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TRANSLATION UNIVERSALS

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1. Introduction

The English term 'universals of translational behaviour' first appeared in the literature on translation studies in Gideon Toury's monograph *In Search of a Theory of Translation* (1980: 60), a collection of papers written over a period of five years (1975–80). These essays represented the various stages of Toury's search for a theory whose goal was to account for translational phenomena in a systematic way and within a unified framework that 'focuses on *existing* translations rather than on hypothetical ones, on actual *products* rather than on the process of translation on the one hand, and an *a priori* "translatability" on the other' (Toury 1980: 7, original emphasis). Over the same period of time, Toury also used the Hebrew equivalent of 'universals' in his doctoral thesis (Toury 1976, 1977), which was written in 1976 and was published a year later in a slightly revised version (Toury 2004: 29). The kind of conceptual innovation introduced by the new term in those days is an example of what Andrew Chesterman (2019: 18–19) calls 'rebranding'. Rebranding concepts are cases where a new term is given to an existing concept, thus changing its connotations, associations, and attitudes. The concept of translation universals can be seen as the rebranding of the basic notion of a (general) tendency. One instance of a universal of translational behaviour is explicitation. This is 'an almost general tendency – irrespective of the translator's identity, language, genre, period, and the like – to explicitate in the translation information that is only implicit in the original text' (Toury 1980: 60). In line with this general definition, Shoshana Blum-Kulka posited the so-called 'explicitation hypothesis' on the basis of her investigation of shifts of cohesion and coherence in translation:

> The process of translation, particularly if successful, necessitates a complex text and discourse processing. The process of interpretation performed by the translator on the source text might lead to a TL text, which is more redundant than SL text. The redundancy can be expressed by a rise in the level of cohesive explicitness in the TL text. This argument may be stated as 'the explicitation hypothesis', which postulates an observed cohesive explicitness from SL to TL texts regardless of the increase traceable

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> to differences between the two linguistic and textual systems involved. It follows that explicitation is viewed here as inherent in the process of translation.
>
> *(Blum-Kulka 1986: 19)*

Toury considers the universals of translational behaviour, like explicitation, to be possible factors that, in addition to translational norms, cause shifts from the adequate translation.

By adequacy Toury intends 'maximal representation of a preexisting text composed in another language' (Toury 1980: 60, 75).

In a paper entitled "Translation Universals – Perspectives and Explorations", Aryeh Newman (1987) draws on the notion of language universals posited by Joseph Harold Greenberg (1966) and Toury's notion of universals of translational behavior and defines translation universals as 'rules or facts true of the translation process as a whole regardless of the languages involved' (Newman 1987: 69). These norms or rules, he specifies, are derived 'from the observation and experience of the maximum number of authentic instances or performances of the given phenomenon' (Newman 1987: 69, 71). The quest for universals of translation, Newman contends, is motivated as much by pedagogic concerns – that is, improving the translator's art and teaching it – as by academic pursuits – that is, predicting and describing a human activity. According to Newman, interference or negative transfer is a translation universal (1987: 71, 75). It derives from the situational, cultural, and linguistic differences inherent in the translation activity. Another posited universal is the antidote to interference or the best techniques and norms that translators acquire through experience to achieve 'the most satisfying correspondence between the two languages involved' (1987: 75). Another universal is that the same source text will produce a variety of synchronic and diachronic translations, as exemplified by the Bible (1987: 76). Also, the translator will add textual material in order to compensate for any loss of information due to linguistic differences and the cultural distance between the source and the target language. Captions and film titles offer good examples of this hypothesized universal feature (1987: 77). Moreover, Newman identifies three kinds of lexical shifts that may qualify as universals of translational behaviour, namely 'transliterate (a kind of literal borrowing where no better alternative seems available or where such a choice is preferable for prestige reasons), modify, or invent' (1987: 78). Finally, Newman points out that beside Toury's posited universal of explicitation (Toury 1980: 60), there are many cases where the target text is less explicit than the source text. The choice between explicitness and implicitness, he argues, 'must be qualified by a host of factors, some low-level syntactic, others high-level pragmatic' (Newman 1987: 79). Newman's survey reveals his view that universals are conceptual tools for exploring and improving the art of translation, hence the search for universals is envisioned as a valuable endeavour from a descriptive and a prescriptive stance.

In a paper entitled "Corpus Linguistics and Translation Studies: Implications and Applications", Mona Baker (1993) draws on the notion of universals and the concept of 'third code' elaborated by William Frawley. Frawley (1984: 169) posits that, since the act of translation involves bilateral consideration and accommodation of at least two codes, translation itself 'emerges as a code in its own right, setting its own standards and structural presuppositions and entailments, though they are necessarily derivative' of the codes involved. Baker (1993: 245) argues that a translated text is the 'result of the confrontation of the source and target codes' and defines universals as a superordinate category that comprises 'features which typically occur in translated text rather than original utterances and which are not the result of interference from specific linguistic systems' (1993: 243). Moreover, Baker

introduces an additional notion in the formulation of the idea of universality, the notion that a universal can be examined through the analysis of texts translated into a given language vis-à-vis original texts in the same language. The perspective she adopts is therefore product- and target-oriented, and the methodology she considers best suited to capture the distinctive patterning of translational language is corpus-based. More specifically, Baker (1995: 233–4) proposes to investigate the universals of translation with monolingual comparable corpora. These are two computerized collections of texts in the same language: one corpus includes original texts, while the other consists of translations in that language from one or more source languages. The two corpora are of comparable length and cover a similar subject-specific domain, variety of language, and time span. Based on empirical research involving the analysis of target texts vis-à-vis source texts, Baker suggests six possible universals: (a) explicitation in the form of shifts of cohesion, insertion of additional information in the target language text and at the syntactic level in the form of higher redundancy; (b) disambiguation and simplification; (c) textual conventionality in written and oral translations; (d) avoidance of repetitions present in the source text; (e) a tendency to over-represent features of the target language; (f) different frequencies of occurrence of the same or equivalent lexical items in translated vis-à-vis source texts and original texts in the target language (Baker 1993). In a third article, Baker discusses the potential of a corpus-based methodology for investigating 'the distinctive nature of translation as a communicative event, shaped by its own goals, pressures and context of production' (Baker 1996: 175). Baker also argues that the specificity of translational text production can be investigated fruitfully providing at least two conditions are met. The first is the elaboration of explicit criteria and procedures for the selection, acquisition, and annotation of the texts to be included in the corpus. The second is the precise definition of the linguistic features that are considered concrete manifestations of translation universals in order to render these constructs operational and verifiable. In sum, in these three papers, Baker elaborates the defining characteristics of the universals of translation. She justifies them in terms of the specific nature of translation, viewed as a language activity that is qualitatively different from original text production, and then suggests investigating translation universals with the analytical tools and techniques of corpus linguistics, using comparable corpora.

Not long after the publication of his monograph (Toury 1980), as he himself recalls, Toury refrained from using the word 'universals' even when other scholars such as Newman started to use the term. The notion he favoured from the early 1980s onwards was that of 'laws'. The reason for such preference

> 'is not merely because, unlike 'universals', this notion has the possibility of *exception* built into it . . . but mainly because it should always be possible to explain away [seeming] exception to a law with the help of *another* law, operating on *another* level.
> *(2008: 29, original emphasis)*

During an interview conducted by Daniel Simeoni at York University, Toronto, on 16 and 18 September 2003, Toury (2008: 409) explained the meaning of his posited laws of translational behavior. These were 'different from laws made by a government or municipality, or natural laws'. They were probabilistic, conditioned laws. Therefore,

> [i]n real life the question can be asked to what extent this law is followed in actual practice. So you can ask then – keeping future behaviour in mind – "What is the

> probability of such a law being actually followed?" And the answer would be, "It depends on the circumstances." And the next question would be, "Can you list different possible circumstances?"
>
> *(Toury 2008: 409)*

Based on his extensive studies of literary translations produced in different cultures, Toury (1995/2012: 303–15) formulated two exemplary laws of translational behaviour: the law of growing standardization and the law of interference. One of the most general formulations of the law of growing standardization is: 'in translation, textual relations obtaining in the original are often modified, sometimes to the point of being totally ignored, in favour of [more] habitual options offered by a target repertoire' (1995/2012: 304). In the process of translation, Toury argues, the dissolution of the original set of textual relations is inevitable and can never be fully recreated. Factors such as age, extent of bilingualism, the knowledge and the experience of the translator, cognitive factors, and the status of translation within the target culture may influence the operation of the law. Toury proposes to incorporate these elements as conditions of the general probabilistic law. For example, the position of translation in the target system may be accommodated 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' (1995/2012: 307). In its most general and unconditioned form, the law of interference reads: 'in translation, phenomena pertaining to the make-up of the source text tend to be transferred to the target text' (1995/2012: 310). Toury maintains that translators tend to produce a translated utterance not by retrieving the target language via their own linguistic knowledge, but directly from the source utterance itself. Interference gives rise to either negative or positive discourse transfer, and both are believed to be inherent in the mental processes involved in translation. Negative discourse transfer refers to 'deviations from normal, codified practices of the target system'. Positive discourse transfer refers to 'an increase in the frequency of features which do exist in the target system and can be used anyway' (1995/2012: 311). From a psycholinguistic perspective, the operation of the 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' (1995/2012: 312). The extent to which interference is realized depends also on the professional experience of the translator and on the sociocultural conditions in which a translation is produced and consumed. Experienced translators tend to be less affected by the make-up of the source text, and tolerance towards interference 'tends 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 some other sense' (1995/2012: 314). The prestige value assigned to different text types in the target language also has an impact on the operation of the law. Technical translation, for example, may display a lower degree of interference compared with literary translation (1995/2012: 314). Also, interference may be adopted as a deliberate strategy to enrich the target language/culture as an integral part of language and cultural planning (1995/2012: 315). To sum up, the value of relational and conditioned probabilistic laws of translational behaviour lies in their '*explanatory power*' rather than in their '*existence* – "in the world", so to speak', and the rebranded concept of universal as law is believed to be 'one of the most powerful tools we have had so far for going beyond the individual and the norm-governed' (Toury 2004: 29, original emphasis). Against this background, the rest of the chapter will first examine some of the main

theoretical and methodological issues arising from empirical research undertaken on translation universals from the second half of the 1990s till the first decade of the twenty-first century. Next, it will identify the main trends emerging from current research on translation universals. Finally, it will draw some conclusions and point to future directions.

2. Critical issues and topics

As envisioned by Baker, the introduction of corpus-based methodology in translation studies has acted as a stimulus to empirical research into universals thanks to the refinement and explicit definition of different hypothesized patterns of translational behaviour together with the increasing availability of monolingual and bi-multilingual comparable corpora as well as bi-multilingual parallel corpora. The first doctoral thesis that investigated the universal of simplification with an English comparable corpus of newspaper and narrative texts, comprising translations from a variety of Romance languages, was completed three years after the publication of Baker's programmatic paper, "The English Comparable Corpus (ECC): A Resource and a Methodology for the Empirical Study of Translation" (Laviosa-Braithwaite 1996). The starting point of this study is the interpretive hypothesis that lexical simplification can be viewed as the 'process and/or result of making do with *less* [sic] words' (Blum-Kulka and Levenston 1983: 119, original emphasis). The general testable descriptive hypothesis Sara Laviosa-Braithwaite puts forward in her thesis states that, independently of source language and text type, translators working into English as their mother tongue tend to restrict the range of vocabulary available to them and use a lower proportion of content words over grammatical words. Based on descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, the study shows three patterns of lexical use in both newspaper and narrative texts, which indicate that the range of lexical variety is narrower in translational English compared with non-translational English. Translated texts display a lower lexical density, a higher proportion of high-frequency words over low-frequency words, and a higher repetition rate of high-frequency words. These patterns are confirmed by a comparable study of translational Chinese (Xiao and Yue 2009; Xiao, He, and Yue 2010). In simultaneous interpreting, however, the evidence supporting these patterns is rather patchy. The results based on a trilingual corpus of original and interpreted speeches from and into English, Italian, and Spanish confirm the hypothesis of lexical simplification only for Italian interpreted from Spanish (which displays a lower lexical density and a higher repetition rate of high-frequency words than Italian) and English interpreted from Spanish (which has a lower lexical density than original English) (Russo, Bendazzoli, and Sandrelli 2004).

Blum-Kulka's (1986: 19) general descriptive explicitation hypothesis was first tested by Linn Øverås (1998) with a corpus of literary translations drawn from the bidirectional English-Norwegian parallel corpus (ENPC). Starting from the interpretive hypothesis that a rise in the level of cohesion in the target language text can be seen as an aspect of explicitation, Øverås (1998) puts forward a restricted descriptive hypothesis stating that English and Norwegian target texts tend to be more cohesive than their source texts. The results largely confirm this hypothesis since the explicitating shifts, involving the addition and specification of lexical and grammatical items, were found to outnumber the implicitating shifts in both directions of translation, although English target texts display a lower level of explicitness vis-à-vis Norwegian target texts. Øverås considers various factors that may explain her findings, in addition to the process of interpretation inherent in translation,

namely the stylistic preferences of the source and the target language as well as their systemic differences and culture-specific translation norms.

Drawing on Blum-Kulka's (1986) and Baker's (1993) general descriptive explicitation hypotheses, Vilma Pápai (2004) puts forward three restricted descriptive hypotheses that she examined with the ARRABONA corpus, which comprises a unidirectional English-Hungarian parallel corpus and a comparable corpus of original Hungarian texts. Pápai's first hypothesis is that English-Hungarian translations are characterized by five explicitation strategies involving not only shifts in cohesion but also the addition of linguistic and extra-linguistic information and the disambiguation of source-text items. The second and third hypotheses state that translated Hungarian texts tend to exhibit a higher level of explicitness than comparable originals, and the degree of explicitness is higher in translated scientific texts than in literary texts. The first two hypotheses were confirmed, but the third one was not supported.

Baker's interpretive hypothesis that normalization can be viewed as 'the tendency to conform to patterns and practices which are typical of the target language, even to the point of exaggerating them' (1996: 176–7) is the starting point for Dorothy Kenny's (2001) study of lexical creativity and lexical normalization. She assembled a unidirectional German-English parallel corpus of contemporary literary texts (GEPCOLT) and examined the English renderings of German creative hapax legomena (word forms that occur only once in the corpus), creative forms specific to a particular writer, and creative author-specific collocations. The findings show that 44 per cent of creative hapax legomena and 16 per cent of creative collocations are normalized. So, although normalization appears to be a feature of translation, in most cases it did not take place. Corpus analysis revealed that the extent to which creative lexis is normalized is influenced by how translators see their brief and by the systemic differences between the source and the target language. For example, creative lexis linked to the derivational possibilities offered by German or those that involve puns may be particularly difficult to render in English.

Toury's law of interference has been investigated by several studies. A study based on the Corpus of Translated Finnish (CTF) shows that Finnish academic texts translated from English vis-à-vis comparable original Finnish texts display a higher frequency of multiword strings with the functions of organizing the text, providing comments, and guiding the reader's interpretation. Moreover, translated academic texts show a different and/or more varied pattern of near-synonymous lexical combinations compared with original texts. The highly target language-specific item *toisaalta*, which roughly means *on the other hand* but has no exact equivalent in English, is hugely under-represented in translated texts, regardless of the source language and genre variation (Mauranen 2000). Both the over-representation of text-reflexive expressions in translated texts versus comparable originals in the target language and the under-representation of lexical items specific to the target language can be regarded as examples of negative discourse transfer. The former exemplifies what Mauranen names 'pair-wise interference'; that is, interference which is specific to a particular language pair; while the latter illustrates the law of interference as a 'universal language-independent law' (Mauranen 2004: 69). In a similar vein, Nilsson (2004) compared the frequency and collocational patterns of the Swedish function word *av* (of, by) in narrative texts drawn from the bidirectional English-Swedish parallel corpus (ESPC). Her findings reveal a significantly higher frequency of *av* and its typical collocational and colligational patterns in translated Swedish vis-à-vis comparable originals. Both results are attributed mainly to the influence of the source language. The Unique Items Hypothesis (UIH)

proposed by Sonja Tirkkonen-Condit, which evokes Mykola Lukash's concept of 'unique items' (Lukash 1956/2009), can be subsumed under Toury's general law of interference as a particular case of negative discourse transfer. This general descriptive hypothesis states that target language-specific elements that do not have equivalents in the source language tend to be under-represented in translated texts compared with comparable originals, since 'they do not readily suggest themselves as translation equivalents' (Tirkkonen-Condit 2004: 177–8). The hypothesis was confirmed by a study of two sets of verbs of sufficiency and of the clitic particles *-kin* and *-han* that were analysed in two subcorpora drawn from the CTF: academic and fictional texts. Further evidence is provided in a study by Eskola (2004), who found that language-specific Finnish referative non-finite structures, which have the function of shortening an affirmative *that* clause and have no straightforward equivalents in either English or Russian, are under-represented in translated versus original Finnish. Conversely, temporal and non-finite constructions that have direct equivalents in the source languages were found to be over-represented.

The quest for universals has prompted a number of scholars to reflect on the value of this line of research. Andrew Chesterman views the empirical study of universals as one way of looking for generalizations about translation. As Chesterman observes, these general regularities are explored by putting forward and testing descriptive hypotheses about the existence of similarities between different types of translation, without disregarding either the differences between them or the uniqueness of each particular case. Within a comparative model of translation, Chesterman (2004: 39) groups universals under two categories: S-universals, 'universal differences between translations and their source texts', and T-universals, 'universal differences between translations and comparable non-translated texts'. If universals are supported by substantial empirical evidence, they can have explanatory force as regards the occurrence of a given feature in a particular translation (Chesterman 2000: 26). The reasons for the existence of universals are to be found in the nature of translation as a communicative act, the translator's awareness of their sociocultural role, and in neighbouring fields of scientific enquiry such as cognitive linguistics. From a cognitive perspective, Sandra Halverson contends that the general tendency towards lexical simplification observed in monolingual comparable corpora supports and can be accounted for by the idea of gravitational pull from category prototypes in semantic networks, since prototypes are selected more frequently than more peripheral structures or items (Halverson 2003: 218–19). Malmkjær (2008) suggests that general features of translational behaviour such as simplification, explicitation, and normalization would be better accounted for by the norm concept and explained on sociocultural grounds. Instead, the Unique Items Hypothesis (UIH) is believed to be a good candidate for universal status because it can be explained on cognitive grounds. Indeed, the UIH, which has been confirmed by studies carried out on unrelated languages (Swedish and Danish on the one hand, and Finnish on the other), is a phenomenon that is not triggered by the source text but seems to arise, during the translation process, from the under-representation in a translator's mental lexicon of unique features of the target language. Malmkjær argues that, if the concept of the translation universal is to retain any theoretical credibility, it would have to be reserved for phenomena such as the UIH, 'for which it makes sense to produce a cognitively based explanation' (Malmkjær 2008: 57).

In sum, research into universals has shown that 'translations are texts of a particular, specific kind, which reflect the complex cognitive processes and the particular social contexts from which they arise' (Mauranen 2008: 45). There are instances where translations

reveal lexical and structural trace of language contact, while at other times they may underrepresent features unique to the target language, overrepresent elements that are less common in the target language, or display a tendency towards conservative or conventional target language use. As regards the importance of this area of research, Chesterman (2004: 46) claims that over a period of ten years or so, from 1993 to 2004, the quest for universals of translation 'has been one of the most important methodological advances in Translation Studies . . . in that it has encouraged researchers to adopt standard scientific methods of hypothesis generation and testing'. More recently, Chesterman has reiterated that the hypothesized tendencies of translational behaviour known as translation universals need to be explicitly defined in order to be falsifiable (2019: 19).

The concept of universals has also been the subject of some criticism. Maria Tymoczko (1998: 653) maintains that the pursuit of universal laws of translation presupposes a positivist view of scientific objectivity, which privileges observable phenomena and verifiable facts. Such a stance, Tymoczko contends, is at odds with modern thought, which 'has increasingly come to understand the way that the perspective of the observer or the researcher is encoded in every investigation and impinges upon the object and the results of the study'. In a similar vein, Rosemary Arrojo argues that any regularities identified in translation 'will reflect the interests of a certain translation specialist, or a research group, at a certain time, in a certain context' (Chesterman and Arrojo 2000: 159). Toury adds his voice to the debate. In response to Simeoni's question about the tenability, from a postmodern perspective, of the concepts of 'transfer' and 'interference' inherent in the laws of translational behaviour, Toury replies by making a distinction between the terms and the notions they refer to. Toury claims that the problem lies in the negative semantic connotations associated with the term 'interference'. 'But this is not in the nature of the word "interference", it's in the nature of the historical use of the word' (Toury 2008: 411). As regards the criticism levelled at the positivist view of scientific objectivity, Toury's response is that his aim is to be objective within a historical and cultural orientation. He also recognizes that it is impossible to be '100% objective'. Indeed, this is not his claim. The only question, as Toury argues, 'is whether, if you know that you cannot be 100% objective, whether you give up objectivism at all or you do try your best to achieve it' (413).

From a linguistic perspective, the very existence of translation universals is questioned by Juliane House, who claims that the whole research endeavour is futile since there are no, and there can be no, translation-inherent universals. The reasons for denying the existence of linguistic features of translation *per se* are as follows: (a) since translation is an act that operates on language, the universals of language also apply to translation; (b) translation is inherently language-pair specific, hence even corpus-based multi-pair comparisons remain agglomerations of different pairs; (c) the suggested candidates for the status of translation universal for one particular translation direction need not necessarily be candidates for universality in the opposite direction; (d) translation universals have been found to be genre-sensitive; for instance, while there is a tendency towards explicitation in German translation of popular scientific texts, this is not the case to the same degree for economic texts; (e) translations may be influenced by the status of the language of the source text genre, which in turn may influence the nature of the translation text genre and also the nature of comparable texts in the same genre (House 2008: 11). Viktor Becher (2011) shares House's critical stance. The starting point for his corpus study of English-German and German-English translations of business texts is not the assumption that explicitation is a translation-inherent universal process. Instead, Becher posits that every instance of

explicitation (and implicitation) can be accounted for by lexicogrammatical and/or pragmatic factors, and his findings confirm this hypothesis.

3. Current contributions and research

Researchers have become increasingly aware of the methodological limitations of corpus-based research. First, a predominant number of studies have focused on T-universals, using mainly monolingual comparable corpora. This kind of corpus design requires that 'near-perfect comparability must be postulated, otherwise any observed differences could be due to unrelated or marginally related variables' (Bernardini and Ferraresi 2011: 228). Besides, the explanatory power derived from the studies using monolingual comparable corpora is limited because the influence of the source language cannot be ruled out or accounted for. Thirdly, resorting only to descriptive statistics to compare two sets of corpora does not show whether the differences observed are statistically significant. There is clearly a need for more advanced statistical methods to describe and explain the evidence provided by corpus data. Fourthly, corpus-based research has largely relied on quantitative analyses. In this regard, it is useful to recall Maria Tymoczko's recommendations that researchers using corpus tools and methods 'must avoid the temptation to remain safe, exploiting corpora and powerful electronic capabilities merely to prove the obvious or give confirming quantification where none is really needed' (Tymoczko 1998: 657–8).

In order to address these limitations, recent corpus-based research on translation universals has employed more sophisticated designs such as bivariate/multivariate methods and advanced statistical approaches (see Oakes and Ji 2012). To a large extent, this new trend has been motivated by an increasing awareness that translation is a by-product of language-internal as well as language-external factors and that the translation status is not the sole variable associated with the peculiarities of translational language. Some researchers have introduced the term 'multifactorial design' (e.g., Kruger 2018) to conceptualize translation as an activity influenced by multiple variables that are qualitatively different, including linguistic, social, cultural, and even political factors. We can reasonably argue that the concept of translation universals is currently being 'interpreted differently, more loosely' just as Chesterman (2014: 86) recommends it should be because '[t]ranslations are instances of *parole*, not *langue*, and as such they come in very different forms and sizes, from a single spoken word to a whole book, for instance, not to mention all kinds of multimodal variants'. Recent approaches to examining distinctive features of the process and product of translation (note that the term translation universals is still used) have addressed the methodological and theoretical limitations of prior studies. In what follows, we review some exemplary investigations that have made a methodological and theoretical contribution to this area of enquiry.

Bernardini and Ferraresi (2011) use a parallel subcorpus in combination with comparable corpora to examine the use of Anglicisms in original and translated computing texts in Italian. Their results show that translators use fewer English loan words than original writers, thus supporting the universal of normalization. As regards corpus design, the inclusion of the source text component forms

> a tripartite corpus structure in which the monolingual comparable component is used to identify quantitative differences across translated and non-translated texts

> (signaling potential T-universals), and the parallel component is used for the qualitative analysis of shifts accounting for the previously observed differences.
>
> *(Bernardini and Ferraresi 2011: 228)*

This can be a fruitful way to promote current research on translation universals (or translation laws/norms).

In a number of recent studies, the omission and inclusion of the optional syntactic element *that* as a feature of explicitation has been investigated using advanced statistical methods. Kruger and Van Rooy (2012), for example, have used a comparable corpus of translated English (CTE) and non-translated original English produced in South Africa (ICE-SA), and have found statistically significant differences in the use of the optional *that* as well as lexical diversity between corpora. They also found limited evidence supporting the hypothesis that translated language is more explicit, conservative, and simplified than non-translated language. The use of the optional complementizer *that* as an explicit marker in translated language has also been investigated in a number of multifactorial studies (Kruger 2019; Kruger and De Sutter 2018). Multifactorial approaches are premised on the assumption that translation is conditioned by a number of factors and the translation status is merely one of them. Also, research in this area has taken a more explanatory approach. For example, in her exploratory study of the variables conditioning *that* addition/omission, Kruger (2019) has found that the explicit *that* in translated texts is largely due to pragmatic risk-aversion tactics rather than a source-language transfer effect.

Richard Xiao and Guanrong Dai (2014) argue that research on translation universals 'has largely been based on and confined to closely related European languages, in which some linguistic features may not be as markedly dissimilar as in genetically distinct languages such as English and Chinese' (48), while 'evidence from a genetically distant language pair such as English and Chinese is arguably more convincing' (11). Xiao and Dai (2014) systematically explored a range of lexical and grammatical properties of translational Chinese versus native Chinese and found that explicitation is supported and simplification is partially supported, while normalization is not.

Another trend that characterizes the quest for universals is the use of new parameters. For instance, Feng, Crezee, and Grant (2018) have adopted collocability and delexicalization as linguistic indicators of simplification and explicitation in a comparable Chinese-to-English corpus of business texts. The results show that translated texts overuse free combinations and underuse bound collocations, idioms, and collocations with a delexical sense, thus confirming both simplification and explicitation. It is noteworthy that in some studies of the complementizer *that*, researchers such as Kruger (2019) no longer rely on frequency-based occurrence only, but have developed and employed syntax-related parameters conditioning the use of the explicit/implicit *that*, such as matrix verb semantic class, matrix-clause subject, clausal complexity (distance between matrix-clause verb and onset of complement clause), to probe into the factors behind the phenomenon of explicitation. This trend is also evident in a number of studies that make use of statistical techniques and methods commonly employed in computational linguistics to study the global textual features of translated texts. By way of example, Fan and Jiang (2019) use mean dependency distances (MDD) and dependency direction. They have found that the MDD of translated English texts is much longer than non-translated English texts, and the translated English texts are more head-initial than their non-translated counterpart as regards dependency direction.

In the past decade, corpus-based approaches have given momentum also to interpreting research. It should be noted, though, that corpus-based interpreting studies are often based on corpora that are manually transcribed and annotated. For this reason, they are often much smaller in size and narrower in genres when compared with translation corpora. Tang and Li (2016, 2017) have looked into different types of explicitation in a study of 12 professional and 12 trainee interpreters. They have found that English to Chinese and Chinese to English interpreting show some similarities in that most instances of explicitation are of an experiential nature, 'which occurs when the explicitated information is related to experiential modifiers, processes, circumstantial adjuncts or participants' (Tang and Li 2017: 3). Also, explicitation is adopted for clarification purposes, and is often related to the interpreter's level of competence. So, professional interpreters tend to use more explicitation than trainee interpreters.

As for simplification, Bernardini, Ferraresi, and Miličević (2016) have conducted a study based on the intermodal corpus EPTIC (the European Parliament Translation and Interpreting Corpus) and have found that simplification occurs in both translation and interpreting, but interpreters use more simplification techniques than translators. Lv and Liang (2019) have also investigated simplification, aiming to assess whether simultaneous interpreting (SI) is more simplified than consecutive interpreting (CI) due to its heavy cognitive load. They used three parameters (information density, lexical repetitiveness, and lexical sophistication) to examine a comparable corpus made up of English SI and CI output texts, read-out translated English speeches, and original English speeches. Contrary to the researchers' expectations, the results show that the CI output is more simplified than the SI output in all three parameters.

Translation universals are currently being conceptualized within the framework of 'constrained communication', where the cognitive effort associated with the activation of more than one language, as in second language use, is posited to have a greater than average role in text production compared to the effort associated with the activation of one language, as in native language use (Lanstyák and Heltai 2012: 100). Constrained communication occurs in a variety of language contact settings, which translation, both in its written and spoken form, is a specific type of. Quoting Svenja Kranich (2014: 96), translations are, in fact, 'a locus of language contact'. Within this perspective, translation universals are being investigated as patterns of language use (lexical, grammatical, syntactic, textual, or pragmatic) that written, spoken, or audiovisual forms of translation share, to varying degrees, with other language contact varieties such as the interlanguage of L2 learners and non-native text production.

So, the quest for translation universals is becoming part of a wider interdisciplinary research endeavour that aims to unveil the linguistic features that characterize constrained communication and set it apart from relatively unconstrained language varieties such as different forms of native language use. This line of research draws on the theoretical models and research approaches and methods offered by multiple disciplines in addition to translation and interpreting studies, namely contrastive linguistics, second language acquisition studies, cognitive psychology, language typology, and bilingualism. Recent corpus-based investigations of patterns of language use shared by English translated texts and non-native written texts have found that these bilingually constrained varieties display a higher degree of formality and explicitness vis-à-vis comparable native text production (Kruger and van Rooy 2016; Rabinovich et al. 2016). These traits are accounted for by the higher-than-average effort involved in the activation of two languages and possibly by 'an overly strict

conformance to perceived standard language norms' on the part of translators and non-native speakers (Kruger and van Rooy 2016: 27).

4. Future directions

As we have seen in this historical excursus and overview of recent empirical research, the quest for universals is increasingly being construed, and quite rightly so, as 'no more than a search for patterns and generalizations that guides empirical research in general' (Chesterman 2014: 87). And in the quest for universals, as in any kind of empirical endeavour, it is legitimate to test a hypothesis that is formulated in a maximally general form, so long as we are ready to restrict its scope in the light of counter-evidence. Conversely, we may test a hypothesis at a lower level of generality, which is specific, for example, to particular languages, genres, translator profiles, working conditions, and be ready to extend its scope on the basis of supporting evidence. And '[a]s our knowledge accumulates about how these *conditioned* hypotheses fare in different tests, we may be able to generate more general correlative or causal hypotheses' (Chesterman 2014: 87, original emphasis). This helical process involving discovery and justification procedures, to adopt Toury's (1995/2012: 31–4) terms, would enable us to gain new and valuable information about the distinctive features of the process and product of translation in given contexts as well as show the 'relations between types of features and types of contextual conditions' (Chesterman 2014: 87).

Further reading

Laviosa, Sara (2002) *Corpus-based Translation Studies: Theory, Findings, Applications*. Amsterdam & Leiden, Rodopi & Brill.
This monograph examines and evaluates the theory and the empirical evidence provided by corpus-based studies of translation universals as well as the methods adopted and the definition of the object of study of this substantial body of research over nearly two decades, from 1993 till the turn of the century.

Xiao, Richard, and Xianyao Hu (2015) *Corpus-Based Studies of Translational Chinese in English-Chinese Translation*. Berlin & Shanghai, Springer & Jiaotong University Press.
This volume examines the macro-level features of translational Chinese using the Lancaster Corpus of Mandarin Chinese (LCMC) and the Zhejiang University Corpus of Translational Chinese (ZCTC). The parameters employed are lexical density, textual information load, average word and sentence lengths, as well as the lexical (e.g., distribution of part-of-speeches, keywords, and categories of keywords) and grammatical (e.g., typical Chinese sentence constructions) patterns of translational Chinese.

Related topics

adequacy and acceptability, corpus-based translation studies

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