

## **Rapport en vue de la soutenance de thèse de Mme Judyta Mężyk.**

### **Review prior to the viva voce examination of Mme Judyta Mężyk.**

The present assessment will consider the qualities of the doctoral thesis presented by Judyta Mężyk, entitled *Pragmatemes in audiovisual translation in English-French-Polish language pairs*, with a view to a forthcoming *viva voce* examination. The assessment is organised into two sections. In the first, I will briefly consider whether the document submitted meets the material requirements for a thesis. In the second, I will review the arguments presented in the document, chapter by chapter, pausing to formulate questions and comment whenever it appears relevant to do so. I will conclude with a summary of my impressions and an opinion on the appropriateness of moving on to a formal examination before the thesis board.

Judyta Mężyk's doctoral thesis runs to 327 pages, comprising 241 pages of text proper, which are preceded by Acknowledgment and Abstracts in English, French and Polish, and followed by three sections of thematically categorised references (36 pp.) and 24 pages of Appendices (lists of pragmatemes, of probability scores, of figures and of tables). In quantitative terms, the thesis is undoubtedly among the more economical that I have read, but I cannot say that I have noticed any areas relating to the subject material that have been significantly neglected. I also understand that the length is more in accordance with expectations in Poland, a reflection of the fact that this thesis is the final result of a Franco-Polish co-direction.

The presentation is on the whole commendable. Figures, tables and screenshots of key moments in the audio-visual material considered are integrated harmoniously into the text and reproduced in a fashion that makes reading a pleasure. Transitions are well managed on the whole. The quality of the English is also generally good, although a number of points do require attention, in the present author's opinion. These include a limited, but nonetheless significant, number of typographical slips (interlocuter → interlocutor p. 51, diistributed → distributed p. 99, onlsy → only p. 161, absord → absorb p. 226), grammatical or lexical mistakes (in none ... context was → was context p. 7, smoothening (Indian English) → smoothing p. 49, the language of the youth → of youth p. 141, although does not convey → although it... p. 217, a smaller probability to be imperative → of being p. 216, etc.). I'm also unconvinced by "variantivity" (versus "variation") or "imperativeness", but these might be accepted by some linguists. There are a number of infelicitous expressions, which hamper the reading at points, including the systematic anteposition of "used", as in "the used tools" (p. 28), "the used sources" (p. 252), instead of "the tools / sources used", or sentences like the following : "Because in corpus linguistics, an enormous amount of data is analyzed, accusations of 'armchair linguistics', such as the one that intuitive hypothesizing is not reliable, can be avoided" (p. 122). A little more problematic is the overuse and frequent misuse of argumentative connective devices, including "therefore" (e.g. p. 6), "furthermore" (p. 25), initial "then" (p. 30) and, especially, "however", which is often called upon to conjure up contrast a little artificially (pp. 46 and 62, for instance). I am happy to provide a fuller list of these, generally venial, mistakes and infelicities, for the purposes of later correction, or a list of errata, if required.

On the whole, however, these inconsistencies remain occasional and do not seriously hinder comprehension of the arguments pursued by Judyta Mężyk. In short, then, I consider that the work submitted by Judyta Mężyk meets the material requirements for a doctoral thesis.

I move on now from formal aspects to a consideration of the content.

In a five-page general introduction, Judyta Mężyk places pragmatemes in the broader context of formulaic language, before stating her aim to “conduct an in-depth examination of pragmatemes from a comparative and translational standpoint” (p. 25). In the course of the study, she intends to propose a cross-linguistic definition of the pragmateme and to provide a number of translation techniques employed in the audio-visual translation of the category of the “charged pragmateme”. The introduction concludes with a brief outline of the thesis.

The four chapters that follow are respectively entitled “Theoretical Background”, “Methods”, “Linguistic analysis of pragmatemes” and “Translational Analysis of Charged Pragmatemes”.

Chapter 1, Theoretical Background, is divided into three parts, dealing respectively with the definition of a pragmateme, perspectives on “formulaic language” more generally, and a historical and institutional introduction to audiovisual translation or AVT. After reviewing a number of definitions of pragmatemes, Judyta Mężyk provides her own characterisation of pragmatemes as “language units that are fixed, i.e., used without changes in their form, in a language and predictably used in situations of communication which are typical, repeatable, and specific.” (p. 50). While not a specialist in the field, I find that the definition could be formulated more clearly. In particular, I am not sure I agree with the use of the word “specific” here. Surely any language unit is used in a specific context... I think what is intended is not “specific” in opposition with “generic” (which is what one might expect in the context of a thesis) but rather “characteristic”. This appears to be the point of the additional remark that “pragmatemes themselves trigger a mental representation of the specific communication situation” (p. 50). This is in fact a key point for me indeed and one that bears careful consideration. Not only do pragmatemes have pragmatic effect, but they also 1) are appropriate to certain situations and, also 2) allow us to reconstruct certain types of situation, cultural scripts, etc. by their very use. I will return to this point further on. Another point that worries me is that, in my understanding, formulaic language can only really be proven to be formulaic when it evinces properties of unpredictability. This can be semantic, when the relation between lexical meaning and a particular contextually situated meaning is opaque, or formal, when the expression seems to run counter to formal expectations (ellipsis, fossil forms, etc.). In so far as the meaning in context of expressions like *Sign here please* is entirely predictable, unlike *Go away with you* (when expressing amused disbelief) or *Cheers*, for example there are grounds to wonder whether these ought really to be included in the category. The second part of Chapter 1 considers views on formulaic language. The third and final part provides a very useful account of audiovisual translation, in its various forms, including dubbing, subtitling, voice-over, both from a historical and a cultural perspective. This provides important context for the following chapters and especially for the translation techniques Judyta Mężyk proposes in Chapter 4.

Chapter 2, Methods, as its title suggests, details the methods used in compiling comparable and parallel corpora of pragmatemes, in audiovisual contexts, in the three languages considered. After some general considerations on the advisability of using genuine corpora in language study, Judyta Mężyk explains how her own corpora were compiled, with an ingenious exploitation of a Google Chrome extension, *Language Reactor*, which “allows its users to display content on Netflix with two lines of subtitles in two different languages simultaneously” (p. 124). The subtitles are extracted and

formatted suitably for exploitation with corpus analysis software. The next step, we are told, is the identification of pragmatemes in the corpus material. This is done using several methods, that result in the elaboration of a list of pragmatemes which are then checked against the corpus material for matches. Searching inside the corpus for the pragmatemes in the list is carried out using Unitex, which presents the advantage of facilitating either-or searches, as I understand it (although the same result could also be obtained with a Regex approach). Pragmatemes and their translations are then assembled and compared across the different languages. Judyta Mężyk indicates what percentages of pragmatemes are identifiable to those of the preestablished lists, those bearing some similarity with members of the lists, those that are identified manually and those that are identified thanks to “pragmatic patterns”. This last criterion could, in my opinion, be explained in rather more detail than is the case.

With the methodology clearly explained, in Chapter 3 “Linguistic analysis of pragmatemes”, Judyta Mężyk moves on to the first of her two steps of analysis, aiming to compare the use of pragmatemes in English, French and Polish on the basis of the corpora she has compiled. One first point of note is that English and French corpora are shown to “contain a larger number of pragmatemes of a substantially lesser [sic] frequency” (p. 150).<sup>1</sup> One possible reason for this, I suggest, might be the size of the samples (the English corpus comprises 770k tokens, the French 664k and the Polish 138k). Given that unique occurrences of pragmatemes were not considered, the smaller the corpus, the greater the probability that a pragmateme will occur only once and therefore be excluded from the resulting dataset. This explanation is not considered in the thesis. The pragmatemes found are considered in turn on the basis of a series of properties, including complexity, variantivity, imperativeness, verbless forms, question forms, elliptical forms, deictic expressions, speech acts and pragmateme types (“plain”, i.e. literal meaning, “charged”, i.e. ambiguous, or “loaded”, i.e. non-literal, following Kecskés’s terminology). One might question the relevance of some of these criteria. For example, why should the presence of a deictic expression within a pragmateme particularly be worthy of note? A pragmateme is appropriate to a particular type of situation, as noted in the first point of Judyta Mężyk’s earlier characterisation, i.e. a Situation Bound Utterance, in Kecskés’s words. In addition to this, a pragmateme also evokes its typical conditions of use, in accordance with the second point of the characterisation, “pragmatemes themselves trigger a mental representation of the specific communication situation” (p. 50). In this respect, I would suggest that any pragmateme therefore contains a form of indexicality very reminiscent of deixis. There is a form of bijective determination at play such that a pragmateme is not only triggered by the situation, but its utterance also tells us that this situation belongs to a certain type of situation. The frequencies of each of the different criteria considered are represented graphically, in the form of bar charts and, more innovatively, in the visually effective form of the mosaic plot. While all the graphics are systematically commented upon, the fullest and most enlightening analysis, in my view, is carried out in the commentary on the graphics resulting from multiple correspondance analysis (MCA). It is here that the relevance of the fairly heterogeneous set of properties of pragmatemes is made more obvious for the reader.

Chapter 4, “Translational Analysis of Charged Pragmatemes”, finally, carries out an analysis targeting the translation of “charged” or situationally ambiguous pragmatemes, in the context of the audio-

---

1 I suggest: “lower”.

visual subtitle material comprising Judyta Mężyk's corpus. The aim is to consider three existing typologies for translation "techniques", and to propose an original typology, if those existing are found unsatisfactory. Judyta Mężyk runs through the models of Molina and Hurtado Albir, Hejwowski and Díaz-Cintas and Remael. Each model, with its different categories of translation techniques, is put to the test against Judyta Mężyk's corpus material, considering the French and Polish audio-visual translations of charged pragmatemes in the light of these different theoretical perspectives. Judyta Mężyk's own typology of translation techniques follows, with special reference to the specific translation problems presented by the corpus. She lists ten techniques: deletion (context-based, technical constraints-based, repetition-based and visual-based), ostensibly redundant rendition, compression (syntactic and contextual), erroneous equivalent, consistency equivalent, contextual interpretation, idiosyncratic addition, creative rendition, ostensible idiomatic equivalence, equivalent. Each technique is then illustrated fully, with examples from the corpus and screenshots which help considerably in understanding how the techniques might apply. The most original feature of Judyta Mężyk's translation techniques is, we are told, a fuller consideration of the role played by context: "The striking lack of the concept of context in the typologies of translation techniques discussed above is the driving force behind proposing my own set of techniques: a set of ten translation techniques that take context into account" (p. 231). While I recognise the relevance of Judyta Mężyk's presentation of previous typologies, and the work required in the elaboration of a new typology of translation techniques, it is a shame that the concept of "context" is not discussed in more depth. A section considering what one might understand by "context" would be useful. That being said, each technique suggested is presented effectively, and although the reader is not told explicitly, one nonetheless comes to understand how this notion of context is conceptualised by Judyta Mężyk. Of special interest here, I think, are the remarks on the particular context of audio-visual translation, with institutional, cultural and commercial constraints coming into play that might vary between countries, streaming platforms, etc.

Any typology is open to criticism on a number of points. Personally, I have always found it hard to place translations firmly in one or other of the well-known translation processes presented by Vinay and Darbelnet, for example. More often than not, a translation seems to belong to more than one category, and even something as basic as the opposition between transposition and modulation bothers me, in that any transposition, it seems to me, must go hand in hand with a form of modulation. Judyta Mężyk's techniques do not escape such criticism. The key point of interest is her analysis of the specific nature of the audio-visual context.

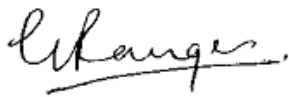
Another quibble concerns Judyta Mężyk's category of "erroneous equivalent". The author admits herself that one can hardly call an error a technique, and one would be hard put to disagree with this. Perhaps what we are looking at are in fact not so much "techniques" as "processes", analysed a posteriori, while a technique would suggest something that a translator might seek to implement in rendering a text. It might be interesting to see whether Judyta Mężyk's techniques, with the exception of the "erroneous equivalent", could be conceptualised in term of a decision tree. But that, of course, is material for a future research project!

There is plenty more one could say about the issues raised in the course of the four dense chapters of Judyta Mężyk's thesis. Pragmatemes have rarely been considered in any depth in the framework of the Theory of Enunciative and Predicative Operations, which seeks to explain how meaning is

constructed in context, but which has avoided in-depth consideration of the pre-fabricated, situation-specific chunks of meaning that pragmatemes represent. Any characterisation of pragmatemes also requires us to think carefully about situation-types, cultural scripts and this again, is something enunciative linguistics would be well advised to take into account. And, lastly, the TV or online series chosen for the corpus come with their own set of codes, which may well vary from one cultural context to another, despite the cultural macrosystem that the hegemony of American popular culture arguably imposes on such media. Some of Judyta Mężyk's rather tentative explanations of translation choices indeed touch upon such problematic issues.

It will be clear from the above that the doctoral thesis submitted by Judyta Mężyk is a thoroughly prepared, and richly documented piece of work, which, in so far as it straddles a number of different areas of research represents an important contribution to transdisciplinary applications of linguistic analyses, both quantitative and qualitative. I have indicated several points of potential disagreement, and others where some further clarification might be useful. This is all to be expected, of course, in a thesis that broaches so many fields, and I have no hesitation in recommending that the thesis be defended at the earliest opportunity.

Eyguières, 21st March 2024.



Graham Ranger, Full Professor. (English Linguistics.)

Graham Ranger, Professeur des Universités. (Linguistique anglaise.)

DECISION: FAVORABLE

AVIS: FAVORABLE À LA SOUTENANCE