Enhancing Translator Trainees' Awareness of Source Text Interference by Combining Learner and Comparable Corpora

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Source text or source language interference, whatever we may think of it as researchers, is usually regarded as something undesirable in translation practice and teaching. It seems safe to assume that translator trainees are more prone to interference than professional translators, and that within professionals the ability to resist interference must be in direct proportion to their degree of expertise – all other factors being equal. If this assumption is correct, it follows that trainee translators stand in particular need of being made aware of the dangers of interference.

In order to raise students' awareness in that respect, an experiment is here envisaged which comprises a set of tasks involving the use of two different kinds of corpora. The experiment unfolds in five steps:

a)   students are first provided with a source text (ST1) and requested to translate it into Catalan;

b)   the same students are then provided with a number of Catalan translations of another source text (ST2, i.e. different from the previous one) done by students from previous years. They are asked to identify lexical units or strings in those translations which may be regarded as unidiomatic or even incorrect, for whatever reason (untypical collocation, possibility of *calque*, a possible false friend shining through the translated text, etc.);

c)   the class collectively draws up a list of possible instances of (undesired) interference. Then those instances are inserted as queries in the Wordsmith concordancer in order to separately search for occurrences in the two components of a comparable corpus of narrative texts in Catalan: translations from the particular source language that features in the language pair and non-translations in the target language. By comparing the number of occurrences of the possible instances of interference in both components, students are expected to be able to determine whether (or to what extent) they are idiomatic or otherwise;

d)   students are finally provided with ST2 so that they can ascertain whether (or to what extent) instances of source text interference may be justified by the source text stylistic profile – e.g. a given untypical collocation in the target text may have been triggered by a source text collocation which is also untypical in the source language. Steps b, c and d may be repeated as many times (each time with a different ST and a different set of student translations) as the trainer sees fit, depending on the progress made by the class;

e)   for the wheel to come full circle, students are requested to translate again the source text they translated at the beginning of the whole process (ST1), so that the trainer can gauge the extent of their improvement (or otherwise) in dealing with possible cases of source text interference.

The aim of the experiment is ultimately to validate Corpas' claim (2008: 92), based on previous work by Bowker (e.g. 1998, 2000, 2003), that "students manage to produce translations which are more idiomatic and closer to the target culture norm" when they use comparable corpora as documentation tools. If the claim is supported by the results of the

experiment, the paper may be said to point a way in which learner and comparable corpora might be combined in translator training.

References

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