Explicitation and simplification in translation of poetic and prosaic genre from Persian into English: the case of Sadi's *Gulistan*

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated some cross-linguistic properties of poetic and prosaic genre through the compilation and application of a parallel corpus. To this end, 16 stories from Sa'di's *Gulistan* (Rose Garden) and three translations of the book by Gladwin, Ross and Rehatsek were compared. Regarding the general contentions in terms of explicit hypotheses about the translations, four hypotheses were formulated to test two translation universals, i.e., simplification and explicitation. The analysis of the data demonstrated significant cross-linguistic differences in the original Persian text and its translations as pertinent to the intended properties.

Introduction

The common assumption among numerous scholars in translation studies is that translations as specific text type differ not only from their original source language (SL) texts, but also from comparable original texts in the same language as the target language (TL) texts. For instance, on the one hand, it has often been observed in comparison with their SL originals. On the other hand, this text-type tends to be longer and simpler than their originals or than comparable original texts in the TL, (Hansen and Teich [1]).

Corpus linguistics, which has been mirrored in descriptive translation studies during recent years, takes an empirical approach to the description of language and insists upon the primacy of authentic, attested instances of use (Bonelli [2]). Baker [3] predicts the availability of large corpora together with the development of the corpus driven methodology would enable translation scholars to uncover "the nature of translated text as a mediated communicative event" (p. 243). Since then a growing number of scholars in Translation Studies have begun to seriously consider the corpus-based approach as available and fruitful perspective within which translation and translating can be studied in a novel and systematic way (Aston [4], Bowker [5] and [6], Kubler [7], Laviosa [8] and [9], Machniewski [10], Olohan [11]).

Recently, a great number of scholars have been interested to formulate more exact and explicit hypotheses regarding the textual features of translation and to provide empirical evidence to confirm or reject them (Toury [12]; Baker [13], Kenny [14]). These principal hypotheses are as follows: *Simplification* implies that translations use simpler language than original text in order to enhance optimal readability of the target language text (Toury [12]). *Explicitation* implies that translations tend to spell things out rather than leave them implicit (Baker [13]). *Normalization* suggests that translations tend to conform the typical patterns of the target language, exaggerating the typical features of the

target language (Baker [13]). *Leveling-out* states that in comparison with the original texts in the same language as the TL, translations are more similar to each other than the individual texts in the set of original texts (Hansen & Teich [1]).

There some possible measures at hand to determine simplification including mean sentence length, lexical density and type-token ratio or lexical variety (Williams and Chesterman [15]). Moreover, in order to test the explicitation, some language-specific tests have been proposed. Baker [13] suggests that the frequency counts of that (both as complementizer and relative pronoun) can be used as a test for explicitation. The other one is that translations use more explicit (less densely packed) linguistic renderings of a given semantic content vs. less implicit ones (more densely packed), e.g., more conjunctions vs. prepositions. According to Halliday and Matthiessen [16] conjunctions indicate that logico-semantic relations, such as temporal or causal ones, are made explicit, prepositions indicate less explicit lexcio-grammatical renderings of such relation.

The present paper discussed the analytic features of various linguistic levels of the English and Persian texts through the application of a parallel corpus. The study selected two specific properties of translations for presentation, i.e. simplification and explicitation. It intended to examine the extent of simplification and explicitation used in translations of *Sa'di's Gulistan* by Gladwin [17], Rehatsek [18], and Ross [19]. Concerning the specific properties of translations, the following hypotheses were formulated to test the simplification and explicitation in the original Persian text and its translations:

(H1) The mean sentence length of the original Persian text is lower than translations of the text into English.

(H2) The lexical variety and lexical density of original Persian text are higher than translations of the text into English

(H3) More *that* complementizers are found in translations from Persian into English.

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(H4) More prepositions and fewer conjunctions are found in translations from Persian into English.

Materials

The study utilized the text analysis approach in examining the data, following Baker's translation hypotheses [13] to discover the degree of simplification and explicitation in translations of Gulistan. The text examined in this study was a typical Persian literary text; namely, Gulistan of Sa'di which is composed of stories written in prose and poetry is a great masterpiece not only in Persian literature but also in the world's literature. Furthermore, there are various terms and issues in the book that cannot be simply understood by the target language audience and require simplification. The book has been translated into English by numerous translators and there are various translations at hand. To this end, the first and last stories of each chapter (16 stories in sum) were selected for textual analysis (the book comprises of eight chapters). As to the English versions of the Gulistan, three translations from the available translations were selected including translations by Gladwin [17], Rehatsek [18], and Ross [19]. These translations were selected on the rational that they were thorough and were translated in different time spans. Therefore, a parallel corpus was designed which consisted of the Persian original text and three aforementioned translations into English.

The corpus

The parallel corpus utilized in the study was composed of 16 stories from a Persian literary book (Gulistan) and three different translations of the book. The comparable corpus in this study consisted of 9417 words including a 1680- word subcorpus of the original Persian text and a 7737- word subcorpus of three translations of the original Persian text into English. Gladwin's translation comprised of 2736 words, Rehatsek's translation and Ross' translation 2283 words and 2718 words respectively. The corpus compiled for this study was a full-text, synchronic, specialized, bilingual, and written English and Persian one. It can also be considered as a bilingual parallel corpus and can be identified as a combination bilingual-parallel-mono-directional corpus as well as a mono-source-language translational corpus (based on Laviosa's four-level classification [9]).

Procedure

To initiate the corpus analysis, the parallel corpus was prepared in the electronic format and Concordance software (Oxford WordSmith Tools, Version 4) was applied to calculate the tokens, the types, the frequency of content words, and the frequency of sentences of the corpus components through utilization of Word List option in the software. Based on Williams and Chesterman's formulas [15], the lexical variety, lexical density and mean sentence length of the corpus were determined. The mean sentence length was computed by dividing the total frequency of words by the total frequency of sentences. The formulas to calculate lexical variety and lexical density as percentage are as follows:

Lexical variety = Total types x 100 / Total Tokens

Lexical density = Total Lexical words x 100 / Total Tokens (both formulas taken from Williams and Chesterman [15]).

In the next stage, the other intended textual features were also determined through the use of the data in the Word List. The frequency of *that* complementizer, the frequency of prepositions, the frequency of conjunctions, and the ratio of conjunctions to prepositions were calculated for both components of the corpus.

Data Analysis

The empirical testing of each of the formulated hypotheses required different types of corpus analysis techniques. In the first stage, the components of the parallel corpus were analyzed in order to determine the type, token, frequency of content words, and frequency of sentences of the corpus; in the second stage, mean sentence length, lexical density, and lexical variety were computed for each text to investigate simplification in the components of the corpus. Lexical density, lexical variety and mean sentence length were presented in Table 5.1:

Table 5.1: Lexical variety, lexical density, and mean sentence length of the Persian text and its translations

Moreover, the occurrences of *that* complementizer were counted as a test for this translation universal since this study intended to analyze explicitation. Another possible test for simplification includes the ratio of conjunctions to prepositions which was measured in this study. Table 5.2 and 5.3 displayed the results of these textual features respectively:

Table 5.2: *That* complementizer in the Persian text and its translations

As the analysis results indicated there were significantly more *that*-clauses in English translations compared to the original Persian text; therefore, there was explicitation in relation to the SL text.

Table 5.3: The ratio of conjunctions to prepositions, frequency of conjunctions, frequency of prepositions in the Persian text and its translations

Taking the frequency of conjunction vs. preposition and the ratio of conjunctions to prepositions, the results displayed in Table 5.3 revealed that there were more conjunctions and fewer prepositions in the translations than in original Persian text because the ratio of conjunctions to prepositions is 1: 2.03 in Persian text and 1: 1.18, 1: 1.26, and 1: 1.24 in its translations respectively. The result of this measurement also indicated explicitation in the translations.

In order to compare the results of intended textual features in translations with the original Persian text, in the next level of analysis, the mean of these features were calculated. The results were demonstrated in Table 5.4:

Table 5.4: Mean for the textual features of translations

Based on the findings of the study, the following results were revealed:

1. The mean for the mean sentence length of the translational component of the parallel corpus was higher than the mean sentence length of the original Persian text.

2. The mean of the lexical variety and lexical density of the translational component of the parallel corpus were higher than the mean sentence length of the original Persian text.

3. The frequency of *that* complementizer was higher in the translations in comparison with the original Persian text.

4. Regarding the ratio of conjunctions to prepositions, there were more conjunctions and fewer prepositions in the translations compared to the original Persian text.

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the parallel corpus, the results indicated that there were significant and meaningful differences between the mean of lexical density, lexical variety, mean sentence length, the frequency of *that* complementizer, and the ratio of conjunctions to prepositions of translations and the original Persian text. As mentioned earlier, Sa'di's Gulistan is composed of stories written in prose and poetry.

Furthermore, there are numerous terms and issues in the book that cannot be simply comprehended by the target language audience and they required that translator make them explicit and spell them out.

The study was set out to analyze the some textual features of the English and Persian texts through the application of a parallel corpus. It intended to examine the extent of simplification and explicitation used in translations of Sa'di's Gulistan Gladwin [17], Rehatsek [18], and Ross [19]. Taking the specific properties of translations and common hypotheses regarding the translation into account, the researchers formulated four hypotheses to test the simplification and explicitation in an original Persian text and its translations. The findings of the study confirmed all the aforementioned hypotheses. In conclusion, this contrastive research revealed two universal features of translations, i.e., simplification and explicitation.

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Table 5.1: Lexical variety, lexical density, and mean sentence length of the Persian text and its translations

Textual feature	Persian text	Translation by Gladwin	Translation by Rehatesk	Translation by Ross
Type	799	884	850	950
Token	1680	2736	2283	2718
Frequency of content words	1262	1575	1521	1800
Frequency of sentences	91	102	94	113
Lexical variety	47.55	37.20	37.23	35.99
Lexical density	75.11	57	66.62	66.22
Mean sentence length	18.46	26.62	24.28	24.05

Table 5.2: *That* complementizer in the Persian text and its translations

Textual feature	Persian text	Translation by Gladwin	Translation by Rehatesk	Translation by Ross
That complementizer	30	38	35	41

Table 5.3: The ratio of conjunctions to prepositions, frequency of conjunctions, frequency of prepositions in the Persian text and its translations

Textual feature	Persian text	Translation by Gladwin	Translation by Rehatesk	Translation by Ross
Frequency of prepositions	277	292	288	359
Frequency of conjunctions	136	246	228	288
The ratio of conjunctions to prepositions	1: 2.03	1: 1.18	1: 1.26	1: 1.24

Table 5.4: Mean for the textual features of translations

Text Type	Textual feature	N	Min	Max	Mean
Translations	Mean sentence length	3	24.05	26.62	24.98
	Lexical density	3	57	66.62	63.28
	Lexical variety	3	35.99	37.23	36.8067
	That complementizer	3	35	41	38
	Frequency of prepositions	3	288	359	313
	Frequency of conjunctions	3	228	288	254
	The ratio of conjunctions to prepositions	3	1: 1.18	1: 1.26	1: 1.22