

The Contribution of Construction Grammar to Translation Teaching

A Case Study on the Transfer of German Path and Property Resultatives into French

Françoise Gallez

Université catholique de Louvain/Université Saint-Louis – Bruxelles

Trainee translators have to express the meaning of a source text in a fluent target text. To that end, they have to learn to identify and understand constructions in the source text and use corresponding target language constructions. This task may turn out to be difficult, for instance when there is no one-to-one “constructional equivalence” between the source and target languages (Rojo & Valenzuela 2013). This is the case for the translation of German path and property resultative constructions (Goldberg 1995, Goldberg & Jackendoff 2004) into French, e.g.

1. GERM: *Ronaldo köpft Portugal ins Finale.* (EN: Lit. ‘Ronaldo heads Portugal into the final.’)
FR: *D’une frappe de la tête, Ronaldo hisse le Portugal en finale.*
2. GERM: *Unbekannter klingelte Merkel aus dem Schlaf.* (EN: Lit. ‘A stranger rang Merkel out of her sleep.’)
FR: *Un inconnu réveilla Merkel en sonnant à sa porte.*
3. GERM: *Den Konservatismus wegtwittern.* (EN: Lit. ‘to twitter [away] conservatism [away]’)
FR: *Éradiquer le conservatisme via Twitter / en twittant / à coup de tweets.*

In traditional linguistic approaches to translation, such issues have been dealt with in terms of *recategorization* and *interchange*. *Recategorization* (Delisle et al: 1999) is the change of the word class or part of speech of a word or phrase with a semantic equivalent (GERM: *Sie ist eine leidenschaftliche Tänzerin.* EN: *She is a passionate dancer. => She has a passion for dancing). With *interchange* (Delisle et al. 1999), the translator swaps two lexical items with respect to form and function, thereby switching their respective parts of speech, e.g. FR: *Il sortit de la maison en courant.* => EN: He ran out of the house. The concepts of *recategorization* and *interchange* favor a translation approach which focuses on lexical items, e.g. GERM *köpft* (‘heads’) => FR *frappe de la tête* (‘hit of the head’). By contrast, the constructionist approach privileges the whole resultative construction and accounts for both formal and semantic equivalence. It further reflects the privileged lexicalization patterns of particular languages and allows for the generalization of translation procedures.

Against this backdrop, the question arises whether a construction-based teaching approach (Delorme-Benites 2017) can facilitate the inference of appropriate translation procedures, thereby making translation choices easier. In order to answer this question, a classroom-based study was conducted among French-speaking learners of German (n=40) at B2 level according to CFR. The experimental group was presented with an innovative construction-based teaching unit for translation issues in the domain of path and property resultatives, whereas the control group worked with a translation teaching approach based on lexical items. Participants were tested on language proficiency regarding these specific constructions before and after the treatment. The results consistently show that the construction-based teaching approach can substantially contribute to leveraging translation performance and pave the way for the implementation of such approaches in other language areas.

Literature

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