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Translation counterparts as markers of function: the case of copular clauses in a parallel corpus

While traditional contrastive approaches to language study focussed on a comparison of language systems, the use of parallel corpora now makes it possible to turn the attention to the study of corresponding 'units of meaning' in the languages compared. "If we assume that we may find the meaning of a textual element through its paraphrase, which is also a text, then we may describe parallel corpora as repositories for such paraphrases." (Teubert, 2001: 151) In other words, multi-lingual corpora "can make meanings visible through translation patterns" (Johansson, 2007: 28).

Our approach relies on the patterns of translation correspondence as devices which enable us to proceed from a particular meaning or function to its realization forms. Assuming that the various English constructions which share the same Czech translation counterpart are functionally equivalent, the counterpart can be used to identify the members of a group of English constructions which share the same function. For instance, copular verbs *seem*, *appear*, *look* and *sound* were found to be frequently translated by the same Czech epistemic adverbials. Searching for the equivalents of these adverbials in English texts, other constructions conveying epistemic modification - such as modal verbs, adverbs and adjectives, or comment clauses – can be grouped together. While there may be parallel paradigms of means of expressing the particular function in the two languages, the actual patterns of choice can be language-specific. Moreover, the pattern of preferences in the source language can leave its mark on the translation through overuse or underuse of particular constructions. This may be illustrated by the higher proportion of copular verbs as means of epistemic modification in English source texts as compared with English translations from Czech.

Since the repertory of copular verbs in English is much broader than that in Czech (with *být* and *stát se*, corresponding to *be* and *become*, only), Czech translations display a variety of equivalents overtly rendering into Czech the various types of 'modified' attribution of a quality or value to the subject conveyed by the English copular verbs. Apart from epistemic modification, these equivalents make it possible to search, for example, for the expression of aspectual meanings of 'remaining' and 'becoming' in English.

The corpus used is InterCorp, a multilingual corpus being put together within the project Czech National Corpus and corpora of other languages. The project aims at compiling a large multilingual corpus with Czech as its pivot language, comprising, at the moment, 21 European languages. Our analysis of translation correspondences of copular clauses is based on the English-Czech bidirectional section of the corpus (about 8 million tokens).

InterCorp: Czech National Corpus and Corpora of Other Languages, http://www.korpus.cz/intercorp

Johansson, S. (2007): Seeing through Multilingual Corpora. On the Use of Corpora in Contrastive Studies, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Teubert, W. (2001) 'Corpus Linguistics and Lexicography', International Journal of Corpus Linguistics, Vol. 6 (Special Issue), 125-153.