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The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time: Pragmatic Distinctness of the Protagonist's Speech – Comparison of Source vs. Translation

MA thesis

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English Abstract

This study examines the distinct discourse patterns of the protagonist who, according to the book jacket, has Asperger's Syndrome, in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon. The study also examines the ways in which these distinct patterns were dealt with in the published Hebrew translation (translated by Ehud Tagari).

The anomalous linguistic behavior of the protagonist, who is also the narrator of this book, is examined with respect to both his own descriptions of his disabilities, and the literature in three different fields: developmental disorders, self-advocacy of individuals with disabilities, and pragmatics.

First, we present and explore the explanations and indications of the protagonist's disabilities and difficulties, as he himself describes them. Here we try to discern the features of his disabilities.

Afterwards, we examine and analyze excerpts of the protagonist's discourse, pointing to a certain difficulty or a problem with performing or deciphering direct and indirect speech acts. According to Searle (Searle, 1969), a distinction is drawn between the illocutionary force of an utterance, and its propositional content. We also point out the cases where indirect speech acts are performed, namely, when there is no obvious relation between the utterance itself and the action performed by it.

Lastly, based on the pragmatic approach to translation studies, we examine the translation for shifts that affect the reconstruction of the protagonist's distinctness. We then consider whether the shifts that are found may be ascribed to linguistic constraints or to differences in pragmatic conventions between the two languages: that of the source text (English) and that of the target text (Hebrew). We will also examine the means of conveying the protagonist's disabilities to the readers of the translation.

We conclude that the protagonist does exhibit pragmatic distinctness, which manifests itself in a lack of pragmatic competency in the field of direct and indirect speech acts.

His responses to the direct speech acts performed show that he does decipher most of them. Yet, this is not always the case, and there are also cases in which he has difficulties in understanding direct speech acts, even though no indirectness was involved.

Christopher's responses to complex speech acts that had indirect intentions are mixed. On the one hand, there are a few cases in which he recognizes and deciphers the indirect speech act. On the other hand, in most cases it seems he finds them difficult to interpret. We cannot conclusively determine what specific and consistent difficulties the protagonist encounters. However, we can conclude that although he sometimes demonstrates pragmatic abilities and deciphers direct and indirect speech acts, in most cases he is initially unable to identify the existence of indirect intentions, and therefore cannot proceed to decipher them.

The translation analysis showed the presence of numerous non-obligatory shifts throughout the book, affecting the transfer of the pragmatic distinctness of the protagonist's speech. These shifts can be divided into two categories: shifts that put a little more emphasis on the protagonist's disability; and shifts that further disguise the protagonist's disability. A comparison between the examples found in each category shows that despite the other non-obligatory and obligatory shifts as well as the cultural differences, the transfer of the pragmatic distinctness of the protagonist speech is

retained. However, there is one specific and prominent shift throughout the book; namely, deviations from the lexical repetition of the reporting verb “said” which explicitates the reported speech act performed. As mentioned, Christopher has difficulties recognizing, deciphering and performing speech acts, and this shift partly disguises the reflection of the protagonist’s disability in the translation. Also, the use of a different performative verb in the translation creates better cohesion and presents the protagonist as more fluent, thus further masking his impairment. Due to its recurrence, the pragmatic distinctness of the protagonist's speech is less apparent.