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Annotation

This article focuses specifically on syntactic difficulties in translation, but issues in translation can manifest itself on different linguistic levels. In this section article summarises relevant literature in the field of (human) translatability.

Key vocabulary: translation, complementary, translatability, translation problems, translation distortions

Introduction

Most content of this overview is also spread out over the following chapters, where each chapter highlights specific aspects of its topic with respect to translation difficulty. This overview section should therefore be seen as complementary to the following chapters rather than an independent whole. Translatability in this section does not refer to the, almost philosophical, discussion whether or not a source text can truly and fully be translated.

Analyses of Used Literatures

Instead, the focus lies on difficulties that can hinder a translator. For a deep-dive into (source) text complexity and translation difficulty, also see the overviews in Akbari and Segers (2017); Heilmann (2020); Sun (2012, 2015). Although not directly using the term translation “difficulties”, Ervin and Bower (1952) discuss translation distortions where the meaning of the source text has been changed in the translation due to a number of language-related categories. As a first category, direct lexical translations may not share the exact conceptual meaning with the original text, leading to an incorrect translation. Second, grammatical rules and requirements may differ between the source and target language system, which may cause either a loss of information or, conversely, uncertainty or vagueness (e.g. languages where the gender of the speaker is part of the grammar compared to those where such information is not represented). Syntactic variations may also result in unintended emphasis or even other, unwanted meaning.

Methods and Outcomes

Cultural factors, finally, can have an important effect on which translation should be produced, and depend on the languages and cultures involved. Nord makes the distinction between translation difficulties and translation problems, the former of which, she argues, is subject to the specific translator. Translation problems, however, can be categorised as follows. Pragmatic



problems are caused by a difference in the source and target situation in which the text and its translation are used. Convention-related problems are cultural-bound, similar to the cultural factors of Ervin and Bower (1952). Linguistic problems relate to structural differences between source and target language systems. Text-specific problems, finally, arise from specific properties of (parts of) the source text. In addition to such broad, categorical approaches translation difficulty has also been investigated with empirical methods. A pioneer of sorts, Campbell (1999) defines translation difficulty in terms of the cognitive processing. First, limitations of a translator's working memory with respect to the task are indicative of difficulty (Gathercole & Baddeley, 1993). In terms of (source text) syntax, the author gives the example of grammatically difficult items where a lexical item, perhaps ambiguous, needs to be held in the limited capacity of the working memory until another disambiguating element is encountered, for instance its grammatical head. Because the working memory has a limited capacity, it can only hold (and process) a limited amount of information at a time. Supplementary to that approach, a lexis-driven language processing paradigm can be utilised as seen in follow-up research to the speech production model of Levelt (1989), particularly de Bot and Schreuder (1993). In such a view, difficulties in the source text are either those lexical items for which no lemmatised form is available in the mental lexicon or whose lemma is underspecified so that the (semantic) concept cannot be readily retrieved. In an initial experimental study, Campbell hypothesises that translation alternatives across translators of the same text can serve as an indicator of difficulty and motivates that decision by its correlation with the number of edits that translators made to a segment. Number of edits are indicative of dealing with problems or difficulties. Such a focus on translation variation left its mark and was later refined by means of an entropy-based component (both on the lexicosemantic and syntactic plane; Carl & Schaeffer, 2014; Carl et al., 2019), as will be discussed later in this thesis. Among Campbell's results is the impact on translation difficulty of word class (particularly verbs and adjectives), complex (and ambiguous) noun phrases, and the level of abstractness. Similarly, considering difficult lexical items, Dragsted (2005) emphasises the effect that difficult terminology has on the translation procedure. Campbell continued research into translatability, most notably with his colleague Hale. Initially in Campbell and Hale (1999) and later in Campbell (2000), they present the Choice Network Analysis (CNA), which is a continuation of Campbell's earlier work involving variation amongst the generated translators.

Conclusion

On the one hand, source text specific properties can be responsible for a number of problems and on the other, translationspecific issues may give rise to higher translation difficulty. Translation is a complex process that involves interacting mental sub-processes. But, broadly speaking, we can say that the source text needs to be read, understood, and its meaning translated. Text reading and comprehension is therefore an important component of the translation process. The relation with the field of readability should be clear. It has been suggested that formulas to quantify the readability level of the source text can to some extent be used as approximates for translation.



The List of Used Literatures

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