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Simplification as a Translation Universal

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Abstract: I will discuss the notion of simplification within the framework of Translation Studies. It is subsumed under the category of linguistic universals alongside explicitation, normalization, and convergence. Simplification is the most widespread and well-known universal of all in terms of its power in disambiguating the complexity of translation process and transferring message from distant languages and cultures. The question here is whether translator's tendency for simplification universal originates from the motivation peculiar to translatorial behavior to bridge the gap between temporal and spatial distances. Namely, the translator adopts simplification universal to produce simpler, more reader-oriented and fluent texts at the expense of idiosyncratic features of style. On the other hand, in the age of information and globalization translator's recourse to simplification can be justified when considered the huge amount of knowledge and work produced all over the world. Simplification speeds up the flow and transfer of knowledge even if it affects the lexical richness, lexical density, syntactic structure and discourse markers of the original. If we consider determinants of translation in terms of achievement of an end, we can pose two variables: transfer of message and transfer of style. From the point of communication, simplification can be correlated to the achievement strategy in terms of its power in dissemination of knowledge. In the light of these preliminary remarks, I will discuss the pros and the cons of simplification within the framework of translation universals, as well as the underlying reasons that coerce translators to adopt reductionist strategies in translation.

Keywords: Translation Universals, simplification, translation strategy, achievement strategy.

Simplicity vs Simplification

I will discuss the terms "simplicity" and "the simplification" within the framework of Literature and translation Studies in the first section of this paper before focusing on the issue of simplification from the perspective of Translation studies. The term "simplicity" in literature is generally associated with the term "style", which involves the author's word choice, sentence structure, figurative language, and sentence arrangement, which all together constitutes the tone, images and message, or meaning of the text.

Undoubtedly, all these linguistic features are closely related with the expressive identity of the author, or the way the author expresses his ideas, intentions and feelings. What George Orwell stated in his essay *Politics and English Language (1946)* exemplifies the principles of simple style in literature:

Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech […].
Never use a long word where a short one will do.
If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
Never use the passive where you can use the active.(Orwell 1946)

The linguistic devices mentioned above can be easily attached to the author's intentions in disseminating or sharing his political views. What he wrote in the pref*ace* of the Ukrainian version of *Animal Farm* discloses his intentions as an author, and justifies the underlying reasons why he has adopted simple style in the original.

On my return from Spain, I thought of exposing the Soviet myth in a story that could be easily understood by almost anyone and which could be easily translated into other languages (Orwell 1947)

This also overlaps with the universal of simplification and justifies why Halide Edip Adıvar has adopted simplification universal in the Turkish version of *Animal Farm* by using simple, popular and colloquial language parallel with the author's intentions. Furthermore, in *Memoirs* (1926) she confessed her ideas concerning simplification in translation although she adopted ornate and elaborate style in her novels as follows :

There is a wild harmony in the Anglo- Saxon diction of Shakespeare the parallel of which I thought I could find in the simple but forcible Turkish of popular usage, the words and expressions of which belong more to Turkish than to Arabic or Persian sources. This was at the time an un-heard of and shocking thing, but as I had no intention of publishing I was not hindered by any of considerations of what the public or press might say. The popular Turkish genius in its language was a thing rather apart, although it had greater resemblance to the forcible Anglo-Saxon than the refined Persianized Turkish could be made to have…. (Edib 1926:220).

From these remarks we can see that Halide Edib's recourse to simplification in translation is not a random choice; On the contrary, her strategy is based on her cultural awareness in literary translation. Furthermore, we can claim that her stylistic dilemma as an author and as a translator arises from the central or canonized status of Divan literature prevailing even in the foundation years of Turkish Republic in spite of the efforts of replacing it with folk literature. Accordingly, can we claim simplification universal in translation played a key role in acknowledging colloquial language as an official language of the newly founded republican regime as opposed to the established misconception that simplification ends in impoverishment of languages? Or we can ask whether simplification universal serves for activating the dynamics of colloquial language and speeds up the transition from oral culture to literary culture?

Within this framework, I will discuss the universals of translation from the point of translation theory before dealing with simplification universal and suggest a research strategy to yield data to observe the impact of translations in the development of Modern Turkish.

Theoretical Account of Translation Universals

Gideon Toury was the first theorist who discussed and introduced the term "law" into the jargon of translation studies. In the course time the term "law" grown into "universal" since the findings obtained from the corpus studies disclose that they are peculiar to translation activity held all over the world. He categorizes two universals: the law of growing standardization and the law of interference. He defines the law of growing standardization as 'textual relations obtaining in the original are often modified, sometimes to the point of totally ignored, in favour of habitual options offered by a target repertoire' (Toury 1995:268). If we are to question it from the point of translation activity held in foundation years of Turkish Republic, we can claim that translator's recourse to colloquial language as a result of the law of growing standardization has enriched and canonized it as an official language, which was parallel with cultural policy of the republican regime. From these remarks one can deduce that translation activity has served for two ends; first, it has purified Turkish language from foreign or loanwords, especially from Arabic and Persian words; the second is it has replaced the artificial language of the Ottoman Empire, which was composed of Turkish, Arabic and Persian with Modern Turkish of the Republican regime.

As for the law of interference, Toury depicts it as the transfer of 'the phenomena pertaining to the make-up of the source text' (ibid.275). He divides the transfer into two groups, negative and positive transfer. Negative one refers to the deviations from codified practices; whereas positive transfer refers to selecting and operating the linguistic features which exist in target language (ibid.277). If we discuss it from the perspective of translation history, most of the procedures which the translators applied during the Ottoman reign can be defined as "negative transfer" since the codified practices during the Ottoman reign was based on Arabic or Persian literary polysystems. Then, translator's recourse to negative transfer was inescapable. The question is what has happened to transform negative transfer to positive on in Turkish history of translation? Undoubtedly the authorial identity of the translators in the foundation years of the Turkish Republic has played a great part in converting 'the negative transfer' prevailing in the Ottoman reign, which ended in dirtying of Turkish language, into positive one. It was due to their contribution that Modern Turkish has flourished and Turkish literary polysystem extended its borders to acknowledge new genres. Andre Lefevere discusses the degraded position of colloquial language within the coverage of translated literature, and relates its elevated position not to the translations, but to the revolutions realized under the patronage of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk as seen in the following excerpt:

> *The Ottoman Empire produced coterie literature centered on the literature of Istanbul, whereas the literature produced in the country at large, modeled on Turkish traditions, was never taken seriously by the coterie group and always rejected as popular, if referred to at all. This same "popular" literature was to become of "elevated" to the position of a national literature after the change of patronage produced by Ataturk's revolutions (Lefevere 1992:17-18).*

In this case, one can claim that Turkish translators of the republican regime has pioneered the transition from oral culture into literary culture. In other terms, translations took a great part in shaping the literary polysystem of the newly founded republican regime. Here the ends of simplification as a universal of translation overlaps not only with the simplicity of

popular literature, but also with the ideology of the republican regime in terms of its force in disseminating knowledge and granting equal rights to the citizens of the newly founded nation. However, one can also claim that simplification may have ended in the impoverishment of Turkish language and text type conventions. The question here is whether plainness of language causes stylistic loss from the literary perspective even if the above mentioned statements may verify that the adoption of plainness in language ended in the elevation of colloquial language as the official language of Turkish Republic. In the beginning folk literature as a product of colloquial language could not meet the requirements of written literature in terms of text type conventions, especially when considered the huge amount of information flow or transfer in international correspondence. Besides, new regime turning its face to the West requires new text types for correspondence in face of new institutional formations set up by the new regime. By this way new text type conventions was replaced with the old ones since there was no codified practices peculiar to literary (written) culture available in the beginning. That is why Turkey is called as a haven of Translation activity in the foundation years. Consequently, we can claim that Modern Turkish literary Polysystem was born out of folk literature and translation activity. In this case we cannot discuss negative or positive transfer since we cannot distinguish the borders between the original and translation.

Functional approaches best describes the position of translation activity held in Turkey from 1930s to the end of eighties. The cultural policy of the regime held Translators in high esteem in this period since they assumed translation as an action with prospective ends. Accordingly, the translators bore in mind the demands of initiators, or policymakers in fulfilling their task. In other terms, the Skopos of the translations was set by the initiators. However, in face of the constraints arising from cultural and linguistic distances, the rich heritage of folk literature came to the help of translators of the Republican Age. There are two rules in functional approach: coherency and fidelity. Coherency means that the translators take such coherent decisions in translation process as to regard the cultural background and situations of the addressees. As for the fidelity rule, its coverage is expanded today as opposed to the past misconception related with "the equivalence-based theories". The translator has to consider the initiator's needs, or the skopos of text in observing the intertextual relations, or fidelity to the source text. In this case, the translator's task was to seize the delicate balance between the TL-oriented norms and SL-oriented norms, which also draws up the borderlines of the third code called "translation". (Nord 1997:10). However, from the experience of The Turkish translators in the past, we can see that they acted as text-producers to establish the Turkish literary system even if their efforts in translation activity mostly ended in simplification. Accordingly, it can be claimed that simplification served to draw up the borderlines of "the third code" in Turkish literary polysystem.

Simplification as a translation universal

Mona Baker's approach to universals is suitable in defining relations in distant languages and cultures. Moreover, I believe it sheds light on new openings in translation research due to her emphasis on the role of corpora in translation studies since one can reach the universals only through descriptive studies on corpora; however Turkish scholars are lagging behind on corpus studies even if they were living in the haven of translation as

stated above. Baker, as the first person who has discussed the universals within the framework of corpus linguistics and translation studies, defines translation universals as linguistic features peculiar to translation (Baker 1993: 244). They are basically categorized into three groups as simplification (production of simple and easy-to-follow or reader-oriented texts), explicitation (insertion of additional words), normalization (tendency towards observing textual conventionality prevailing in target culture), convergence (similarity between translated texts in such a way as to form the third code). Translators are constrained by the linguistic and cultural barriers, especially in transfer of knowledge from distant languages. Accordingly, it can be claimed that the translator's frequent recourse to one of the above-mentioned universals is closely related with the linguistic family the translator works on (Laviosa-Braithwaita 1998: 288-291). It is for this reason that I place special emphasis on Mona Baker's definition of translation universals based on linguistic features in verifying the claim that simplification universal in translation activity enriches and reveals the potentiality of Modern Turkish. As an agglutinative language, Turkish proceeds by inserting suffixes or prefixes to the roots of the words to indicate the subject, time and space relations in communication. This entails inductive reasoning in verbalizing the message and hinders the translator from repetition and redundant thinking. It is for this reason that simplification does not mean stylistic impoverishment, on the contrary it is a translatorial operation to disambiguate the information load of the text by operating procedures at different levels**:** lexical, syntactic and stylistic. In this sense simplification universal hosts Toury's laws of growing standardization. However, translator's recourse to it arises from the concern of transferring the information load of the original text without loss. Then, it is for the sake of sharing information fully with the target readers that translator takes rational decisions to provide the intratextual coherency. Accordingly, simplification is a way of covert introduction of new knowledge without distracting the reader's attention just opposed to explicitation where information is transferred overtly. (Claudiu 2010:5) Similarly, Sara Laviosa, who has conducted a corpus study on ECC subcorpus of Newspapers, compared translational corpus with the non-translational ones at lexical, syntactic levels to disclose the linguistic features concerning the simplification universal. Accordingly, the linguistic features related with lexical and syntactic features can be divided into two levels:

Lexical Level

1. Use of superordinate words or hypernyms

2. Approximation of the concepts or tendency to choose less sophisticated terms,

3. Use of circumlocations instead of high level matching words

4. Use of daily language or layman's terms in place of those in Professional or academic jargon

5. Replace cultural elements obtaining in ST with the ones peculiar to Target culture. (Laviosa 1998:101)

On other hand, Lucia Specia, who has conducted a similar research on parallel corpus of original and simplified texts within the coverage of PorSimples project (producing tools to

simplify complex texts literacy and reading disability) reached similar findings at sentential level:

1. Non simplification or literal translation

2.Simple rewriting (substituting discourse markers, sets of words, idioms collocations)

3. Depassivization

4.Inversion of the clause structuring

5. Splitting or joining sentences

6. Dropping sentences or parts of it (Specia 2010:32)

All these remarks indicates omission of superfluous text, or covert explanatory addition in such a way as to maintain the coherency of the text. All these features can also be observed in EU Commission document of style guide for authors and translators:

Hint 1Think before you write.....

Hint 2: Focus on the reader — be direct and interesting

Hint 3: Get your document into shape

Hint 4: KISS: Keep It Short and simple

Hint 5: Make sense — structure your sentences

Hint 6: Cut out excess nouns – verb forms are livelier

Hint 7: Be concrete, not abstract

Hint 8: Prefer active verbs to the passive — and name the agent

Hint 9: Beware of false friends, jargon and abbreviations (European Commission 2013)

All these hints aim at avoiding redundant correspondence and developing effective writing in transferring knowledge. The question here is to what extent Turkish language allows translator to apply all these procedures enlisted above. At lexical level Turkish is flexible enough to provide options for translators to apply all the lexical procedures listed above. Besides, tendency to concretization in Turkish helps translators to disambiguate abstract concepts. It provides several options to translators to derive a lot of new words, from the morphemes. Its derivative power helps to enrich Turkish language and translation activity has played a very important role in transferring new concepts and deriving new terms.

At sentential level, even if the word order as subject-object-verb is different from synthetic languages as English and French, as an official language arising from folk language, the colloquial features established in written language allows the translator to change the word order, which helps to place the rheme (the unit of new knowledge)or verb to the front position. For example, inverted style as the contribution of Nurullah Atac, one

of the most eminent authors and pioneers of Modern Turkish, helps the addressees to focus on the main issue, which contributes to the dynamicity of written language. (Yazıcı 2007:62-67) This means that translation activity has gained speed in transferring new knowledge. Besides the logics of Turkish language is unilateral; this helps to state thoughts in a direct way without giving place any circumlocutions as in Persian, or Arabic. Simple and short sentences are more acceptable than the long, complex sentences. In short, plainness is one of the most remarkable features of it. It is due to this feature of Turkish language, translation activity has fulfilled its missions as realizing language reform and transforming it into a modern society through providing fast flow of information in the foundation years of Turkish Republic.

Conclusion

Simplification universal cannot be assumed as a constraint in translation: on the contrary, it is a means of effective writing, and can act as a means of disambiguating information load, as well as a tool of enriching language as in the example of Turkish history of translation. Besides, it has promoted literacy, and disseminated knowledge throughout the country.

The second point, or drawback of simplification universal is related with stylistic concerns. For example Turkish as a plain language is more open to simplification universal. However, in literary translation where the main aim of the translator is to transfer the expressive identity of the author, the general conception is that the frequent recourse to simplification ends in stylistic loss. However, it operates just in the reverse direction in transition from Ottoman literary polysytem to the modern Turkish polysytem. The readers more easily adopt the new genres owing to clever tactics of simplification adopted by translators bearing authorial skills.

All in all in spite of the widespread operation of simplification universal, there seems to be no corpus studies on it except for a few doctoral dissertations conducted in an individual and isolated way. However, simplification universal is based on providing cooperation in sharing knowledge, and building goodwill. This indicates that Turkish scholars should cooperate to launch corpus studies on simplification universal at their earliest for the sake of promoting projects for the disabled, for prospective ends, or, at least, for the sake of testing the claims, or inferences I have proposed in this paper.

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