

COMPARATIVE-CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF ROMANIAN TO ENGLISH TRANSLATION. LANGUAGE STRUCTURES

Laura SASU¹

ABSTRACT:

THE PAPER INVESTIGATES THE MOST COMMON TRANSLATION ERRORS THAT CAN BE TRACED BACK TO THE INTERFERENCE OF THE SOURCE LANGUAGE (ROMANIAN) UPON TARGET LANGUAGE (ENGLISH). THE COMPARATIVE-CONTRASTIVE STUDY OF MULTIPLE LANGUAGE STRUCTURES HIGHLIGHTS THOSE ERRORS THAT REPLICATE CERTAIN PATTERNS OF THE SOURCE LANGUAGE BY ERRONEOUSLY APPLYING THEM TO THE TARGET LANGUAGE. SUCH SOURCE LANGUAGE INTERFERENCE ERRORS BECOME HIGHLY PREDICTABLE AFTER HAVING CONDUCTED CONTRASTIVE ANALYSES ON EACH LANGUAGE STRUCTURE (NOUNS, ADJECTIVES, ADVERBS, PRONOUNS, PREPOSITIONS, CONJUNCTIONS ETC.). AWARENESS OF THE HIGH PROBABILITY FOR THESE PARTICULAR ERRORS TO OCCUR BECOMES USEFUL IN THE TRANSLATING, PROOFREADING AND REVISING PROCESS, AS WELL AS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING. THE INFLUENCE (INTERFERENCE) OF THE SOURCE LANGUAGE UPON THE TARGET LANGUAGE TRANSLATION PRODUCT IS STRONG ENOUGH TO PRODUCE INADEQUATE PHRASING (INTERLINGUAL TRANSFER ERRORS) BOTH WHEN TRANSLATING FROM A FOREIGN LANGUAGE INTO THE NATIVE LANGUAGE AND - EVEN MORE SO - WHEN TRANSLATING FROM THE MOTHER TONGUE INTO A FOREIGN LANGUAGE OR BETWEEN TWO FOREIGN LANGUAGES. TRANSLATION THEORY AND PRACTICE BOTH BENEFIT FROM THE FINDINGS OF SUCH COMPARATIVE CONTRASTIVE ANALYSES BY IDENTIFYING PREDICTIBLE LANGUAGE INTERFERENCE ERRORS FOR SPECIFIC LANGUAGE PAIRS AND STRUCTURES.

KEY WORDS: TRANSLATION, CONTRASTIVE LINGUISTICS, SOURCE LANGUAGE INTERFERENCE, INTERLINGUAL ERRORS

INTRODUCTION

Modern linguistics includes a relatively new branch of applied linguistics, known as contrastive linguistics, that was initiated in the latter half of the past century by linguists such as Charles Fries (1945) or Robert Lado (1957) and continued by more recent theoretical contributions such as Anthony Pym's (2010). Starting out from the hypothesis that there is a significant influence of the native language upon foreign language acquisition process, the analysis of specific examples

¹ PhD, Faculty of Letters, *Transilvania* University of Braşov, Romania, laurasasu@gmail.com

of native language influence upon foreign language message production can provide a structured outlook on language structures prone to be affected by ‘interlingual transfer’. Thus, the predictability of certain specific language transfer errors can be used for producing more effective language teaching methods and/or materials translation/proofreading/revising protocols.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

For any specific pair of languages, the results of methodical comparative-contrastive studies of morphological structures contribute to a more comprehensive image of existing high risk structures, namely, structures where the probability of interlingual transfer to produce inadequate or erroneous phrasing is highest. The scope of comparative-contrastive analysis has been extended from language teaching and language acquisition to more recent applications in translating studies. Contrastive analyses of specific language structures become useful both in language teaching/acquisition and, even more so, in translation studies and translator training. In the case of the latter, bidirectional analyses are able to provide translators with the necessary disambiguation criteria for attaining best message equivalence as well as the natural/correct use of the target language.

The underlying study focusses on Romanian to English translation, and, hence, on the interlingual transfer errors occurring in message production in English, since in many cases “the difficulty for Romanians might be to opt for the right solution in English in the absence of solid contrastive knowledge”. (Arhire 2016, 10) The comparative-contrastive study of Romanian to English translation of each morphological structure is performed at first by theoretical forecast and subsequently verified and (in)validated by error analysis on a relevant translation corpus.

2. METHODOLOGY

The comparative-contrastive study of Romanian to English translation of each morphological structure is performed at first by theoretical forecast and subsequently verified and (in)validated by error analysis on the relevant corpus of translation tests. The methodology used in this paper implies theoretical forecast starting from source and target language analyses for each sample, followed by applying the source pattern to target language in order to identify each case that produces formal or semantic inadequacies originating in source language interference upon translation. Interlingual transfer analysis is then performed by providing the most frequently occurring errors and listing the incorrect versus [correct] translation of *the source language word/term/phrase* (marked as such in the text).

Examples of inadequacies common in Romanian to English translation tests are numbered and listed contrastively next to the [correct form], marked as such in the text, to highlight the difference between the correct/incorrect forms. The third entry for each sample is the *Romanian structure*, marked as such, to serve as an indicator on whether that particular error results from replicating the source language pattern in the target language or not. The final stage implies the investigating the interlingual transfer occurring in each case, that coins a specific inadequacy as a predictable translation error for a certain language structure, language pair or translation directionality.

3. LANGUAGE STRUCTURES IN CONTRAST

3.1. *Learner language and translation product*

Using a foreign language for communication implies translation both *from* and *into* that specific *language*. Understanding and producing messages switch back and forth between the two languages involved, therefore creating a permanent translation process *from* and *into* one of the languages. The target language of this translating process or the ‘learner language’ (Johansson 2008: 112), as it is referred to in contrastive linguistics concerned with language teaching/acquisition, is predictably influenced by the source/native language. In language teaching and learning the target language is often severely influenced by the native language, while in translating any given source language of the two impacts the translation language in the translation results.

3.2. *Nouns*

3.2.1. *Number*

Plural forms are created and used for certain uncountable nouns by extending and applying a target language plural forming pattern, erroneously presuming that there is a plural form in the target language, merely because the source language has plural forms for such nouns.

(1) I need more informations [information]. *Am nevoie de mai multe informații.*

(2) I am interested in more recent researches [research]. *Mă interesează cercetări mai recente.*

Irregular (thus unpredictable) plural forms in English similarly prompt for the generation of regular plural forms in the target language.

(3) Such phaenomenons [phaenomena] are uncommon. *Astfel de fenomene sunt rare.*

The influence of the source language upon the target language results in typical interlingual transfer, here creating erroneous plural forms.

3.2.2. *Case*

The Romanian means of expressing possession do not include variable patterns applicable in Genitive constructions, according to semantic or formal features of the possessor. Therefore, the choice between the use of the analytical and the synthetic genitive in Romanian to English translations seems to be rather aleatory.

(4) This new computer’s peripheral devices [of the new computer] are wireless. *Dispozitivele periferice ale calculatorului modern sunt conectate fără fir.*

(5) The conclusions of the researcher [researcher’s conclusions] indicate the contrary. *Concluziile cercetătorului indică contrariul.*

3.2.3. *Gender*

Gender distinction in Romanian is strictly formal (masculine feminine, neuter), while English (masculine, feminine, neuter and common gender) nouns are classified semantically. Therefore, common or dual gender nouns in English are insufficient when translating Romanian nouns, referring to animates that are gender marked in the source language. Transfer to either masculine or feminine (by including gender contrast markers) is necessary in order to provide accurate translations in such cases.

(6) There are 89 students [male students] and only 64 female students in our department. *În departamentul nostru sunt 89 de studenți și doar 64 de studente.*

Gender contrast is marked by entirely different nouns, specific compounds and suffixes in cases of common/dual gender English nouns, hence posing predictable translation difficulties when the source language is Romanian.

3.3. Articles

The three main article categories in English (definite, indefinite and zero article) have only two semantically corresponding types of articles in Romanian (definite and indefinite articles). The generic meaning provided by the use of the zero article in English is rendered by the definite article in Romanian. Thus, common errors in Romanian to English translation include translating the definite article instead of using the zero article for conveying generic meaning.

(7) The [-] information is the most valuable asset nowadays. *Informația este cel mai valoros bun la momentul actual.*

In Romanian generic meaning is inherent to the use of the definite article and that is semantically equivalent to the use of the zero article in English. The formally corresponding translation including the definite article implies a specific reference that is absent in this case.

(8) I like [the] nature. *Îmi place natura.* (generic meaning)

(9) I like the nature here. *Îmi place natura de aici.* (specific reference)

3.4. Numerals

3.4.1. Cardinal Numeral

Due to the interlingual structure transfer of Romanian cardinal numerals, the *and* is often omitted when reading or writing the corresponding English numerals.

(10) 621 - six hundred [and] twenty-one. *Șase sute treizeci și unu.*

Numerals that typically have plural forms in Romanian tend to be translated accordingly, even though in English plural forms for *hundred, thousand, million, billion* are restricted to nominal use or as part of constructions followed by *of*.

(11) Two millions [million] five hundred circuits are integrated in this microchip. *Două milioane cinci sute de circuite sunt integrate în acest microcip.*

(12) Millions protested against this law. *Milioane au protestat împotriva acestei legi.*

(13) Millions of dollars have been invested here. *Milioane de dolari au fost investiți aici.*

3.4.2. Ordinal Numeral

The exceptional occurrence of cardinal numerals instead ordinal numerals for expressing order in specific contexts creates situations where English cardinal numerals should be used for Romanian ordinal numerals or conversely, Romanian cardinals should correspond to English cardinals. Preserving the type of numeral typically used in the source language results in rather artificial phrasing in English.

(14) The office is on [the sixth] floor six. *Biroul este la etajul șase.*

(15) The sixth chapter [six] is the most interesting. *Capitolul al șaselea este cel mai interesant.*

3.4.3. Multiplicative Numeral

Multiplicative numeral structures consisting of the cardinal numeral followed by *times*, are preferred to the synonymous structure consisting in cardinal numeral followed by *fold*, due to the prevalence in Romanian of a formally similar construction.

(16) I told her ten times [tenfold]. *I-am spus de zece ori.*

3.4.4. Decimal Numeral

The decimal separator in Romanian is a *comma*, whereas the in English indicator is *point*. Conversely, the *point* is used in Romanian numerals to separate billions, millions, thousands and hundreds, while in English numerals the comma is used for this purpose. Source language interference does not only create erroneous phrasing, in such cases, but it may completely alter the semantic level by referring to completely different numeral.

(17) 54,367 /fifty-four thousand three hundred and sixty-seven [54.367/ fifty-four point three six seven] meters of fibre optic cable are not enough. *54,367 metri de cablu de fibră optică nu sunt suficienți.*

(18) 2.931/two point nine three one [2,931/two thousand nine hundred and thirty one] hectares were damaged by the flood. *2.931 hectare au fost afectate de inundații.*

Translation errors in these cases concern correct interpretation and writing of figures/numerals and correct subsequent conversion to the corresponding numeric unit. Confusion in such cases may result in severe distortion of meaning, therefore such errors may be labelled as high-risk errors with significant semantic implications and high occurrence probability.

3.5. Adjectives

3.5.1. Comparison

The choice among synthetic, analytical and irregular comparison structures is difficult because of a single existing pattern for comparative/superlative forms in Romanian, hereby creating source of confusion.

(19) The more narrow [narrower] stripes are not visible. *Dungile mai înguste nu sunt vizibile.* Special comparative constructions in English (*the* +comparative, typically used when comparing only two items) are often replaced by word-for-word translations of Romanian superlatives.

(20) This device is the best [better] of the two tested last week. *Acest dispozitiv este cel mai bun dintre cele două testate săptămâna trecută.*

This device is the most [more] reliable of the two tested last week. *Acest dispozitiv este cel mai fiabil dintre cele două testate săptămâna trecută.*

3.5.2. Position

Position of adjectives in Romanian is typically considered to be the post-position, where adjectives appear after the noun, while any breach of this sequential pattern be perceived as exceptional markers for emphasis, contrast or specific reference.

English adjectives typically occur in pre-position, preceding the noun they are determining. The semantic implications of adjectives pre-determining nouns in Romanian are often lost in Romanian to English translation.

(21) They haven't tested the new technology yet. *Nu au testat încă noua tehnologie.*

(22) They haven't tested the new technology yet. *Nu au testat încă tehnologia nouă.*

(23) Products with visible flaws [visible] are returned to the manufacturer. *Produsele cu defecte vizibile sunt returnate producătorului.*

3.6. Pronouns

Singular and plural demonstrative pronouns with proximity reference are translated incorrectly by substituting the plural form with the singular, due to the similar pronunciation.

(24) I intend to purchase this [these]. *Intenționez să le cumpăr pe acestea.*

Plurals of reflexive pronouns for second person are frequently replaced singular forms, producing thus incorrect target language phrasing.

(25) Help yourself [yourselves] to some coffee, dear friends. *Poftiți la cafea, dragi prieteni.*

3.7. Adverbs

Irregular comparison of English adverbs with parallel forms and distinct meanings for comparative and superlative are the source of translation difficulties for native Romanian speakers, who do not perceive any difference in form or meaning in the source language.

(26) You should farther [further] investigate. *Ar trebui să cercetezi mai departe.*

(27) You should walk further [farther]. *Ar trebui să mergi mai departe.*

3.8. Prepositions

Source language transfer occurs when translating prepositions, producing either incorrect phrasing or alteration of meaning.

(28) The results were obtained through [by] adding up pre-existing data. *Rezultatele au fost obținute prin însumarea datelor existente.*

(29) The children jumped in [into] the yard. *Copiii au sărit în curte.*

(30) The children jumped in [within] the yard. *Copiii au sărit în curte.*

3.9. Conjunctions

Conjunctions with implicit negation in English occur in translation contexts with a double negation, closely following the source language structure.

(31) Don't call unless you don't have [have] good news. *Să nu suni, dacă nu ai vești bune.*

(32) He made a complete backup for fear he shouldn't [should] lose all the data. *A salvat totul, de frică să nu piardă toate datele.*

4. CONCLUSION

Applying contrastive analysis in foreign language acquisition, teaching and in translation pedagogy and practice provides research results useful both for oral and written communication in a foreign language. The theoretical forecast and the practical validation procedure described above is meant to assist foreign language teachers/learners and translators to rely thereon as a notional and illustrative framework for improving results of foreign language teaching/acquisition and translation practice. A similar comparative-contrastive investigation can be applied for any given language pair, directionality or language structure for obtaining results relevant for assessing the occurrence probability, type and cause of inadequacies typical to learner language and translations.

REFERENCES

1. **Arhire, Mona;** 2016. *Structural Equivalence in Translation. An introduction.* Vol I Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2016;
2. **Bell, Robert T.;** *Translation and Translating: Theory and Practice.* London and New York: Longman, 1991;
3. **Fries, Charles C.;** *Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1945;
4. **Johansson, Stig;** *Contrastive Analysis and Learner Language: A Corpus-based Approach.* Oslo: University of Oslo, 2008;
5. **Lado, Robert;** *Linguistics across cultures: Applied linguistics for language Teachers.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1957;
6. **Pym, Anthony;** *Exploring translation theories.* New York: Routledge, 2010.