

Simplification as a linguistic universal versus text readability enhancement

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Abstract

Emerging from the theoretical assumptions voiced by Descriptive Translation Studies (Toury, 1995), the theory of translation universals (Baker, 1996) reflects the current trend in Translation Studies wherein the centre of gravity is shifted from source-oriented to target-oriented translation. The concept of translation universals has further shifted attention from comparing the quality of translated texts by making reference to their original source texts (the S-universals, Chesterman, 2004) to analysing their features by juxtaposing them with other texts in the target language (the T-universals), both translated and non-translated. By comparing the translated texts with other translated texts or other non-translated texts in the target language, some general (universal) patterns can be observed regarding the tendencies in the process of both interlingual (between two languages) and intralingual (within one language) rendering. While the idea of treating intralingual transfer as one of the subtypes of translation still evokes some discussions and controversy, it has been recently acknowledged by a growing number of scholars. Regardless of the status of intralingual transfer, both interlingual translation and intralingual rendering deploy similar simplification techniques, and pursue the same aim of making texts easier to read and understand, that is, making them more readable.

Keywords: readability (comprehensibility); intralingual translation; corpus-assisted analysis' simplification; translation universals

1. Introduction

This paper aims to discuss the question of text readability (comprehensibility), which in recent approaches to translation is seen as a vital element to be considered in the process of translation, and which bears a close relation to simplification, i.e., one of the so-called translation universals. Text readability will be illustrated by making reference to the traditional understanding of translation, i.e., interlingual translation (between two languages) as well as to intralingual translation (within one language), as text simplification used as a way to achieve better text readability is a process present in both types of rendering. The thesis the paper adheres to is that the borderline between intra- and interlinguistic translation is fluid and gradual, rather than binary and exclusive, and that intralingual rendition may be seen as one of the forms of translation understood in broader terms.

There is no unanimous opinion about whether simplification occurs in the translated texts in all languages, that is, that the translated texts show more simplicity relative to the untranslated texts, written originally in a given language; however, even if this tendency is not universal or does not occur to the same extent in various languages, writing texts that are comprehensible (readable) for readers should be the priority in the process of translation. It must be stressed that intralingual simplification is not a concept identical to interlingual simplification; however, the two measures deploy similar simplification techniques, and pursue the same aim of making texts easier to read and understand, that is, making them more readable.

The structure of the paper is as follows: the concept of readability will be discussed in section 2; section 3 will be devoted to a review of how the concept of readability has been recently implemented in Translation Studies, intralingual transfer vs. interlingual translation will receive attention in section 4; the discussion in section 5 will revolve around the question of linguistic universals, in particular simplification and its relation to readability; and this will be followed by some general conclusions in section 6.

2. Readability

In most general terms, text readability is a set of lexical, syntactic, stylistic and text organisational features that allow poorly educated readers to read and understand a text (Nielsen-Bohman et al., 2004, pp. 37-38). Another approach to that concept assumes that readability is associated with the effort the reader must make to understand a text (Albin, 1998, p. 122). These two approaches to readability, text-oriented and reader-oriented, reflect early studies conducted by psychologists, for whom readability could mean, on the one hand, the ease of reading a text, which stems from the reader's interest in a given topic, so it is

dependent primarily on the reader, and, on the other hand, it could also mean the ease of comprehending a text, which depends on the text style and quality (Klare, 1984). Garner et al. (2012) follow a reverse line of reasoning and stress that text readability results from parameters of a text (i.e., the lexical, syntactic and stylistic features), while text comprehensibility refers to readers' skills and knowledge (their encyclopaedic knowledge, speed of reading, level of education, expectations, cognitive skills, etc.). In this paper, text readability and comprehensibility will be treated as synonyms while primarily discussing textual features, i.e., text-oriented aspects.

Text readability is a widely publicised issue in Great Britain (mainly through the Plain Language Campaign), Scandinavia and the US, as well as in the EU, where recently a document "How to Write Clearly" was issued on this topic. In Poland, there is a legal act regarding the readability of patient information leaflets (PILs) wherein it is recommended that the texts be written in plain language comprehensible by an average client/patient (Journal of Laws from 2010, no 85, item 551). All these documents aim to simplify the language of printed texts (mainly official or medical) for the benefit of the citizens.

The recommended level of text readability, to the best of my knowledge, has not been established for texts written in Polish. There are some guidelines for experts evaluating school textbooks that recommend checking whether the level of texts is not higher than the sixth grade in Polish schools (Gąsiorrek et al., 2014). In the US, on the other hand, the recommended text readability level is defined as one that would allow understanding a text by a person who has completed five years of education in the US (USDDH, 2010).

A number of indices are used to verify text readability. Most of them have been used for over 80 years and are still used in the field of medical sciences (more details in Bączkowska 2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b; Bączkowska & Kościatkowska-Okońska, 2020). In early studies, text readability was checked by employing algorithms that calculated it based on the number of letters (or syllables) in a word and the number of words in a sentence. This mechanistic and statistical approach to analysing text comprehensibility met with severe criticism as early as in the 60s (Bormuth, 1966; Gilliland 1968). The drawbacks of the tests most often cited include the claim that text meaning cannot be assessed by sheer mathematical calculations of counting the letter/syllable and word ratio in a sentence as they consider superficial aspects of language only, and ignore a number of other vital factors, epitomised by, for example, the role, expectations and competences of a reader, the competences of the author, possible errors in a text, etc. It seems logical that while evaluating text comprehensibility, other features should be considered along with the statistical measures (word and sentence length), such as the semantic, syntactic, pragmatic, stylistic

and even psycholinguistic factors as well as readers' competencies (Bączkowska, 2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b; Bączkowska & Kościatkowska-Okońska, 2020; Iluk, 2012; Crossley et al., 2019; Charzyńska et al., 2015; Kottur et al., 2010; McNamara et al., 2014). A reliable methodological framework of text readability can only be achieved by relying on a text's statistical and linguistic aspects. Incidentally, despite the heavy criticism of the traditional statistics-based readability tests voiced for over six decades (Bączkowska, 2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b; Bączkowska & Kościatkowska-Okońska, 2020; Bruce et al., 1981; Buchbinder et al., 2001; Charzyńska et al., 2015; Clerehan et al., 2005; Crossley et al., 2016; Crossley et al., 2019; Davidson & Green, 1988; Davidson & Kantor, 1982; Garner et al., 2012; Gilliland, 1968; Iluk, 2012; Leroy et al., 2013; Stokes, 1978; Weiss, 2007), their popularity has not diminished, and is even on the rise (DuBay, 2004). The counter-argument in defence of the criticism that is often put forward is that apparently, the outcomes of both the traditional and the linguistics-oriented tests tend to converge (Klare, 2000, p. 110).

Studies that integrate statistical parameters typical of the traditional text readability tests with the linguistic indices are still scarce (but see e.g., Albin, 1998; Conde, 2011; Simonsen, 2014, 2015; Spaulding, 1956; Tsai), and are often conducted in medical sciences and psychology (e.g., Banasiak & Meadows-Oliver 2013; Barney et al., 2011; Hayden, 2008; Jo et al., 2020; Sierra et al., 1992).

3. Readability and translation

In Translation Studies, text readability is reached mainly by applying explicitation and simplification (Hansen-Schirra & Gutermuth, 2015; Steiner, 2012, p. 4). Explicitation consists in explanation (clarification) of meaning and is achieved by adding some text by the translator. Clarification is an indispensable element of translation, and thus the aim of explicitation is to explain to the reader whatever is expressed unclearly or is hidden in the original text (Berman, 2000, p. 289). This can be done through lexical repetitions, paraphrasing, using simple sentences (clauses) to substitute for long sentences, avoiding ellipses, etc. On the other hand, simplification is a reverse measure and consists of omitting selected elements (which are redundant) or simplifying the original text by, e.g., using easier synonyms or words of higher frequency and avoiding polysemic words. Albin (1998) further suggests a change in text organisation, for example, bulleting information in order to simplify a text.

To these features, the Hamburg School (that consists of psychologists: Langer et al., 1974, 2006, as cited in Wolfer, 2015, pp. 40-41) also adds other changes, such as enhancing text cohesion as well as two types of simplification: shortening and linguistic simplification. Langer et al. (1974, as cited in Wolfer,

2015) realise that adding explanations and simplifying texts are two opposing measures; still, they hold that they are equally critical constitutive elements of text readability. However, from their more recent studies (Langer et al., 2006, as cited in Wolfer, 2015), it transpires that simplifying had a more significant impact on text readability enhancement than explicitation did. Similarly, Groeben (also a psychologist, who represents the Heidelberg School, 1982, p. 191, as cited in Wolfer, 2015), for whom linguistic simplification is a concept tightly related to text readability, holds that it hinges on resorting to high frequency words and writing short sentences. The Hamburg School, which is empirical-inductive, and the Heidelberg School, which is theoretical-deductive, are not univocal in their theses, yet their conclusions regarding readability are convergent; moreover, both schools focus on text analysis rather than the interaction of the reader with a text (Göpferich, 2009, p. 33). Inspired by research conducted by the German psychologists based in Hamburg and Heidelberg and drawing on their achievements, a German linguist, Susanne Göpferich (2009), proposed her own typology of text readability for TS. Her text readability typology, known as the Karlsruhe model, completely ignores the category resembling explicitation, and instead Göpferich proposes two simplification measures (out of six elements in her typology): simplicity and concision (Göpferich, 2009, p. 33). Research by the German psychologists and the Karlsruhe model defines simplification on the level of lexical and syntactic changes, yet the Karlsruhe model adds a psycholinguistic element to it, i.e., it also focuses on the interaction occurring between the text and the reader.

Both simplification and explicitation may be used in interlingual translation, which is traditionally associated with the concept of translation, and intralingual translation, a more controversial subtype of translation (more details in the next section). An oft-cited subtype of intralingual transfer is a communication between the expert and the layman (Zethsen, 2009, p. 800), and an excellent example of it can be a medical text, in particular Patient Information Leaflets (PILs), which are usually based on a document known as Summary for Product Characteristics (SfPC). As PILs are written for patients, they are expected to be a more accessible version of SfPCs; the latter are provided for experts (e.g., pharmacists or physicians). The readability of PILs is generally low, and often-times the text in PILs is not well understood by patients (e.g., Askehave & Zethsen, 2000, 2002; Bączkowska, 2020b; Clerehan et al., 2005, 2009; Raynor et al., 2007). Moreover, Askehave and Zethsen (2000) analysed 40 PILs translated from English into Danish and noticed that translators-pharmacists encountered severe problems when rendering pharmaceutical terminology into simple, everyday language; they tended to use long and complex sentence structures, tried to include too much information in a single sentence, often resorted to nominalisation and overused passive voice. Askehave and Zethsen (2002) proved that

PILs translated from English into Danish are often more complex than those in the original version. The authors hold that the reason for that may lie in the fact that in Denmark, PILs are usually translated by pharmacists rather than professional translators (Nisbeth Jensen & Korning Zethsen, 2012), who focus primarily on text precision at the cost of text readability, and hence they have a tendency to overuse specialised terms in PILs (Gal & Prigat, 2005, p. 489).

A number of scholars (Clerehan, 2014; Clerehan & Buchbinder, 2006; Clerehan et al., 2009; Wermuth, 2016) analysed PILs in line with the systemic-functional theory. Clerehan and Buchbinder (2006, p. 56) noticed that adverbs of frequency are often misinterpreted by patients, particularly those mentioned in the side effects section, a part of PILs that is apparently most often read by patients (Raynor et al., 2010). It is not clear, for example, whether the phrase *less commonly* is tantamount to *very rare* (the latter means that its occurrence is below 1%). Berry et al. (2002) have noticed that the meaning of adverbs of frequency is often overestimated in defining the risk of drug application. The complex language of PILs discourages patients from reading them, and the information they contain does not help them learn about the given drug (Raynor et al., 2007).

4. Intralingual translation

Intralingual translation¹ refers to translation within one language (Gottlieb, 2001; Jakobson, 1959), which requires information *transfer* (Göpferich, 2010). Along with interlingual translation (between two languages) and intersemiotic translation (across varying types of signs, e.g., verbal, nonverbal, visual, etc.), intralingual translation was proposed by Roman Jakobson (1959, p. 233) in the late '50s of the 20th century as a subtype of translation in his tripartite typology; however, up till now intralingual translation has been treated as a peripheral rendering compared with the other two subtypes of translation (Baker, 1998; Zethsen, 2007), or is even excluded from translation subtypes by some theoreticians.

According to a number of scholars (e.g., Jakobsen, 2005, p. 176; Mossop, 2016, p. 2; Newmark, 1981, p. 12; Shuttelworth, 1997, p. 82; Schubert, 2005, p. 126), the only possible type of translation (as Jakobson called it *translation proper*) is interlingual translation. For example, when writing about technical translation, Schubert (2005, p. 126) maintains that "To translate means to render a text into a different language. Translation is by definition interlingual" (Schubert, 2005, p. 126). Mossop (2016, p. 2) asks himself: "Why call rewording within a language a kind of translation?" and insists that "The push by some to

¹ Other terms used to denote intralingual translation are *re-wording* (Jakobson, 1959; Mossop, 2016), *re-verbalisation* (Krings, 1986, as cited in Kajzer-Wietrzny et al., 2016) and *transfer* (Göpferich, 2010), all of which will be treated here as synonyms.

incorporate ‘intralingual translation’ into TS is one of several manifestations of this loss of focus, which should be resisted.” Jakobsen (2005, p. 176) sees translation as a three-stage process: understanding the source text, producing the target text, and mapping the meaning encoded by one language onto another. Understanding the process of rendering texts in this way assumes that there is no room for intralingual translation, as avers Jakobsen (2005, p. 176). The requirement of the three stages “sets interlingual translation apart from intralingual text operations like paraphrase, text revision, and summarizing” (Jakobsen, 2005, p. 176). Interestingly, in more recent publications, he deems that the process of translation (including machine translation) should also comprise text revisions and post-editing (Jakobsen, 2019, pp. 66, 75-77), which are seen as examples of intralingual transfer.

Intralingual translation is not a topic often discussed. As Baker (1998, p. xviii) noted in the introduction to the “Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies”, she had not heard of studies devoted to intralingual translation. Today, over 20 years later, the topic is still not very popular, albeit some more interest can be recently observed, notably in Denmark, where a group of researchers associated with K. Zethsen (Dam et al., 2019; Zethsen, 2007, 2009, 2018;), a scholar dealing with readability in medical texts, have brought the topic to a broader discussion.

There are also scholars who promote the inclusive definition of translation, i.e., one which allows for intralingual translation (Dam et al., 2019; Even-Zohar 1990; Göpferich 2007; Jakobsen, 2019; Kajzer-Wietrzny et al., 2016; Muñoz-Miquel, 2012; Nisbeth Jensen, 2015; Steiner, 1975, 2001; Whyatt et al., 2017; Zethsen 2007, 2009, 2018), yet they are not in the majority. They claim (Weissbrod, 2004, p. 24; Zethsen, 2018, p. 84; Zethsen & Hill-Madsen, 2016) that both inter- and intra-lingual translation rely on the same processes and strategies (Zethsen, 2018, p. 84), that intralingual transfer is yet another version of a text which differs only in register (Steiner, 2001), and that it is only a text transfer for another audience (Weissbrod, 2004, p. 24), alternatively, that both transfers exemplify communication and there is no need to separate them (Steiner, 1975, p. 223-225).²

Incidentally, Zethsen (2009, p. 805-807) identifies four factors that decide about intralingual transfer depending on text *skopos* (aim). Firstly, an understanding of a specialised text requires its transfer (simplification) for non-specialists (Zethsen calls this factor knowledge). Secondly, texts written in earlier times often need re-translation to adjust the language to contemporary forms (the factor of time). Thirdly, culture-specific elements may need adjustments too for the secondary audience (the factor of culture). As an example, Zethsen gives re-translation of the novel “Harry Potter” for American readers where

² G. Steiner’s proposal is based on hermeneutics, which assumes that translation is a form of communication, and communication is interpretation.

some lexical items were changed, such as *biscuits* into *cookies*, *Mummy* into *Mommy*, *football* into *soccer*, etc. Finally, the last parameter (space) assumes shortening or lengthening a text, which relates to writing summaries, subtitles for the hard of hearing, etc. on the one hand (shortening), and adding content in order to provide some explanations, and by the same token, making a text more readable (lengthening) on the other. These four parameters may co-occur, and their main aim is text reduction, i.e., simplification of the original text or its explication.

Another stand completely underestimates this binary division of translation into inter- and intralingual (Berk Albachten; 2014; Pym, 2004; Schmid, 2012; Toury, 1986). Pym (2004, p. 21), for example, while discussing localisation, came to the conclusion that the borderline between languages was not easy to identify. In particular, he claims that in the case of translating dialects, sociolects and idiolects, translations may be called both inter- and intralingual. Similarly, Toury (1986, p. 1113-1114) holds that the translation of dialects is a borderline and problematic case that is difficult to label. These typological difficulties could be levelled out if, following Toury's proposal, both inter- and intralingual translations were treated as subtypes of intersemiotic translation. For G. Steiner (2001, p. 169), reverbalisation is a variant of the text genre. Berk Albachten (2014) also treats this dichotomous approach to translation as ambivalent and inappropriate. As proof, she provides the controversial example from the Turkic languages, which comprise: Azerbaijani, Kazakh, Kirghiz, Turkish, Uzbek, Tatar, and Turkmen. The problem resides in the fact that some Turkish linguists question the fact that these languages are separate and see them instead as dialects of Turkish (Berk Albachten, 2014, p. 574). If so, then translation between pairs of these languages would be rather intralingual. Likewise, Schmid (2012) claims that sometimes a division between two languages is social and political in nature rather than corroborated by language typology arguments. He mentions Serbo-Croatian, a language that, after the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, divided into two separate languages, Serbian and Croatian. The two linguistic codes are very close and the differences between them are essentially limited to using distinct alphabets, with some lexical discrepancies being substantially exaggerated for political reasons (Longinović, 2011, p. 285). Other, less apparent cases of intralingual translation comprise, e.g., localisation, transfer across genres (as from a poem to a narrative), adaptation (e.g., a novel changed to a film or the other way round), a summary (Whyatt et al., 2017, p. 137; Zethsen, 2009), literary texts initially created for adults but adapted for children or varying language levels for foreign language learners (the so-called abridged versions), scientific texts simplified in such a way that they become popular science texts (Niederhouser, 1997, as cited in Hansen-Schirra & Guterath, 2015); simplified film subtitles for foreigners to support their language learning (Göpferich, 2010, p. 374; Gottlieb, 2001, p. 247). Within audiovisual translation, which essentially is an intrasemiotic and interlingual translation, intralingual transfer may also

take place, for example, in the case of media accessibility, such as rendering a film into sign language for the deaf and hard of hearing as well as audiodescription, dedicated to the blind and visually impaired.

All these types of translations are non-prototypical, and thus they defy the traditional definition of translation. Jakobsen (2005, p. 82, 2019), Zethsen (2009) and Whyatt et al. (2017, p. 137-138) hold that intralingual transfer is complementary to interlingual translation and as such, there is no need to treat them as two separate forms of rendering. As the case of dialects/languages mentioned above has shown, the concepts of inter- vs intralingual translation are not binary but gradual. Regardless of whether the process of rendering is closer to the inter- or intra extreme on the cline of language transfer, re-wording often assumes some form of simplification of the original text.

Intralingual translation can thus be seen as a form of transfer of equal importance. One of the leading advocates of such an approach to re-wording, is Zethsen (2009) and her associates centred in the Aarhus School of Business in Denmark, who focus on medical texts. In line with their approach, one of the aims of intralingual translation is simplifying the source text in order to increase text readability for the benefit of readers (Askehave & Zethsen, 2000, 2002; Hill-Madsen, 2015; Zethsen, 2007, 2009, 2018; Nisbeth Jensen & Korning Zethsen, 2012; Nisbeth Jensen, 2013, 2015; Zethsen & Hill-Madsen, 2016; Zethsen & Askehave, 2011). The other group of scholars dealing with intralingual translation and promoting a close relationship between translation (of any type) with the concept of readability, is based in Germany in several centres, in Mainz and Meinhem as well as Freiburg and Hamburg, and their approaches were discussed in section 3. These centres promote the enhancement of text readability by resorting, to a great extent, to simplification, whether between languages or within the same language.

5. Linguistic universals: Simplification

The tendency to simplify the language in interlingual translation is known in TS as simplification (Baker, 1996, p. 181-182). Simplification is one of the so-called translation universals (Baker, 1996; Laviosa-Braithwaite, 2001), which occur regardless of the pairs of languages involved (Baker, 1993). Translation universals are built on the theory of Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS; Toury, 1995) and, advocated by DTS, functionalism and, generally, target-oriented approaches to translation.

The concept of translation universals is attributed to Mona Baker,³ who introduced corpus linguistics to Translation Studies in 1993, which started Corpus-Based Translation Studies (CBTS) and was – as Chesterman claims (1998, 2010)

³ Translation universals were, however, first described by G. Toury in 1977.

– the most significant enterprise in Translation Studies from the 1990s. The year 1993 is seen as the beginning of a turn in Translation Studies from the prescriptive to descriptive approach (Tymoczko, 1998, p. 1).⁴

Drawing on the tools and methods corpus linguistics offers, Baker began to analyse significant collections of texts,⁵ which were translations from varying languages. By so doing, she shifted the centre of gravity in TS once dominated by prescriptive, that is, evaluative, critical and pejorative analyses of the quality of the translated text relative to the source text, focusing on single words, phrases or sentences, to objective comparisons of translated texts to other, untranslated texts in the target language. Thus, interest has been shifted from identifying the so-called S-universals, that is, with source-texts as a point of reference, to the so-called T-universals (Chesterman, 2004), that is, with target texts as a benchmark. Put differently, translated texts in the target language started to be compared to other texts in the target language rather than to their original versions in the source texts. Corpus linguistics proved very helpful in comparing big collections of translated texts. While the S-universals are analysed with the help of parallel corpora, the T-universals typically rely on comparable corpora.

Research conducted for decades in the pre-corpus era, which focused on comparing the source texts with their translations, led to the emergence of translation strategies, techniques, procedures and methods (Newmark, 1981), as well as equivalence taxonomies (Chesterman, 2004). On the other hand, the comparisons of the translated versus untranslated texts within one language conducted in the corpus era have allowed observing text features on a higher level of generalisation. For example, it has been noticed that translated texts sound less natural than untranslated texts in the same language; oftentimes, “strange strings,” as Mauranen (2000) calls them, tend to occur, which are sequences of words that sound unnatural.

Whilst S-universals concentrate on the identification of *differences* between texts, comparing translated texts with the untranslated ones in the same language seek *similarities* (Chesterman 2010), as they allow one to draw conclusions at a generic level, in other words, to propose norms (Toury 1995), which is

⁴ A. Pym (1999) holds, however, that the division into prescriptive vs descriptive in Translation Studies is too idealized.

⁵ Compared to corpora used in corpus linguistics for linguistic analyses, corpora compiled for the purpose of the analysis of translations are not big (e.g., the TEC corpus compiled by Sara Laviosa in the 1990s of the 20th century is only 10 mln in size, while the BNC (British National Corpus), also created in the same decade, has almost 100 mln tokens, and the so-called third generation corpora (e.g., enTenTen15) amount to more than 190 billion tokens in size). A 10 mln TEC corpus was, however, a big quantity jump in data size in the 1990s in Translation Studies comparing to earlier studies.

the main aim of DTS. A search for similarities is much easier and effective in the corpus era (in the CBTS) as the analysis can be easily made automatic and may span an extensive collection of texts, which was impossible to examine manually in the pre-corpus era. The use of corpus linguistics methodology has thus enhanced and sped up achieving the goals of DTS. The pioneering corpus-assisted research initiated by M. Baker allowed her to see certain regularities that are observable only on large sets of data and can be searched through automatically due to their electronic format.

Some research that aimed at uncovering tendencies and drawing generalisations was also observed in the pre-corpus era. For example, Ria Vanderauwera (1985) has investigated some general tendencies of translated texts based on 50 Dutch novels rendered into English. Her study supports the hypothesis of simplification often occurring in translations, as she has noticed a tendency to simplify syntactic structures and replace pronouns with nouns, which facilitates fast identification of things or persons described in a text. Another study, by two authors often cited by the advocates of translation universals, Blum-Kulka and Levenston (1983), reports overrepresentation of lexical cohesion in texts translated from Hebrew into English. Furthermore, Vanderauwera (1985, p. 11) maintains that translated texts are often marked for overrepresenting features typical of untranslated texts in the target language. It is a common assumption that was later verified by Nilson (2004), and that underestimates Tirkkonen-Condit's (2004) conclusions. Her opinion is that in translated texts, there is usually a smaller number of words and structures typical of the target language than in the untranslated texts in the same target language. Put differently, there is an underrepresentation of items typical of the target language in texts that are translations (see, for example, studies by Cappelle (2012), which support this tendency in French-English translations).

In her corpus-based research, on the other hand, Sara Laviosa-Braithwaite (1996) and Laviosa (1998) noted that original texts published in British newspapers *The Guardian* and *The European* have longer sentences than their translations, grammatical words are less frequent, and high frequency words are more common in translations than in the original texts. Moreover, lexical density in translations is more even than in untranslated texts. Laviosa (1998, 2002) has noticed that translated texts (English prose rendered into several other languages), compared with untranslated ones, have a lower lexical variation, smaller number of rare words, and fewer words per sentence. Similar observations have been expressed by Kaibao Hu (2016) regarding lexical density and variation of Chinese literary texts. These studies corroborate the above-mentioned simplification hypothesis.

Another scholar, Stig Johanson (1995), was interested in translations from Norwegian into English and the other way round and found out that the number

of words in translations is 10% higher than in the original versions in the case of Norwegian into English renderings, which in turn speaks for the hypothesis of explicitation. English-Norwegian translations were also studied by Linn Øverås (1998), who came to similar conclusions as Johanson, yet she also holds that cohesion enhancement was the same regardless of the direction of translation. She maintains that translated texts are, in general, more coherent. Two other scholars, Klaudy and Károly (2005), who examined English-Hungarian and Hungarian-English translations and came to similar conclusions, corroborating thus the hypothesis of asymmetry (Klaudy 2017).

The studies mentioned above are just exemplary ones that seem to support the concept of translation universals, which comprise either simplification (T-universals) or explicitation (S-universals according to Chesterman 2010).⁶ Despite having some advocates and enjoying relative popularity, translation universals have also met with criticism regarding some terminological problems encountered, a lack of sufficient proof of the existence of universals, and inappropriate methodological considerations that are to evince their existence. Laviosa (1998), one of the advocates of the existence of translation universals (along with Mona Baker), admits that not in all her studies did she manage to find convincing arguments for the universals (see, e.g., Laviosa, 1998, pp. 5, 7). In the study from 1998, Laviosa acknowledged that, contrary to her expectations, sentences in translated texts were longer than in the original texts and lexical density was not homogenous.

J. House (2008) expresses severe criticism regarding the existence of translation universals, an opinion also supported by Steiner (2012, p. 4). The arguments against translation universals are that there is no precision in defining translation universals and that the term universals is ungrounded. House (2008) further claims, based on her own translations, that the direction of translation may underestimate the existence of universals, e.g., explicitation is discernable in translations from English into German, but translations from German into English do not contain explicitations at all. As a result, making generalisations about the existence of explicitation is unfounded.

The discrepancies in conclusions regarding the existence or nonexistence of translation universals was somewhat attenuated by the hypothesis proposed by Tirkkonen-Condit (2004), the so-called unique items hypothesis; notably, a concept introduced somewhat later than translation universals, which allows going round the problematic studies criticising universals. It assumes the existence of structures and words unique to a given language. In fact, Mona Baker

⁶ The topic of universals is not the aim of this paper; therefore, only two out of four universals are mentioned here: simplification and explicitation. The former is related to the concept of text readability elaborated in the first part of this article, whereas the latter is often contrasted with simplification.

mentioned this problem in 1993 (p. 245) and later in 1996 (p. 181), in particular, that the number of words might differ in translated texts due to varying morphological systems of languages. However, such a disclaimer weakens the thesis of translation universals she put forward as it is hardly possible to draw a line between explicitation (or simplification) stemming from language systems and one being a measure applied by translators. Incidentally, Klaudy (2001, p. 82-83) classifies the problem of language-specificity as an example of one type of explicitation only, labelled the obligatory explicitation, which to some extent reconciles the problem.

Overall, the differences in the number of words and the choice of syntactic structures seem to stem from, on the one hand, the translator, and this is a controllable and subjective process, and on the (language) system on the other, which is uncontrollable and objective. Given this assumption, verification of the existence of translation universals such as explicitation encounters a substantial methodological hurdle as bearing in mind the number of languages and the possible translation combinations thereof, as well as the undefined number of possible translators, making any generalisations, i.e., searching for universals, seems to be hardly possible.

Critical comments were also voiced regarding simplification, which was not positively validated in studies by Mauranen (2000), Jantunen (2001, 2004) and Eskola (2004). Eskola (2004) and Jantunen (2004) signal a lack of simplification at the lexical level. Collocations used in translated texts, in turn, did not show translators' tendencies to simplify the original texts in the study by Mauranen (2000). Jantunen (2004) and Mauranen (2000, p. 40) see a problem in the very definition of simplification, which is rather vague in TS. Jantunen (2004, p. 121) eventually concludes that he has not observed any convincing arguments for the existence of translation universals.

Victor Becher (2010) also noticed a definitional problem regarding translation universals in general, and explicitation in particular. In what he calls the explicitation dogma, he propounds that the term 'universals' is too blurry and unjustified to label any kind of universality due to a lack of sufficient evidence for the predominance of this phenomenon across languages. He underestimates (Becher 2011) the research reported by Olohan and Baker (2000) devoted to the omission of the conjunction *that* in translated texts by enumerating several methodological drawbacks of the study. Firstly, the very structure of the corpus (the TEC corpus compiled by Laviosa) is problematic as the corpus is not balanced and thus is not comparable in structure to the British National Corpus serving as the reference corpus in the study. Similarly, Tymoczko (1998) stresses that there is a need to make the criteria that define the structure of the corpus more precise. Furthermore, Mauranen (2000) and Becher (2011) argue that the study supporting the existence of explicitation in translated texts reported by Blum-Kulka and Levenston (1983), on which Baker often relies and cites as one

of the first investigations proving the existence of linguistic universals, revolved around only one aspect of texts, that of *cohesion* in translation. The study thus does not evince the existence of translation universals per se. In support of the critical claims also come conclusions drawn by Weissbrod (1992, p. 167-168), who observed that explicitation was present only in one type of literary texts translated from English into Hebrew, those published till the end of the 1960s of the 20th century and which were unpopular among the literary establishment of those times. According to this scholar, such an observation proves that explicitation is not a universal feature of translated texts but dependent on social norms. Zeller-mayer (1987, as cited in Weissbrod, 1992) has further noted that explicitation depends on the status of the source or the target language. These interesting studies seem to be unnoticed by Kenny (2001, p. 53), for whom explicitation depends on cognitive factors rather than socio-cultural ones. In a similar vein, Baker (1993, p. 243-246) maintains that translation universals stem from limitations inherent in the very *process* of translation but not cultural differences of the final product of translation. Contrary to Kenny's (2001) and Baker's (1993) claims, simplification understood in this paper assumes that it is a process resulting from cognitive processes (the conscious decisions of translators) as well as a number of other factors, in particular socio-cultural aspects and language specificity.

In line with the translation universals hypothesis, on the lexical plane, simplification may entail several types of modifications, e.g., the reduction of the number of words and replacing words with easier (more popular) words and their synonyms (Blum-Kulka and Levenston 1993, p. 119-131); reducing content words and increasing function words (Baker 1996, p. 176, 183); increasing the number of hyperonyms, using more frequent synonyms, and resorting to paraphrasing (Laviosa-Braithwaite, 2001, p. 288). Syntactic simplifications have not received much attention, even in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (1998). Laviosa-Braithwaite (2001: 288) mentions only two types of syntactic simplifications noted by Vanderauwera (1985): using finite structures in the place of non-finite and resorting to ellipsis. Stylistic simplification comprises, according to Laviosa-Braithwaite (2001): writing shorter sentences, using short collocations in place of longer phraseological units, reducing repetitions and redundant information, omitting modifiers, etc. These stylistic features, however, overlap with those defined as lexical and/or syntactic ones.

Surprisingly, Baker (1996, p. 176) defines simplification as "the idea that translators subconsciously simplify the language or message, or both." From this it transpires that for her, simplification is a process the translator is not aware of and which s/he does not control. It is hard to agree with this thesis. Baker does not propose a term that would define a conscious simplification, which implies that it does not exist, which in fact she claims explicitly in a paper published in

2000 (Olohan & Baker, 2000, p. 143). However, it is easy to imagine a situation where simplification is applied consciously, as the translator's choice, just like the translator consciously applies translation strategies, which, by definition, are a result of conscious processes (see the definition of translation strategies in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation*). Simplification is treated as a conscious process by other scholars, for example, two Danish scholars, Hjort-Petersen and Faber (2010, p. 249), who analysed legal translation. They noticed that translators chose simplification (in particular reduction) where the translator lacked relevant legal knowledge. Similarly, two German scholars, Hansen-Schirra and Gutermuth (2015, p. 55), acknowledge simplification as a conscious process, while other investigators, Klaudy and Károly (2005, p. 15), hold that simplification may be a process either conscious or subconscious in the act of translation.

To reassume, there are a number of studies devoted to translation universals, with the majority of them underestimating their existence by criticising some methodological and definitional problems. The most oft-cited weaknesses of the hypothesis comprise: lack of clear criteria for the compilation of parallel and comparable corpora (Becher, 2011; Tymoczko, 1998), ignoring language specificity and typology of source languages (Becher 2010, 2011), unfounded use of the term 'universals' due to a small scale of research and small data size, compared with the concept of language universals used in linguistic studies (Chesterman, 2010; House, 2008), overinterpretation of earlier studies (the hypothesis of explicitation by Blum-Kulka (1986), which referred solely to text cohesion) to find support for translation universals (Becher, 2010, p. 5, 2011, chap. 2.2; Chesterman, 2010, p. 41), ambiguous (Jantunen, 2001, 2004; Laviosa, 2002; Mauranen, 2000;) or contradicting results (Vanderauwera, 1985 vs. Tirkkonen-Condit, 2004; Johanson, 1995 vs. Klaudy 2011; Klaudy & Károly 2005 vs. Øverås, 1998) achieved in studies on translation universals and hence unjustified claims of their existence; and finally, inappropriately selected reference corpora (Becher, 2010). Furthermore, Baker's and Kenny's claims that simplification is a cognitive process, which is an unconscious measure according to Baker, and that socio-cultural aspects do not influence translation universals, are unsound and unconvincing. The weakness of the hypothesis of translation universals lies in the radical and unsupported definitional and typological claims, particularly in the case of simplification seen as a cognitive and universal process common to all languages.

Despite the existing criticism of translation universals, they seem to enjoy unflagging popularity. In defence of the concept, it must be acknowledged that even if their existence will not be eventually evidenced, the discussion revolving around them has drawn attention to specific patterns of structures in the languages that recur in translations, some tendencies that were ignored before (in the prescriptive era) or which were difficult to verify (in the pre-corpus era). The

interest has finally been shifted in TS to the target texts, and the scope of Translation Studies has been substantially extended and integrated with corpus linguistics. Moreover, in line with DTS, the centre of gravity has been pushed from the problems of equivalence to norms and functions of texts in the target languages.

6. Conclusions

This paper has aimed to discuss the concept of simplification used in studies on text readability and in Translation Studies, including intralingual translations, i.e., re-translations. Intralingual transfer is characterised by using lexical and syntactic simplifications in order to enhance the ease of reading and understanding texts by potential readers (in particular, clients or patients). Interlingual translation has a similar motivation, which also resorts to simplification (in TS treated as one of the possible translation universals) for the benefit of the target reader. It is simplification, not explicitation (also one of the translation universals), that is claimed to enhance text readability. Regardless of whether simplification is or is not a universal phenomenon occurring across languages in the translated texts, and whether it is dependent on translators' choices and/or socio-cultural expectations and norms, what makes simplification similar to intralingual transfer and text readability norms is pursuing texts which are comprehensible for the target reader. The ways that lead to achieving this aim in inter- and intralingual translation/transfer are similar.

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