

Plenary Talk

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Translation as a contact variety between English-German: some findings about explicitness

In an earlier presentation on the occasion of the opening of this Centre, I gave a talk on *Explicitation – towards an empirical and corpus-based methodology* (Steiner 2008). This presentation was an attempt at specifying an architecture for an empirical research methodology into properties of texts which are in some kind of contrast, either by instantiating different registers, or else different languages, or else by being related through the special property of “translation”. It was assumed that among the properties in terms of which such texts can be usefully contrasted, we find *density*, *directness*, and in particular *explicitness*.

I would today like to report on a first round of results investigating translation as a contact variety between English and German (cf. http://fr46.uni-saarland.de/croco/index_en.html for the project’s website; cf. also Hansen-Schirra et al.2006; Hansen-Schirra et al in press, Steiner forthcoming). Our paper summarizes, contrasts and interprets a number of individual investigations carried out so far. These investigations are characterized in terms of the *types of contrast* investigated in the corpus, in terms of the *linguistic phenomena covered*, and in terms of *results* and of *kinds of explanation* which can be evoked against the architecture of the corpus and against independent sources of explanation (language type, register, translation as a process of text production). The findings so far on the most general level are that

- a) in terms of low level features (lexical density, type-token-relationships, part-of-speech-proportionalities), translations between both languages show normalization and explicitation
- b) in terms of higher level features (phrase-type proportionalities, semantics-to-syntax-mapping, word order, referential, lexical and conjunctive cohesion), translations are again more explicit than original texts
- c) some of these general statements need to be qualified depending on the specific registers involved.

Possible explanations are derived from systemic contrasts between English and German (cf. Hawkins 1986; Doherty 2006; König and Gast 2007), register, and the nature of the translation process. We shall assume a theoretically-motivated model of translation as outlined in Matthiessen 2001 and Teich 2003, against an overall SFL-based account of lexicogrammar and cohesion (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, Halliday and Hasan 1976).

References

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