The Tree-Banks as a Method for Translation?

Report of a Workshop conducted in Tehran, October 2017

A) Main Question of the Workshop:

Was information provided by the tree-banks enough for the beginners to reach an acceptable translation of a sample text?

There was a paragraph of Plato (Sym.: 210e-211a) as a sample with two tree-banks showing syntactical relations in the text, Jiyoung's Greek tree-banks and Brian's Greek tree-banks.

The paragraph from Jiyoung's tree-banks

(ἔφη) ὃς γὰρ ἂν μέχρι ἐνταῦθα πρὸς τὰ ἐρωτικὰ παιδαγωγηθῇ , θεώμενος ἐφεξῆς τε καὶ ὀρθῶς τὰ καλά , πρὸς τέλος ἤδη ἰὼν τῶν ἐρωτικῶν ἐξαίφνης κατόψεταί τι θαυμαστὸν τὴν φύσιν καλόν , τοῦτο (εστιν) ἐκεῖνο , ὦ Σώκρατες , οὗ δὴ ἕνεκεν καὶ οἱ ἔμπροσθεν πάντες πόνοι ἦσαν , πρῶτον μὲν ἀεὶ ὂν καὶ οὔ -τε γιγνόμενον οὔ -τε ἀπολλύμενον , οὔ -τε αὐξανόμενον οὔ -τε φθίνον , ἔπειτα οὐ τῇ μὲν καλόν (ὄν) , τῇ δ᾽ αἰσχρόν , οὐ -δὲ τοτὲ μέν (ὄν) , τοτὲ δὲ οὔ , οὐ -δὲ πρὸς μὲν τὸ καλόν (ὄν) , πρὸς δὲ τὸ αἰσχρόν , οὐδ᾽ ἔνθα μὲν καλόν (ὄν) , ἔνθα δὲ αἰσχρόν , ὡς τισὶ μὲν ὂν καλόν , τισὶ δὲ (ὄν) αἰσχρόν :

B)   First Session- 10/24/2017:

There was a pretest at the first session, before introducing the tree-bank designed by Jiyoung. In the pretest, the beginner's confidence about the probable meanings of a word in the sample text (4 scores), her/his ability to compose sentences with the words, which she/he knew with certainty the meaning of (5 scores), the words she/he knew only by conjecture (3 scores), the words she/he had seen but now forgot their meanings (2 scores), and the words she/he did not know (1 score) were assessed or marked. Then, the first tree-bank designed by Jiyoung was introduced generally. And the roles of the words and their syntactical relations were explained, based on the tree-bank and without any reference to their meanings in New Persian.

C)   Second Session- 10/28/2017:
At the second session, the following sentence composed by the main verb of the text was selected for translation:
"κατόψεταί τι θαυμαστὸν τὴν φύσιν καλόν, ..."
Here, the verb "κατόψεται" is the main verb of the text and also, it selected by Jiyoung as a PRED. from ROOT.
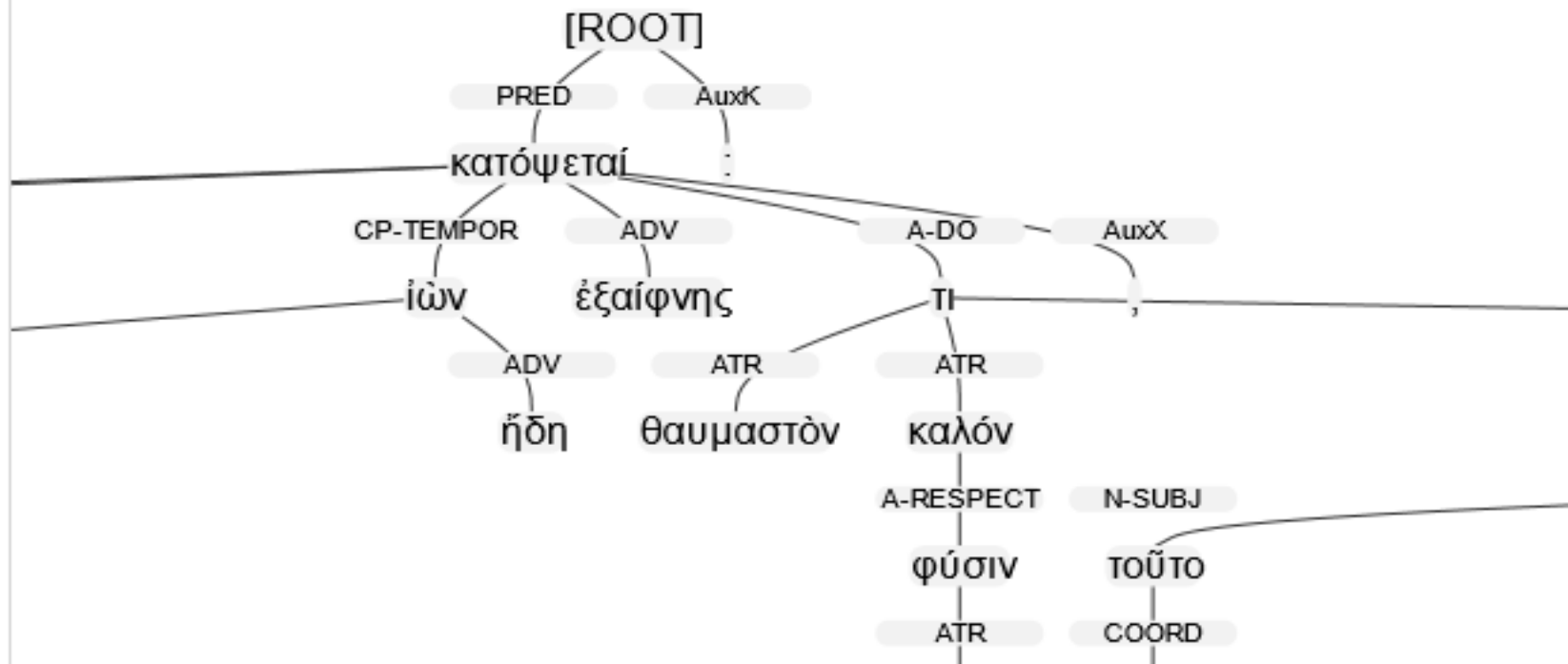
Based on the results of the pretest, four students of five did not know the verb and one student had seen it but now forgot its meaning.

The pretest results of the sentence are as the followings:

Student 1 (Ms Mahdieh Roohi): κατόψεταί (2) τι (3) θαυμαστὸν (2) τὴν (1) φύσιν (1) καλόν (4).

Student 2 (Ms Fatemeh Haghiri Peykani): κατόψεταί (1) τι (3) θαυμαστὸν (2) τὴν (4) φύσιν (1) καλόν (4).

Student 3 (Ms Faeze Khoshtinat): κατόψεταί (1) τι (1) θαυμαστὸν (1) τὴν (1) φύσιν (1) καλόν (2).

Student 4 (Mr Hasan Salehi): κατόψεταί (1) τι (2) θαυμαστὸν (3) τὴν (3) φύσιν (4) καλόν (5).

Student 5 (Mr Mohammad Enayati Raad): κατόψεταί (1) τι (1) θαυμαστὸν (1) τὴν (1) φύσιν (1) καλόν (2).

The tree-bank of the sentence having been explained by the teacher of workshop, the students composed translations in New Persian based on the meanings of the words in English. Regarding the teacher's guide about the difference between two accusative substantives in the sentence, i. e. "τι" and "φύσιν", as well as the explanation of the roles of the words in the tree-banks, the students composed acceptable translations of the sentence, showing the difference in the syntactical roles of the words.

These Persian translations were some phrases similar to the following English phrases:

Student 1: "He will perceive (see) a wonderful thing which is essentially fair".
Student 2: "He will perceive something, a wonderful and essentially (naturally) fair thing".
Student 4: "He will perceive a wonderful thing, the natural beauty".
Student 5: "He will perceive a wonderful thing with natural beauty".
(A translation composed by "Student 3" was similar.)

Such phrases might be compared with a translation composed by Benjamin Jowett:
"He … will … perceive a nature of wondrous beauty".
(Published in "Great Books of the Western World", Vol. 7.)

D) Third Session- 10/31/2017:
At the third session, the students were asked to compare two different tree-banks, one designed by Jiyoung and the other designed by Brian, of the following sentence, in order that the teacher might find out whether they considered the information provided sufficient for translation.

"πρῶτον μὲν ἀεὶ ὄν καὶ οὔτε γιγνόμενον οὔτε ἀπολλύμενον, οὔτε αὐξανόμενον οὔτε φθίνον, …"

The pretest results of the sentence are as the followings:

Student 1: πρῶτον (2) μὲν (4) ἀεὶ (2) ὄν (4) καὶ (4) οὔτε (3) γιγνόμενον (4) οὔτε (3) ἀπολλύμενον (2), οὔτε (3) αὐξανόμενον (1) οὔτε (3) φθίνον (2).

Student 2: πρῶτον (1) μὲν (4) ἀεὶ (1) ὄν (1) καὶ (4) οὔτε (2) γιγνόμενον (4) οὔτε (2) ἀπολλύμενον (2), οὔτε (2) αὐξανόμενον (2) οὔτε (2) φθίνον (1).

Student 3: πρῶτον (2) μὲν (1) ἀεὶ (1) ὄν (1) καὶ (1) οὔτε (2) γιγνόμενον (1) οὔτε (2) ἀπολλύμενον (1), οὔτε (2) αὐξανόμενον (1) οὔτε (1) φθίνον (1).

Student 4: πρῶτον (3) μὲν (4) ἀεὶ (5) ὄν (5) καὶ (5) οὔτε (1) γιγνόμενον (3) οὔτε (1) ἀπολλύμενον (3), οὔτε (1) αὐξανόμενον (1) οὔτε (1) φθίνον (1).

Student 5: πρῶτον (1) μὲν (1) ἀεὶ (1) ὄν (3) καὶ (2) οὔτε (2) γιγνόμενον (1) οὔτε (2) ἀπολλύμενον (1), οὔτε (2) αὐξανόμενον (1) οὔτε (2) φθίνον (1).

Based upon the first tree-banks by Jiyoung, the students, aided by the teacher, managed to arrive at similar, though not exactly the same, translations in New Persian, which were acceptable.
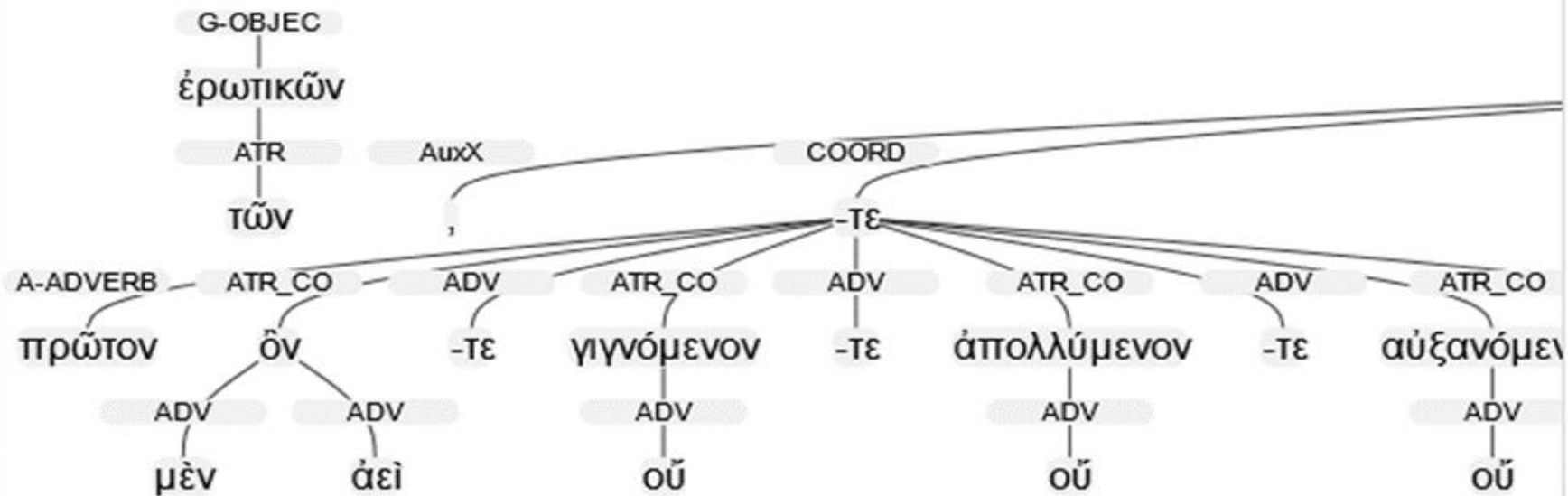
These Persian translations were similar to the following English phrases:

Student 1: "At first, always it is, neither becomes, nor perishes, neither grows, nor decays".

Student 2: "Always-Being, neither becomes, nor perishes, and neither grows, nor decays".

Student 3 (regarding "μέν" as negative): "Always, the first Non-Being neither becomes a reality, nor expands, neither perishes, nor decays".

Student 4: "At first, Being always is, neither it becomes, nor it perishes, neither it grows, nor it decays".

Student 5: "At first, everlasting Being/ eternal Being μέν (?) and neither changes, nor perishes, neither grows/ neither increases, nor decays".

(B. Jowett's translation of the phrase: "A nature which in the first place is everlasting, not growing and decaying, or waxing and waning".)

The second tree-banks by Brian was, however, assessed as puzzling by the students compared to the first one. And it seemed that the second tree-banks could not help the students to comprehend the roles of words in syntax.
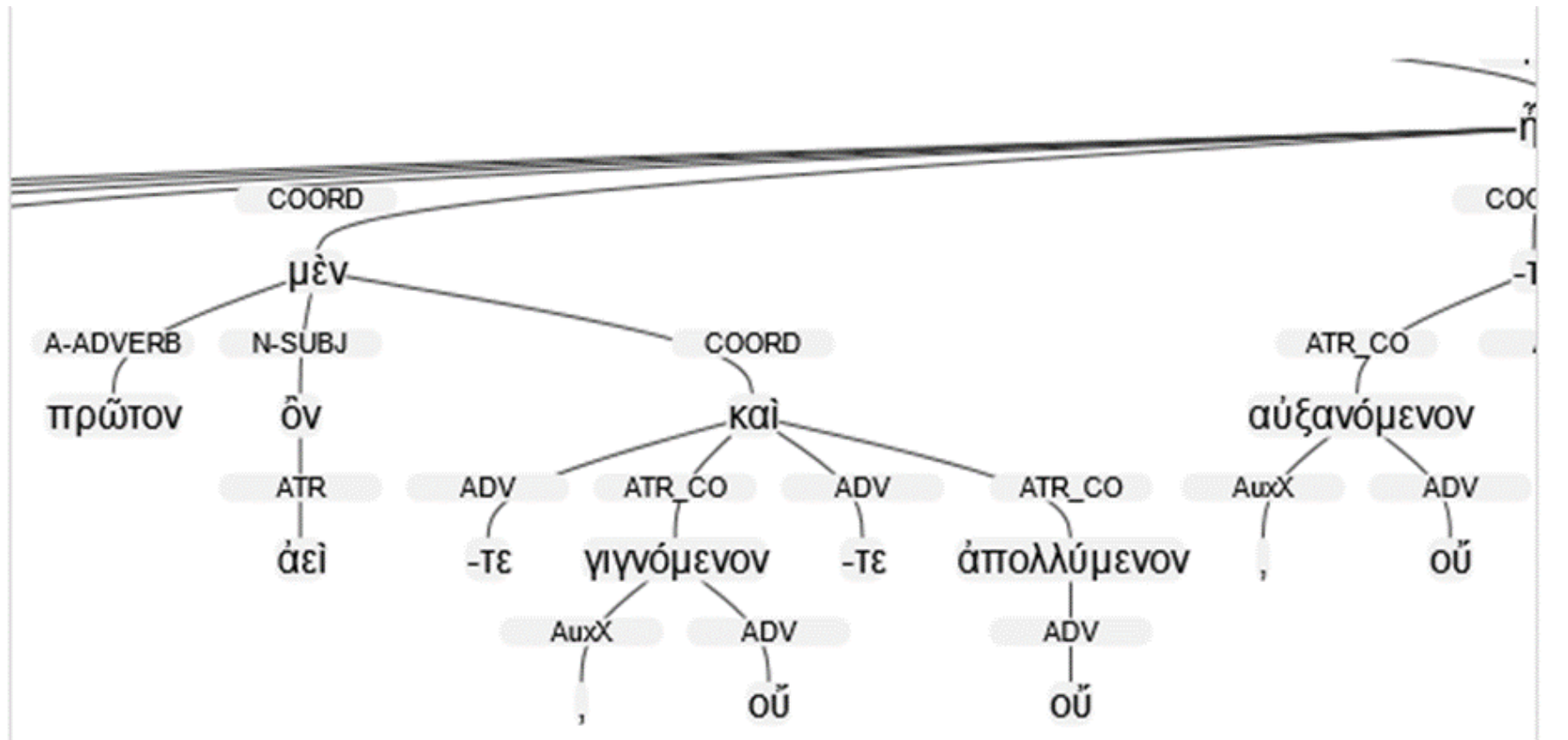
The Persian translations composed by the students based on Brian's tree-banks were similar to the following English phrases:

Student 1: "Always, it is the first Being, and that it neither becomes, nor perishes, neither grows, nor decays".

Student 2: "It always is- that it neither becomes, nor perishes, neither grows, nor decays".

Student 3: "At first, the everlasting Being neither becomes, nor perishes, neither decays, nor grows".

Student 4: "At first, that which is, is always, but it neither becomes, nor perishes, neither grows, nor decays".

("Student 5" did not compose any translation based on Brian's tree-banks.)

Comparing the tree-banks, then, some of the students composed different translations of the sentence based on their different understandings of the roles of the words presented differently in them.

For example, based on the first tree-banks, "student 2" translated "ἀεὶ ὄν" as a substantive (something like "Always-Being" in English), while, based on the second tree-banks, she translated it as a complete sentence (something like English "It always is."). To compare, "student 1" translated the same words as a complete sentence with a verb referring to "being" (something like "Always, it is.") based on the first tree-banks, while, based on the second one, she translated them also as a complete sentence but with a copula and a subject referring to "Being" (something like "Always, it is Being"). "Student 3" translated them as "Always, the Non-Being" using the first, and as "The everlasting Being" using the second. And based on the first tree-banks, "student 4" translated them as "Being always is", while based on the second one he translated them as "That which is, is always".

E) An Answer to the Main Question of the Workshop, and the Students' Assessments:

It seems that the tree-banks can provide enough information for the beginners to arrive at New Persian translations of the aforementioned sentences.

However, the tree-banks cannot be employed solely by the beginners to compose translations, since it is necessary for them to be aided by a teacher to understand the roles of the words in their syntactical relations in the sentence. Then, it is better to employ such diagrams alongside teaching grammars.

If such diagrams are employed as additional course-plan by teachers, the expected results may be reached more quickly. The teacher, being aided by such a diagram, can conduct the sessions better than a traditional plan in which the course is planned based on grammatical explanations and without employing such a diagram.

Moreover, visible and different comprehensible analyses of one text, shown in different tree-banks, was one of the benefits of such a diagram in terms of translation. Nevertheless, the Jiyoung's tree-banks, here, seems to be more comprehensible for the students compared to the tree-banks designed by Brian, and the students comprehend the roles of words, such as adjectives and objects, through the former better than the latter.

Alongside the abovementioned items, if in such a beginners' course, based on the students' viewpoints, a simpler diagram had been employed, it would be better concerning translation, noticing that for the beginners of Greek language, it may be better to pass some elementary courses before using the diagrams. However, if there is a true comprehension of the tree-banks of a text, the student can reach a better comprehension of the text.