

Explicitation in Old Swedish translations: when, where, and why

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During the Late Middle Ages, Old Swedish develops into a literary language. In this process, most genres are adapted from Latin models, and most texts are translated from Latin sources. As a consequence, it is quite unclear in what respects the extant sources represent the whole language or any particular varieties of it (Höder 2010). In principle, any feature observed in an Old Swedish corpus, especially any innovative feature, could be (a) the result of contact-induced language change in Old Swedish or its written variety, (b) an effect of the communicative parameters of written communication, (c) due to translation interference, or (d) the outcome of universal translation-inherent mechanisms independent of the languages involved. Unlike factors (a)–(c), factor (d) has hardly been addressed in historical linguistics, let alone corpus analyses, and is indeed difficult to control.

In translation studies, it is widely assumed that one such translation universal is explicitation. Translated texts are thus generally expected to be more explicit than both their source texts and other, non-translated texts in the target language (e.g. Blum-Kulka 1986), though this view is challenged by e.g. House (2008) and Becher (2010). In my paper, I will discuss whether or not an analysis of a Latin-Old Swedish translation corpus supports this Explicitation Hypothesis. I will demonstrate that obligatory and pragmatic explicitation is a contributing factor in the higher degree of explicitness in the translated texts as compared to their Latin sources. However, I will argue that the differences in explicitness between Old Swedish translated and non-translated texts are better explained by other, translation-independent factors.

References

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