

Translation Universals: Can Optimality Theory Help? **Richard Mansell, University of Exeter**

This paper will analyse findings from the study of the translation process within an Optimality-Theoretic framework to determine how it can help us to understand cognitive aspects of translation.

There have been three attempts to apply Optimality Theory within translation studies; Dols and Mansell (Dols 2006; Mansell 2004, 2008; Dols and Mansell 2008), Darwish (2008) and Calfoglou (2010). It seems that these have arisen independently, since there is no cross-referencing between them, something that echoes this workshop organisers' general comment on various OT applications: 'The authors of these isolated attempts usually even did not know of each other.' These applications will be analysed to determine their strengths, but also areas where OT principles have not been fully applied, such as the identification of inputs and outputs, and the universality of constraints.

In particular I shall focus on the search for universals in translation, which has been a particularly fertile line of investigation in translation studies since the advent of corpus-based studies in the mid 1990s (Mauranen and Kujamaki 2004; see Baker 1993 for the seminal work in the field). Despite this activity, to date there is still no satisfactory definition of translation universals themselves, nor how they manifest themselves and how they should be studied. I propose that the definition of the object of study of universals has been determined to a great extent by the method of investigation (see Pym 2008 for a criticism of corpus-based studies in this field), and shall use optimality-theoretic principles to demonstrate provide an encompassing and yet clearly delimited definition of what translation universals are and how and why they arise, regardless of the language pair involved.

References

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