# But - what does it mean? A case study of a clinical report ${ }^{\text {a }}$ 

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#### Abstract

A high degree of isomorphism is often assumed to exist between fairly closely related languages in the translation of scientific, especially medical, texts. This isomorphism may be reflected in the communicative situation, specific genres and their associated formats, and down to the terminology, much of which is derived from, and created from, Greek and Latin. On the other hand, each language is known to have its own peculiarities and preferences. The tension generated between these two opposing forces can lead to anomalies, particularly if, in the translation process, the sentence is taken as the largest translation unit. We report a case of "malignant equivalent frequency syndrome" presenting as a dysfunction in the transfer of coordinated BUT sentences to structures of equivalent frequency, which was associated with disturbed textual patterns and impaired communicative function. Expression of other closely related syntactic structures was normal, but some microstructural elements were either altered or absent.


[^0]Textual analysis indicated a breakdown in the mapping of the higher levels of meaning onto the surface texture. The results suggest that communicative intention, textual patterns and information structure, as well as surface features, must be taken into account in the translation of this kind of text.

## Introduction

"Benign superficial equivalent frequency" was first described in a clinical setting by Newmark in 19791. It is characterised by replacement in the surface texture of certain lexico-grammatical features of the source language (SL) by others of equivalent frequency in the target language (TL) when the subject is transferred from one cultural and linguistic context to another. The condition is considered superficial if deeper layers are uninvolved, and benign if overall communicative function remains unimpaired. Since then, malignancy associated with this condition has been reported by Neubert and Shreve ${ }^{2}$, who found that global coherence could be seriously affected even when equivalent frequency appeared to be focal, that is limited to the sentence level. Hatim and Mason ${ }^{3}$ have also reported alterations in coherence and text patterns at the segmental level (paragraph and other subunits) in different fields and in different cultural and linguistic contexts, including Spanish and English. However, little attention has been given to this matter in the clinical setting, possibly because of the high degree of isomorphism that is assumed to exist in this case between fairly closely related languages. Thus, the most frequently used genres, the research report and the case report, have similar formats in English and Spanish, communication is usually from specialist to specialist, and much of the terminology is either derived from classical Greek and Latin or built from the roots and affixes of these languages as neologisms. We report a case of malignant equivalent frequency syndrome in an English-Spanish clinical setting and review the literature.

## Case Report

The "patient" was a Spanish subject of English origin, whose condition was discovered at a routine examination performed for other reasons.

Examination revealed a lack of BUT (pero) coordination on the TL side. The distribution of but, although, however and other related structures, together with their TL expression is given in Table 1. Only two instances of pero were found (see Fig. 1A) and increased levels were observed for the subordinator aunque (Fig. 1B), and related adverbials (no obstante, sin embargo) (Fig. 1C). At the microstructural level, some elements such as verb forms, adverbs, etc. presented abnormalities, or were absent. Occasionally, no connector was present (juxtaposition), and, in one instance, absence of a contrastive connector was associated with a viewpoint adverbial, or conjunct, (en este sentido) (Fig. 1D). The SL-TL correspondence of other related structures (although and however) was normal (Table 1). Textual analysis was performed with the Hatim and Mason ${ }^{3}$ (H\&M) technique modified by addition of Halliday ${ }^{4}$ mediumb ${ }^{\text {b }}$. This analysis revealed focal and segmental disturbance of the expected text pattern, information structure and coherence (Figs. 2 and 3), resulting in impaired communicative function. The final diagnosis was malignant equivalent frequency syndrome due to failure in the mapping of higher levels of meaning onto the surface structures in the creation of texture.

## Discussion

The uses of BUT have been well described ${ }^{4,5}$ and are summarized in Table 2. The incidence of the adversative and concessive types is much higher than the remaining types in the clinical setting. In our case, these two types predominated, while one example was interpreted as an appended structure on macroscopic examination. Moreover, only these three uses of but are susceptible to transformation - benign or malignant - into subordinate structures with although (aunque).

[^1]A number of factors have been identified as having an influence on BUT coordination and its interpretation both at the surface and at deeper levels. A contrastive interpretation is usually indicated when parallel syntax and contrasting lexical items are present in the coordinated units. This interpretation may be strengthened by location in the more objective sections (Methods and Results). In contrast, if such parallelism is absent and disparate elements are coordinated, then temporal or cause-effect relationships may be implicated. When location is in the more argumentative sections of the report (Introduction and Discussion), this cluster of features will normally indicate a concessive interpretation. However, the only requirement for both types is that there be some kind of opposition expressed between the two coordinated units and there would appear to be a continuum ranging from the contrastive to the concessive type.

Halliday and Hasan ${ }^{6}$ noted that the implied opposition may derive either from the content or from the communicative situation, and referred to this feature as "external" or "internal", respectively. When an overt opposition exists in the lexico-grammatical features, which would normally imply objective "external" contrast in terms of the content and, therefore, equality between the two units, the interpersonal "internal" relation may still override the essential equality of coordination to establish the predominance of one unit over the other. An interpretation can then only be arrived at from the communicative situation. Factors at deeper levels must come into play.

According to Quirk et al. ${ }^{5}$, when a message is constructed, "it is courtesy to the receiver [...] to provide the point of the message with enough context for this point to be both clearly identified and unambiguously understood" (p. 1360). Moreover, these authors indicated that, when two coordinated units are placed in sequence, the second unit gains focal prominence from its position; that is, the second is placed in focus against the background of the first in agreement with the general principle of communicative dynamism (CD). This principle is complemented by other factors of text organisation, such as the movement from general to particular, large to small, outside to inside, etc., as identified by van Dijk. ${ }^{7}$

An example taken from the Results section in the case under study will illustrate the point:

There was a greater proportion of cancers of the caecum among patients with barium enema but the proportions at other sites were similar.

Since the syntax is not parallel and, therefore, does not emphasise the lexical contrast between "caecum" and "other sites" and between "greater" (i.e., different) and "similar", a purely objective contrast may be ruled out. If we then apply the above CD principles, what is in focus is the similarity. We may deduce, therefore, that the authors' intention is to stress the validity of their results, since only minimal bias could have been introduced by the difference. The Spanish translation was as follows:

> Hubo una mayor proporción de cáncer de ciego entre los pacientes sometidos al enema de bario, aunque las proporciones de las restantes localizaciones fueron similares.

If our interpretation is correct, the position of the subordinator aunque would clearly seem to distort the message: it should occur initially to minimise the importance of the difference. Alternatively, if objective statement of the results were intended, the subordinator mientras que might have been a better choice.

In the reported case, the sequence of the coordinated units could be interpreted as decreasing in intensity or anticlimactic in only two instances. One of these was translated by pero (see Fig. 1A), and the second by aunque (not shown). The second unit in both instances could be interpreted as explanatory, and there was a close lexical link between the two units but no parallelism to indicate contrast. In the first instance, a comparison was linked to statistical significance, which is usually presented as secondary supporting evidence in the discussion of clinical significance. In the second instance, the advantage of one of the diagnostic techniques was minimised in the second coordinate unit.

The presence of parallelism or of a triad (a three unit structure) indicated a climactic progression and resulted in translation by other means than aunque. However, most sentences involving BUT seem to be climactic. This is particularly true of the replacive and correlative uses, but the presence of parallelism and the tendency to move from general to the particular (i.e., from background to focused information) serve to bring the contrastive and concessive uses into line with those other functions. Since BUT can only join two units and, therefore, the structure is basically binary, the presence of a third coordinated unit means coordination at two different levels: $\{A+B\}$ BUT C; A BUT $\{B+C\}$. Nevertheless, a triad appears to have a special rhetorical quality that naturally implies a climax, even without explicit coordination, as in Caesar's famous statement: "I came, I saw, I
conquered". Our analysis showed that only one of 5 triads had BUT downgraded to aunque, which lends support the hypothesis of Quirk et al.. ${ }^{5}$

Coordination achieves that seemingly impossible task of giving three units equal status and yet making the third climactic (p. 1473).
When syntactic and lexical markers of information focus are absent and if there is no clear indication of a temporal or causal relationship between the coordinate units, the main information focus can only be identified by moving beyond the sentence for clues at a more global level. As seen in figures 2 and 3, the translator seems to have misread the authors' argument and has, therefore, often downgraded units through subordination when they should have constituted the main clause (and focus) in order to carry the argument forward more clearly. In those 9 instances when aunque was located in mid-sentence, i.e., in the place occupied by BUT in the SL text, we maintain that the authors' intention and the information structure would have been made clearer by attaching the subordinator to the initial clause.

The pathogenesis of equivalent frequency syndrome remains uncertain. It may be related to restricting the unit of translation to the sentence or below. ${ }^{1}$ The TL will probably have sufficient resources to allow many different lexical and syntactic realisations of the same propositional content. However, their communicative value will not be the same. If an appropriate choice based on equivalent frequency is made from the stock of resources, the alteration will result in the benign superficial form. It appears that some people have inherent protection against malignancy, which may derive from their intuition, aided by long and healthy experience of communicative and translation processes. If, however, the meaning is seen to be distorted, the malignant form has developed and affected deeper structural layers. In our patient, some or all of the following contributory factors may have been involved:
a) In Spanish, the anticlimactic use of pero may prove to be the norm, thus bringing it closer to subordinate use of aunque;
b) The argumentative presentation in the Results section (Fig. 2), which is normally characterised by objective exposition of data, is atypical;
c) The presentation of two techniques has misled the translator into emphasising the comparisons between them and their good qualities, when the authors' purpose was to show that both were clearly unsatisfactory.
d) The translator may have missed the significance of the few references to "postoperative colonoscopy" - in the title and in the conclusions to the main article and to the Abstract. They underline the message, which could be summarised as follows: despite the common use of the two techniques and despite the small number of patients with synchronous cancer, we must not be satisfied that the job has been completed with surgery; postoperative examination is, therefore, necessary to ensure a satisfactory result.

In our opinion, the SL text was well structured, well written and achieved its communicative goal because all levels of expression were in harmony. The same cannot be said for the TL text. This does not mean that we are proposing literal translation, or that adequacy should be the norm in the translation of pragmatic texts. Quite the opposite. Pragmatic texts should be made acceptable, and this is only possible if all text levels are appropriately matched. If this is not achieved, the communicative purpose may not be entirely lost but readability will be impaired and, in severe cases, the reader may well stop reading.

The prognosis of the malignant form is poor. If symptoms are noted in the early stages, a specialist should be consulted and the outcome may be favourable. Usually, however, the condition is not detected until extensive damage has occurred. Preventive measures seem to hold out more hope for the future. People should be trained not to examine the surface for what might be called "cosmetic surgery", but to learn to recognise how the deeper structures are expressed at the surface and how they interact in communication.

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## References

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Table 1
Distribution of BUT, ALTHOUGH, HOWEVER, and related structures in the SL text, and TL translations

| Type | $\mathbf{N}^{\circ}$ | Translation | $\mathbf{N}^{\circ}$ |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| But |  | pero | 2 |
|  |  | aunque | 10 |
|  |  | no obstante | 2 |
|  |  | sin embargo | 1 |
|  |  | con todo | 1 |
|  |  | en este sentido | 1 |
|  | [juxtaposition] | 2 |  |
| Although | 6 | aunque | 6 |
| However | 5 | no obstante | 4 |
|  | sin embargo | 1 |  |
| [Juxtaposition] | 1 | sin embargo | 1 |

Table 2
Uses of BUT [Based on Halliday ${ }^{4}$ and Quirk et al. ${ }^{5}$ ]

| Type | Example | Meaning | Spanish |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :---: |
| 1. Adversative | They are pretty, <br> but they are difficult to grow | on the other hand <br> [ X and yet Y$]$ | pero |
| 2. Concessive | I can't grow them, <br> but I keep trying | nevertheless <br> [if P then, unexpectedly, Q$]$ | pero |
| 3. Replacive | Don't drown them, <br> but give them just enough | instead <br> [not X but Y] | sino |
| 4. Conditional | I would grow them, <br> but they are too difficult | except that <br> [Q if not for P$]$ | pero |
| 5. Correlative | I not only grow them <br> but I sell them | and also <br> $[\mathrm{X}$ and also Y] | sino |
| 6. Appended <br> Comment | They all died <br> - but I did wam you | by the way <br> $[\mathrm{X}$ but let me add Y] | pero |

Figure 1
TL versions of But sentences with Pero (1A), Aunque (1B), No obstante (1C) and Juxtaposition plus En este sentido (1D)

| The proportion of patients with a synchronous adenoma who had endoscopic examination was twice that of DCBE, although half the colonoscopies were incomplete, but this difference does not reach statistical significance. | La proporción de enfermos con adenoma sincrónico y exploración endoscópica fue del doble que la de los sometidos a EODC pero, aunque la mitad de las colonoscopias fuera incompleta, esta diferencia no alcanzó significación estadística. | Effective bowel preparation is of paramount importance for accurate DCBE but the presence of a carcinoma anywhere in the large bowel may, in our opinion, inhibit the effect of preparation. | La preparación del colon es de la máxima importancia para la realización del EODC, aunque la presencia de un carcinoma en cualquier localización colónica puede inhibir el efecto de la preparación. |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Fig. 1A: Note the preservation of the coordinator (bold) in association with severe displacement of the subordinate clause (underlined), resulting in a minor alteration of the information structure. Both structures appear anticlimactic. |  | Fig. 1B: Detail of surface structure before (left) and after (right) treatment. The SL marker (underlined) of the main focus is absent in the TL text, where the main argument appears subordinated, resulting in a change from climactic to anticlimactic progression. |  |
| Double contrast barium enema (DCBE) is the commonest investigation used to examine the large bowel in the UK but it has failed to demonstrate synchronous tumours in some reported instances and, even in expert hands, does miss some small adenomas. | La técnica empleada con mayor frecuencia en el Reino Unido para explorar el colon es el enema opaco con doble contraste (EDOC); no obstante, en muchas ocasiones, dicha exploración fracasa cuando se trata de demostrar la existencia de tumores sincrónicos e incluso, efectuada por las manos más expertas, pasa por alto algunos adenomas de pequeño tamaño. | It has been suggested that such patients should have total colectomy and ileocolic anastomosis, but we agree with others who favour such radical treatment only in younger patients with multiple adenomas. | Se ha indicado que dichos pacientes deberían someterse a colectomía total más anastomosis ilcocólica; en este sentido, nosotros coincidimos con otros autores en que dicho tratamiento radical debe reservarse para los individuos más jóvenes que presenten adenomas múltiples. |
| Fig. 1C: Detail of a segme showing only minor alteration structure, with preservatio focus (italics). Distortion of (underlined) is evident. No indicating climactic progr | of the Introduction ons to the information the marker of main verb form and adverbial the triadic structure ion. | Fig. 1D: Note the obliteration of the connective tissue associated with the appearance of a viewpoint adjunct (bold), thus establishing an area of cohesion between the adjacent structures. The rare presence of the pronoun (underlined) restores contrastive emphasis. |  |

Figure 2
Sections from SL (top) and TL (bottom) texts analysed by the H\&M technique with addition of Halliday medium


Figure 3
Sections from SL (top) and TL (bottom) texts analysed by the H\&M technique

|  |  |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
| The first two elements of Sequence I are introductory and reduce the total of 80 down to the "proximal" subtotal of 30 . Elements $3,4,5$ form a triad with E3 providing background (30 complete) for the focused elements ( 5 poor +3 problems). Sequence II has a parallel structure, with E6 introducing the "distal" subtotal and the second triad: E7, E8, E9. Between E6 and E7, however, is the "tacit" incomplete group $(50-36=14)$. $E 7$ is background ( 36 complete) for the focused elements, one of which is given independent status, and linked not by and, but by in addition; however, we still have ( 13 poor +4 problems). Sequence III provides a summarising conclusion. E10 has both logical and content (underlined) themes. Note that the authors have reached the figure in E11, the main clause, by summing the numbers in the focused elements (18 poor +7 problems) and adding the incomplete group (14): total 39, which represents the unsatisfactory examinations. The E12 figure is reached by summing the numbers in the background elements and, significantly, is placed in a subordinate clause. They could as easily have presented a total for satisfactory examinations, but this would weaken their message. [ $\mathrm{H} \& \mathrm{M}$ ] |  |  |
|  |  | todos los enfermos fueron sometidos a exploracion completa del colon, aunque en 5, la visualización del colon distal al tumor fue de baja calidad, y 3 más en quienes la calidad técnica de la película era buena. presentaban enfermedad diverticular grave... |
|  |  | De los 50 enfermos con tumor distal, <br> 36 fueron sometidos a exploración completa; la calidad $\sin$ embargo fue pobre en 13 de ellos. Además, 4 de los enfermos de los que se obtuvo una exploración completa de calidad satisfactoria presentaron enfermedad diverticular grave. |
|  |  | aunque se obtuviera una exploración completa en 66. |
| Some minor superficial alterations are evident in E1 and E2. In the triad (E3, E4, E5), however, E3 is now the focused element;E4 and E5 are coordinate subordinate clauses and appear downgraded. In Sequence II, parallelism is lost. The three elements in the triad all have independent status. BUT is now replaced by sin embargo so that E9 can be at the same level as E8. In Sequence III, the SL introductory theme (underlined) has moved from E10 into E11, and the final conclusion is not so strongly supported because of the lack of parallelism and changed focus in the triads of Sequences I and II. Note the bizarre "pluperfect" verb form in E12. Disturbance of information flow and impaired communicative function are evident. [H\&M] |  |  |


[^0]:    a. The English original: J. J. T. Tate, J. Rawlinson, G. T. Royle, F. J. Brunton, I. Taylor (1988), "Preoperative or postoperative colonic examination for synchronous lesions in colorectal cancer". $\mathrm{Br} . \mathrm{J}$. Surg, 75, pp. 1016-1018. The Spanish version: "Exploración pre o posoperatoria del colon para la detección de lesiones sincrónicas en el cáncer colorrectal". Br. J. Surg. (Ed. esp), Vol. 1, N ${ }^{\circ} 1$, Enero 1989, pp. 83-86.

[^1]:    b. Hatim and Mason analyse sections of texts into sequences with macrotextual rhetorical functions. These sequences are subdivided into elements which can be characterised by rhetorical functions at a lower local level. Halliday analyses clause structure as a message, in which the sender organises the clause according to what the receiver is assumed already to know: i.e., progression from given, presupposed or known in the communicative situation to new. He also analyses the clause in terms of information structure, in which the sender organises the clause according to what he/she wants to say: i.e., progression from theme to rheme. Usually, the theme will be chosen from given information and the new will fall within the rheme. Both systems play an important role in coherence during the process of inserting clause elements into sequences at the higher discourse level.

