights what is lost with the loss of the instance of the potentially deictic form in initial position in the text, namely an important aspect of the deictic patterning of the text. And this loss suggests that that form does indeed have a deictic function.

For a much larger study of spatial deixis in Chinese and English employing translational data along with data of other types, see Wu (1997).

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**Source for the story:**

**Sources for the translations**


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