

Translation as linguistic variation

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Translation has long been regarded as a phenomenon in its own right, unrelated to any other kind of linguistic product and activity. While this seemed a necessary focalization to establish the study of translation as an academic endeavour, it unnecessarily separated it from and impeded synergetic effects with other areas of linguistic study. One such area is the study of linguistic variation (Biber 1993, 1995; Conrad & Biber 2001; Halliday 1985; Halliday & Hasan 1989; Mair 2006; Matthiessen 1993; Matthiessen 2006).

Considering that translations form a substantial part of text production in many languages, it appears a valid question to ask what their specific contribution to the repertoire of variation of a given language might be: Do translations seamlessly integrate into the existing variation? Or do they leave traces, possibly elaborating and extending that variation? If they do, which of the linguistically available mechanisms of variation formation do they tend to harness? This and similar perspectives have been pursued by a number of researchers since the mid 1990's (House 1997, 2002; Matthiessen 2001, Hansen 2003; Hansen-Schirra et al. 2007; Neumann 2003, 2008; Teich 2001, 2003; Steiner 2002, 2004, 2008) resulting in multiple descriptive insights on commonalities and differences of translations to other kinds of text and the factors that govern this variation as well as the advancement of methods and techniques of comparing texts both intra-lingually and cross-lingually.

In my talk, I will assess the contributions that this line of research has made, both in descriptive and in methodological terms, and try to identify future directions of research.

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