

The mechanisms behind increased explicitness in translations: a comparative study of the Dutch om-alternation and English that-alternation

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A great deal of previous research into the increase of lexicogrammatical encodings in translated texts has focused on the English that-alternation (Kolbe-Hanna & Szmrecsanyi 2015; Olohan & Baker 2000; Wulff et al. 2014). In a recent study, Kruger & De Sutter (2018) present an elaborate study of the possible mechanisms behind increased explicitness in translated English from Afrikaans: processing complexity, risk avoidance and cross-linguistic inference (CLI). They found the most support for the risk-aversion hypothesis and ruled out CLI: translated English from Afrikaans prefers the retention of that, while original Afrikaans shows a higher omission rate of the complementizer.

In this paper, we show that other mechanisms are at work when investigating a similar alternation within other language pairs. The alternation under investigation is: the Dutch om-alternation, i.e. the variation between infinitival complements with and without the prepositional complementizer *om* as in *Hij belooft (om) op tijd te komen* (Eng.: He promises to be on time). Both alternations involve a complement clause optionally introduced by a complementizer. In both cases, the complementizer is semantically neutral and functions as a boundary signal.

Through a generalized linear mixed-effects model with data extracted from the Dutch Parallel Corpus and English and French as source languages, we found not only evidence for risk avoidance and the processing complexity like Kruger & De Sutter (2018), but also for CLI as source language is one of the factors which significantly determine the choice between the explicit or implicit option. Dutch translated from English demonstrates a preference for the implicit option and Dutch translated from French for the explicit option. Altogether, it appeared that other mechanisms are responsible for increased explicitness in translations according to the language pair under investigation. This made us conclude that we cannot always take for granted claims about certain theoretical concepts (e.g. the causes of increased explicitness) based on specific case studies in which foremost English is one of the languages under scrutiny.

References

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