

Finally, it needs to be stressed that momentary attention to units of fairly fixed sizes during translating and during comparison of source and target texts does not preclude the translator or analyst from considering the text as a whole. The translator will be influenced by his or her familiarity with the text as a whole, as well as with languages and cultures, genre conventions, and perhaps other works by the source-text writer, in making decisions about equivalence within the units s/he is translating, even though, in the actual translating process, these units are considered one at a time. Selective attention does not mean attention to units in isolation from the rest of the linguistic, cultural, or textual world in which the units are situated.

See also:

SHIFTS OF TRANSLATION.

Further reading

Catford 1965; Isham and Lane 1993; Lörcher 1991a, 1993; Toury 1986.

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Universals of translation

Universals of translation are linguistic features which typically occur in translated rather than original texts and are thought to be independent of the influence of the specific language pairs involved in the process of translation (Baker 1993: 243).

A number of features considered common to all types of translated texts have been identified, mainly on the basis of contrastive analyses of translations and their source texts. These features concern simplification, avoidance of repetitions present in the source text, EXPLICITATION, normalization, discourse transfer, and distinctive distribution of lexical items.

Simplification and avoidance of repetitions present in the source text

Three types of simplification have been identified in translated text: lexical, syntactic and stylistic.

① Blum-Kulka and Levenston define lexical simplification as 'the process and/or result of making do with *less* words' (1983: 119). Drawing on evidence from studies of translations from Hebrew into English and investigations of other types of language mediation involving these languages (Dagut 1971; Rabin 1958; Wonderly 1968), they suggest that lexical simplification operates according to six principles or strategies which derive from the individual's semantic competence in his/her mother tongue. These principles are: use of superordinate terms when there are no equivalent hyponyms in the target language, approximation of the concepts expressed in the source language text, use of 'common-level' or 'familiar' synonyms, transfer of all the functions of a source-language word to its target-language equivalent, use of circumlocutions instead of conceptually matching high-level words or expressions (especially with theological, culture-specific or technical terms), and use of paraphrase where cultural gaps exist between the source and the target languages.

Other scholars, too, have observed such strategies in operation. Baker (1992), in discussing the different strategies used by professional translators for dealing with non-equivalence at word level, notes the use of superordinates when there are no corresponding hyponyms in the target language. In her survey of 50 English translations of Dutch novels, Vanderauwera (1985: 102-3) similarly mentions the use of modern, colloquial, simple and confidential synonyms *vis-à-vis* old, formal, affected and high-level words in the source texts. Toury provides an example of the type of transfer noted by Blum-Kulka and Levenston when he discusses the case of the word *na'ara* which in Hebrew refers mainly to a teenager, but which, in Hebrew translations from English, has acquired some of the functions of the word *girl* (Toury 1995: 209-10).

② With regard to syntactic simplification, Vanderauwera (1985) finds several instances where complex syntax is simplified by replacing non-finite clauses with finite ones and by suppressing suspended periods. She also provides substantial evidence for various forms of stylistic simplification, the most common

being the tendency to break up long sequences and sentences, replacing elaborate phraseology with shorter collocations, reducing or omitting repetitions and redundant information, shortening overlong circumlocutions and leaving out modifying phrases and words.

The translational procedures of reducing and omitting the repetitions which occur in the source text have been recorded by various scholars (e.g. Blum-Kulka and Levenston 1986) and can be regarded as an aspect of stylistic simplification. Shlesinger (1991), in the context of courtroom interpreting, and Toury (1991a), in the area of literary translation, also find several examples where the repetitions present in the source text are omitted in the target text. Toury (1991a: 188) claims that the tendency to avoid repetitions which occur in the source text is 'one of the most persistent, unbending norms in translation in all languages studied so far'.

Explicitation

In her study of professional and non-professional translations from English into French and vice versa, Blum-Kulka (1986) notes that shifts occur in the types of cohesion markers used in the target texts and records instances where the translator expands the target text by inserting additional words. She notes that both phenomena have the effect of raising the target text's level of explicitness compared to the corresponding source text. Blum-Kulka suggests that these translational features may not be language-pair specific but may rather result from the process of interpretation of the source text. On the basis of her own study and research into the interlanguage of learners of English (Berman 1978; Stemmer 1981) Blum-Kulka (1986: 19; 21) puts forward 'the explicitation hypothesis', which posits that the rise in the level of explicitness observed in translated texts and in the written work of second language learners may be a universal strategy inherent in any process of language mediation.

Toury claims that there is an obvious correlation between explicitness and readability (1995: 227) and proposes to exploit this relationship in experimental studies with a view to assessing the varying extent to which the strategy of explicitation may be applied either

in different processes of language mediation or in the same type of mediated linguistic behaviour performed under different conditions.

Consistently with Blum-Kulka's observations, Vanderauwera (1985) points to numerous instances where the translator applies explicitation techniques. The main procedures she records are the use of interjections to express more clearly the progression of the characters' thoughts or to accentuate a given interpretation, expansion of condensed passages, addition of modifiers, qualifiers and conjunctions to achieve greater transparency, addition of extra information, insertion of explanations, repetition of previously mentioned details for the purpose of clarity, precise renderings of implicit or vague data, the provision of more accurate descriptions, the explicit naming of geographical locations and the disambiguation of pronouns with precise forms of identification. Baker (1992) also reports several examples where the translator inserts additional background information in the target text in order to fill in a cultural gap.

Shifts in cohesion which take the form of replacing substitution and ellipsis with either repetition or the use of a synonym have been found in simultaneous interpreting, both from Hebrew into English (Shlesinger 1989b: 171-2) and from English into Hebrew (Shlesinger 1995: 201). According to Shlesinger, these findings suggest that 'the medium - simultaneous interpreting - may exert a stronger effect than the stylistic preferences typical of the languages concerned' and that the explicitation hypothesis may apply to oral as well as written translations, so that 'regardless of the languages concerned, the interpreter tends to render implicit forms more explicitly' (Shlesinger 1995: 210).

Normalization

In her corpus of novels translated into English from Dutch, Vanderauwera (1985) finds extensive evidence of shifts in punctuation, lexical choice, style, sentence structure and textual organization, all of which she considers as manifestations of a general 'tendency towards textual conventionality', apparently approved of by the target audience (1985: 93).

*Corrected
to original*

Some of the adjustments found at word level include adaptations of Dutch names and culture-specific references, and the minimization of the transfer of foreign language expressions found in the source text. Unusual punctuation is standardized by restoring missing quotation marks or by replacing commas with semi-colons and full-stops to separate independent clauses. Sentences left unfinished in the source text are completed, and clumsy or idiosyncratic sentence structures are replaced by simpler syntax. The present tense and the historic present are substituted with the past tense, which is more frequently used in written English narrative. Sentences, paragraphs, narrative sequences and chapters are ordered more logically. The representation of spoken language in the source text is adjusted towards the norms of written prose; on the other hand, formal dialogues are rendered as intimate and colloquial conversations. Old-fashioned expressions are replaced by modern ones and experimental narrative is rewritten in a more familiar mode. Finally, untypical and affected imagery, which is realized by creative collocations, is translated with more normal expressions.

According to Vanderauwera, all these manipulations have the effect of creating a text which is more readable, more idiomatic, more familiar and more coherently organized than the original. She observes that these adjustments occur not only in those translations which are explicitly target-oriented, but also in those whose declared aim is to make Dutch literature known to foreign cultures and which might therefore be expected to adhere more closely to the source text. Vanderauwera explains textual conventionality in terms of the translator's assumptions about the stylistic norms that operate in the target literary system with regard to translated prose fiction in general, and to translations of lesser-known literatures in particular.

Shlesinger (1991), who analysed oral translations from Hebrew into English by courtroom interpreters, also found evidence of various forms of normalization, such as a tendency to complete unfinished sentences, replace ungrammatical source utterances with grammatical renderings, and delete false starts and self-corrections.

Finally, on the basis of his extensive studies of literary translations produced in different cultures, Toury posits what he calls a law of growing standardization, which he believes governs translational behaviour. The most general formulation of the law is that 'in translation, source-text textemes tend to be converted into target-language (or target-culture) repertoremes' (Toury 1995: 267-8). A repertoreme is a sign which belongs to an institutionalized repertoire, that is, a group of items which are codifications of phenomena that have semiotic value for a given community. A repertoreme becomes a texteme when, as a result of being used in a particular text, it assumes specific functions which derive from the special relationships it acquires within that text.

According to the law of growing standardization, the special textual relations created in the source text are often replaced by conventional relations in the target text, and sometimes they are ignored altogether. In the process of translation, Toury argues, the dissolution of the original set of textual relations is inevitable and can never be fully recreated. Moreover, Toury suggests that factors such as age, extent of bilingualism, the knowledge and experience of the translator, as well as the status of translation within the target culture may influence the operation of the law. He proposes to incorporate these elements as conditions in a more elaborate formulation of the same law; for example, the condition regarding the position of translation in the target system may be expressed as follows: 'the more peripheral [the status of the translation in a particular culture], the more translation will accommodate itself to established models and repertoires' (Toury 1995: 271). The numerous instances of normalization found by Vanderauwera (1985) in the English translations of Dutch literary works exemplify and substantiate the operation of this rule.

Discourse transfer and the law of interference

Toury (1986a; 1995) identifies a further universal of translation: translators, he suggests, tend to produce a translated utterance not by retrieving the target language via their own

linguistic knowledge, but directly from the source utterance itself. The universality of discourse transfer is expressed through another translational law, the law of interference: 'in translation, phenomena pertaining to the make-up of the source text tend to be transferred to the target text' (Toury 1995: 275).

According to Toury, discourse transfer, both negative and positive, is inherent in the mental processes involved in translation. From a psycholinguistic perspective, the operation of this law depends on the particular manner in which the source text is processed, so that 'the more the make-up of a text is taken as a factor in the formulation of its translation, the more the target text can be expected to show traces of interference' (Toury 1995: 276). The extent to which interference is actually realized depends also on the professional experience of the translator and on the sociocultural conditions in which a translation is produced and consumed. These two factors are built into the law of interference as conditions, suggesting that 'even when taking the source text as a crucial factor in the formulation of its translation, accomplished translators would be less affected by its actual make-up' (ibid.: 277), and 'tolerance of interference – and hence the endurance of its manifestations – tend to increase when translation is carried out from a major or highly prestigious language/culture, especially if the target language/culture is

'minor', or 'weak' in any other sense' (ibid.: 278).

Distinctive distribution of target-language items

Shama'a (1978: 168–71) found that in English translations from Arabic, the frequency of the words *say* and *day* can be more than twice as high as their frequency in original English texts and considerably lower than the occurrence of their equivalents in the Arabic source texts.

Baker (1993: 245) suggests that the unusual distribution patterns of certain lexical items in translated texts, compared to both their source texts and original texts in the target language, may be the result of the process of language mediation *per se*; such unusual distribution indicates that translation represents a specific variety of linguistic behaviour which merits attention in its own right.

See also:

CORPORA IN TRANSLATION STUDIES; EXPLICITATION; NORMS.

Further reading

Baker 1993, 1995; Blum-Kulka 1986; Blum-Kulka and Levenston 1983; Shlesinger 1991, 1995; Toury 1986a, 1995; Vanderauwera 1985.

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