

## TRANSLATION METHODS

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**Abstract.** Over the last 20 years corpus resources and tools have considerably affected translation research and practice. This paper fo on the intersection of corpus linguistics and descriptive translation studies. It first provides an overview of several types of descriptive investigation based on corpora, to focus then on research on so called translation universals, offering a survey of some 20 studies and making a distinction among descriptive features, linguistic indicators and computational operators.

**Keywords:** Corpus linguistics; translations studies; translation universals; corpus methods; corpus design; corpus encoding.

## INTRODUCTION

Corpus linguistics has made a significant contribution both to translation practice and to translation theory. In translation practice, corpora have had a decisive impact as concerns the work of translation professionals, learners and users. Most professional translators today rely to a large extent on computer assisted methodologies to carry out their work, and translation memories, which are a specific type of dynamic parallel corpora, are a standard tool of the trade. Translators often compile their terminologies from corpora, and corpus management and analysis skills have become part of translational competence.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Perhaps the first computer-assisted studies of translated texts is Gellerstam, who set out to investigate the features of ‘translationese’, that is “all forms of translation which can in some form be viewed as having been influenced by the original text, without the term implying any value judgment”. Now corpus-based translation studies (CTS or CBTS) is an established subfield of the descriptive branch of the discipline, and includes a number of different lines of inquiry [1].

The main research strand is perhaps that which investigates the hypothesis of translation universals, i.e. supposedly invariant features which characterize all translated texts independently of source language and translation direction. A second line of research focuses on individual variation rather than on universal properties. Its aim is to investigate translator style, i.e. coherent and motivated patterns of choice “recognizable across a range of translations by the same translator”, which “distinguish that translator’s work from that of other translators” and which “cannot

be explained as directly reproducing the source text’s style or as the inevitable result of linguistic constraints”. A third area, whose level of generality stands in between these two, concerns translation norms and conventions. Like universals, norms are interpersonal and above the individual, but they refer to variant rather than invariant traits of translation since they refer to features which characterize translations produced in specific social and historical settings. The concept of translation norms is at the basis of empirical descriptive studies. However, though in her influential study Baker predicted that corpora would be used to investigate both “universal and norm-oriented features of translational behaviour”, this latter area of research is seemingly under-developed.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For this article about 20 studies which have used corpora and corpus linguistics methods to investigate the hypothesis of translation universals were surveyed. Some of the studies surveyed are among the most well-known and quoted in the literature, while others were chosen more or less at random among those published in the last 10 years. The overview aims at illustrating the distinction among different tiers of abstraction and levels of linguistic analysis rather than being an attempt to provide a map of corpus-assisted studies of universal features of translation. Thus, it should be possible to apply the distinction between theory and description, indicators and operators to other areas of investigation, such as research on translator style, translation norms, or on the contribution of translation to language change [2].

Table 1 maps the linguistic indicators of some descriptive categories as put forward in the studies surveyed. The first column lists features which have been posited as translation universals. The indicators which realize each descriptive feature are subdivided into four levels of linguistic analysis, that is lexis, syntax, semantics and discourse. This subdivision is somewhat arbitrary, in as much as different labels could be used (e.g. “grammar” or “pragmatics”) and the distinction between the different levels is not always clear cut.

Table 1: Descriptive Features and Linguistic Indicators

Features	Linguistic Indicator			
		Syntax	Semantics	Discourse
Simplification	Lexical variety	Readability		
	Lexical density	speakability		

Explicitation	Explicit signals of clausal relations	Explication of optional syntactic choices		Explicitating shifts in lexical cohesion
				conjunctive explicitness
				Explicative reformulation
Normalization	Lexical creativity	Distribution of typical and	Range of terms used to represent a	
	Collocational creativity	atypical register features	conceptual domain	
	Formality degree			
Transfer	Distribution of most frequent words	Distribution of typical and atypical register features		
Translation of unique items	Distribution of TL specific lexis	Distribution of TL specific structures	Distribution of TL lexicogrammatical realizations of a concept	
Asymmetry			Distribution of TL lexicogrammatical realizations of a concept	Implicitating vs explicitating shifts

In studies looking at “simplification”, the hypothesis to be proved is that the language contained in a corpus of translations is simpler than that contained in a corpus of comparable texts in the same target language.

### CONCLUSION

I would like to summarize the issues at hand under the headings of quantity and quality. As regards quantity, I think translation studies need more and larger corpora, in more languages, in more directions of translation and covering a wider range of internal varieties. Also needed are more corpora containing texts collected at different times, which can be used to gain insights into how evolving translation styles and norms relate to evolving language norms, and on how translation affects and is in its turn affected by language change. Their study therefore adds a temporal dimension to considerations of corpus design. The isolation of translation universals and norms may be demanding in terms of corpus resources, since several translation and reference subcorpora are needed in order to disentangle source language, genre-related and diachronic variables.

### REFERENCES

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