

Juliane House

## General Introduction to the First and Special Issue of **trans-kom**

The papers in this first issue of **trans-kom** are part of the Panel "Beyond Intervention: Universals in Translation Processes", which I organized for the Second Conference of the International Association for Translation and Intercultural Studies (IATIS) held at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa, July 12-14, 2006.

In this thematic issue launching the e-journal **trans-kom**, the important question of universality in translation will be reflected upon from a number of different theoretical and empirical vantage points, and in particular from the perspective of "intervention" – which may be taken to be the very opposite to universality. If universality constitutes something like the "stable core" of translation, intervention is the way originals and their translations vary or are deliberately made to vary, in the act of translation.

Following a discussion of the general issue of universality in translation, which needs to be clearly differentiated from the type of linguistic universals that have been proposed for a long time, the question will be raised whether the quest for translation universals is bound to be futile in the face of pervasive cultural filtering and other widely accepted types of intervention with which translated texts are made to fit the expectations and needs of their new addressees.

An important goal of this issue is to illuminate – from a broadly interdisciplinary perspective – the crucial question of whether it is in fact possible (or even desirable and fruitful) to look for "true universals" in translation. If universals were to exist, how would they advance translation theory? And would a denial of their existence amount to a license to destabilise (in principle) the relationship between source and target texts?

To support findings and arguments for or against universals in translation processes, contributors to this volume provide solid empirical corpus-based evidence stemming from analyses of both oral and written translation corpora and monolingual corpora covering a multitude of different languages (among them English, German, French, Spanish, Brazilian Portuguese, Hungarian, Assamese and Hindi), different genres and different linguistic-textual phenomena.

I believe that such a special issue can greatly enrich the field of translation studies as it will – assisted by modern methods of data gathering, storage and analysis – approach one of the century-old issues of translation theory: what can, should, must be maintained and what can, should, must be changed as texts travel through time and space?

In the introductory paper by the editor of this special issue, an overview is given covering the main proposals of universals made in the traditions of linguistics and philosophy. The author then proceeds to express her doubts as to the possibility that such translation universals exist, and she is also sceptical about the need to look for them. She lists a number of reasons for such a sceptical stance, and summarizes this discussion in a graphic display. In a similar vein, the author also cautions against any indiscriminate (often ideologically motivated) intervention in the original text.

The following paper by Gabriela Saldanha "Explicitation Revisited: Bringing the Reader into the Picture" also looks critically at the question of the existence of universals in translation processes. She examines the claim made by several translation scholars that translations are more explicit or more informative, and she stresses the need for precise definitions of terms. In the study she presents in her paper, she draws on the corpus of translations by Peter Bush and the corpus of translations by Margaret Jull Costa, both holding English translations of Spanish and Portuguese narratives and their source texts. The author argues that when seen as a consistent pattern across translations by the same translator, instances of explicitation may be fruitfully explained with reference to relevance theory and the concept of audience design. However, explicitation should not be regarded as a universal, rather – more modestly – as a consciously applied strategy associated with translators' individual assumptions about their envisaged audience and its likely cognitive context and external environment.

In Carmen Dayrell's paper "Investigating the Preference of Translators for Recurrent Lexical Patterns: A Corpus-based Study", the question of translation universals is approached from the following hypothesis: translated texts draw more heavily on

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#### Redaktion

Leona Van Vaerenbergh  
Hogeschool Antwerpen  
Hoger Instituut voor Vertalers en Tolken  
Schilderstraat 41  
B-2000 Antwerpen  
Belgien  
[leona.vanvaerenbergh@scarlet.be](mailto:leona.vanvaerenbergh@scarlet.be)

Klaus Schubert  
Fachhochschule Flensburg  
Studiengang Internationale Fachkommunikation  
Kanzleistraße 91-93  
D-24943 Flensburg  
Deutschland  
[schubert@fh-flensburg.de](mailto:schubert@fh-flensburg.de)

standard forms of language, on prefabricated lexical phrases and patterns than on flexible, situation-specific, newly created sequences that would allow varying items within them. Dayrell investigates this hypothesis on the basis of analyses of a monolingual Brazilian comparable corpus consisting of two separate subcorpora of best-selling fiction: one made up of translated Brazilian Portuguese texts, the other of non-translated Brazilian Portuguese texts. The results of the analyses indicate that the translations show a preference for recurrent lexical patterns thus confirming the author's hypothesis. It would be inappropriate however to conclude that translations in general tend to conform to typical and standard forms of language, and that they invariably show signs of standardisation and simplification. And indeed the author warns us that her results may well be an artifact of the selection of texts, and the restricted number of collocational patterns examined.

In her paper "What Does the Figure Show? Patterns of Translationese in a Hungarian Comparable Corpus" Maria Balaskó suggests that whatever universality there may be in translation, it would be likely to stem from the context of production of a translation, which she argues is crucially different from the production of an authentic, original text. A translated text has its own specific patterns – which, according to Balaskó, results from the fact that it carries features of both the source and the target language. The typical linguistic patterns or "prefabs" used to formulate a translated text are different from those used in a non-translation. It is this characteristic, this "translationese" or "third-codeness", which constitutes a translation universal being a distinct characteristic of a translation qua translation and comprising all those features that distinguish a translation from a non-translation. Translationese, the universal characteristic of a translation in terms of frequency, distribution and patterning of linguistic items, results from the regular influence of the source language on the target language. Balaskó substantiates her assumptions through empirical work with a tripartite corpus of Hungarian original academic texts, English original texts and Hungarian translations of the English texts. In her conclusions, the author suggests that her analyses point to the existence of two further translation universals: simplification and normalisation.

Madan Sarma's paper "Translating Shakespeare: Intervention and Universals in Translation" is the only "literary" paper in this collection. However, the author "supplements" his small corpus of two Shakespearean plays into a major Indian language, Assamese, with a type of "control corpus" holding not only Assamese translations of a modern Hindi novella but also a contemporary book of sociology. In his analyses of the translations of Shakespeare's plays, the author adduces a number of examples designed to elucidate the occurrence of strategies of intervention into the original text as well as the author's hypothesized universals. He classifies interventions into four different types: retaining the foreignness of the Shakespearean play, continuous adjustment, rhetorical adaptation and elucidation and expansion. The author then proceeds to suggest for his small corpus the operation of translation universals, which he takes over from the list of universals known from the literature, i.e. explicitation, normalisation and conventionalisation as well as simplification. The author refrains

from providing any details about how and why what he has identified as intervention differs from, overlaps with or is similar to the so-called universals.

In their paper "Language Separation in Translation and Interpreting", Susanne J. Jekat and Maureen Ehrensberger-Dow propose a very general type of universal: the influence of one language on another in interpreters' and translators' brains. Like Balaskó, these authors consider translationese as a feature inherently belonging to the process of translating and interpreting. They make the important distinction between translationese and transfer arguing that it is translationese which is the result of transfer from the source language to the target language. Translationese seems to be triggered by the translation process proper and by the source text and can thus be said to be a translational universal. Transfer on the other hand simply reflects competence gaps in one of the languages spoken by a bilingual speaker or translator. The authors present two empirical studies investigating the influence of language acquisition mode and the present status of translators' languages on language separation. The study involves highly proficient bilinguals and translation students. Results suggest that only performance, not the underlying competence, is involved in translationese, and that interpreters and translators with two L1s tend to have more problems with language separation (i.e. are more prone to interconnections) than those who learnt second and third languages later, which means that the former's translating and interpreting performance tends to be inferior.

The final empirical corpus-driven paper in this issue, "Interpreting Proper Names: Different Interventions in Simultaneous and Consecutive Interpreting", is by Bernd Meyer. He looks at intervention and universals in interpreting and examines the question of whether intervention as such can be taken to be a universal feature of interpreting (and translation). Like House in her introductory paper, Meyer expresses doubts that there are or indeed can be specific translation universals other than such a general one as "intervention", and he cautions against a continuous "hunt" for them. Meyer then specifies what he means by intervention as a potential universal in interpreting processes. As a concrete example of intervention he investigates the way proper names are rendered (similarly or differently) in simultaneous and consecutive interpreting processes. Meyer concludes from his analyses that intervention, which he regards as a creative reaction of interpreters to their audiences particular needs that leads to changes in the structure and content of the source discourse, can indeed be regarded as a universal strategy in both simultaneous and consecutive interpreting.

In sum, the papers in this special issue provide an interesting variety of approaches to the question of translation universals, and they will hopefully stimulate further fruitful and controversial discussion of this important theoretical and empirical problem.

*Author*

Juliane House is Professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of Hamburg and co-chair of the German Science Foundation's Research Center on Multilingualism, where she is currently principal investigator of three projects on translation and interpreting. She is best known for her model of translation quality assessment.

E-mail: [jhouse@fastmail.fm](mailto:jhouse@fastmail.fm)

Website: <http://www.rrz.uni-hamburg.de/SFB538>