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Exploring directionality in translation studies

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Abstract

The paper analyzes the elements of directionality in translation and its implication on the quality of translation from the second language into the first (L1 translation) and translation from the first language into the second (L2 translation). The traditional view of directionality in translation studies completely neglects L2 translation, often qualifying it as impossible, inappropriate, etc. However, various studies conducted in European countries indicate that this type of translation is not only possible but highly needed, especially in the countries where less disseminated languages or languages of limited diffusion (LLDs) are spoken. The paper will first present the traditional standpoints and then provide the opposite views followed by the analysis of both types of translation. The results of this study show that both L1 and L2 translations are possible and that both directions include certain difficulties.

Key words: directionality; L1 and L2 translation; translation problems.

1. Directionality in translation

The notion of directionality had long been neglected, if not completely ignored, by traditional translation studies in the sense that translation into a non-mother tongue was completely rejected and disapproved. This position of directionality in terms of translating into the non-mother tongue had been, so to say, “cemented” until the 1990s when the call appeared by various scholars who were prepared to tackle this tradition. Fortunately, this call bore fruit and thus the situation has been changing and various scholars and specialists have shown their initiative in giving this type of translation, which is all too often ignored in the world of translation studies, the proper position.

As N. Pavlović (2007: 3) claims the term “directionality” refers to whether translation is done into one’s “first language” (“mother tongue”, “native language”, “language of habitual use”) or from it into a person’s “second language” (“non-mother tongue”, “non-native language”, “foreign language”). It is evident that there are numerous terms for one’s “first language”. The reason for this lies in the fact that all these terms can create certain difficulties and that many of them carry some negative value judgment (N. Pavlović, 2007: 3). Therefore, the terms "mother tongue," "language of habitual use," "native language," "foreign language" and "second language" are seen as problematic, as pointed out by various authors who are in favor of a more neutral classification of the different working languages and translators' activities (see Pedersen, 2000).

The division "first language - L1" and "second language - L2" was selected for this work. The reason is that these two terms seem to be the least ideologically "colored", and that they do not immediately create the feeling that one language is "inferior" to the other. In this paper we focus on translation from the first language into the second (L2 translation) as compared with translation from the second language into the first (L1 translation).

In order to achieve the research objectives, this paper tries to determine the relation between the L1 and L2 translation, their characteristics, and implications on the quality of the target text (TT). The research addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the main characteristics of L1 and L2 translation?
2. Do L1 and L2 translation exhibit similarities?
3. What are the problems encountered by translators in both directions?
4. Is there a correlation between the direction of translation and the quality of TT?

2. Theoretical background

As Beeby Lonsdale (1998: 63) explains, "directionality" refers to the fact that translations can be done from a foreign language into a mother tongue or vice versa. It seems that there has always been the assumption that translating from one's own language does not have any but pedagogical purpose for practicing certain grammar elements. This opinion is still widely present in Europe, which can be supported by the fact that international organizations accept only the translation into the mother tongue.

2.1. *Traditional view of directionality*

N. Pavlović (2008: 81) claims that the traditional view of translation theorists regarding directionality is probably best reflected in the following (in)famous statement by Newmark (1988: 3): "translat(ing) into your language of habitual use […] is the only way you can translate naturally, accurately and with maximum effectiveness." It is evident that Newmark completely rejects the practice of L2 translation claiming that the results of such a procedure cause nothing but amusement and laughter.

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However, N. Pavlović (2008: 81) claims that although there are many examples of suboptimal quality in L2 translation, there are just as many examples of bad translations done into L1. Basically, none of the directions of bilingual processing is free from flaws, and the aspect of directionality must not be the major excuse for them.

N. Pavlović (2008: 81) emphasizes that in the past three decades, translation studies has seen a shift from traditional prescriptivism, as represented by Newmark, toward more descriptive, empirically oriented research-based work. However, when it comes to directionality, it seems as if "old habits die hard" and some attitudes rooted in traditional prescriptivism seem to persist. For such a long period, translation from the mother tongue was disregarded or seen as a didactic means only. Some more recent studies, such is *The Study on directionality in translation and interpreting practice in Croatia* suggest that this is not always the case.

2.2. *Challenging the traditional view*

As Grosman (2000: 17) states, "translation theory holds that ideally all translations must be done by native speakers of the language of the target culture." According to that, non-mother tongue translations are commonly regarded to be unacceptable, if not inappropriate. If we accept this idea, we would be faced with the situation that the only people who fully qualify for translating are native speakers of the target language. Grosman (ibid) also points out that native speakers involved in translating are assumed automatically to be highly proficient in their language and well acquainted with their own culture.

Snell-Hornby (2000: 37) warns that "it is particularly on the global level of supracultural communication that translation into English as a non-mother tongue has become a fact of modern life." Dollerup (2000: 61) claims that translation into a foreign language is widespread, but it is a particularly acute problem for translators of small nations where minor languages (also called languages of limited diffusion - LLDs) are spoken. They must usually recruit translators from among their own population in order to have an international impact by means of a world language.

According to Campbell (1998: 4, in N. Pavlović, 2008: 82), "L2 translation is an activity as normal and possibly as widespread as translation into the first language." Indeed, this is something we cannot ignore, there are some new guidelines and new perspectives and it is high time that the traditional view be challenged and changed.

Prunč (1997: 6, in Grosman, 2000: 22) has launched an interesting attack on the theories holding that only native speakers qualify as translators whereas translation into non-mother tongues should be questionable, pointing out that such theories are in conflict with the existing practices. It seems as if such opinion is a consequence of inappropriately conceived basic concepts of such theories, above all the concept of a mother tongue, which is not in keeping with the present linguistic situation. Prunč (ibid) also believes that the idealized concept of the target speaker's perfect linguistic competence as implied by such theories is often unrealistic. Perfectly aware of the translation situation of LLDs, he calls for a realistic theory that could accommodate the specific situation of the communities speaking LLDs, and provide an efficient basis for both the education of future translators and the development of a translation culture. Other translation theorists and scholars have joined Prunč's challenge of the soundness of a translation theory out of accord with current practices.

Grosman (2000: 30) warns that "unless we believe in the productive possibilities of non-mother tongue translation, wherever and whenever it is necessary, such translation will continue without the necessary examination and scholarship that could improve its quality." Grosman (2000: 31) emphasizes the importance of translation for intercultural communication, giving it the central role. She claims that the impact of translation has been so pervasive that it is literally impossible to imagine the outlook of any culture if this impact is somehow obliterated. According to her, "this impact has recently been so amplified by new communication technologies and processes of globalization" (ibid).

McAlester (1992: 292, in N. Pavlović, 2008: 82) reaches a conclusion that "the lion's share of translation from "minor" languages is inevitably done by native speakers of those languages." Pokorn (2005: 37) also agrees with the fact that translation into L2 is "especially common in languages with restricted distribution." Pokorn also criticizes traditional translation theory for "ignoring the practice of L2 translation and accepting the assumption that translators should work only into L1" (ibid).

2.3. *Quality issues in L2 translation*

As it has been mentioned before, the practice of L2 translation, which is necessary in settings with LLDs, has been questioned, especially in terms of quality. Many researchers claimed that the quality of L2 translation is compromised. Does the argument that L2 translations are of poor quality really stand firm?

N. Pavlović (2008: 90) states that it does not necessarily mean that, if we talk about the settings involving a 'language of limited diffusion', the quality of translation/interpreting into a major language will be suboptimal. The reason, she further explains, why L2 translation/interpreting may be satisfactory – rather than merely the only one available – could be that the direction of translation is not the only variable involved in the overall picture.

Another extremely important element is the L2 competence. Besides directionality and L2 competence, motivation is also a very important part of

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successful L2 translation. All these elements are accompanied by the type of the text translated and our familiarity of the topic. As Prunč (2003: 84, in N. Pavlović, 2007: 15) emphasizes, L2 translators can produce quality translations if they are adequately trained. N. Pavlović (ibid) adds another element – the norms prevalent in a given culture, referring to the fact whether L2 translation is considered acceptable in professional circles.

2.4. *Directionality in empirical research into translation processes*

N. Pavlović (2007: 16) asks the following: is Campbell's statement (1998: 57) that "translating into a second language is very different from translating into the first language" true for all language pairs and all types of text, is it true for all levels of L2 competence and translation competence, are training and previous experience important. Can we actually divide the translation process into two sides? Kussmaul (1997: 243, in N. Pavlović, 2007: 16) claims that this traditional notion of dividing the translation process into two phases should be replaced by a model that leaves room for overlapping of the phases.

Pedersen (2000: 110) claims that translation into L1 and L2 really have a lot in common. In both cases there are two main problems: to understand all relevant implications of the source language message, and to render them adequately in the target language (ibid). The latter process is often thought of as having two aspects: the problem of describing source language phenomena which are unknown in the target language culture, and the problem of making up for the inevitable differences between source and target language vocabulary and structure. In both cases the difficulties must be overcome by linguistic means.

N. Pavlović's works - *Directionality in translation and interpreting practice. Report on a questionnaire survey in Croatia* and *Directionality in Collaborative Translation Processes: A Study of Novice Translators* are the only two studies on directionality involving Croatian as L1 and English as L2. Hansen (e.g. 2005a & b), Tirkkonen-Condit (e.g. 2000), the members of the PACTE group (Beeby Lonsdale, Rodríguez, Fox, Albir, Neunzig, Orozco, Presas, Rodríguez Inés, and Romero from 1998 onwards) and other scholars have also conducted studies of translation processes involving both directions of translation, although some of them did not make direct comparison. N. Pavlović (2007: 18) claims that "more empirical research into the issue of directionality is needed if we want to construct more valid theoretical and pedagogical models."

3. Methodology

The main aim of this study was to examine and compare L1 and L2 translation in order to isolate the most important linguistic features that can be related to the direction of translation.

3.1. *Research design and subjects*

The study took place at the Faculty of Philosophy in Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina at the end of the summer semester of the academic year 2010/2011. At the time of the research there were no undergraduate programs in translation in the country and future translators were educated at departments of modern languages.

3.1.1. *Subjects participating in the study*

Thirteen subjects (all third-year students studying at the Department of English Language and Literature), or three groups of three and one group of four, participated in collaborative translation sessions. These subjects were chosen as they were very suitable for collaborative translation protocols (CTPs) as the method of data collection, since they were used to working collaboratively.

All the participants in the CTPs were novice translators. The fact that "novices" were chosen as particularly suitable for the research study of this type is best explained by N. Pavlović (2007: 70) who points out that their translation competence is expected to be relatively high, but they are also expected to encounter some problems. All subjects volunteered for the participation in this study and gave their written consent. In all the translation tasks, the same subjects were asked to translate in both directions, from and into their L1.

It is important to mention that all the subjects had approximately the same level of experience in translation. During their first two years of studying they were all exposed to translation for didactic purposes. During their third year of academic education they attended the classes in Translation Practice (two contact hours per week), with the focus on translation via translation studies.

3.1.2. *Selection of source texts (STs)*

Two source texts (STs), one in English and one in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian (B/C/S), were chosen. It is generally accepted that when two different texts are translated, we can never compare them as the two texts in the same language. This certainly causes some problems related to research design with regard to the selection of texts. Texts can be compared in terms of various parameters, such as

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readability, word frequency, length or genre. There are many methods and formulae for measuring readability, such as the Kincaid formula, the Flesch reading easy formula, the Fog index, and so on.

Problems arise, however, when these tools, freely available on the Internet, are used to compare texts written in different languages, as is the case in studies involving directionality of translation. Pavlović (2007: 62) explains this by the morphological and syntactic differences of the languages compared.

An additional problem with all these measurements is that what makes a text easy or difficult to read is not necessarily the same as what makes it easy or difficult to translate. Pavlović (2007: 63) states that a text, or part of it, may be relatively easy to translate into L1, but more difficult for subjects doing the same translation into their L2 (or vice versa). It seems that difficulty here is no longer a source-text related variable, but directionality-related variable. Therefore, the combination of various methods and tools may yield a more accurate result than any single method in isolation.

Thus, the texts for this research were subjected to several tests. Both of them are non-technical, general language texts and they are around 140 word-long excerpts from travel guides. Their readability was measured by using the Lix formula (used for measuring word length and sentence length) and the resulting grades placed both texts in the category of medium difficulty (35-44) with the English text value of 39 and the B/C/S text value of 43.

3.2. *Data collection*

It should be mentioned that triangulation, i.e. the investigation of one and the same phenomenon by means of different complementary data sources is generally considered to enhance the trustworthiness of findings in the translation process (see Alves, 2003). In this study the following data sources were used: (1) think-aloud (or more precisely collaborative) protocols, (2) written translations, (3) quality assessment, and (4) questionnaires. The study demonstrated the usefulness of collaborative translation protocols for investigating the linguistic aspect of translation.

A series of translation tasks were conducted in which a set of subjects were asked to fill out a pre-translation questionnaire and then collaboratively translate two source texts, one into L1 (B/C/S) and the other into L2 (English). This was followed by a post-translation questionnaire. The collaborative sessions were audio-recorded. Later, the collaborative translation protocols obtained from the sessions were transcribed and coded. The target texts (translations) were collected and given to the external evaluator for evaluation.

All four groups worked on the same day, although not at the same time. The collaborative translation sessions were recorded with an MP3 player and sound recorder. The subjects were instructed to bring their own resources (dictionaries) to the translation sessions. The subjects' time for the tasks was not limited. The sessions took between 90 minutes and two and a half hours.

3.3. *Translation problems*

The main emphasis during the analysis of translation was on the problems that the subjects identified in translation. The definition for translation problem has been taken from Livbjerg and Mees (2003) who defined it "from the perspective of the participating subjects" as "any word or phrase in the text, or any aspect of such a word or phrase, which is verbalized by any single participant and for which he or she expresses any degree of doubt about its proper translation" (2003: 129). This doubt was sometimes explicitly and clearly identified as a problem but sometimes the existence of a problem was inferred and signaled by the fact that the subjects proposed several solutions or it was expressed by some uncertainty regarding its correctness.

3.4. *Evaluation of target texts*

In this study an external evaluator was chosen to do the evaluation of the target texts obtained in the translation tasks. Being closest to the definition of a native bilingual speaker (born in Bosnia and Herzegovina, completed her education in the USA as an American citizen, and actively involved in the university education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where she is currently engaged as a lecturer), the evaluator was asked to evaluate the translations in both directions. The evaluator was not acquainted with the aims of the study, or with the way in which the translations were produced (in terms of collaborative work). She was sent anonymous translations.

The need for an external bilingual evaluator must be emphasized here. Namely, only a bilingual evaluator would actually be able to assess the translation process from one language to another and vice versa. The assessment performed by monolingual evaluators (experts in one of the languages involved who observe only the target text) would focus only on the product of the translation process without the possibility to consider the source text as well.

The evaluator was instructed to "revise" the translations in two ways. (The system was taken from N. Pavlović, 2007). Red was to be used to mark parts of the target text that were considered unacceptable. These would be the parts of text that, in her opinion, could not be published as they were, either because they

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distort what the evaluator perceives to be the plausible interpretation of the source text, or because they contain an unambiguous target language error (of whatever kind). Yellow, on the other hand, was to indicate parts of text which, although perhaps passable – in the sense that they were "good enough" – were nevertheless "revisable". In other words, the evaluator could think of a "better" version, perhaps more idiomatic, more readable, more conforming to target usage norms, and so on. These would be the parts of the target text that, while not exactly unpublishable as such, could benefit from improvement.

The evaluator returned the translations that she had revised on her own in the manner described above and marked what should count as unpublishable ("red card") and publishable but could be improved ("yellow card"). In order to achieve the data that can be quantitatively measured and compared, "red cards" were counted as one negative point and "yellow cards" as half a point. The resulting number is what Pavlović (2007: 91) calls revisability score. A lower revisability score, that is, the lower number of negative points, indicates a "better" translation product.

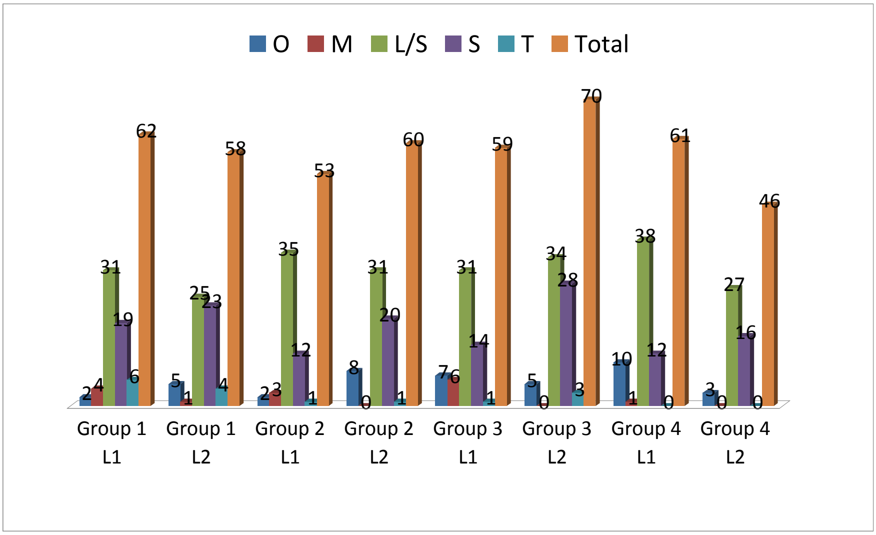
4. Results and discussion

4.1. *Division of problems into categories*

We have already identified the term "problem" as it was classified and used in our analysis. The following part of the paper presents the findings related to the overall number of problems each group encountered in the collaborative sessions in each direction of translation. Also, the findings related to the type of problems will be presented, followed by a short discussion.

The bars in Graph 1 show the number of problems divided into categories as well as the total number of problems. The rows present the groups and directions of translation. The letters O, M, L/S, S and T stand for orthographical, morphological, lexical/semantic, syntactic and textual problems respectively.

Graph 1. Number and types of problems.



4.1.1. *Problems related to L1 translation – inter-group comparison*

An inter-group comparison of L1 translation shows that Group 1 registered the highest number of problems (62) in this direction of translation. It is immediately followed by Group 4 which has only one problem less (61). Group 3 encountered 59 problems and Group 2 had the lowest number of problems in this direction of translation (53).

The highest values can be seen in the category of lexical/semantic problems for all four groups (ranging between 50% and 66%). Syntactic problems are also very frequent for all four groups and they account between 20% and 30% of all problems. When it comes to orthographical problems, it can be seen that for Groups 4 and 3 they were more present (16.4% and 11.8%) than for Groups 2 and 1 (3.77% and 3.22%). Group 3 encountered the highest number of morphological problems (around 10%), compared to 6.45%, 5.66% and 1.64% in Groups 1, 2 and 4. Groups vary the most in the category of textual problems. Namely, 9.68% of all problems Group 1 encountered were textual problems. Groups 2 and 3 encountered a relatively low number of these problems (1.89% and 1.70%), while Group 4 did not encounter them at all.

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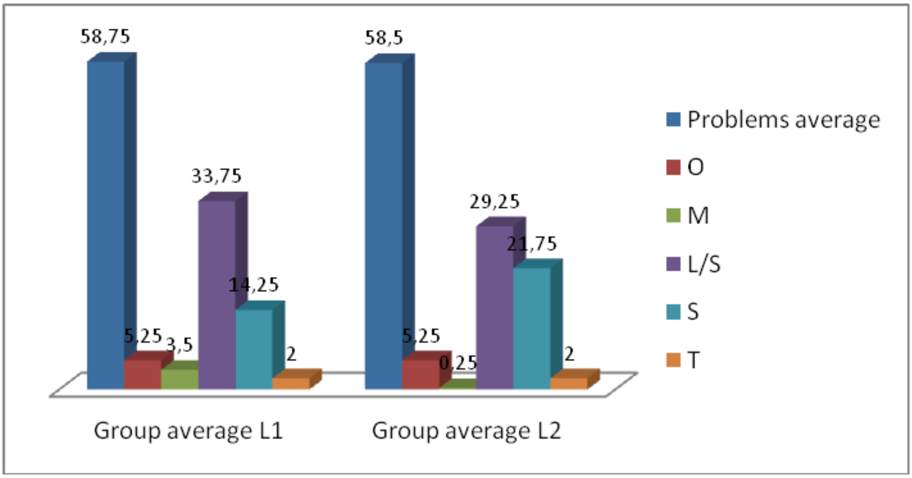
4.1.2. *Problems related to L2 translation – inter-group comparison*

In this direction of translation the groups encountered between 46 (Group 4) and 70 problems (Group 3). Two categories with the highest number of problems are again lexical/semantic and syntactic problems. Lexical/semantic problems range from 43.10% in Group 1 to 58.7% in Group 4. Syntactic problems are again placed second, ranging from 33.33% (in Group 2) to 40.00% (Group 3). Group 2 displays a higher value for orthographical problems (13.33%) than the other groups whose values in this category are 8.62% (Group 1), 7.14% (Group 3) and 6.52% (Group 4). Groups 1, 2 and 3 encountered textual problems (ranging from 1.70% to 6.90%). These problems were not encountered by Group 4. Group 1 was the only group which encountered morphological problems in this direction of translation.

4.1.3. *L1 and L2 translation compared*

The average values for all groups in both directions provide a full insight into the number and types of problems between L1 and L2 translation.

Graph 2. Translation problems – group average.



These figures show that there is a high degree of coincidence among the two directions of translation for some types of problems. The orthographical problems in L1 translation are primarily related to capitalization and insecurity regarding the general spelling of certain words (for example as one, two words or with a hyphen). In L2 translation, the main issues are related to general spelling of the

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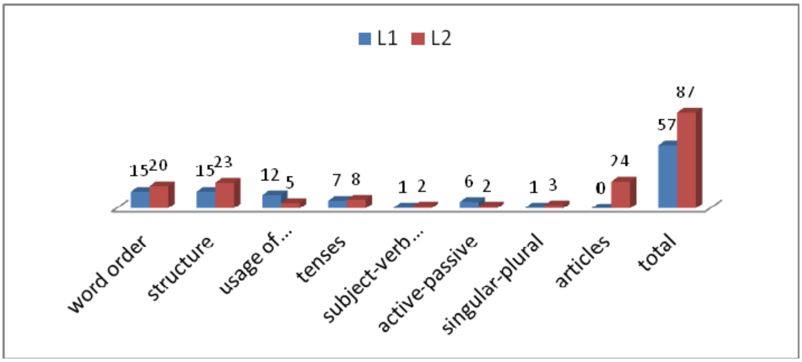
words. Out of 15 morphological problems identified, 14 were encountered in L1 and only 1 in L2 translation. The reason is the fact that 13 out of 14 morphological problems encountered in L1 translation were related to case forms in the target language. The only morphological problem encountered in L2 translation was related to the word form and its usage.

Bearing in mind the very nature of the translation process itself, it is not surprising that the highest level of coincidence among the groups is in the category of lexical/semantic problems. Namely, the translation strategy for all the groups was rather similar and it included the identification of words whose meanings might create problems during translation. Thus, in both directions of translation the subjects struggled with multiple meanings and finding the appropriate equivalent.

In the category of textual problems the two directions of translation also exhibit a high level of similarity. In both L1 and L2 translation textual problems mainly refer to cohesion of the TT, with some problems related to repetition and length of sentences.

In the category of syntactic problems the two directions show certain differences that are indicated by the number of problems. Namely, 57 problems were identified in this category in L1 translation, while in L2 translation 87 problems were registered. It is the most diversified category and Table 3 brings a detailed analysis of the problems.

Graph 3. Syntactic problems – detailed analysis



Word order was present more in L2 (20 problems) than in L1 (15). This comes as a rather surprising finding, bearing in mind the characteristics of the languages analyzed in terms of word order ("fixed" in the English language and "relatively free" in B/C/S). The problems related to structure were more frequently encountered in L2 (23 cases) than in L1 translation (15 cases). Structure here refers

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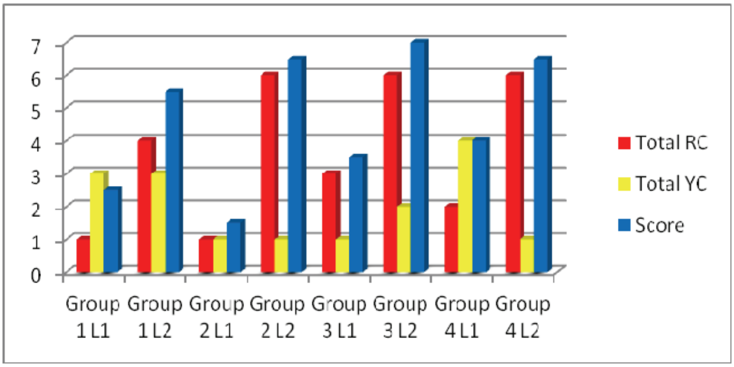
to various elements within a sentence. For example, it includes the choice of premodification or postmodification in the noun phrase, types of dependent clauses used (relative, appositive, *-ed* or *–ing* participle etc). The subjects encountered problems with the usage of commas at the level of sentence more in L1 than in L2. Tenses, subject-verb agreement and the usage of singular or plural forms are somewhat similar in numbers, while the choice between active or passive sentence structures was registered more often in L1 than in L2. Finally, as many as 24 syntactic problems in L2 translation are related to the usage of articles.

4.2. TT evaluation

The concept of evaluation of target texts in the field of translation has been discussed in this paper, as well as the system of evaluation used in this study. In this section we shall present the findings on the number of "yellow cards" and "red cards" in each target text, as well as the resulting "revisability score" and compare groups and directions of translation.

Graph. 4 Revisable elements.

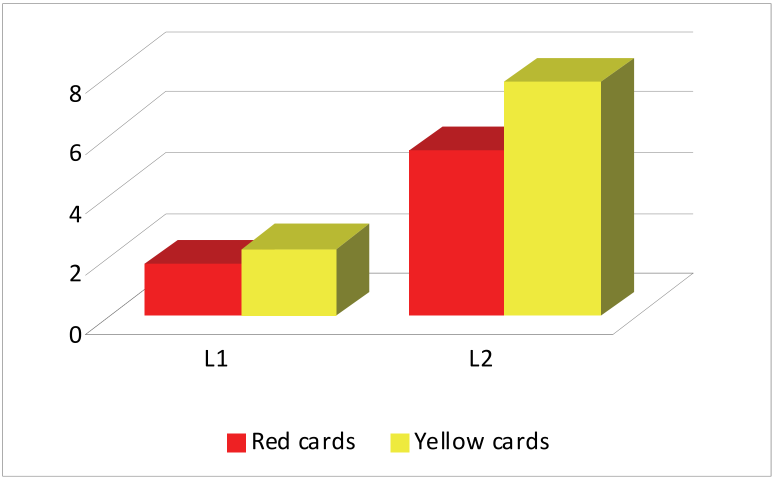


Graph 4 presents the findings related to the number of revisable elements for each group and each direction of translation. The red bar gives the number of "red cards" and the yellow bar gives the number of "yellow cards" for each group and each task. The blue bar ("score") shows the revisability score for each group, i.e. the sum of penalty points for "red" and "yellow" cards.

The number of "red cards" is lower in L1 than in L2 translation, ranging from 1 to 3 in L1 and from 4 to 6 in L2 translation. For Groups 1 and 2 the number of "yellow cards" is identical for both directions of translation (3 and 1 respectively). Group 3 has more "yellow cards" in L2 translation, while Group 4 got more "yellow cards" in L1 translation.

In terms of the revisability score, it is evident that the results are better for L1 translation. The best revisability score for L1 translation was achieved by Group 2 (1.5) while Group 4 had the revisability score 4 for this direction of translation. Group 1 had the best revisability score in L2 translation (5.5) while the worst result was achieved by Group 3 (7).

Graph 5. Red and yellow cards (group mean values).



The findings related to revisability scores do not seem that surprising. The quality of L2 products at this level of L2 competence and translation competence of our subjects still shows L2 translation to be somewhat more difficult than L1 translation. However, it is obvious that L1 translation is not "free from flaws" and that it does not "come naturally" as many are determined to claim.

5. Limitations and further research

It is certainly necessary to mention some of the limitations and suggestions for further research into the field of directionality.

First of all, the assessment process could benefit from evaluation performed by more than one evaluator. Such evaluation would perhaps resulted in different quantitative data and facilitate decreased subjectivity on behalf of the evaluator.

In addition, bearing in mind that the sample in this study was rather small, the conclusions stated cannot be generalized without further research and studies. Some of the elements of the study which can be changed include:

- the number of subjects

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- the level of subjects' L2 competence (including professionals)
- restriction of time
- methods of data collection (eye-tracking, individual think-aloud protocols).

6. Conclusion

The aim of this research was to compare L1 and L2 translation processes in the educational context especially in the settings where a language of limited diffusion is used. The novice translators performed translation tasks in both directions of translation and the materials were then compared.

The analysis of L1 and L2 translation (made by novice translators working on the translation of general texts) shows that there is a certain level of similarity between these two directions of translation. In L1 and L2 translation of general texts, novice translators encounter similar types and similar number of problems in terms of the basic division of categories.

However, the study showed that for the analyzed set of subjects the quality of the final products of translation of general texts depends on the direction of translation. Namely, the quality of L1 translation proved to be somewhat higher than the quality of L2 translation. This can be assigned to various aspects of the study, including subjects' translation competence, number of subjects, environmental conditions, personal preferences, etc. The change of some variables (such as text type, the subjects' translation experience, etc.) may offer the possibility for the generalization of certain conclusions.

It is very significant that the problems involved in L1 and L2 translation are largely of the same types and frequencies. This shows that fundamentally there is no difference in the difficulty of the L1 and L2 translation, both involve the same problems, and in equal measure. The only difference then is how successful the translators are in finding solutions to these problems. It could then be said that if a translator is adequately trained, s/he could produce an L2 translation that is of equal quality as L1 translation, although it may take more time to do so (another possible variable) and may require more work on the part of the target language editor (yet another variable).

More research into this subject matter would certainly create possibilities for additional conclusions and generalizations and provide some new guidelines for further research into this largely unexplored topic.

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