Regularities and Variations in Learner Translations:
a corpus-based study of conjunctive explicitation

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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the use of connectives in a corpus of translations by Italian students, with a view to verifying the existence of phenomena of explicitation, interference and normalisation in these translated texts, as well as their possible correlation with some objective/external factors (such as source text/language and target language preferences) and other more subjective/personal factors (such as translator's style and experience). The above notions have already been extensively studied and debated in the framework of translation studies, where they have even been presented as candidates for translation "universalhood".

Compared with previous studies, the approach adopted in this thesis is novel in several respects, beginning with the language pairs under examination and the focus on learner rather than professional translations. The proposed methodology is also new, in that it relies on the analysis of a multiple translation corpus, i.e. a special kind of parallel corpus in which several translations into the same target language are available for each source text; each translation can thus be compared not only with the relevant source text, but also with concurrent translation solutions.

One of the aims of the thesis is to investigate whether this new corpus resource can provide new insights as regards the nature of explicitation (i.e. motivations behind it) and interference, based on the observation of regularities and variations in the way different translators cope with the same source text. The study explores the hypothesis that the possibility to compare various translations of one and the same source text should help distinguish norm-governed and recommended shifts, i.e. shifts connected to target language norms or preferred patterns, from translation-induced (non-linguistically-motivated) and idiosyncratic behaviour, on the basis of the proportion of translators performing similar shifts.

The study shows that explicitation is a significant characteristic of Italian student translations from both English and French. Quantitative analyses based on the frequency of connectives in source and target texts reveal that the trend towards conjunctive explicitation is stronger than the opposite trend, i.e. implicitation. The claim put forward by some scholars that explicitation may be seen as a universal feature of translation, i.e. that it occurs even when there are no language-related motivations for it, however, is not fully supported by the results of a comparison of learner translations with comparable original Italian texts. While translations from English turn out to be more conjunctively explicit than both source texts and comparable original texts, which suggests that explicitation is not (only) connected to target language preferences, increased connective frequency in translations from French appears to be due to an attempt to conform to target-language standards. Nonetheless, differences can be observed with respect to the distribution of different types of connectives in translated and original texts, which suggests that the process of normalisation may not be fully achieved.

This hypothesis is corroborated by more focused qualitative analyses showing that interference also plays a major role in shaping student translations. The comparison of multiple translations of the same source text proves to be an effective method for distinguishing shifts linked to target language norms/preferences from non-linguistically-motivated shifts, and a valuable support to the researcher's intuition about the appropriateness of alternative renditions.

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