

The status of but in documentaries and their Romanian subtitles

Abstract:

The aim of this article is to describe the status of but functioning as a connector of contrast in documentaries and their subtitles, with English as the source language and Romanian as the target language. But is a complex word, serving as a connectivity evince, comprehension facilitator and argumentative indicator, acquiring therefore a host of roles, both within and beyond the sentence.

As theoretical support, I will employ the idea put forward by Fraser (2009) that but conveys one core meaning, that of contrast and that pragmatically it has a wide range of interpretations which are to be inferred from the context, but I will also draw on the Relevance Theoretic approach to discourse connectives elaborated by Diane Blakemore (1987, 2002, 2004) who referred to these functional items as encoding procedures rather than concepts, their meaning being interpreted based on what they indicate, not on what they describe. As for its role in argumentation, but will be analysed within the pragma-dialectical framework.

Using my own research, but also that carried out by Halliday and Hasan (1976), Quirk et al. (1985), Biber et al. (1999) and Fraser (1999, 2009), I have made a list of connectors of contrast and the conclusion I have reached so far is that there are roughly 66 such items in English. However, in documentaries, there is a tendency to use only a few of them, approximately 15 (but, yet, still, however, though, although, even though, despite, rather, in reality, better, while, whereas). But is at the top of the list, having by far the largest number of occurrences and therefore being of outmost importance in constructing the idea of contrast. However, there is a certain inconsistency with respect to the rendition but in Romanian. When it functions at the level of the sentence, it is very rarely omitted as it displays a strong syntactic dependence. Conversely, when it functions at the discourse level, its translation does not always have the same degree of salience, in certain cases the subtitler resorting to its omission as part of his/her strategy of text condensation. I will identify and analyse the types of situations in which but is omitted in Romanian and those in which it is not, focusing on its role according to the various patterns typical of documentaries that include this connector.

Keywords: *Connectors of contrast; Relevance Theory; Procedural meaning; Pragma-dialectics; Audiovisual translation.*