

Explaining variation between interpreted and non-interpreted English and Russian: constrained language variables

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The presentation reports on the analysis of a parallel, comparable corpus of simultaneous interpreting Russian<>English. Separate studies of such variables as lexical complexity, non-fluencies, and the presence of interpreting transformations, in the two languages yield a contradictory picture: the predictions based on the ‘translational universals’ are carried out in some cases, but not in others.

To reconcile these contradictory findings with theory, I turn to multivariate analysis that also takes into account different explanatory factors. The importance of such methods has been brought to the fore recently in empirical translation studies (Delaere&De Sutter 2017, De Sutter & Lefer 2019). First applications, e.g. Evert&Neumann (2017), demonstrated the feasibility of the approach.

The second stage of research involves an interpreting variation study using factor analysis (cf. Biber (1988) for register variation). After quantifying 36 explanatory variables, factor analysis was conducted to explore variable covariation in interpreted vs. non-interpreted speeches. Five factors were extracted. There are first indications that linguistic features cluster along the dimensions identified in the literature on World Englishes and second language acquisition, e.g. “conservative choices” (Mesthrie&Bhatt 2008).

Contrary to the majority of existing translational variation research, the choice of explanatory variables was informed not by the postulated translation universals, but by the tenets of “constrained language” (Kruger&Van Rooy 2016). This allows us, on the one hand, to avoid the circularity of using the same concepts to choose variables and to explain the behavior of these same variables, and on the other hand, to put to further test the hypothesis that interpreted language is a type of constrained language.

Additional explanatory variables considered in the study include the native speaker status of the interpreter, since many of the English speeches in the corpus are interpreted into the B language. Bridging the gap between the research on World Englishes and translation studies is especially important in the current day and age when borders between native and nonnative English varieties blur and the goalposts for the translation product move towards lingua franca recipients rather than an imagined golden standard speaker. The directionality of interpreting also is shown to play a role, underscoring the importance of including more than just the English material in the research design. Finally, the investigation on the level of the individual variables demonstrates that the typological characteristics of languages, e.g. the scale between nouniness and verbiness (Sasse 2008), enters a complex interplay with the translation universals/trends to produce certain weightings of the features of the target text.

References

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