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Translatability and Attitudinal Meaning in the World's News Media

The paper provides some fresh insights into cross-linguistic commensurability issues associated with the translation of explicitly attitudinal words and phrases (terms which convey either positive or negative assessments). The findings reported follow from a study employing semantically-annotated, parallel corpora of English-French and English-Chinese texts.

The paper is broadly concerned with the degree of attitudinal equivalence which is being achieved in the context of the translations into English of news media texts which are currently available to casual readers via the World Wide Web, and more specifically translations into English of French and Chinese news media texts. It considers this question of attitudinal equivalence both with respect to human translations (for example the English translation of *Le Monde Diplomatique* and the English translation of items from the *People's Daily*, the *Renmin Ribao*) and with respect to translations by the various automatic, machine-translation software packages which are currently available. It reports what are probably unsurprising findings that attitudinal equivalence is very much a hit-and-miss affair in the context of the machine translations. Perhaps more surprising are findings that the different translation software packages are not created equal in terms of their ability to handle explicitly attitudinal terms. The paper also reports findings that, according to the measure of "attitudinal equivalence" developed for the study, the human translations vary greatly from attitudinal term to attitudinal term with respect to of the degree of equivalence achieved. One key finding to be reported is that attitudinal equivalence seems to be related to how frequently the translated version of the term occurs in the Birmingham Bank of English corpus and in pages returned by a Google search of the Web. The more frequently occurring the translated term, the greater the likelihood that the translation will be deemed to be equivalent with respect to its attitudinal valeur. The less frequent, the more likely that the translation will be deemed incommensurate, and, interestingly, the more likely that the different machine translation packages will select different lexemes for their translation. These findings suggest more general conclusions with respect to a distinction between attitudinal terms which are more stable in terms of their attitudinal valeur and those which are less stable.

The methodology employed was as follows. A number of corpora were compiled from instances of original French and Chinese news media texts, linked with translations of those texts both by human translators and by machine translation software. Using Extensible Markup Language (XML), all instances of explicitly attitudinal terms were manually annotated by native speakers by reference to the taxonomy of attitude types and sub types as outlined by the appraisal framework (see for example, Martin & White 2005).

References.

Martin, J.R., & White, P.R.R., 2005, *The Language of Evaluation – Appraisal in English*, Palgrave/Macmillan, Houndmills.

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