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Psycholinguistic prospects of translation universals

"Translation S- and T-universals have been widely discussed in Translation Studies (Chesterman 2004; Toury 2004; Corpas Pastor 2008). However, their study from the perspective of Psycholinguistics has not been among the priority topics of late. Our research is focused on the study of translation S- universals and is based both on the psycholinguistic model of literary translation, which combines two approaches to language organization in today's neuroscience – cognitivism and connectionism, and on the experimental data that demonstrate its validity.

A 'think aloud protocol' (TAP) analysis was used to explore the ways in which the meaning of the original text was reconstructed in the target text by the novice translators. A free word association test was used to identify a translator's cognitive style as a universal tendency determining his/her linguistic choice. This psycholinguistic tool helped explore the ways how the meaning of the original text was reconstructed in the target text by the selected group of novice translators. A quantitative content analysis and psycholinguistic text analysis were applied for the purpose of studying the correlation between specific textual features of authors and those of the translators.

The analysis showed that the translator's brain does possess something like a 'switching' mechanism which enables him/her to apply either a 'gestalt' or a verbal-propositional approach to the encoding and decoding of source and target texts. This finding, along with others, undoubtedly contributes to our model of literary translation, providing a strong empirical base for comparing and contrasting the concepts of symbolism and connectionism (Poersch 2007), the dual coding mechanism and the laterality of the cerebral hemispheres in the discourse and thinking activity.

The proposed psycholinguistic model can help to facilitate an understanding of the concept that translation should be viewed not merely as an algorithmic, rule-observing mental activity, but also as a heuristic, strategic and creative process. As the model incorporates both symbolic and connectionist components, it is able to provide an insight into the way in which a translator's memory can be trained through recurrent synapse activation, resulting in the strengthening of neuronal connections in the translator's cerebral network and the emergence of new ones.

As the empirical study showed, the translation S-universals maintain the status of literary translators' common strategies depending on their individual cognitive style.

The study and classification of 'T-universals' is viewed as one which offers

prospects for further research in the field of Applied Psycholinguistics and Translation Studies. Assembling bilingual electronic corpora of English and Ukrainian fiction also seems to be an undertaking which now holds great promise for the future, since such databases could contribute greatly to translation theory and practice by showing current and future translators and scholars a set of possible 'deforming tendencies' to be avoided in their mediating activity and research.