

CAN THE TRANSLATOR PLAY WITH THE SYSTEM, TOO?: A STUDY OF THEMATIC STRUCTURE IN SOME PORTUGUESE TRANSLATIONS*

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This paper explores the tension between maintenance of the thematic structure of the source text (ST) and the (im)possibility to produce translations faithful to the overall discourse structure of the original. The view of language expressed by Halliday's Functional Grammar (1985/1994), with its separate Textual component, provides the theoretical background. Nine translated texts (TT's) of one and the same source text (ST) are compared. The concepts of "markedness and unmarkedness" are drawn upon in the investigation. Points of convergence and divergence are examined and some factors suggested to account for changes in the thematic organization, which produced different rhetorical effects.

The speaker can exploit the potential that the situation defines, using thematic and information structure to produce an astonishing variety of rhetorical effects. He can play with the system, so to speak.

Halliday 1985:270

1. Introduction

1.1. Theoretical framework

The view of language proposed by Halliday and expressed in his functional grammar (1967-1968, updated in 1985 and 1994), with its separate Textual component, provides the theoretical background for the present discussion of some translated texts (TT's) as re-textualisations of one and the same source text (ST).

1.2. The clause: three simultaneous semantic processes

One of the central claims of functional grammar is the principle that "a clause is the product of three simultaneous semantic processes. It is at one and the same time a representation of experience, an interactive exchange, and a message" (1985: 53). These three aspects of the meaning of the clause are related to three more general functional concepts, which form the basis of the semantic organization of all natural languages: the Ideational, the Interpersonal and the Textual meanings. Each meaning carries out a "meta-function". The Ideational function of the clause is that of representing "processes", or to simplify it, of expressing through processes the propositional content of the speaker's experiences of the real and inner world. The Interpersonal function is that whereby we achieve communication, taking on speech roles in relation to other people. This function is responsible for the organization of the clause as an interactive event. The Textual function is that which serves to organize and connect discourse. Through the Textual component, discourse achieves a texture that relates it to its environment .

1.3. The Textual component

As mentioned above, all these three meta-functions are present at the same time in any text, variation being likely to occur depend-

ing on the different degrees of emphasis on either of the three components, which different types of text will present. The Textual is thus one of the functional components of the semantic system, that responsible for providing texture. One of the ways of achieving texture will be through a thematic system, which is realized by the order in which the elements occur. In other words, the clause in its function of constructing a message, consists of a two-part structure: a Theme combined with a Rheme. It is the Theme-Rheme structure which constitutes the basic form of the organization of the clause as a message.

For the purposes of my study, I have narrowed the focus to cover what is known as the grammar of the messages — the thematic structure — realizing the Textual component of the semantic system. This component informs all and every message, specify not only the global organization of the text, but also the beginning and the end of the internal structure of the message unit itself.

2. The Thematic structure

Discourse has to start somewhere. This beginning of the message is significant as it constitutes what the speaker selects as his point of departure (the significance of beginnings is well established in the literature, as can be seen in Fries 1983:119 and Brown & Yule 1983:125). In Hallidayan terms, this beginning is called the Theme, the “what the sentence is about”. As Halliday explains, “the Theme can be identified as that element which comes in first position in the clause”, organizing it as a message (1985:39). Part of the meaning of the clause lies then in which element is chosen as thematic. For purposes of Theme identification, Halliday suggests the glossing of the theme as the ‘I’ll tell you about ...’ phrase.

2.1. Theme/ Subject/ Actor

The Theme is distinguished from the Subject (a function in the

clause as exchange) and the Actor (a function in the clause as representation). The example below (a) shows the three functions realized in three different elements in the sentence: (Halliday 1985:35)

- | | | | |
|----------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|
| a) This teapot | my aunt | was given by | the duke. |
| (Theme) | (Subject) | | (Actor) |

In many instances, however, they coincide or are mapped on to each other, or “are conflated” as in example b):

- b) The duke gave my aunt this teapot.
 Theme
 Subject
 Actor

In the case of b) the mapping of Theme on to Subject and Actor is referred to as the UNMARKED THEME of a declarative clause. In fact, this is the general tendency: “The Subject is the element that is chosen as Theme, unless there is a good reason for choosing something else” (45). In such a case, that is, when the Theme is something other than the Subject, in a declarative clause, it is referred to as a MARKED THEMES. There is a strong tendency for the speaker to choose the unmarked form. The choice of another item as thematic constitutes then a highly motivated choice as this item is explicitly foregrounded, becoming a manifestation of what the speaker/writer chooses to take as his point of departure, “the nature of his underlying concerns” (67).

2.2. The marked organization of the clause

The feature of marked organization of the clause as a message can have two different explanations, as Baker (166) reminds us. The Hallidayan approach explains it in terms of the fronting of an element to make it thematic. The Prague linguists’ approach explains it in terms of reversing the Theme-Rheme sequence. I favor

Halliday's view because it allows for the stability of the concept of the "starting of the message" as it always maintains the role of the initial position element, while accounting for prominence of items other than the subject in the clause by "marking" the Theme. For the purposes of translation, however, what matters is that both types of analysis recognize the sequence as marked.

The notion of markedness is relevant in translation because the dislocating effect on a text of changing the thematic structure might be suggestive of different motivations underlying the translator's choices and might render completely different flavors.

2.3. The identification of the Rheme

As for the Rheme, it constitutes the remainder of the message, for which the Theme provides the environment, being the "what is said about the Theme". Also realized by the sequence in which the elements of the clause are ordered, it is that element which, placed in final position, generally carries the focus of information in the message. This organization constitutes the unmarked place of focus, which is the default choice, unless some positive signal to the contrary is given, for example by grammatical structure, as in predication (it is ... that...). While the Theme is speaker-oriented prominence (it is "what I am talking about"), the unmarked Rheme is listener-oriented prominence (it is "what I am asking you to attend to"). Both are, however, speaker/writer-selected. Being the part of the sentence which occurs last, it has, in the unmarked case, most communicative importance. Rhematic elements are context-independent thus contributing to the advancement of communication.

2.4. The Theme-Rheme arrangement as a result of choice

The Theme-Rheme arrangement is not random and not only formal. It also conveys significant meaning as the result of choice and it is at the service of rhetorical purposes. Thus when the basic word order is overridden by other considerations and a later ele-

ment is brought to the fore, quite different effects are produced in terms of rhetorical intentions. The implication of this conception of sentence texture for translators is that sensitivity to how the source text develops might be of great help in analysing and manipulating these general rhetorical intentions and achieving the desired effects in the translated text. Or, at least, in dealing with the systemic constraints exerting pressure upon the construction of the translated text.

3. The scope of the present study

3.1. Theme-Rheme structure in interlingual translation

In interlingual translation, we deal with different languages, which work out differently the general tendencies of the Experiential, Interpersonal and Textual meanings. In spite of this fact, however, it is plausible to think of a comparative analysis of this kind for, as Halliday rightly points out (1985:169), since these very general tendencies are clearly discernible in all languages. Sometimes, however, syntactic constraints exert pressures of such a nature that force either alteration of the Theme-Rheme structure or yielding of syntax. This is a decision the translator has to take, which he does, at times consciously and at other times automatically simply surrendering to systemic differences. Whatever his decision is, however, it suggests different implications and has different effects, which I want to examine in the light of the significance of the Thematic Structure as proposed by Halliday.

3.2. A special kind of descriptive translation study

It is important to make it clear that the descriptive translation study proposed here is not to be reduced to mere comparative analysis of source and target texts, but is meant to include the analysis and comparison of different translations of one and the same source

text into one target language (TL) carried out by various translators. As has been commonly suggested (See, for example, Toury 1980:58), in the investigation of textual aspects of translation, central issues can arise out of this kind of comparison, which can eventually shed light on different aspects of the source text, invisible if analysis is carried out otherwise.

3.3. "Can the translator play with the system, too?"

The question that motivated the present study stems from reflections on the speaker's virtual possibility of handling the informational structure of the language as expressed in the quotation opening this study. It is the speaker who assigns the informational structure to the discourse, producing, by force of his choice, different rhetorical effects. This is basically the signification of the "game" he can play with the system. The implications of this question to translation can be phrased as follows: what kind of liberty will the translator be entitled to, as a mediating speaker, producing that which is simultaneously the same and yet another text? Or to put it another way, if the initial position of the Theme in the SL text is relevant to the structure both of the unit of the message and of the discourse as a whole, to what extent can the translator mess it up? Should it be maintained in the translation? What happens to the clause as a message when the translator, for a number of reasons, decides to change the element in initial position in the message unit? In other words, can the translator play with the system, too?

3.4. Some diverging perspectives

Some researchers say "No". Muriel Vasconcellos, for example, claims in several occasions (1991, 1992) that the initial position of the Theme(s) in the source text (ST) is relevant for both the structure of the discourse as a whole and for the structure of the message unit and thus "deve ser mantida na tradução" (1991:110). She insists that if the functional structure of the ST is severely impaired

by syntactic constraints in the target language, “then syntax has to yield” (1992:50). She goes on to equate faithfulness of a translated text with the maintenance of the informational structure of ST, claiming that it is necessary to overcome syntactic and lexical constraints “para se chegar a uma tradução fiel e completa” (1991:115).

Yet, despite the evidence provided by the study of 3,826 message units derived from 32 published translations, which favoured the maintenance of the structure, it seems she eventually realised she had come to hasty conclusions. In fact, in the closing remarks of her 1992 article, the normative tone of her previous claims is dissolved into a healthy doubt as, eventually, she calls into question the possibility of producing translations that are faithful to the overall structure of the discourse and of the functional force of theme and information in individual message units (63).

Indeed, to make such a strong claim would be naive, to say the least. A better stance would be that expressed creatively in Trévisé’s 1986 title: “Is it transferable, topicalisation?”, which suggests not a certainty, but an inquisitive posture quite similar to that demonstrated by Baker (1992:172) on discussing the maintenance of the ST thematic organization in TTs: she asserts the importance of an awareness of aspects of information flow and potential ways of resolving the tension between syntactic and communicative functions in translation, without being dogmatic.

Baker’s main point is to draw translators’ attention to the problem of translating between languages with different priorities and different types of syntactic restrictions, which necessarily involves a great deal of “skewing” of patterns of information flow (167). She believes translators can do something to minimize the skewing and suggests strategies to reduce linear dislocation. Her aim is mainly pedagogical and her suggestions are useful for her purposes.

3.5. The perspective guiding this study

Unlike Baker’s, my objective is not primarily didactic, although it might eventually bring forward some pedagogical reflections. What

I set out to do is an investigation of a number of existing translations and an examination of their treatment of questions relating to the information flow of the message. I propose to carry out an analysis in thematic and informational terms, exploring the reflexes of the informational system of the same source text in various re-textualizations .

4. Corpus and analysis procedures

A translation task was proposed to students of a translation course at undergraduate level at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC) and the result was the production of nine translations into Portuguese of the English short story by Somerset Maugham, "Appointment in Samarra". The objective was to make use of this practical exercise and of the problems arising from it to illustrate some of the theoretical problems discussed in the course. The final products present both instances of what could be called good solutions to troublesome issues and also instances of problematic re-textualisations due to performance problems. I will not focus on the problems of performance of individual translators as this is a question beyond the scope of the present paper. Instead, I will concentrate on the Theme-Rheme organization of the sentences in the source text (ST) and on the treatment they received in the translated texts (TT's).

I will first carry out a thematic analysis of the source text and then this analysis will be used as a background against which the TT's will be matched. I will be considering the effect of sequencing first with respect to the internal structure of messages at the clause and sentence level, and then with respect to the organisation of the entire paragraph. Finally, I will look into the tension between word-order as a requirement of syntax and the thematic structure as a function of communicative purposes in the translated texts. In doing so, I will try to evaluate the extent to which features of syntactic structure, such as restrictions on word-order, the principle of

end-weight and the natural phraseology of the TL seem to affect the rendering of the thematic organization of the ST.¹

5. A look into the source text

5.1. General configuration

The ST consists of one long paragraph inside which sentences are assembled, including subordinated and coordinated clauses as well as stretches of dialogues embedded in the narrative. This feature is in accordance with the essential requirements of the text type of which it is a sample — a short story in the tradition of folktale conventions — contributing to the characteristics of unity, intensity and brevity typical of the genre. This configuration complicates the decision as to the stretch of language to be treated as the basic unit of my analysis, for the reasons explained below.

This short story is made up of strings of sentences connected by the item “AND”, which functions as a device to keep the narrative flowing without unnecessary interruptions and delays towards the ending. As Halliday (1985:317) points out, this device sets up an external relationship, which he sees as an “ideational” link between processes: a sequence of events shown as following one another in time. In this sense, the item “and” plays the functional role of answering the question “what happened next?”, central to folktale narratives. For this reason, it is placed in initial position in the sentences, thus constituting the Theme of the message unit. A possible paraphrase would be something like “I’ll tell you about an additional event...”, a meaning which might be accounted for in generic grounds, as mentioned above. This Theme partakes in the building up of tension into a crescendo which culminates in the denouement, carefully prepared in the sequential unfolding of the narrative. This feature can be easily seen in “Appointment in Samarra”: the narrative moves from the opening existential Theme — there —, which introduces the reader in the domain of the nar-

rated world, gives direction about the type and structure of mental representation to be created, instructs the reader to construct a folktale model and installs the existence of a merchant as the starting point of the message; then it moves through various thematic "and's", pointing to the doomed drivings towards an inevitable destination; finally, in the last part, which tells about the so called appointment, the text moves into structures that thematise Death, or substitutes in the form of the personal pronoun "I".

However, as Halliday points out, items like "and" constitute a conjunction and thus have to be thematic by force of their nature, but do not take up the whole of the thematic potential of the clause. The writer has the choice of which element to put next; and whatever item is selected to follow will still have thematic force (51).

The fact that such items do not take up the whole of the thematic potential of the clause opens up the possibility of an alternative approach to the thematic structure of this short story: to treat the and as a textual theme, as a transition item playing a structural role in the larger frame of the paragraph and considering the next item as the topical Theme of the message unit. This topical Theme is the Ideational element within the multiple Theme. In fact, a simple Theme consists of this topical element alone, whereas a multiple Theme consists of this element plus one or more preceding elements, that is, some additional thematic material, interpersonal (as in vocatives or modal Themes) or textual (as in continuatives, structural and conjunctive Themes).

5.2. Configuration of the text in terms of individual sentences

An analysis of the thematic structure disregarding the item "and" would then give rise to the organization of the paragraph into the following message units:²

(1) There was a merchant in Bagdad who sent his servant
to market to buy provisions

(and)

- (2) in a little while the servant came back (and) said:
- (3) Master, just now when I was in the market place I was
jostled by a woman in the crowd
(and)
- (4) When I turned I saw it was Death that jostled me
- (5) She looked at me (and) made a threatening gesture
- (6) Now, lend me your horse
(and)
- (7) I will ride away from this city (and) avoid my fate
- (8) I will go to Samarra
(and)
- (9) there Death will not find me
- (10) The merchant lent him his horse
(and)
- (11) The servant mounted it
(and)
- (12) he dug his spurs in its flanks
(and)
- (13) as fast as the horse could gallop he went
- (14) Then the merchant went down to the market-place
(and)
- (15) he saw Death standing in the crowd
(and)
- (16) he came to Death (and) said
- (17) Why did you make a threatening gesture to my serv-
ant when you saw him this morning
- (18) That was not a threatening gesture, Death said
- (19) It was only a start of surprise

(20) I was astonished to see him in Bagdad for I had an appointment with him tonight in Samarra.

5.3. The title

Before starting the analysis of the thematic configuration of the texts, it is worth commenting on a special feature of thematized elements in clauses: Themes provide not only a starting point around which what follows in the discourse is structured, but also a starting point which constrains our interpretation of what follows (in this respect, see Brown & Yule's (1983:133) discussion of thematization as a discoursal rather than a sentential process). Following this line of argument, the title, as the writer's choice of what to put first, plays a decisive role in raising the reader's expectations as to the topic entity of the text. In the present case, the Appointment in Samarra, thematized in the title, points to the "what the text is about", that is the inexorable character of man's fate.

As mentioned above, in the unmarked version of the informational structure, the writer/speaker chooses the Theme as his starting point and locates the focus of the message, the climax of the "New" element, somewhere within the Rheme, generally at the end of the information unit. It is interesting to notice that in this text, there is a confirmation of the thematic meaning of the opening unit. The message is about the appointment and the last sentence (20), which thematizes Death, lexicoreferentially expressed as the first personal pronoun "I" inside the dialogue, has the focus in its unmarked position, on the final element of the information unit — Samarra. This specific distribution of the text as an information unit closes up the circle of the narrative, completing the meaning of thematic structure: "I will tell you about the appointment..." and "the appointment is tonight in Samarra".

5.4. Thematic structure in the Clause Complex

Let's go on now to the thematic analysis of the individual sen-

tences in the text. As a general procedure, they will be examined as a Clause Complex, although their internal structures of course have their own thematic configuration. Considerations at internal clause level will be made when necessary for the discussion of relevant points.

5.4.1. A look into the unmarked structures

The unmarked organizations are those which, allowing for a conflation of Theme and Subject, do not displace the focus of the message unit, thus not suggesting additional dimensions to the utterance. In 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 18, 19 and 20, Subject, Theme and Actor are mapped on to the same initial element. It is interesting to notice the points of the narrative at which these unmarked structures are located. Some of them are part of the narrating voice (10, 11, 12, 15, 16) and others (18, 19, 20), are part of Death's utterances. Interestingly enough, the character of "naturalness" conferred to these stretches of discourse by the choice of the unmarked structures could be seen as both support and projection of the general message of the tale: the simple assertion of the facts of life including Death, which thus had better be taken as a natural part of existence. Curiously, some of the marked stretches are either related to or uttered by the servant, who refuses to accept his encounter with Death and tries to avoid his fate (2, 3, 4, 6, 9). This might be taken as an indication of disturbance, not only of the word-order itself, but of the natural acceptance of the order of things in life, on the part of the servant. The deliberate way in which the author manipulates the syntax to make his point is meaningful and suggestive of some emotion. As Brown & Yule (1983:127) say, the more marked the construction, the more likely an implicated meaning is conveyed. It is also interesting to notice that it is also the servant who, besides being associated with the disturbance mentioned above, remains as the topical Theme for most of the structures, if we consider both clause and sentence level structures. In other words, "the servant" is the ideational element both in simple and in mul-

tiple Themes. The two facts just mentioned might be an indication of the servant's status in the short story, which explores the tension between fatalism and resistance to it, the latter embodied in the servant's futile attempts to avoid his fate.

5.4.2. A look into the marked structures

(i) Existential Theme:

Sentence (1) opens the narrative with an existential predication in the impersonal pronoun *there*. In this case, the very existence of a merchant constitutes the theme. This is a complex sentence, including an embedded clause (who sent his servant to market to buy provisions) which functions inside the structure of a nominal group. As the thematic contribution of this clause to the discourse is minimal, I did not treat it as a separate unit in my analysis. The same feature can be observed in the sentences in (4) (...Death that jostled me), which received similar treatment.

(ii) Clauses as Themes

In a Clause Complex, the typical sequence found is that which has the Head clause followed by the Modifying clause. Where this order is reverted, the motive is thematic: the Modifying clause is given the status of marked theme, being the starting point for the rest of the message, the Rheme, in such cases the Head clause (see Halliday 1985:57). This is the kind of marked organization found in c,d, where the thematic motive is that of establishing a relationship of time sequence between what has gone before and what is asserted in the main clause. Thus, the time of the event acquires prominence and is made the starting point of the utterance.

Had the existing structure been reworded in a typical unmarked sequence, the topical element would be the unmarked Theme I, for example, in c, which would produce a sentence with a completely different flavour, to say the least: "I was jostled by a woman in the

crowd when I was in the market place just now". Thus the effect of the marked organization of this clause as a message is to bring to the fore the circumstances of place and time surrounding the event.

In (13), the thematized modifying clause expresses circumstances of manner attendant on the process realized in the Head clause: "as fast as the horse could gallop". This constitutes a marked choice, and its placement in this position brings to the foreground implications of the servant's anxiety and fear, as the agitated manner in which he ran away is thus emphasized. This was one of the thematic organization which gave the most trouble to the translators I worked with. Translation problems relating to the information flow arose from the tension between requirements of syntax and phraseology of the target language on the one hand and the communicative function of the word order on the other. This problem will be detailed below.

It is interesting to notice that in (3) we find a vocative component, "Master", typically marking the beginning of the interpersonal element within the multiple Theme, which, however, does not carry the whole thematic potential of the structure. This is the next step in the discussion below.

(iii) Instances of Multiple Themes

As Halliday explains (Ibid: 53), the part of the clause functioning as Theme can have a further, internal structure of its own. The principle at work here is that in the total make up of the Theme, components of the three functions (Textual, Interpersonal and Ideational) may contribute, the Theme also being the product of three simultaneous semantic processes. When this happens, the typical sequence in the Multiple Theme is *Textual ^ Interpersonal ^ Ideational*, modification being allowed to occur between the two first elements. This phenomenon is found in the text, in sentences (2, 3, 6, 9, 14), where the first item in the Multiple Theme does not exhaust the thematic potential of the clause. Thus in b, an adverbial phrase of time ("in a little while") is thematized. This consti-

tutes a marked choice as the circumstances of time surrounding the event are foregrounded by being made thematic, there being no conflation of theme and subject. This choice suggests that the direct link between what has gone before and what is asserted in the main clause ("the servant came back") is the adverbially expressed relationship. In this case, a relationship of time, expressing an interrupted course of action (that of being sent to the marked place) is thematised thus providing the environment for the remainder of the message, the Rheme. The "servant" however, still carries thematic meaning, constituting the Topical Theme.

An interesting thematic organization is found in *f*, where the continuative "Now", one of the elements of the multiple Theme, signals that a new move to the next point in discourse is beginning. The move is to a certain degree unexpected and abruptly takes the reader to the next stage in the narrative (this transition seemed to have been noticed by the translators, although the items chosen to perform this function in the TL differed). Following the continuative, the next element of the Theme is an imperative form. The basic message of an imperative is 'I want you to do something', the thematic component of request being left implicit. Because of the strong association of first position with thematic value in the clause, this structure gives the verb the status of a marked Theme, conflated with the predicator.

The temporal relationship is thematized once again in (14), where "Then" constitutes the conjunctive part of the multiple Theme, relating the clause to the preceding text in temporal terms.

In (9), there is a similar pattern. Only this time it is the place adverbial which is brought to the fore, the marked Theme — there — which was selected from the last element of the Rheme in the preceding sentence. Thus there was a maintenance of focus on the place, which seems to be, from the point of view of the servant, a point of tension in the unfolding of the narrative.

As discussed above, the peculiar marked structure in which circumstances surrounding the events are explicitly foregrounded is frequent in this narrative. This feature seems to point to the very

progression of the text as a series of occurrences unfolding in sequential time. The choice is clearly motivated. It contributes to the build-up of emotion culminating in the final and inexorable encounter of the closing sentence: the appointment in Samarra. In fact, this feature is very much in accordance with the genre this text can be identified with, that is, a short story in folktale fashion. This seems to confirm Halliday's assertion that "it tends to be the overall organisation of the text... that determines at least the general pattern of thematic choices..." (1985:98).

(iv) Theme in the interrogative

In (17), which constitutes a Wh-question, there is an obvious search for a missing piece of information. The element that requests this information functions as Theme and can be paraphrased as "I want you to tell me about...". In other words, the fact that a question is being framed becomes central. This structure does not seem to offer any problems as the occurrence of the wh-element in initial position is the regular pattern. In this sentence, *why* is the Theme.

(v) Theme in the dialogues

In the dialogues of the narrative there was alternation of Themes, especially between I and YOU representing speaker and listener. The pronoun "I" deserves special comments. Its referentiality is constrained by the very instance of discourse in which it occurs: every time a speaker holding his turn designates himself as "I", the pronoun constitutes its own reference.³ Thus, in some instances, it maintains the "sameness" of the thematic element Death (as in 20) and at other times it expresses lexicoreferentially the "sameness" of the item the servant, made thematic in (11) and (12).

5.5. An examination of some internal structures

There is a thematic structure inside the complex sentence in (3)

which is worth mentioning: "I was jostled by a woman in the crowd." This passive construction, which would have been the main clause had the informational organization been unmarked (I was jostled by a woman in the crowd just now when I was in the market place), has a special role in the development of the narrative. The choice of its function as a Rheme in the complex sentence, constituting the "New" element, can be related to the organization of its internal structure: the use of the passive allows for the "woman in the crowd" to be the "New" element in the clause, thus carrying the focus of the message. As the narrative unfolds, it is this Rheme, produced by manipulation of syntax, which develops into a very marked Theme inside d: it was Death that jostled. The Theme is selected from within the Rheme of the clause preceding. In it, the "new" element is dislocated and mapped on to initial position. From this point on, Death is the participant which remains as the topical Theme for the next stretch of discourse, its "sameness" being established lexicoreferentially by the use of the personal pronoun "she". This feature contributes to the building up of the main protagonist in the tale, the inexorable encounter in Samarra (See Halliday 1985:315, for a detailed discussion of lexicoreferentiality).

This special thematic organization inside the complex sentence (it was Death that jostled me), constitutes a predicated theme structure. The theme here is not it, but the noun which comes after the verb to be, in this case, Death. This marked choice is frequently associated with an explicit formulation of contrast and of exclusiveness as it gives prominence to Death and nobody else around in the carrying out of the action. The listener is invited to attend to this part of discourse as "unexpected" or "important", thus assigning to it the news value of the information unit.

By analysing the thematic structure of a text, we can gain insight into its texture and understand how the writer made clear to us the nature of his underlying concerns. As Fries claims, "the Theme-Rheme organization of the sentence forms part of a larger pattern which governs the flow of information in any English discourse" (1981:144).

6. A look into the translated texts

The analysis of the TT's will be carried out in relation to the criteria proposed for this study, that is the extent to which the thematic and information structure of the ST seemed to have been recognized and maintained and the effects of the dislocation of the focus in the TT's. The analytical procedures will basically include two steps. First, I will see the points of convergence of the nine re-textualizations in the terms proposed in this study; then I will see the most significant diverging points. While doing this, I will try to discuss the findings and suggest possible explanations for the motives behind the manipulation of language on the part of the translators, in terms of the tension between requirements of word order and demands of communicative function as expressed by thematic structures.

6.1. Translation of the Title

The first noteworthy feature of the TT's examined is the choice of the title. In seven out of the nine translations, the translators opted for a literal rendering as the Portuguese "Encontro em Samarra" seemed to capture the tone and implications of the original. The only exceptions were two added articles to the title, a definite one in "O encontro em Samarra" (TT7), and an indefinite one in "Um encontro em Samarra" (TT8), a change which was not significant in the overall analysis of the TT's.

As for the maintenance of the end-focus pattern, again, except for two instances (TT1 and TT5), the item Samarra closed the narrative as the "New" element carrying the highest degree of prominence.

6.2. Maintenance of Ideational links

Another feature of the TT's called my attention: the fact that only

four out of the nine TT's kept all the "ideational" links between processes (as discussed above), setting up an external relationship between the events. The "and" item, in its functional role of answering the question "what happened next?", was sometimes omitted and at other times translated as "então" (TT1), or "que" (TT7 and TT9). The latter solutions seem to be in accordance with the general framework of the narrative as they still point to the sequence of events in time, thus constituting categories with an "external" (Ideational) interpretation. The omissions displayed some regularities as they mostly occurred between sentences (15, 16) (TT2, TT6, TT9) and (10, 11) (TT1, TT2), points where the transition from one process to the other was very sudden. The same might be said in relation to the link between (6, 7), a transition which seems to have troubled some translators (TT1, translated as "entao", TT7, TT9, the last two having been replaced by "que"). The link between (1,2) was also omitted twice in TT1 and TT2, being in both cases replaced by a pause in the narrative expressed by a comma. These omissions and replacements had a bearing on the flow of the narrative. This was perceived specially when the translators applied the "let's see how it reads" test: the phonological effects of the different renderings came to be felt as the implicit sound pattern was made explicit in reading aloud. In the terms discussed above, TT3 displayed the best flow of the narrative: it seems to have kept the rhythm and pace of the ST, while displaying its own internal progression (this was one of the TT's which favored "comerciante" instead of "mercador", though, as discussed below).

6.3. Treatment given to unmarked structures

The unmarked constructions, the ones having the Subject as Topical Theme, did not vary significantly in the TT's either. For example, the servant, which remained as Topical Theme for most of the discourse stretches in the ST, was also kept Topical in the Portuguese renderings. All the translations of (7, 8, 11) kept the serv-

ant, he, or I (here the reference pointing back to the servant, the entity assuming the discourse at the time of the utterance) as the unmarked Theme. The same situation can be seen in the internal structures of the thematized clauses in (3) and (4), which favoured the servant as Theme, either as the noun itself, *o servo*, or pronoun substitutes. An interesting phenomenon happened, though, concerning the personal pronoun “I”, inside the dialogues in the TT’s. As is known, Portuguese, contrary to English in which predicators are rarely thematic, can easily thematize verbs. The verb forms, by virtue of their conjugation for person and number, identify the grammatical entity in question, thus making the explicit use of the pronoun redundant. For this reason, it is frequently avoided. Such is the case in the TT’s studied.

However, I could not detect any regularity in the omissions or maintenance of the pronouns, as variation occurred without any apparent explanation. There was a pattern, however, in the maintenance of the pronoun appearing for the first time, with subsequent instances being omitted. For example, TT1 (3) has “*eu estava no mercado*” and from (4) on, the pronoun is intermittently omitted. The same is found in TT2. In the cases of omission, the verb form occupied initial position, being, in Hallidayian terms, thematic. But I would rather treat these “Themes” differently from the treatment given to imperatives in English, as is the case in (5) (“lend me your horse”) discussed above. There, the verb form was given the status of a marked Theme conflated with the predicator. I think it would be more sensible to give such verb forms the status of an unmarked Theme as although they are not the Subject, they do have the Subject embedded in them, a feature which prevents the foregrounding of the predicator itself. The message continues to be about the Subject in unmarked position in the declarative sentence, though it is not explicit. This approach to the verb form in cases of elliptical personal pronouns is different from the treatment given to the verb form in (5). The TT’s kept the marked organization of the clause of the ST by also giving the verb in Portuguese the status of a marked Theme conflated with the predicator. The only excep-

tion was found in TT1, “eu gostaria do seu cavalo”, a distortion which is neither motivated nor justified in terms of grammatical constraints of Portuguese.

6.4. Treatment given to marked structures

In general, the marked organization of the clause as a message seems to have been recognized in the translations as there was a maintenance of the thematic pattern of the ST in the TT's. As mentioned above, the explanation for this feature on generic grounds seems plausible: the translators might have reproduced (consciously or unconsciously) the pattern of information structure of folktales. This fact confirms Halliday's assertion about the tendency of the overall organization of the text to determine the general patterns of thematic choices, as discussed above. Examples are given below.

The initial existential theme was maintained in every TT, pointing to acknowledgement (unconscious or not) of a supratextual level, in which the genre has a bearing on the thematic choices; “Havia um mercador” was the preferred rendering, although “um comerciante” substituted for the “mercador” in two instances (TT1, TT3). Retrospective discussions with the students about solutions like this led to the recognition of generic issues, favoring the acceptance of the former solution.

Similarly, the thematization of the circumstances surrounding the events, be they time or place adverbials, as in (2) and (9), for example, tended to be kept in the TT's. The translations of the Theme in (2) varied in terms of their internal wording. Thus, the following was found: “depois de alguns minutos” (TT1); “pouco tempo depois” (TT2); “num curto espaço de tempo”(TT3); “em pouco tempo” (TT4); “logo depois” (TT5); “em pouco tempo” (TT6); “em um curto espaço de tempo” (TT7); “dentro em pouco” (TT8); “em pouco tempo” (TT9). This internal variation, however, did not affect the functional force of the Theme, confirming the configuration of the ST, as discussed above.

6.5. Special difficulties in keeping the thematic pattern

Difficulties involved in the maintenance of the flow of the information in terms of the thematic structures of the ST were particularly felt in (3, 4) and (13), where a whole clause is given the status of marked Theme. The main thematic changes found were from marked to unmarked Theme, in (3, 4) and (13). For (13) (“as fast as the horse could gallop he went”), the TT’s presented the following solutions:

- TT1 - o servo saiu o mais rápido possível
- TT2 - e se foi tao rápido quanto o cavalo pôde galopar
- TT3 - e tão rápido quanto o cavalo pôde galopar ele foi.
- TT4 - e tão rápido quanto o cavalo, pode galopar e fora.
- TT5 - e fugiu tão rápido quanto o cavalo conseguiu galopar
- TT6 - e tão rápido quanto o cavalo pudesse galopar, partira
- TT7 - e o mais rápido que o cavalo podia ir, ele partiu
- TT8 - e tão rápido quanto o cavalo poderia correr foi
- TT9 - e se foi tão rápido quanto o cavalo podia galopar

Five attempts were made to keep the thematic structure of the ST, which might be taken as an indication of the recognition of the “markedness” of the clause and of the foregrounding of the circumstances surrounding the action of running away. The greatest problem here was with the natural phraseology of the TL, which posed some difficulty to the translators. I see this fact as an explanation for the yielding to normalization and unmarkedness of the other four renderings. Undoubtedly, however, the communicative force of the marked structure was lost, as the implication of the servant’s anxiety and fear was definitely toned down. Maybe a mixture of the solutions found in TT3 and TT5 might turn out to be a better choice: “e tao rápido quando o cavalo conseguiu galopar, ele fugiu”.

As for (3), my comments go for the internal structure of the complex sentence, precisely the renderings of the clause “I was jostled by a woman in the crowd”. But this clause has to be seen in

connection with the internal predicated Theme in (4), “it was Death that jostled me”. My argument is that the use of the passive voice in (3), gives “I” the status of an unmarked Theme as it is the Subject (its identification made possible by the addition of the tag “wasn’t I?”). The structure being unmarked, the focus then is at the end of the Rheme, in “a woman in the crowd”. As discussed above in this paper, this segment becomes the marked Theme inside the next sentence (4): “it was Death that jostled me”. This chained construction supports and projects the gradual build up of the narrative, being thus motivated and meaningful. If treated otherwise, unless for motivated choices, it will certainly display a different make-up which will have a bearing in the general weaving of the narrative. In the TT’s, tension between requirements of word order and information flow was felt in the treatment of the passive and its consequent effects. The following solutions were found:

TT1 - uma mulher na multidão empurrou-me ... era a Morte que me empurrara

TT2 - eu esbarrei numa mulher na multidão ... era a Morte que esbarrou em mim

TT3 - eu fui empurrado por uma mulher na multidão ... era a Morte que tinha me empurrado

TT4 - fui empurrado por uma mulher na multidão ... era a Morte que estava empurrando-me

TT5 - uma mulher na multidão esbarrou em mim ... era a Morte

TT6 - fui empurrado por uma mulher na multidão ... era a Morte que empurrara-me

TT7 - fui empurrado por uma mulher na multidão ... era a Morte que me empurrara

TT8 - fui empurrado por uma mulher na multidão ... era a Morte que empurrara-me

TT9 - fui esbarrado por uma mulher na multidão ... foi a Morte quem esbarrou em mim

Six out of nine renderings displayed some sort of sensitivity to the

chained marked organization of these clauses. Whether this was conscious or unconscious is not at stake now. The point I am trying to make is that there is a tendency for translators to reproduce the thematic structure of the ST and when they do not do so, this is likely evidence of the tension discussed above. Thus the linking of the “mulher na multidão” with the fact that it was “a Morte” and nobody else that had done the jostling is better made explicit if the passive voice is maintained in the translation. It is interesting to notice, however, that though differences occur in the treatment of voice, there was a general recognition of the markedness of the predicated Theme, which was kept in all the renderings. Once again, I favour the solution in TT3, which seems to capture the flavour of the ST while displaying a flow of its own. This might point to a perception on the part of the translators of the prominence of the notion of “exclusiveness”, inherent in this kind of structure.

6.6. One adequate re-textualization

In general, TT3 seemed to contemplate the most the thematic and information structure of the ST. This translation certainly displayed translational problems in certain renderings, including errors, which did not constitute, however, the focus of my considerations. My comments are restricted to the discussion I proposed to carry out, and in this respect, the narrative in TT3 can be said to have a flow of its own, which proves to be sensitive to the marked organizations of the ST as a message.

7. Final Remarks

My basic argument in this study was that the recognition of the feature of marked organization of the clause as a message might turn out to be a useful tool for translators. This awareness, I argued, is virtually fruitful in that it might provide translators with potential ways of resolving tension between syntactic constraints

and communicative intentions. I also argued that when the thematic organization of the ST is not attended to, this fact can be accounted for by at least three reasons: a) for a motivated choice on the part of the translator; b) for utter impossibility of reconciliation between systemic characteristics or c) because of indifference to or ignorance of thematic organization.

It is worthwhile noticing that the translation task which resulted in the nine TT's discussed here was carried out without any previous explicit "teaching" of thematic structures of clauses. The results of the analysis showed a certain tendency in the TT's towards the maintenance of the organizational structure of the ST. This fact may be due to factors like intimidation facing the ST or simply to a tendency towards repetition of the patterns in the original. It seemed that the translators did the job somewhat unconsciously, as if the thematic structure took care of itself. Deviations, however, produced different effects, which were worth examining for a better understanding of the interaction between syntax and communicative function.

At the closing remarks of her chapter on "Textual equivalence: thematic structure", Baker (172) makes a point of emphasizing the difficulty for the translator to always follow the thematic organization of the original due to features of syntactic structure of the TL. She rightly asserts that what matters is that the TT has some thematic organization of its own, that it reads naturally and smoothly. However, she insists on the preservation, when and wherever possible, of "any special emphasis signalled by marked structures in the original". I fully agree with her. I believe that marked structures are never random. On the contrary, they are chosen (sometimes unconsciously, I admit) for specific purposes and effects and thus ought to, at least, be attended to. Because of my stand towards sensitivity to textual features, I believe in awareness raising work in relation to these issues. Of course I know that sole acknowledgment of these delicacies in ST's is never a guarantee of the production of an adequate TT. Of course not. A large number of other factors, many not dealt with in this paper and many even pertain-

ing to the realm of individual talent, definitely come into play. Nevertheless, the ability to perceive and manipulate and exploit thematic and information structure might prove to be one additional tool in handling the complex activity of translating.



Notes

* This paper is a revised version of a talk delivered as an Open Seminar during the doctorate program at PGI (Pós-Graduação em Inglês), at UFSC/SC, under the supervision of Dr. Walter Costa, in 1994.

1. The ST and the TTs are presented in full in Appendices 1 and 2. The reader is invited to read them before continuing.
2. The principle that the Theme includes everything which is located at the beginning of the clause, as the result of choice, will be taken as a criterion in deciding what is or is not thematic in the description of the ST and of the TT's.
3. Elsewhere (my unpublished MA dissertation), I carried out a thorough study of the construction of subjectivity in language, drawing on Beneveniste's (1996) notion of language as the foundation of subjectivity. This study made evident the instability and decentralization of the pronoun "I".



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APPENDIX I

Source text:

Appointment in Samarra

MAUGHAM, W.S. 1993. In Sheppey. Doubleday & Company, Inc.

There was a merchant in Bagdad who sent his servant to market to buy provisions, and in a little while the servant came back, white and trembling, and said, "Master, just now when I was in the market-place I was jostled by a woman in the crowd and when I turned I saw it was Death that jostled me. She looked at me and made a threatening gesture; now, lend me your horse, and I will ride away from this city and avoid my fate. I will go to Samarra and there Death will not find me. "The merchant lent him his horse, and the servant mounted it, and he dug his spurs in its flanks and as fast as the horse could gallop he went. Then the merchant went down to the market-place and he saw Death standing in the crowd and he came to Death and said, "Why did you make a threatening gesture to my servant when you saw him this morning?" "That was not a threatening gesture," Death said. "It was only a start of surprise. I was astonished to see him in Bagdad, for I had an appointment with him tonight in Samarra."

APPENDIX II

NINE RE-TEXTUALISATIONS OF “APPOINTMENT IN SAMARRA”

TT 1

Encontro em Samarra

Havia um comerciante em Bagdad que mandou seu empregado fazer compras no mercado aberto da cidade, depois de alguns minutos o serviçal voltou, pálido e nervoso, e disse: “Senhor, agora mesmo eu estava no mercado e uma mulher na multidão empurrou-me e quando virei vi que era a Morte que me empurrara. Ela olhou-me e fez um gesto ameaçador, agora eu gostaria do seu cavalo emprestado, então irei galopando para fora da cidade, e evitar meu destino, eu vou a Samarra e lá a Morte não me achará.

O comerciante emprestou o cavalo e o servente saiu o mais rápido possível. Então o comerciante foi ao mercado e viu a Morte em meio da multidão, e perguntou-lhe: “Porque você ameaçou meu empregado esta manhã quando o viu.” “Não era nenhuma ameaça”, disse a Morte. “Era um gesto de surpresa ao vê-lo em Bagdad, porque eu tinha um encontro com ele em Samarra hoje à noite”.

TT 2

Encontro em Samarra

Havia um mercador em Bagdá que enviou seu servo ao mercado

para comprar provisões, pouco tempo depois, o servo retornou, branco e trêmulo, e disse, “Mestre, agora pouco, quando eu estava no mercado, eu esbarrei numa mulher na multidão e quando me virei, vi que era a Morte que esbarrou em mim. Ela me olhou e fez um gesto ameaçador. Agora, empreste-me seu cavalo, e eu fugirei desta cidade para evitar meu destino. Irei para Samarra e lá a Morte não me encontrará.”

O mercador emprestou o cavalo para ser servo, ele montou-o e fincou suas esporas nos flancos do cavalo e se foi tão rápido quando o cavalo pode galopar. Então o mercador foi ao mercado e viu a Morte na multidão, ele se aproximou e disse: “Por que você fez um gesto ameaçador para meu servo quando o viu esta manhã?” “Aquilo não foi um gesto ameaçador” disse a Morte, “Era apenas começo da surpresa. Eu estava surpresa por vê-lo em Bagdá, porque eu tinha um encontro com ele hoje à noite em Samarra.”

TT 3

Encontro em Samarra

Havia um comerciante em Bagdá que enviou seu empregado ao mercado para fazer compras, e num curto espaço de tempo o empregado voltou, pálido e tremendo, e disse: “Mestre agora mesmo quando eu estava no mercado eu fui empurrado por uma mulher na multidão e quando eu virei vi que era a morte que tinha me empurrado. Ela olhou para mim e fez um gesto ameaçador; agora empreste-me seu cavalo, e eu irei para longe desta cidade e evitarei meu destino. Irei para Samarra e lá a morte não me achará. O comerciante emprestou para ele seu cavalo, e o empregado montou-o, e ele cravou suas esporas em seus flancos e tão rápido quanto o cavalo pôde galopar ele foi. Então o comerciante desceu até o mercado e viu a morte parada na multidão e aproximou-se dela e disse: “Porque você fez um gesto ameaçador para meu empregado quando você o viu esta manhã?” “Não era um gesto ameaçador” a morte

disse “Isso foi só o começo da surpresa. Eu fiquei pasma em vê-lo em Bagdá porque eu tinha um encontro com ele esta noite em Samarra.”

TT 4

Encontro em Samarra

Havia um mercador em Bagda que enviara seu servo ao mercado para provisoes e em pouco tempo o servo retornara, branco e trêmulo e disse: “Mestre, exatamente agora quando eu estava no mercado fui empurrado por uma mulher na multidão e quando virei, eu vi que era a morte que estava empurrando-me. Ela olhou para mim e fez um gesto ameaçador; então, empresta-me o vosso cavalo e eu fugirei desta cidade e evitarei minha sina. Eu irei para Samarra e lá a morte me encontrará. O mercador emprestara seu cavalo e o servo montara-no, e ele cravara suas esporas em seus flancos e tão rápido quanto o cavalo, pode galopar e fora. O mercador descera ao mercado e vira a morte parada na multidão e chegara até ela e disse: “Por que fizeste um gesto ameaçador para o meu servo quando o viste esta manhã?” “Aquilo não era um gesto ameaçador, disse a morte. “Era somente um sinal de surpresa. Eu estava atônita para vê-lo em Bagda, por isso eu tinha um encontro com ele à noite em Samarra”.

TT 5

Encontro em Samarra

Havia um mercador em Bagdá que mandou o seu servo ao mercado comprar provisões, e logo depois o servo retornou, pálido e tremendo, e disse: “Meu senhor, agora mesmo quando eu estava na praça do mercado uma mulher na multidão esbarrou em mim e

quando eu me virei eu vi que era a Morte. Ela me olhou e fez um gesto ameaçador; agora empreste-me o seu cavalo, e eu vou fugir desta cidade e evitar o meu destino. Eu irei para Samarra e lá a Morte não me encontrará”.

O mercador emprestou a ele o seu cavalo, e o servo montou nele, e afundou-lhe as esporas nos flancos, e fugiu tão rápido quanto o cavalo conseguiu galopar. Então o mercador foi à praça do mercado e viu a Morte em pé no meio da multidão, e ele aproximou-se da Morte e disse, “Por que você fez um gesto ameaçador para o meu servo quando você o viu esta manhã?” “Aquilo não era um gesto ameaçador”, disse a Morte: “Foi somente uma expressão de surpresa. Eu fiquei consternada de vê-lo em Bagdá, pois eu tinha um encontro com ele em Samarra hoje de noite”.

TT 6

Encontro em Samarra

Havia um mercador em Bagdá que mandara seu servo ao mercado comprar provisões e, em pouco tempo o servo voltara, branco e trêmulo, dizendo: — Mestre, bem agora enquanto eu estava no mercado, fui empurrado por uma mulher na multidão e, quando virei-me, vi que era a Morte que empurrara-me. Ela olhou-me e fez um gesto de ameaça; então, empreste-me vosso cavalo e fugirei desta cidade e evitarei minha sina. Irei a Samarra, e lá, a morte não me achará.

O mercador emprestara seu cavalo e o servo montara-o, cravara suas esporas em seus flancos e, tão rápido quanto o cavalo pudesse galopar, partira. Então, o mercador fora ao mercado e vira a Morte parada na multidão, chegara até ela e disse: — Por que fizeste um gesto ameaçador ao meu servo quando o viste nesta manhã?

— Não foi um gesto ameaçador, a Morte disse. Foi apenas um gesto de surpresa. Fiquei atônita em vê-lo em Bagda, por eu ter um encontro com ele esta noite, em Samarra.

TT 7

O encontro em Samarra

Havia um mercador em Bagdá que mandou seu servo ao mercado para comprar mantimentos, e em um curto espaço de tempo o servo voltou, pálido e trêmulo, e disse: “Mestre, agora a pouco quando eu estava no mercado, fui empurrado por uma mulher na multidão e quando eu me virei vi que era a Morte que me empurrara. Ela me olhou e fez um gesto ameaçador; agora, empreste-me seu cavalo que eu vou sair desta cidade e evitar meu destino. Irei para Samarra e lá a Morte não me achará”. O mercador emprestou-lhe seu cavalo e o servo montou e cravou as esporas em seus flancos e o mais rápido que o cavalo podia ir, ele partiu. Então o mercador desceu para o mercado e viu a Morte em pé na multidão e ele se aproximou da Morte e disse: “Por que você fez um gesto ameaçador para meu servo quando o viu esta manhã?” “Aquilo não foi um gesto ameaçador”, a Morte disse. “Foi apenas um sobressalto de surpresa. Estava admirada de vê-lo em Bagdá, porque eu tinha um encontro com ele esta noite em Samarra”.

TT 8

Um encontro em Samarra

Havia um mercador em Bagdá que enviou seu servo ao mercado para comprar provisões, e dentro em pouco ele voltou, branco e estremeado, e disse: “Meu Senhor, ainda agora quando eu estava no mercado fui empurrado por uma mulher da multidão e quando eu virei, vi que era a Morte que empurrara-me. Ela olhou para mim e fez um gesto ameaçador; agora, empreste-me seu cavalo, e eu irei para esta cidade e evitarei meu destino. Eu irei a Samarra e lá a Morte não me achará.”

O mercador emprestou a ele seu cavalo, e o servo montou-o e

ele cravou sua espora em seus flancos e tão rápido quanto o cavalo poderia correr foi. Então o mercador foi ao mercado e viu a Morte parada na multidão e ele alcançou-a e disse, “Por que você fez um gesto ameaçador ao meu servo quando você o viu esta manhã?” “Aquele não foi um gesto ameaçador”, disse a Morte. Foi somente um impulso de surpresa. Eu fiquei atônita ao vê-lo em Bagdá, porque eu tinha um encontro com ele esta noite em Samarra.

TT 9

Encontro em Samarra

Havia um mercador em Bagdá que enviou seu servo ao mercado para comprar provisões e, em pouco tempo, o servo voltou branco e trêmulo e disse: “Mestre, justo agora quando eu estava na feira, fui esbarrado por uma mulher na multidão, e, quando me virei, eu vi que foi a Morte quem esbarrou em mim. Ela olhou-me e fez um gesto ameaçador; agora empreste-me seu cavalo que cavalgarei para longe desta cidade e fugirei do meu destino. Irei para Samarra e lá a Morte não irá encontrar-me.”

O mercador emprestou-lhe seu cavalo e o servo montou-o e cravou suas esporas nos flancos do animal e se foi tão rápido quanto o cavalo podia galopar.

Então, o mercador foi até a feira e viu a Morte parada na multidão, aproximou-se e disse: “Por que você fez um gesto ameaçador para meu servo, quando o viu esta manhã?”

“Aquilo não foi um gesto ameaçador”, disse a Morte, “foi só um momento de surpresa. Eu estava atônita por vê-lo em Bagdá pois eu tinha um encontro com ele esta noite em Samarra”.