

Book Review

Jacqueline Guillemin-Flescher (2023), *Linguistique contrastive : énonciation et activité langagière*. Textes réunis sous la responsabilité éditoriale de Maryvonne Boisseau, Hélène Chuquet, Françoise Doro-Mégy. Rennes : Presses universitaires de Rennes. 436 pp. ISBN: 978-2-7535-8815-8, € 28,00.

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Colleagues and former students of Jacqueline Guillemin-Flescher have compiled a volume with a representative collection of her essays. The 21 articles are preceded by a comprehensive presentation of the texts by Maryvonne Boisseau and Hélène Chuquet (15–29) and followed by a postface (407–411), in which Françoise Doro-Mégy pays tribute to the didactic qualities and academic charisma of the honorary professor at the Paris Cité University (formerly Paris 7—Denis Diderot University). The volume also contains a complete bibliography of Jacqueline Guillemin-Flescher’s publications from 1969 to 2021 (the first three under the name Jacqueline Flescher). As the bilingual author has also written some essays in English, the volume includes an appendix (413–423) with French summaries of these publications.

The two authors of the detailed introduction to Jacqueline Guillemin-Flescher’s œuvre emphasize a fundamental feature of her publications: the continuity in terms of theoretical principles and terminological instruments. The major work with which Jacqueline Guillemin-Flescher introduced herself to the scientific community and attracted the attention of her peers has a title that indicates the tradition within which she sees herself: *Syntaxe comparée du français et de l’anglais. Problèmes de traduction* (1981) unmistakably evokes the standard work *Stylistique comparée du français et de l’anglais. Méthode de traduction* by the pioneers of translation didactics Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet. However, she subsequently positioned herself even more clearly as a follower of Antoine Culioli (1924–2008) and a follower of his approach, which has developed some influence in France under the acronym TOPE (*théorie des opérations prédictives et énonciatives*) but has remained unnoticed outside the borders of the French-speaking world. She adopted and refined Culioli’s doctrine and founded her own school on this basis.

This filiation probably poses a considerable problem for most readers in so far as Guillemin-Flescher uses Culioli’s (2020) idiosyncratic terminology in almost all her publications without explaining his theory (which is too complex to be exposed here *in extenso*). Guillemin-Flescher seems to presuppose that all readers are initiated enough to follow her argumentation. In view of the limited reception of Culioli’s theory, however, it would perhaps have made strategic sense to place the only essay in which Guillemin-Flescher outlines it in a few words at the beginning of the book. For in “Qualification and Point of View” (1999: 219–244), she points out the cornerstones of her master’s approach (219):

The theory is embedded in a conception of language that rejects the dichotomy between ‘langue’: the abstract system of a given language and ‘langage’: linguistic activity based on usage. It is grounded in a relationship between the speaker and the discourse, but the speaker is included in the theory in so far as there are formal traces of his presence.

Viewed in this perspective, he is both a reference point in the calculation of time, space and personal pronouns and a cognitive origin in the expression of modality.

The editors have thankfully compiled a subject index (*Index des notions*) with all terminological references (429–434) and marked in bold those pages where the respective terms are discussed in detail. But, unfortunately, the two authors of the presentation also seem to assume that the readership can be expected to interpret the terms without further ado so that their comments on the individual essays are only helpful for readers who are already familiar with the theoretical framework. Only in a few places does Guillemin-Flescher declare her intentions in conventional terms of linguistics. So, for example, in the same essay (219):

This approach entails a distinction between a well formed sentence such as: *Two men are in the garden* (syntactically correct) and a well formed utterance: *There are two men in the garden*. A well formed utterance takes into account location of the predicative relation with respect to the situation of enunciation. This situation includes the three parameters mentioned above: the speaker, the time of utterance and the place of utterance.

In this paragraph, Guillemin-Flescher makes clear that she is concerned here (as in many others of her essays) with the way in which a native speaker would spontaneously express something. In the context of translation, Guillemin-Flescher is in line with the intentions of the *stylistique comparée* and she has obviously in mind what Nida (1964: 166) calls “closest natural equivalent” in his translation theory.

The way the author constructs her arguments and pursues her goals in the essays dealing with contrastive aspects hardly varies over the years. In most of the essays she proceeds according to the following pattern: the starting point is a syntactic structure in one of the two languages. The author then provides a (usually printed, i.e. authentic) translation which documents that the structure in question cannot be reproduced element-for-element in the target language. Then, step-by-step, various parameters are being changed in the source text to show that seemingly harmless interventions sometimes cause small, but sometimes dramatic changes, which have a respective impact on the translations. The reader who is not initiated in Culioli’s and Guillemin-Flescher’s terminology will concentrate on the generally almost self-explanatory examples to understand what the author wants to convey. In the following paragraphs, a few specimens will show types of problems that are discussed; for reasons of space, we cannot, however, run through the entire chain of arguments in each case.

In selecting the essays, the editors were guided by the intention of considering as many of the phenomena investigated by Guillemin-Flescher as possible. The homogeneity of the œuvre undoubtedly facilitated the selection and compilation of the articles, which were divided into four groups and placed under the headings “Traduction et linguistique contrastive,” “Système de repérage et prédication,” “Assertion, modalités, détermination” and “Représentation de la perception.”

The first section comprises four essays published between 1983 and 2006. The focus here is on translation, whereas contrastive linguistics sometimes only plays a peripheral role. Since the author basically demonstrates her theses by means of authentic printed translations, it also makes sense to place two programmatic texts on the subject of translation in the introductory section.

The two essays “Langage, culture et traduction” (1994: 49–63) and “Théoriser la traduction” (2003: 65–78) argue very similarly and can therefore be commented on together. It is important for the author to point out that not everything that claims to be theory is theory; in her opinion, it is often rather a matter of ideology or deontology. Jacqueline Guillemin-Flescher is only interested in translation theories in so far as they have linguistic foundations, leaving aside purely literary theories. And although *culture* is mentioned in the title of an essay (cf. *supra*), she does not seem to acknowledge that the field of translation studies, in the course of its emancipation during the third quarter of the 20th century, has assigned culture—in the widest sense—a privileged position. Surprisingly, she regards as a cultural phenomenon a difference between French and English which she describes as follows: When statements are formulated, in French, the point of reference is the enunciator, and in English it is the addressee. She attributes to this phenomenon several divergent tendencies in the two languages. While, for example, the anteposition of elements in French is normal, in English they must be integrated into the linear sentence sequence, as in (1).

- (1) a. Précurseur à certains égards, attardé à d’autres, Wright avait alors cessé de se trouver en harmonie avec son temps
 ‘Forerunner in certain respects, delayed in others, Wright had then stopped finding himself in harmony with his time’
- b. Wright was ahead of his time in some respects, but he was behind it in others, and no longer felt in tune with the world he lived in (33)

What she regards as a *tendency* lies at an intermediate level between syntactic constraints on the one hand and individual stylistic peculiarities on the other. She is convinced that translators follow an *interiorized grammar*; in other words: One can assume that a qualified majority of translators would spontaneously opt for a structure that corresponds to this interiorized grammar. This idea is very reminiscent of what was attributed to the *génie de la langue* in earlier centuries and what Vinay/Darbelnet (1958), following Charles Bally (1865–1947), described as the stylistics of languages (cf. the meaning of *stylistics* in *stylistique comparée*). It would have been easy to check Guillemin-Flescher’s claim in some instances that translators follow their linguistic instinct almost automatically: All one would have had to do is look at several accredited translations of the same text; after all, there are plenty of multiple translations of canonized literary texts.

In the second part, which comprises six essays, the first text (“Étude contrastive de la deixis en français et en anglais”, 1993: 95–118) discusses the different features of the two languages in deixis, starting from the observation that French *ce* in English can refer to a closed class with *this* or to an open class with *that* (100). The following essay contrasts the linguistic representation of activity, action and event (“Représentation linguistique de l’activité, de l’action et l’événement en français et en anglais”, 1991: 119–134). It discusses well-established observations such as the correspondence between the French pronoun *on* and the English passive voice but also puts forward some theses that are not (yet) generally accepted in contrastive linguistics; for example, the assertion that English existential statements as in (2a) are systematically transformed in French translations in such a way that the percipient subject comes into focus, cf. (2b).

- (2) a. There was no knocker, no sign of a bell
- b. Il ne vit ni marteau ni sonnette
 ‘he did not see any knocker or bell’ (130)

The English article “Subject and Object” (1994: 135–152) is also about shifting perspectives, here (unfortunately without context) from the point of view of transitivity, as in (3).

- (3) a. He had been taken home by Elena
- b. Elena l’avait ramené à la maison
- ‘Elena had taken him to her house’ (140)

Guillemin-Flescher notices an interesting by-product of her analysis: she could not find a single example of the construction type *Mary was loved by John* (with state verb and a defined source), although this is a model sentence in grammars. In the last part of the second section, Guillemin-Flescher focuses on the different architecture of the relative pronouns: French *qui* and *que* refer to syntactic roles, English *who* and *which* to the lexical property animate/inanimate. Differences in usage in syntactic constructions are particularly evident when a temporal sequence is expressed. In examples such as (4), English translators react to the relative clause with a coordination.

- (4) a. Maigret prit son temps, finit par atteindre la porte vitrée, qu’il ouvrit
- ‘Maigret took his time, ended up reaching the glass door, which he opened’
- b. Maigret [...] got to the glass door and opened it (187)

According to Guillemin-Flescher, this response also works in the opposite direction, as in (5).

- (5) a. She took out a book and opened it to the appropriate page
- b. Elle prit un grand livre qu’elle ouvrit à la page appropriée
- ‘She took a big book which she opened at the appropriate page’

I had DeepL translate several examples of this kind. All the English solutions were confirmed, but in the translations English > French, the coordination was always retained (*and opened it* > ‘et l’ouvrit’).

In Section III, which consists of seven articles, four are not contrastive. The article entitled “Traduire l’inattestable” (1984: 203–217) shows two main tendencies in translations from French into English: French assertions in the future tense are subjected to modalisation in English (*Tu nous remercieras* > ‘You can thank us’, 206) and qualifications in assertions are transformed into what Guillemin-Flescher considers to be quantifying formulations (*Vous êtes impardonnable* > ‘Your behaviour is unforgivable’, 214). The essay “Les énoncés exclamatifs et intensifs dans le passage de l’anglais au français” (2004: 273–288) explores the conditions when English *how* should be translated with *comme*, when with *comme c’est* and when only with *c’est* + adjective.

The last two essays deal with verbless enunciations. In this case, it would have made sense to organize the texts not chronologically, but according to content-related criteria. The article “L’énoncé averbal: Repérage et subjectivité” (2011: 315–330) raises a number of fundamental problems. Guillemin-Flescher discusses, for instance, the thesis put forward by renowned linguists that it is (always) the auxiliary verb *to be* that is missing in utterances without a verb—which is of course not the case. It might have been helpful in this context to take a look at the classical languages to better understand the origin of this thesis, as well-known quotations (*anthropos mikros kosmos, vita somnium breve*) suggest, but the author consistently limits herself to her working languages (and here only to French as the object language). In the contrastively conceived essay “Construction du sens et mode d’énonciation” (2002: 289–313), Guillemin-Flescher shows based on her corpus that the frequency of verbless enunciations is much higher in French than in English. However, it was not possible to derive

any regularities. One must consider, as she puts it, a “linguistique des possibles” contrasting with a “linguistique des probables” (290). In the conclusion, however, she argues that a greater distinction is made between narrative and direct speech in English than in French, where the speaker’s point-of-view is decisive in both types of discourse, which makes it easier to dispense with the verb.

In the fourth and final section, the overarching theme is the verbalisation of perception. In this respect, the essay “Énonciation, perception et traduction” (1984: 343–366) is programmatic. It demonstrates how syntactic divergences can cause differences in perception. At one point in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, one reads the phrase in (6a); here the translator has to rephrase the French sentence, as the simple local element (in contrast to a more complex indication of place) cannot precede the subject. He therefore uses (6b).

- (6) a. And, with her basket and her parasol, **there** she was again
(345, bold in Guillemin-Flescher)
- b. Et, dix minutes plus tard, elle reparaissait avec son panier et son ombrelle
‘And, ten minutes later, she reappeared with her basket and her parasol’ (346)

According to Guillemin-Flescher, there is a change of the manner of perception (in her terminology: perception immédiate → perception représentée).

So, how will the reader benefit from reading this anthology? Many of the essays contain perspicacious observations on selective syntactic differences between the two languages that are the subject of the analyses. Some phenomena can be formulated as rules, but in most cases, we must accept that they are only tendencies. Guillemin-Flescher’s argumentation is trustworthy because the evidence is not constructed by herself but based on texts written by people with a keen *Sprachgefühl*, i.e. primarily writers and translators. The method of changing parameters in linguistic utterances slightly or somewhat more and evaluating the effects of these modifications also requires a great deal of linguistic sensitivity. In her essays, Guillemin-Flescher shows that she also possesses this expertise, which enables her to detect grammatical and stylistic subtleties.

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