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TRANSLATION

Doubts and Directions in Translation Studies

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Doubts and Directions in Translation Studies

Selected contributions from the EST Congress, Lisbon 2004

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Introduction

On September 29–30, 2004, more than two hundred participants assembled in Lisbon, to take a fresh look at current orientations in Translation Studies (TS). In their Call for Papers, the organizers of the Fourth Congress of the European Society for Translation Studies (EST) had acknowledged that "perhaps the time has come to challenge some of the widely held assumptions, biases, and other presuppositions borrowed from other disciplines or based on beliefs and claims that are taken for granted." Hence, the "Doubts and Directions" in the title of the Congress. Obviously, the contributions (more than 140 papers, 40 posters and six panels) did not all cover the same concerns, the same questions, the same concepts or the same methods. Diversity is a precious asset at a scientific meeting of this kind.

About fifty speakers submitted their contributions. Ultimately, thanks to the invaluable help of almost forty referees, we selected twenty-six texts. Our explicit criteria centered on quality of approach; originality of topic, argument and/or analyzed data; and clear composition. The process of grouping the texts was one that we undertook with care and trepidation, leading eventually to the five broad categories presented here.

All of the papers in Part One deal with theoretical aspects. While **A. Chesterman** offers a critical analysis of the so-called unique item hypothesis and raises a number of methodological issues concerning research on the topic, **U. Stecconi** and **S. Göpferich** explain how TS can benefit by opening up towards Semiotics, on the one hand, and Transfer Studies, on the other. Both authors justify the expansion they propose, and take issue with the current scope of TS, while posing the fundamental question: What do we mean by translation? In their papers, they deal with concepts such as translation events, equivalence, text transformation and quality assessment. The fourth paper, by **F. Alves and J. Gonçalves**, endeavors to model translational competence, building on Relevance Theory and Connectionism. All of these aspects – unique item, translation universals, scope of TS, multidisciplinarity, competence, cognitive model – have been on our agenda for some time, and seem to imply a more extensive conceptual and methodological analysis.

In Part Two, we have four texts, rather different but all concerned with how to improve our tools of investigation. A Portuguese team, under the leadership of **T. Seruya**, deals with the cartography of Literary Translation Studies in Portugal: Who are the agents and the architects of this history? What kinds of material do they need? Again, interdisciplinarity and different conceptions of translation make the landscape even more complex. **P. Grant and K. Mezei**, concerned over the dissemination of information about Canadian Literary Translation Studies, outline their web-based bibliography and the challenges they are facing, such as organization of keywords, the multilingual character of the references collected, updating the database, etc., as sharing ideas and solutions is a good way to avoid having to reinvent the wheel. **H. Risku**, aware of the key role played by technologies in our working environments, seeks to determine when, to what extent and with what consequences the available tools can best be used in translating. Efficiency, creativity and quality have been keywords for translators for quite a long time now. The last paper, by **A. Hild**, highlights four ways of promoting rigour in the experimental study of simultaneous interpreting: triangulation, assessing task representativeness, sampling and data management. Each of the four papers grouped here underlines the importance of a precise and systematic definition of the object of study, adequacy of procedures to be used, contextualisation of the results, and relevant consequences of the research.

Part Three, with seven texts, focuses on empirical research. **A. Künzli** presents the changes introduced by ten professional translators who revised a legal text translated from French into German and an expert's assessment of the quality of the final output. **C. Alvstad** suggests that a close reading of translations and their source texts, in a learning context, can enhance university students' awareness of literary reading as a dynamic process. Both cases shed light on two important but often neglected phases in the overall process of producing translations. The two following papers, by **D. Chiaro** and **R. Antonini**, report on how Italian audiences perceive cultural references and verbally expressed humour when watching dubbed programmes. A t-test and an e-questionnaire are the two means applied to carry out these perception studies. **M. Mateo**, also working in the subfield of audiovisual translation but with opera surtitles, describes the marked differences between surtitles in the same language as a function of the translation strategies adopted by certain opera houses. She also examines alternative ways of implementing operational norms and negotiating the constraints imposed both by the transmission channel and by reception factors. **H. Dam** aims at identifying features of efficiency and inefficiency in interpreters' notes for consecutive interpretation. Her hypotheses are tested on the target texts and in notes produced by five interpreters working from Spanish into Danish. Finally, **D. Sanchez** emphasizes the role played by scientific discourses and their translation in the transmission of dominant gendered representations. The reproduction of ideology is analyzed through a specific example (French-Spanish). The diversity of procedures – including think-aloud protocol, statistics, use of metatextual information, analysis of macrostructural elements, semantic network analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis – reveal yet again the different sources of methodology in TS.

The seven articles in Part Four are linguistically oriented. They give a rich overview of the unfolding relationship between Linguistics and TS. The respective studies deal with ideology through the frequency, functions and effects of the evaluative premodified noun phrases in English and Finnish newspapers (**T. Puurtinen**); inferenc-

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ing and transfer of semantic relations – with explicitations in the target texts from Spanish into Danish (**L. Denver**); the interface between Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS), corpus-based research and contrastive analysis – illustrated in the "modality-necessity" field, from English into Spanish (**R. Rabadán**); and the focus-ground structure of texts as expressed by cleft sentences from Portuguese into German (**T. Reichmann**); by the use of prepositions and locative adverbs to construe spatial relations in Danish and Italian (**H. Jansen**); by the transfer of anthropomorphic phraseologies in German, Spanish and Catalan, thanks also to DTS, corpus-based studies and cognitive linguistics (**H. van Lawick**); and by the use of the cognitive approach, as developed by A. Culioli, for a better understanding of language activity and translation (**S. Grammenidis and T. Nenopoulou**). In one way or another, all seven of these papers process methodological and conceptual problems, making clear that translators use manipulative strategies and complex decision-making, and can always identify problems related to their language pair.

Part Five deals mainly with literary works and here too one finds a diversity of themes and procedures. **M. Charron** wonders about the readability of French (re)translations of *Don Quijote*. **M. Mulligan** considers how some British women travellers in the post-colonial period represented the Other in their texts. Their techniques are not without rhetorical and ideological effects on the reader. Searching for a kind of balance between individual agency and collective norms, **O. Paloposki** studies the extent to which a Finnish translator at the end of the 19th century was able to negotiate the conditions of his work (from the selection of books to be translated and the use of source texts to translation strategies, lay-out design and fees). The last paper in the volume, by **A. Mannekens**, defines translation as practised and thought of by French writer A. Artaud. She uses the concept of mimesis, and questions concepts such as imitation and appropriation.

The topics, approaches and methodologies underlying these Proceedings force us to take a fresh look at many of the seemingly well established paradigms and familiar notions, and open up new directions of research, reminding us that our object(s) of study is forever situated at a fluid and shifting interface with many other disciplines.

We are very grateful to the organizers of the conference, who provided the setting out of which this volume emerged, and to all those authors and referees who gave generously of their time and skills and offered us their reliable cooperation in the process of assembling this volume. We also wish to express our appreciation to Andrew Chesterman for his painstaking proofreading of the final manuscript.

The editors

Table of contents

Introduction IX

PART 1: Theory

What is a unique item? 3
Andrew Chesterman

Five reasons why semiotics is good for Translation Studies 15
Ubaldo Stecconi

Translation Studies and Transfer Studies: A plea for widening the scope of Translation Studies 27
Susanne Göpferich

Modelling translator's competence: Relevance and expertise under scrutiny 41
Fabio Alves, José Luiz Gonçalves

PART 2: Methodology

Notes for a cartography of literary translation history in Portugal 59
Teresa Seruya, Marta Teixeira Anacleto, Maria dos Anjos Guincho, Dionísio Martínez Soler, Maria Lin Moniz, Alexandra Lopes

Establishing an online bibliographic database for Canadian Literary Translation Studies 73
Pamela Grant, Kathy Mezei

The role of technology in translation management 85
Hanna Risku

Establishing rigour in a between-methods investigation of SI expertise 99
Adelina Hild

PART 3: Empirical Research

Translation revision: A study of the performance of ten professional translators revising a legal text 115
Alexander Künzli

Translational analysis and the dynamics of reading 127
Cecilia Alvstad

The effect of translation on humour response: The case of dubbed comedy in Italy 137
Delia Chiaro

SAT, BLT, Spirit Biscuits, and the Third Amendment: What Italians make of cultural references in dubbed texts 153
Rachele Antonini

Reception, text and context in the study of opera surtitles 169
Marta Mateo

What makes interpreters' notes efficient? Features of (non-)efficiency in interpreters' notes for consecutive 183
Helle V. Dam

Traduction, genre et discours scientifique 199
Dolorès Sanchez

PART 4: Linguistics-based

Evaluative noun phrases in journalism and their translation from English into Finnish 213
Tiina Puurtinen

Translating the implicit: On the inferencing and transfer of semantic relations 223
Louise Denver

Divisions, description and applications: The interface between DTS, corpus-based research and contrastive analysis* 237
Rosa Rabadán

A clivagem no português: Critérios de classificação e métodos de tradução 253
Tinka Reichmann

Construals in literary translation: Spatial particles and spatial imagery 267
Hanne Jansen

Phraseologie und Übersetzung unter Anwendung von Parallelkorpora 281
Heike van Lawick

The relevance of utterer-centered linguistics to Translation Studies 297
Simos Grammenidis & Tonia Nenopoulou

PART 5: Literature-based

De la question de la lisibilité des traductions françaises de *Don Quijote* 311
Marc Charron

Collusion or authenticity: Problems in translated dialogues in modern women's travel writing 323
Maureen Mulligan

Translators' agency in 19th-century Finland 335
Outi Paloposki

Le concept de mimésis: Une clé pour la définition des *réécritures* d'Antonin Artaud 347
Annick Mannekens

Name index 357

Subject index 359

PART 1

Theory

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What is a unique item?

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The so-called unique items hypothesis claims that translations tend to contain fewer "unique items" than comparable non-translated texts. This is proposed as a potential translation universal, or at least a general tendency. A unique item is one that is in some sense specific to the target language and is presumably not so easily triggered by a source-language item that is formally different; it thus tends to be under-represented in translations. The concept of a unique item is not well-defined, however. Drawing on some earlier work on transfer, contrastive and error analysis, this article offers a critical analysis of the concept, and raises a number of methodological issues concerning research on the topic.

Keywords: unique items hypothesis, recurring patterns, comparable non-translated texts, linguistic resources, relative dissimilarity

1. Introducing the hypothesis

In the context of research on what are often called translation universals, i.e. regular tendencies or recurring patterns in translations, Sonja Tirkkonen-Condit (2002) has proposed a "unique items hypothesis" according to which translations tend to contain fewer unique items than comparable non-translated texts.[1] The hypothesis seems intuitively reasonable, and preliminary research results seem to support it (see also Tirkkonen-Condit 2004), at least with respect to certain items.

Tirkkonen-Condit relates the hypothesis to two wider issues. One is the question of whether the language of translations is more normalized than that of non-translations: a lower-than-normal frequency of unique items would suggest that translations are not "normal" in this respect. This is a textlinguistic matter. The second issue is a psychological one, having to do with people's intuitions about, and reactions to, texts, and in particular about their ability to recognize certain texts as being translations or not. The question here is whether informants use intuitions about unexpectedly low frequencies of certain items when they are asked to distinguish translations from original texts – and to what extent they are successful in making such judgements.

However, it is not clear what exactly is meant by a "unique item".

There are several problems in the way the concept is currently used. Here is how Tirkkonen-Condit introduces the idea (2002: 208–209):

> Katharina Reiss suggested some thirty years ago that translations may not fully exploit the linguistic resources of the target language. In discussing the devices of evaluating translation quality without recourse to the source text, Reiss (1971), following Güttinger (1963: 219), suggests a simple test: take the most frequent words in the target language that do not exist in the source language and check the extent to which these appear in the translation. These "missing words" will reveal whether the translator knows the target language well enough to attain good translation quality. This rule of thumb, according to Reiss (1971: 19) applies not only to the "missing words" but also to "alle Begriffe und Wendungen, die in der anderen Sprache mit unterschiedlichen sprachlichen Mitteln zum Ausdruck gebracht warden". This discussion gives rise to another, potentially universal hypothesis [i.e. in addition to those concerning simplification etc.], which I will call *the unique items hypothesis.*
>
> This means that translated texts would manifest lower frequencies of linguistic elements that lack linguistic counterparts in the source languages such that these could also be used as translation equivalents. I will refer to these as unique items or unique elements. The unique elements are not untranslatable, and they may be frequent, typical and entirely normal phenomena in the language; they are unique only in respect of their translation potential, as they are not similarly manifested in other languages, or at least not similarly manifested in the source languages of the translations. (Square brackets added, emphasis original.)

As examples of unique items in Finnish she cites Finnish verbs like *jaksaa, ehtiä, viitsiä*; these could be translated into English as 'be strong enough / have enough energy (to do something)', 'have enough time', 'have enough initiative / be interested enough'. These sufficiency verbs have traditionally been regarded as rather special to Finnish. Other languages seem to lack lexicalized equivalents and use phrasal expressions of some kind. And this is the point: the claim is that verbs like this are under-used in translations into Finnish, precisely because there is not a similar lexicalized verb in the source text which would "trigger" them in the translator's mind. In a later paper (Tirkkonen-Condit 2004) she explains the notion of a unique item thus:

> Every language has linguistic elements that are unique in the sense that they lack straightforward linguistic counterparts in other languages. These elements may be lexical, phrasal, syntactic or textual, and they need not be in any sense untranslatable; they are simply not similarly manifested (e.g. lexicalized) in other languages. (2004: 177)

I want to focus here on the concept of the “unique item” itself. The hypothesis may be a fruitful one, well worth testing under different conditions; but there are a number of conceptual problems in the way it has been formulated that need to be sorted out first.

2. Unique with respect to what languages?

The first problem is the context in which uniqueness is defined. Is the “uniqueness” defined with respect to a given source language, to several languages, or to all languages? The formulations cited above are slippery in this respect. In the 2002 article, the context is defined as “other languages, or at least... the source languages of the translations”. In 2004, it is “other languages”. In an email to me, Tirkkonen-Condit specifies that she is really focussing on the source languages of specific translations. In other words, no claim is being made about the uniqueness of, say, Finnish sufficiency verbs with respect to all other human languages. Testing such a claim would indeed be quite a task. We should therefore conclude that “unique” means “present in the target language, but not present in a similar way in a given source language”.

This solution is exactly parallel to the definition of a cultureme (or culture-specific item) used by Nord (1997: 34) and other skopos theorists. A cultureme is a cultural phenomenon that is present in culture X but not present (in the same way) in culture Y.

“Unique” is thus the opposite of “universal” only in a very weak sense. An item that is unique is one that does not appear (in the same way) in at least one other language: the source language. It might of course appear in any number of other languages, but that is not the point at issue, since the other languages are not involved in the particular translation at hand.

3. Absolutely unique?

Is uniqueness an absolute property (i.e. given items either are, or are not, unique) or a relative one (i.e. some items can be more unique than others)? Despite the absoluteness that is perhaps implied in Reiss’ formulation, to which I shall return shortly, Tirkkonen-Condit’s incorporation of the notion of similarity in her definition surely forces the conclusion that this uniqueness can only be understood in a relative sense. Translationally equivalent items in two languages can be more or less similar, and moreover more or less similar in an infinite number of different ways. The less similar they are, the more unique a given target item is said to be; the degree of uniqueness depends inversely on the degree of similarity.

For instance, consider the following heading in my Finnish telephone book (both Finnish and Swedish are official languages in Finland):

(1) Finnish: Soittaminen hätänumeroon 112
'ringing to.emergency.number 112'

(2) Swedish: Så.här ringer.du till nödnumret 112
'in.this.way you.ring to emergency.number 112'

The headings are printed one below the other, and are followed by detailed and equivalent instructions in both languages. Consider the kinds and levels of similarity or equivalence that are involved here. Apart from the obvious pragmatic/functional similarity, there are large formal differences: Finnish non-finite vs. Swedish finite clause; Swedish mention of the addressee, in second person singular; Swedish initial adverb; Finnish use of the illative case ('to') vs. Swedish preposition (*till* 'to'). Both use a compound noun for 'emergency number', though. And both share the same thematic order "ring – emergency number – 112".

Now imagine that the source text for these instructions was Swedish, and that it is being translated into Finnish. Our Finnish translator could have followed the Swedish structure fairly closely, and written:

(3) Näin soitat hätänumeroon.
'thus you.ring to.emergency.number'

This solution is quite acceptable. It would have been readily prompted by the Swedish original. The printed Finnish version, however, uses the verbal noun construction with *soittaminen* 'ringing'. This is very different from the Swedish structure in our imagined source text. In standard Swedish the use of a formally similar structure with a verbal noun (*ringande*) would not be acceptable here. But Swedish does allow the nominal use of an infinitive: *att ringa* 'to ring' could be used, although it would be less natural. So: is the Finnish verbal noun construction a unique item? Is it "more unique" to Finnish than the use of the illative case, which is also not available as such in Swedish? The answer will depend on the criteria chosen to measure uniqueness.

The point of this example is simply to underline that the uniqueness under discussion here must be understood in a relative sense, as 'relative dissimilarity'. This means that we are already weakening the semantic content of the term.

4. How do we identify uniqueness?

The suggestion made by Reiss (1971), that we should look for "words" in the target language that do not exist in the source language, can hardly be taken at its face value: of course, *all* the words in a given target language "do not exist" in a given source language, except for possible loanwords from the same source language. In the passages cited above, Tirkkonen-Condit wrote of "elements that lack linguistic counterparts", or "that lack straightforward linguistic counterparts". This is loosely glossed as "elements that are not similarly manifested" or not "lexicalized".

This gloss, and the preceding definitions, are much too loose, because the nature of the required similarity is not made explicit. If we identify a unique item in terms of the non-existence of a straightforward, one-to-one equivalent in some other language(s), this depends in turn on what we mean by equivalence, and by this particular kind of equivalence. We are presumably talking about some kind of formal equivalence here, but at what level of delicacy?

If a verb (such as a Finnish sufficiency verb, like *ehtiä*) is translated into English as a phrase (e.g. verb+object+adverb: 'have time enough'), we have an instance of what Catford (1965: 79) called a unit shift. The units are morpheme, word, group (phrase), clause, sentence. (We might also add higher units such as paragraph, section or chapter, text.) In this case, the shift is from word to group (phrase). Formal shifts of a more delicate kind occur when a translator shifts from one source-text verb class (say, transitive) to a different one in the target text (intransitive), or from a mass noun to a count noun (examples of Catford's class shifts), or from e.g. singular to plural (Catford's intra-system shift). However, shifts of these kinds do not seem to be among those suggesting the existence of unique items, in the sense described by Tirkkonen-Condit. Nor do cruder kinds of shifts involving major restructuring, omissions or additions. Nor even higher-level unit shifts, such as those from sentence to clause or clause to group, or vice versa.

The key level seems to be that of the word or the morpheme. Tirkkonen-Condit's other main examples concern certain Finnish particles. However, she also mentions idioms, which may be manifested as strings as long as a clause. Her examples include the following types of unique items for Finnish (2002: 215):

1. clitic and other particles (e.g. *-pa/pä* signifying emphasis)
2. colloquial lexical items, sufficiency verbs (e.g. *viitsiä* 'have enough initiative')
3. idioms, fixed collocations, set phrases (e.g. *kaikki on katoavaista* 'everything is ephemeral')
4. word order (idiomatic use of clause-initial copula in the possessive structure: *on teillä* 'is at-you' – i.e. 'you have' – instead of *teillä on* 'at-you is')
5. use of impersonal reference (impersonal verb: *täytyy muistaa* '(one) must remember')

My preliminary answer to the question of how to identify uniqueness is that an item counts as unique if it cannot be readily translated back into a given source language without a unit shift. "Readily" is slippery, I admit. But so, I am arguing, is the whole concept of a unique item. This answer also allows the inclusion of (most) idioms as unique items, for their translation usually requires unit shifts at some level. One problem with this answer is that the definition of the basic units themselves may not be so obvious if we turn to less commonly studied languages outside Standard Average European.

This preliminary answer derives from early research of a very similar kind in contrastive and error analysis. In a classic paper on "Over-indulgence and under-representation – aspects of mother-tongue interference", Levenston (1971: 115) wrote:

> One feature of non-native use of a second language, or L2, is the excessive use ('over-indulgence') of clause (or group) structures which closely resemble translation equivalents in the mother tongue, or L1, to the exclusion of other structures ('under-representation') which are less like anything in L1. 'Closely resemble' can be more precisely defined as 'with translation equivalents which correspond at the level of group (or word) as well as clause'; 'less like' means with translation equivalents which correspond at the level of clause (or group) only.

Levenston was not studying translations as such, but non-native use of a language (English as used by Hebrew speakers). But he used translation equivalence in his conceptualization of elements that appear more or less frequently than expected in L2 usage. He defines his notion of relevant similarity in terms of unit correspondence at different levels. This might offer us an alternative formulation of a unique item (cf. Levenston's under-represented item): it is one for which the translation equivalent only maintains unit correspondence at some higher level or levels, not at given lower levels. The higher the lowest possible level of unit correspondence, the less the similarity. For instance, a translation equivalent preserving unit correspondence only at sentence level, but not lower, would be less similar than an equivalent preserving unit correspondence also at group or word level. Consider the translation of proverbs, for example, for which unit correspondence is usually only maintained at the sentence level, not below. Translations that preserve unit correspondence only at higher levels are of course freer translations.

5. Linguistically or perceptually unique?

Is the uniqueness assumed to exist in some psychological sense, as part of the translator's perception of the languages concerned, or in a linguistic sense, as part of the lexico-grammatical systems of the given languages? In other words, are the items really unique (in the sense specified above), or does the translator just think they are? I shall refer to these two interpretations as linguistic difference (i.e. one that is objectively proved by contrastive evidence) and perceived difference (which may or may not also be objectively substantiated).

Levenston's paper combines these two interpretations, in that he brings in the psychological notion of interference from the native language to explain why over-indulgence and under-representation occur. But they should perhaps be kept separate. Speakers of a given language, especially non-native speakers, may not have an accurate

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