Translating History Timelines or «Negotiating-In-iconicity»

Christine Calfoglou*

This article explores the insights provided with regard to translation by two sets of «comparable bilingual» (Bernardini et al.: 2003) corpora composed of Greek and English web-based history timelines. Adopting an iconicity orientation, supportive of «the conceived similarity between conceptual structure and linguistic thought» (Tabakowska: 1999, 410; cf. Fischer & Nænny: 1999, Ljungberg & Tabakowska: 2007, de Cuypere: 2008 among others), and assuming that opening entries in timelines may be free of presupposed information and thus license experientially iconic (Enkvist: 1981), «basic level instances» (Firbas: 1992), it examines linearization pattern frequencies in these entries in both languages. The image obtained is rather varied, with verbless clauses, nominalizations less consistently iconic but also less sweeping than originally hypothesized (Calfoglou: 2009) and subject-initial structures holding sway, especially in the English corpus. These results can largely be accounted for by allowing for «competing» forms of iconicity effects on word order in the genre, among which Conradie’s (2001) event model, a reflection of «the flow of time in terms of events experienced and reported upon.» Most importantly, they point to an independently motivated unifying framework underlying translation decisions in the two languages, interlingual differences being attributable to different iconicity patterns (cf. Tabakowska: 2003). The translator is thus called upon to mediate between the blueprint of human experience and its imprint on the structure of the specific language pair. The validity of these claims is further explored in relation to translation data from a small sample of (L1) Greek – (L2) English respondents.

* Hellenic Open University.
1. Introduction

This article adopts an iconicity approach to language analysis and attempts to illustrate the contribution of this approach to translation processes. More specifically, it examines two sets of «comparable bilingual» (Bernardini et al.: 2003) corpora composed of Greek and English web-based history timelines and focuses on the diagrammatic iconicity (see especially Jakobson: 1965/1990) of the opening entries. On the assumption that these entries might constitute «basic level instances» (Firbas: 1992) in the sense of presupposing no prior textual information and that they may therefore be maximally iconic in terms of major constituent sequencing, it explores linearisation patterns in the two languages. The results point in the direction of iconicity materialising in diverse ways, not always as hypothesised, as well as of its assuming the form of a narrative Subject-Verb-Object schema (cf. Conradie: 2001), especially in the English corpus. The seemingly non-iconic may thus also be interpreted within an iconicity framework. These results are further explored in connection with translation data obtained from a small sample of respondents, which, interestingly, yield an only partly comparable, less diverse image. Thus, combined use of such data may underline the need for further and more systematic exposure to the genre in both languages involved as part of translator education (cf. Williams: 2006 and references therein). Overall, the varied but also motivated image obtained in the corpora suggests that awareness of the different ways in which languages conform to iconicity may be a significant component of the negotiation process involved in making translation decisions. It also, importantly, suggests that, unless this is the case, translators may be tempted to transfer SL linearisation habits into their translation output, thus producing «no man’s land» texts (metaphor from ibid., 1).

The article is organised as follows: Section 2 focuses on the features of history timelines and discusses the link to iconicity, section 3 presents the methodology employed in collecting and analysing the data and section 4 involves the presentation and discussion of these data in the light of the hypotheses advanced. In section 5 we discuss the translation data collected and the article ends with some concluding remarks in section 6.

2. Iconicity, history timelines and translation

2.1. Iconicity and history timelines

Based on the American philosopher G.S.Peirce (see, inter alia, 1867/1991), the concept of iconicity, the causal link between perception
and linguistic expression, underlining the motivation of language form, has received revived attention in the last ten years or so, as can be seen in a number of studies (see, for instance, Müller & Fischer: 2003, Nanny & Fischer: 1999, Sadowski: 2009). One of the areas considered in these studies, though somewhat less systematically, is that of syntax or, more specifically, diagrammatic iconicity, namely the way «conceptual structure» imprints itself upon the algebraic formula of «linguistic thought» (Tabakowska: 1999, 410; see also Fischer: 1999); in other words, the way our perception of experience motivates structural patterns. Word order, in particular, which is the focus of our discussion in this article, has been discussed mostly in relation to specific, often literary genres (Calfoglou: 2010, Fonagy: 1999), and the conformity of sequencing to iconic principles of text organisation has been underlined. In line with this research, we will attempt to explore iconicity principle effects in a non-literary genre, history timelines.

The links between word order and human perception are most plausibly verbalised in Enkvist (1981), who provides examples of different types of locative fronting in guidebook and cookery texts to suggest that «the purpose of the strategy is to make the text mimetic of experience» (p.81). «Such mimesis», Enkvist goes on to say, «satisfies the definition of isomorphism. There is a one-to-one function between things, events, or actions in the world and their representations in the text» (pp. 81-82). And, a few lines further down: «Thanks to this mimetic isomorphism the text becomes an icon of experience. Hence the term experiential iconicism» (p. 82). Most relevantly, Enkvist takes up the issue of diagrammatic iconicity on the sentential level to show how it interacts with information dy-

1. These are only some of the titles in the «Iconicity in Language and Literature» series, which forms the backbone of iconicity-related research.
2. Underlying this «causal» link, this contiguity between perception and language is Peirce’s point concerning what diagrammatic iconicity is most «prominent» about among other icons: «...by direct observation of it other truths concerning its object can be discovered than those which suffice to determine its construction» (Nöth: 2008, 89). Nöth’s approach to diagrammatic iconicity is somewhat different to the one adopted here, as he argues that ordo naturalis, corresponding to the experientially iconic sequencing of constituents, is «twice diagrammatic, semantically and syntactically» (p. 90). It is, however, beyond the scope of the present analysis to go into this, admittedly interesting, issue.
namics, namely the alternation of old and new information, and gives examples of sentences, one notably from a history book, showing how this alternation may dovetail with iconicity. His examples feature a fronted locative, followed by a postverbal subject, that is full inversion, where the subject seems to be richer informationally than all preceding material. This is a sequence which has been referred to as iconic *par excellence*, especially when occurring in poetry (cf. Calfoglu: 2010), and which largely motivates the discussion in the present article.  

So, let us look at it in some more detail in relation to the genre we are researching.

In information distribution terms, locative adverbials followed by full subject-verb inversion have been referred to as «basic instance level» clauses in the sense that they are context-independent, thus involving no presuppositions, and advance communication incrementally, from the informationally least important item to the informationally maximal one, namely the inverted subject (see Firbas: 1992). As argued in Chen (2003, 39), full inversion (in English) «direct(s) the hearer’s attention to a previously unknown figure, something that its uninverted counterpart cannot do».  

Chen actually also gives examples of full inversion with «point time adverbials», as in example (1) below, apparently producing an effect similar to the one produced by timeline entries, as we will see below:

(1) Soon after began the busy and important part of Swift’s life.

(From Chen: 2003, 41)

This, he contends, is an instance of anchoring (see, e.g., p.48), the time adverbial acting as the «landmark» with which the inverted verb is anchored. And the conformity of such structures to iconicity is indirectly referred to in «(they) can be said to capture a more cognitively efficient ( ) way of perceiving a given reality » (p. 52).

It is our contention that timelines involve a ‘zero’ point of some kind, in other words, they take up the time specification element as a starting-point and anchor for the constituent that follows, thus constituting ‘basic level instances’ in the sense noted above. As such, they may be perspec-

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4. For a very elaborate discussion of word order and, more specifically, diachronically motivated noun-adjectival modifier position within a similar perspective see Fischer (2001, 2006).

5. Note that, at this point, we have brought together threads from different theoretical strands: Functional Sentence Perspective theory (Firbas) and Cognitive Grammar (Chen). It is beyond the scope of the present discussion to dwell on the similarities or differences of the two approaches.
tivated from the minimal to the maximal informationally, that is advance from the least to the most focal constituent. This seems to be given a boost by the fact that the time anchor, the date appearing before each entry, somehow precludes prior knowledge and presuppositions. As suggested in Enkvist (1989) about chronicles (see also discussion in Tabakowska: 1999), timelines may be dominated by a temporal strategy, that is topicalise time, using it as a springboard for clause and sentence development. Put differently, in answering a question like «What happened in 612 BC?», for instance, the conceptual structure of the answer, which in this case constitutes the opening timeline entry, may best be captured by a more iconic sequence, as is that of inversion. Also, the fact that timelines constitute no conventional text as such, in the sense that each entry apparently possesses a certain amount of autonomy, might further testify to their basicness. It may therefore be «natural» to expect a high incidence of postverbal subject sequences like the one in the Greek example (2) below:

(2) 612 π.Χ. - Γεννιέται η Σαπφώ, η Ελληνίδα λυρική ποιήτρια από τη Λέσβο. 7

The legitimacy of the example may be enhanced by the non-weighty verbal substance, namely the fact that the verb involves more or less predictable information, as in the case of the verb «be» (cf. Chen: 2003).

Our sequencing assumption is somehow analogous with the idea of putting Old Information First (OIF), that is «begin(ning) clauses and sentences with old information and then go(ing) on to the new» (Enkvist: 1989, 176), as this «ease(s) the receptor’s processing load». After all, «guessing is most difficult at the beginning of a sentence». «Crucial Information First» (CIF), in Enkvist’s terms again, may be hypothesized to be more taxing processing-wise, as it needs to be signalled by means of focal stress, for instance. This would again provide support for our argument.

What happens with the corresponding instances in English, however?

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6. Thus, the contextual boundaries leading to a non-primarily-iconic but textual function of inversion in non-fictional texts, as specified in Prado-Alonso (2008), may not be there.

7. A relevant issue here may be Givon’s (1979) principle of end-weight, relating to the length of the clause-final constituent (cf. Quirk et al.: 1985, 1356-1357; see also Enkvist: 1981), but we will not be working on this issue in the present article. In any case, the image in the data as regards the relative length of the clause components in relation to their position in the clause is pretty complex.
Unlike example (1) above, the fact that the date does not form an integral part of the clause disqualifies subjects from their postverbal candidacy, as this would result in clause-initial full inversion, ungrammatical in English. What is the next most iconic option for English, then? We argue in favour of nominalisation, whenever this is possible, as illustrated in example (3):

(3) 612 BC – Birth of Sappho, the Greek lyric poet from Lesbos.

The advantage of a nominalised structure in this case would be retaining the iconicity of the clause, the important, focal information appearing last. This form may thus be interchangeable with subject-verb inversion in the Greek paradigm, which, as noted above, performs a similarly iconic function:

(4) 612 π.Χ. – Γέννηση της Σαπφούς, της Ελληνίδας λυρικής ποιήτριας από τη Λέσβο.

To sum up: On the assumption that opening history timeline entries are maximally iconic we would expect constituents to be perspective from the informationally minimal to the informationally maximal. Most readily available candidates for this type of sequencing seem to be subject-verb inversion and nominalised sequences. The latter are expected to compensate for the impossibility of the former in the English paradigm. Exploring the occurrence of these sequences will hopefully allow us to determine the linearisation properties of the history timeline genre.

2.2. Iconicity and translation

While, as demonstrated above, iconicity has attracted a lot of attention in recent years, the links between iconicity and translation still remain largely unexplored. Tabakowska’s (2003) study is thus seminal in dealing with how iconicity can be preserved or recreated in translation. Interestingly, she underlines the need for the translator to distinguish between form-meaning transparencies which are still «expressive» in a language and others, which have become conventionalised as well as between iconic practices in any two languages dealt with in the translation. Central to her discussion is also the need to distinguish between intentional and incidental iconicity, which would affect translator decisions accordingly. Although we will not be discussing this distinction in this article, we would tend to take up her point concerning the difficulty of making such a distinction, especially in non-literary texts. In other words, randomness needs to be controlled for if the translator is to gauge the iconicity features of the text.
to be translated accurately, and this may be harder with non-literary texts, like timelines in our case.

So, an important issue to consider in relation to iconicity when translating is the degree to which as well as the way in which iconicity manifests itself in each of the two languages involved. Is the nominalisation sequence, for instance, as hypothesised, equally operative in the pair and, if so, is it equally expressive, that is equally directly iconic in both languages? If not, how can the translator negotiate between sequence candidates to produce an output that possesses the desired iconic (or non-iconic, for that matter) effect? If, for example, postverbal subjects are highly expressive in Greek poetry, as has been suggested in Calfoglou (2010), would we welcome faithfulness to this form of iconicity in translating a poem into English, a language that is conventionally a preverbal subject one? And, how is this issue resolved in the case of texts other than poetry (or fiction)? This is a point we will address indirectly in determining iconicity patterns in our corpus.

3. The study

3.1. The corpus

The corpus analysed in this article is of two kinds. The main set of data consists of two sets of «comparable bilingual» corpora in Bernardini et al.’s (2003) sense, namely «originals in two languages (in our case Greek and English), selected according to analogous criteria such as topic and text type» (p. 5). In our case the text type was that of timelines and the topic was history. Both sets were collected from the Web. Because we would we working on individual entries and wanted our timeline sample to be as varied and, therefore, presumably as representative of the genre as possible, we targeted varied entry length but left out telegraphic along with very long entry timelines, as we thought they might bias results. The Greek history timeline corpus analysed amounted to a total of circa 13,500 words while the English corpus consisted of a circa 16,000 word total.

Because the two subcorpora differed not only in length but also in the number of entries and therefore of the tokens analysed, and because this was also the case with individual texts within each subcorpus, frequencies

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8. Thanks are due to my students at the postgraduate translation course of the University of Athens for their help at the early stages of data collection.
were normalised, as suggested in Biber (1988). Biber argues that «this normalisation is crucial for any comparison of frequency counts across texts, because text length can vary widely. (Thus) a comparison of non-normalised counts will give an inaccurate assessment of the frequency distribution in texts» (p. 75). This is so because «long texts will tend to have higher frequencies simply because there is more opportunity for a feature to occur; in these cases, the higher count does not indicate a more frequent use of a feature» (ft. 3, p. 14; see also discussion in Prado-Alonso: 2008). In our case, however, text length was not the determinant, as it did not directly correlate with the number of entries, so our normalised counts revolve around the number of entries. Following Biber’s rationale, more entries will tend to give higher frequencies simply because there is more opportunity for a feature, in this case a specific word order, to occur.

Our frequency counts for each text were therefore normalised to a text «length» of 1,000 entries. More specifically, for each timeline we divided the number of instances for each sequence obtained by the total number of entries and then multiplied the output by 1,000. In one timeline, for instance, we had a total of 85 entries and 52 instances of nominalisation. The formula used was: (52/85) x 1000 = 610. This would allow us to compare the 680 entries obtained in Greek timelines with the 446 entries obtained in their English counterparts, as well as to make comparisons of entry patterns within each subcorpus.

Our second set of data consists of the translation output obtained from sixty (60) respondents, who were all undergraduate students attending a translation workshop at the English Department of the University of Athens. Respondents were given two sets of timeline entries, one selected from the Greek and one from the English subcorpus, and were asked to provide a translation.9 The Greek set consisted of eight (8) entries while the English set of seven (7) (see Appendix for further details). The selection of entries involved both instances where we expected no particular change in the sequence given (entries (1), (2), (4), (6) in the Greek text and entries (9), (11), (12) and (14) in the English text) and instances which might have favoured tampering with the given order, as in the case of a postverbal subject in Greek turned into a nominalisation in English or of a preverbal subject in English turned into a postverbal subject or a nominalisation in Greek.

9. My deepest thanks go to Maria Pyrgerou and Christiana Gamili for distributing and collecting the worksheets.
3.2. The hypothesis

Let us now sum up our hypothesis: Opening timeline entries may be maximally iconic and reflect an incremental rise in informational content by proceeding from the minimally weighty time reference to the verb to the maximally weighty subject. This would yield an increased frequency of iconic Verb-Subject orders in the Greek paradigm, with maximal stress on the clause-final subject. Where this possibility is unavailable, as is the case in English, iconicity might motivate an increase in nominalised structures, where the genitive noun receives maximal stress. Thus, nominalised structures may constitute a dynamic alternative to subject-initial sequences like «a/the ... is founded». Nominalisation may also be a highly competing candidate in the Greek paradigm. Generally, linearisation patterns in the timeline genre will at least partially be a reflection of its iconic character and may affect translation decisions in the outputs collected.

4. Results and discussion

The sequence types obtained in the opening entries of our corpus were the following: Postverbal subject (or VS), nominalisations, Subject-Verb-Object (or SVO), noun phrases (or NP) and preverbal subject orders with an unaccusative or passive verb, with or without a complement or an agent phrase (henceforth referred to as SV(pass/comp) (AgP)). There was also a marginal group classified as «Other». Below are examples of each from both subcorpora:

(5a) Κατατίθεται στη Βουλή πρόταση νόμου (VS)
(5b) Accompanying the high point of democracy in Athens is a Greek intellectual revolution (VS)
(6a) Ανύψωση του αρχαϊκού ιωνικού ναού του Διονύσου (Nominalisation)
(6b) Possible worship of fertility mother-goddesses (Nominalisation)
(7a) Ο Όμηρος συνθέτει την Ιλιάδα και την Οδύσσεια (SVO)
(7b) Muslims defeat Christian Serb defenders in Kosovo (SVO)
(8a) Δολοφονική απότελεσα ... (NP)
(8b) ‘Minoan’ culture on Crete (NP)
(9a) Η Πάτμος γίνεται ανεξάρτητο μοναστηριακό κράτος (SVcomp)
(9a') Η Θεσσαλία ( ) και η Άρτα παραχωρούνται στην Ελλάδα (SVpass)
(9b) An association agreement is signed (SVpass)
(9b') Olympic Games open (SV)

As can be seen at a glance, the image obtained is pretty varied, evidently more so than was expected. As we will also see in the frequency figures that follow, sequencing was by no means monopolised by the structures hypothesised. Variation was obtained between our subcorpora but also across timelines within the same subcorpus. In other words, certain orders were seriously underrepresented – or totally missing – in some of the texts. Thus, nominalisations, for example, swept the stage in one of the Greek history timeline texts, amounting to 74% of the tokens, and were entirely missing in another text, where SVO was dominant. Similarly, in the English paradigm, nominalisations were totally missing from one text and put in a strong appearance in another, representing some 55% of the entry tokens. While underlining the need for an enriched sample, which will allow us to alleviate such sharp differences, this variation also suggests that diagrammatic iconicity may not always be so readily identifiable as might have been expected on the basis of the more transparent organisation of literary texts (cf. Tabakowska: 2003). But, of course, further support for this needs to be adduced from closer study of a number of other text-types.

Let us now look at each of the sequences obtained in some more detail. First of all, what about postverbal subjects, hypothesised to be a most iconically expressive form in our (Greek) data? As can be seen in Figure 1,

FIGURE 1.
Normalised frequency means (per 1000 entries) for orders obtained in Greek History texts

![Chart showing normalised frequency means for different orders](chart.png)
their frequency rose up to 23.7% of the total entry token, which is substantial but not as substantial as might have been expected. As we had assumed, postverbal subject sequences were largely iconic, in the sense of involving an incremental rise in their informational content, as in the case of «Στην Ουγγαρία ανακηρύσσεται Σοβιετική Δημοκρατία», where the clause-initial locative is minimally and the clause-final noun phrase maximally weighty. On the other hand, not all instances involved this kind of incremental rise. Thus, there were also examples like (10) below, with a clause-initial verb evidently bearing focal stress (cf. Chen: 2003 on phonological stress in full inversion):

(10) Κλείνουν σταδιακά οι σχολές στο Παρίσι.

It appears, then, that the argument concerning iconic VS orders is only partially plausible. Moreover, it should be noted that the distribution of the specific type of order over the texts analysed was particularly uneven, which further reinforces the fact that it may be more peripheral in the genre than we had originally hypothesised.

In the English paradigm, VS, ruled out by the syntactic canon, was practically non-existent, as we can see in Figure 2:

**FIGURE 2.**

*Normalised frequency means (per 1000 entries) for orders obtained in English History texts*
The example provided in (5b) above was, actually, the only instance documented in our data. It would then be interesting to see whether this was compensated for by means of (iconic) nominalisation structures, as we had hypothesised.

In Figure 2 we can see that nominalisations reached a bare 7.4% of the entry total among English history timelines. More interestingly still, of the instances attested, not all involved an incremental rise in informational content, as had been hypothesised. Thus, besides iconic sequences like (6b) above, there were a number of non-iconic ones, with the nominalised form evidently assuming maximal weight:

(11) Development (under Minoan influence), peak and decline (after 1250 BC) of «Mycenaean» culture,

or

(12) Break-up of Mycenaean civilization.

That nominalisations may not really be the sequence opted for when the VS option is unavailable is partly to be seen in their substantially higher frequency in the Greek subcorpus. Thus, as can be seen in Figure 1, nominalisations amounted to some 25% of the entry total, that is were given a status comparable to that of postverbal subjects. On the other hand, as in the case of English timelines, progression was not always from the informationally minimal to the informationally maximal. We thus obtained entries like (13) below:

(13) Πολυρκία συνεχής και ανεπιτυχής, δύο χρόνων, της πόλης της Θεσσαλονίκης από τους Αβάρους, λαό μονολιθικής καταγωγής,

where focal stress seems to fall on the nominalised item and its qualifiers as well as on the clause-final agent phrase rather than on the genitive noun. In addition, as with VS, nominalisation frequencies fluctuated quite a bit.

Preverbal subject sequences with an unaccusative or passive verb could be visualised as the generally non-iconic alternative to the Greek VS in English. Thus, «Κατατίθεται στη Βουλή πρόταση νόμου» in (5a) above would need to become preverbal in English unless nominalised. In view of the fact, then, that nominalisation is rather poor in the English subcorpus, we might expect a more robust incidence of SV(pass/comp)(AgP). Indeed, Figure 2 shows us that frequency means rose to 36.2%, while in the Greek subcorpus, as can be seen in Figure 1, they were a mere 5.8%

10. Yet longer entries seemed to correlate with VS as against nominalised forms, which suggests that the two orders might be interchangeable in some sense.
of the token total. Now, the high incidence of such orders is particularly counter-intuitive, since clauses like

(14) ARISTOPHANES, considered by some to be the greatest Greek comedy writer, is born

are somehow provocatively non-experiential. On closer inspection, however, we may observe that not all passives or unaccusatives were non-iconic. Thus, among a majority of clearly non-iconic instances, there was a non-negligible batch of items like

(15) the New Shakespeare’s Globe reopened

or

(16) Theo Crosby dies,

which apparently lay focal stress on the clause-final process designated by the verb. So, again, it appears that iconicity-related conclusions need to be drawn with caution. On the other hand, it is important to note that SV(pass/comp)(AgP) was among the orders varying least across timeline texts.

Let us now come to another two order patterns obtained in the data. One is NP, namely verbless clauses featuring a noun phrase alone, as in examples (8a) and (8b) above. As can be seen in Figure 1, mean frequencies in the Greek subcorpus amounted to 19.7%, while in the English subcorpus they amounted to 5.1% (Figure 2). Combined with the reduced incidence of nominalisation in the English paradigm, these results may well point to the reduced tolerance for verbless clauses in English timelines and, perhaps, in the language generally.

NP tokens could be interpreted as iconic in the sense that they may be the expressed subject of a covert verb, a generic or predictable one, as in

(17) ογκώδεις διαδηλώσεις,

which may be what is left of «γίνονται/πραγματοποιούνται ...» or

(18) Εμπορική Συνθήκη Κωνσταντινούπολης,

which may form part of «υπογράφεται ...».

If this is so, then transparently iconic sequences in Greek occupy a 68.4% of the entry total, as against English, where the corresponding percentage is 13.1%.

11. This is accentuated by the fact that Givon’s (1979) principle of end weight, which would entail leaving the lengthy subject last, is also violated.

12. The omission of the verb may form part of Enkvist’s (1989) “Crucial Information Only” principle.
Finally, we have SVO – illustrated through examples (7a) and (7b) above, another order, along with preverbal subject unaccusatives or passives, which was relatively even across the texts in both subcorpora. The frequency with which the specific order was represented in the data was unanticipated. Thus, it held the winning position in both Greek and English timelines, though its frequency of occurrence in the English data exceeded that of Greek by far – 25.4% and 50.7% respectively. If added to the percentage of preverbal unaccusatives, it rises to an overwhelming 86.9% among the English texts (as against 31.2% among Greek texts). The differences can be seen more clearly in Figure 3:

![Figure 3. Normalised frequency means (per 1000 entries) for orders obtained in Greek and English History texts](image)

Does this mean that English history timelines are essentially non-iconic? We said above that there were instances of apparently iconic preverbal subject unaccusatives. But what about SVOs? Wouldn’t they normally involve thematising the subject phrase, perhaps construing it as old information and thus moving away from «basic level instances»? On the other hand, whether these tokens are experientially iconic is really hard to determine, as in several cases the noun phrase given subject status and appearing clause-initially may not have been re-introduced.\(^{13}\)

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13. In any case, context emerges as a particularly elusive element in timelines. While, as suggested earlier, individual entries may more often than not be presented as discrete, the appearance of the nominalised «Θάνατος του Περικλή» right after
(19) Ο Ρωμαίος τετράρχης καίσαρας και αύγουστος Γαλέριος Μαξιμιανός επιλέγει τη Θεσσαλονίκη ως έδρα του.

We would be tempted to opt for an account proposed in Conradié (2001) in a different (genitivisation) context, namely his Event Model, which adopts an SVO activity-based narrative schema, purportedly, in Conradié’s words, «reflect(ing) the flow of time in terms of events experienced and reported upon» (p. 229). According to Conradié, «given that entities/things and actions/activities are conceived of as a basic distinction in perception» one of the ways of dealing with the relationship between them is by means of «an activity-based strategy with the action in the centre (not only figuratively but also literally) and entities relegated to the periphery» (p. 230). And, since «narrativity» is one of the «primary functions» of language, «in as far as verbs expressing activity have non-verbal entities as “borders”, SVO structures may be said to be iconic of events» (p. 231).

Reflecting on the «match between an SVO model and the “event”», Conradié then goes on to argue that

While the Agent is not identical with the beginning of an action (and may be present before, during and after the action, strictly speaking), it may be causally associated with the beginning of an action as the initiator or controller or the entity taking the initiative. In the same way the Patient, or the Goal as the target of the action, if present, may be associated with the end of an action (p. 231)

In this sense, SVOs may be iconic experientially, though deciding over a specific Agent and a specific Patient or Goal may remove it from «basic level instances».14 On the other hand, one could visualise treating SVOs, postverbal subjects – which are, in actual fact, objects – and the genitive «object» of a nominalisation together, which would yield a substantial iconic VO frequency total.

One last word about passives or unaccusatives, perhaps the most puzzling sequence in our data. Passives in particular have been treated as non-iconic (Conradié 2001, Tabakowska: 1999 among others) in the sense of

14. Note also that not all SVO clauses in the data possess the same amount of agentivity. What about «Το κέντρο της Αθήνας αποκτά για πρώτη φορά ηλεκτροφωτισμό», for example? It appears that the model would need to be tested against a variety of text-types characterised by narrativity.
involving agent demotion. This is in line with Conradie’s Event Model. However, this explanation would fail to account for examples, like (15) or (16) above, which seem to have an iconic interpretation. On the other hand, Birner & Ward’s (1998) argument as to passives being similar to inversion – and thus, we would take the argument a step further, iconic – in the sense that preverbal material cannot be less familiar than postverbal, may explain why English timelines may employ passives where Greek timelines employ inversion but fails to account for focal passive subjects, as in example (14) above. In view of all this, we would propose a «mixed» status for SV(pass/comp) (AgP), where iconic and non-iconic threads meet.

To sum up, it appears that the timeline genre is a hybrid or multiple-strategy genre in the sense that it combines a number of different strategies in order arrangement in its opening entries. The temporal strategy with its time point anchoring – see section 2.1. – thus merges with «agentive strategies» (Enkvist 1989: 179) prototypically at work in a narrative (or a biography). This means that «the order in which uncertainties are eliminated», as Enkvist puts it (1989: 180), is not so predictable. This poses a particularly taxing task on the translator, who has to weave his/her way through surface affinities and dissimilarities to discover the underlying pattern.

5. Further insights from translation data

The results obtained through our corpus analysis were only partially replicated in the translation data collected. This was mostly so in the sense that respondents demonstrated unwillingness to modify the Source Language (SL) sequence, even when it clashed with Target Language (TL) norms. More specifically:

Nominalisation did not emerge as an iconicity-saving device, except where this involved reproducing the SL structure, as is the case in item (4) in the Appendix. Thus, in items (3) and (5), for instance, reproduced as (20) and (21) below respectively,

(20) 16 Μαΐου — Καταλαμβάνεται και το εργοστάσιο της Renault
(21) 12 Ιουνίου — Στη Γαλλία επιβάλλεται ο στρατιωτικός νόμος,
where a nominalised sequence would have helped retain what we see as an iconic postverbal subject sequence in the SL,\(^{15}\) nominalisation was

\(^{15}\) This is illustrated in «16th May – Takeover of the Renault factory, too» and «12th June – Imposing (of) martial law in France.»
minimal – 1 instance in each item – and the overwhelming majority of instances obtained were preverbal subject ones. Interestingly, 6 respondents in each case opted for the illicitly iconic postverbal subject order in the TL, but this may form part of a more general tendency to retain SL sequences and effect minimal syntactic changes, if any. In Table 1 we can see the full range of orders obtained for these two items:

**TABLE 1.**

*TL (English) translation options obtained for postverbal subject items (3) and (5)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SV(pass)*</th>
<th>Nominalisation</th>
<th>V(pass)S**</th>
<th>NP***</th>
<th>Other****</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>43/60 (72%)</td>
<td>1/60 (2%)</td>
<td>6/60 (10%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10/60 (16%)</td>
<td>60/60 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>37/60 (61%)</td>
<td>1/60 (2%)</td>
<td>6/60 (10%)</td>
<td>1/60 (2%)</td>
<td>15/60 (25%)</td>
<td>60/60 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* As in «The Renault factory is also taken over» or «Martial law is imposed in France» respectively.
** Yielding the deviant «Is under control the Renault factory, too.»
*** As in «Martial law in France.».
**** Mostly left untranslated.

Nominalisation was also marginal in items (7) and (8), where again it could have acted as a means of legally retaining postverbal subject order in the English translation, questionably iconic this time. Similarly, in items (10) and (13), reproduced as (22) and (23) below,

(22) **612 BCE:** Sappho, Greek lyric poet of Lesbos, is born.
(23) **515 BCE:** Parmenides of Elea is born,

where the directly iconic VS sequence or nominalisation are readily available in the TL (Greek), we find that the iconic total in the Greek translation, adding up postverbal subjects, as in «Γεννεϊται η Σαπφώ», and nominalised structures, as in «Γέννησε της Σαπφώς», amounts to no more than 35% and 33% respectively. And, once again, pre-verbal subjects in an S-V with a passive morphology order rule the stage, as we can see in Table 2:
TABLE 2.  
TL (Greek) translation options obtained for postverbal subject items (10) and (13)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>SV(pass)*</th>
<th>Nominalisation</th>
<th>V(pass)S**</th>
<th>SV/VS***</th>
<th>Other****</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(10)</td>
<td>36/60</td>
<td>4/60 (7%)</td>
<td>17/60</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3/60 (5%)</td>
<td>60/60 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(13)</td>
<td>35/60</td>
<td>4/60 (7%)</td>
<td>16/60</td>
<td>1/60 (2%)</td>
<td>4/60 (6%)</td>
<td>60/60 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* As in «Η Σαπφώ, η Ελληνίδα λυρική ποιήτρια από τη Λέσβο, γεννιέται.»
** Yielding «Γεννιέται η Σαπφώ, η Ελληνίδα λυρική ποιήτρια από τη Λέσβο.»
*** The two forms treated as interchangeable.
**** Mostly left untranslated.

It is, however, next to impossible to ascertain the motives underlying this choice: Is it conservatism, as also noted in advanced learners’ translation behaviour elsewhere (see Calfoglou: 2008, for instance) or is it lack of awareness of iconicity effects? As we saw in the discussion of our corpora, SVO is a robust option in Greek but, unlike English, not as robust as to justify such predominance among Greek TL items. In item (15), for example, an interesting 10% of the respondents selected an agentive SVO order in the Greek translation, denouncing the agent demotion of the existing structure. Thus, overall, preverbal subject orders, with or without an object and with varying degrees of agentivity swept the stage in both the English and the Greek translations, as we can see in Table 3 below:

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16. In Greek-English translation workshop data collected among English Dept. undergraduates at the University of Athens, as reported in Calfoglou (2008), a non-negligible number of respondents opted for illicit sequences faithfully replicating their SL counterparts, as in the case of postnominal adjectives, for instance.

17. In the research referred to in footnote 16 above, a surprisingly high percentage of respondents (38% or 46/120) employed a preverbal subject strategy of some kind and came up with a deviant sequence like «she lived with Paris through that long decade of manslaughter an effigy, a ghost of Helen which …» instead of the non-deviant «there lived with Paris through that long decade of manslaughter an effigy, a ghost of Helen which …»
Table 3.
Preverbal subject frequency totals in G>E and E>G translation options*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item no.</th>
<th>Preverbal subject sequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G&gt;E (3)</td>
<td>43/60 (72%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>37/60 (61%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>53/60 (88%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>52/60 (87%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E&gt;G (10)</td>
<td>36/60 (60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(13)</td>
<td>35/60 (58%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(15)</td>
<td>36/60 (60%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The items included in this table involve postverbal subject statements in Greek allowing for nominalisation in English and preverbal subject statements in English allowing for nominalisation or postverbal sequences in Greek.

And, while in English this may be in accord with the trends observed in our corpus, in Greek, possibilities available do not seem to be made use of fully. The overall conclusion, then, drawn from this relatively small sample seems to be that respondents/ translators do not go out of the way in search of the iconic. Alternatively, the sweeping figures obtained for SV(O) orders, as illustrated in Table 3, might point in the direction of alternative forms of iconicity, as suggested in the discussion of order frequencies in our two sets of corpora.

In view of all this, the need to sensitise translators to iconicity considerations in the linguistic paradigm they are involved in emerges most dominantly. This becomes even more imperative if we consider the differences observed between the Greek and the English data in our corpora. The high incidence of nominalisation sequences in Greek history timelines, for instance, might tempt translators into reproducing the pattern in English, which would clash with the order frequencies obtained in English timelines.\(^{18}\)

6. Concluding remarks

In this article we focussed on Greek and English history timelines in relation to iconicity as a driving force underlying word order arrangement.

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18. In the English texts forming part of the bilingual EU timeline corpora examined in Calfoglou (2009), for instance, we are indeed faced with what seems to be an unmotivatedly high percentage of nominalised structures, a bit of a «no man’s land», as suggested in our introduction.
Our data points in the direction of diagrammatic iconicity not always being readily identifiable in the specific text type. However, this data can partially be accounted for on the basis of alternative forms of diagrammatic iconicity. The varied image obtained suggests that iconic transparency may not be so directly at work in non-fictional texts (cf. Prado-Alonso: 2008; see also Tabakowska: 2003), which means that there are subtle processes involved that need to be taken account of. This, combined with the relatively non-varied image obtained in students’ translation output, may point to the need for systematic translator exposure to samples of the specific text-type. This study, then, sides with a number of other studies underscoring the importance of corpora in translator education. For, as can be seen through the differences observed between the two subcorpora, an effective target-like translation would preclude non-data-driven assumptions regarding iconically motivated word order organisation and would instead involve systematic negotiation. In other words, the presumed universality of perception is partially obscured when specific languages are considered, so the translator needs to act as a negotiating force between the blueprint of human experience and its imprint on the specific languages involved.

References


De Cuypere, L. (2008), Limiting the Iconic. (Iconicity in Language and Literature 6), Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.


APPENDIX

Test distributed to University of Athens English Department undergraduates

• Please, translate the following history timeline extracts (not the dates). Translate text A into English and text B into Greek. Write your answers between the lines. Please, note that this is not a test and that it is being done for translation research purposes only:

A. Μάης του ’68: χρονολόγιο

(1) 10 Μαΐου- Η περίφημη «νύχτα των οδοφραγμάτων» στο Παρίσι.
(2) 14 Μαΐου- Γενική απεργία.
(3) 16 Μαΐου- Καταλαμβάνεται και το εργοστάσιο της Renault.
(4) 19 Μαΐου- Προκήρυξη γενικής και απεριόριστης απεργίας στη Γαλλία.
(5) 12 Ιουνίου- Στη Γαλλία επιβάλλεται ο στρατιωτικός νόμος.
(6) 16 Ιουνίου- Η αστυνομία εισβάλλει και εκκενώνει τη Σορβόννη.
(7) 18 Ιουνίου- Επαναλειτουργεί το εργοστάσιο της Renault.
(8) 10 Ιουλίου- Παραπλείστη ο Γάλλος πρωθυπουργός Πομπιντού.

B. http://eawc.evansville.edu/chronology/grpage.htm

(9) 2200 BCE: Indo-European invaders enter the mainland of Greece.
(10) 612 BCE: Sappho, Greek lyric poet of Lesbos, is born.
(11) 546 BCE: The first of the Athenian tyrants, Peisistratus, replaces Solon as ruler.
(12) 530 BCE: Pythagoras and his followers found the city of Croton.
(13) 515 BCE: Parmenides of Elea is born.
(14) 431-404 BCE: The political supremacy of Athens is ended.
(15) 310 BCE: Hellenistic astronomy is founded by Aristarchus of Samos.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!