

Translating politeness in fiction. A study using Czech parallel corpora

This study deals with politeness in translations between a language with a rich system of honorific distinctions in both grammar and lexicon, Czech, and one with more informal means, Swedish. Using fiction texts in InterCorp, a parallel translation corpus in the Czech National Corpus (CNK), it sets out to analyze translation strategies used with Czech as both TL (target language) and SL (source language).

How to express politeness is a well-researched area in pragmatics and sociolinguistics (Nekvapil & Neustupný 2005), including lexical features, such as forms of address and greetings, and morphological features, such as choice of pronouns and verb forms. In a broader sense, politeness is also expressed by negation, diminutives, modality and particles (Chejnová 2015). Brown and Gilman (1972 [1960]) argue that the use of V-form (formal) and T-form (informal) expresses dimensions of power and solidarity.

The corpus data can uncover translation norms (Toury 1978, Chlumská 2017) implicit in the transformations that texts translated into and from Czech are subjected to. The results support the notion that expressions of politeness constitute a challenge for translators. While translations into Czech typically adapt to the norms of the target language, translations from Czech into Swedish tend to retain the T/V distinction.

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