7
Translation, pragmatics and cognition

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7.1 Introduction

In a very broad sense, pragmatics is the study of language use. Morris (1938) is widely acknowledged as the first author to provide a tentative definition of the goals and scope of pragmatics as “the science of the relationship of signs to their interpreters” (Morris, 1938, p. 30). Morris developed a typology of syntax, semantics and pragmatics within a general science of signs (semiotics) in the context of 1930s scholarship on philosophy of mind (see Tipton, 2019, p. 2) and focused on “the relation of signs to those who use the signs” (Mey, 2006, p. 51). In recent publications, both Spencer-Oatey and Žegarac (2010) and Tipton (2019) make such an acknowledgement to Morris (1938) in volumes dedicated to the interface between pragmatics and applied linguistics and between pragmatics and Translation Studies, respectively. However, a consensus about a unified definition of pragmatics seems hard to find. Spencer-Oatey and Žegarac (2010, p. 70) caution that “none of the many pragmatic theories and frameworks comes close to being a generally accepted paradigm, and in fact, there is no consensus as to the domain of pragmatics”.

As Tipton (2019) puts it, historically, pragmatics has been dominated by an Anglo-American tradition, which is cognitive-philosophical oriented, and a Continental European tradition, which is socio-cultural-interactive oriented. The former builds on phenomena such as indexicality/deixis, speech acts, metaphor, implicit meaning, presuppositions, politeness and conversation analysis, whereas the latter draws on a broader perspective for studying language in general.

Focusing on the Anglo-American tradition, the first major breakthrough in this tradition can perhaps be traced back to the distinction between the linguistic form of the utterance and its communicative function (illocutionary force), as suggested in the works of Austin and Searle and their views that language should be seen as a form of action. Austin (1962) suggested that people use language to perform actions (such as requesting information, promising, offering, betting, etc.) that have an impact in some way on the world. He, and later Searle (1969), called these speech acts and tried to classify these actions into different categories of felicity conditions that enable speech acts to be performed successfully by language users.

Grice’s (1957, 1975, 1989) theory of communication is built on the distinction between what is said (explicitly communicated) and what is implicated (implicitly communicated). For Grice,
speaker-meaning is a way of expressing and recognizing intentions. Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995) point out that Grice (1975), in his William James Lectures, conveyed the fundamental idea that “once a certain piece of behaviour is identified as communicative, it is reasonable to assume that the communicator is trying to meet certain general standards” (Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995, p. 33). This view led Grice to formulate a general principle for human communication: “Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged” (Grice, 1975, p. 45). Grice called it the co-operative principle, which he then developed into nine maxims classified into four categories (maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner) with the purpose of explaining how utterances convey not just explicit but also implicit meaning. To achieve this goal, Grice also coined the term implicature to provide an account of how implicit meaning is processed and generated.

Grice’s ideas have been quite influential in the field of pragmatics. According to Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995, p. 38), his basic idea “offers a way of developing the analysis of inferential communication, as suggested by Grice himself in ‘Meaning’ (1957), into an explanatory model”. Grice’s views have been challenged (by Carston, 2002; Levinson, 2000; Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995, among others) but have nevertheless remained influential.

Brown and Levinson’s (1978, 1987) face model of politeness is also considered one of the influential models in the Anglo-American pragmatics tradition; it tries to explain the impact of social factors on people’s use of language as “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61).

Other relevant works within the Anglo-American tradition deal with cross-cultural pragmatics and the semantics of human interaction (Wierzbicka, 1991), pragmatic meaning and cognition (Marmaridou, 2000), and a specific cognitive approach to pragmatics with a focus on relevance, as shown in the works of Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995), Blakemore (1992) and Carston (2002), among others. This cognitive approach to pragmatics has been expanded to incorporate what is known as experimental pragmatics (Noveck & Sperber, 2004).

All these authors have provided input for establishing the goals and the scope of pragmatics within the Anglo-American tradition as seen in the comprehensive volumes published by Leech (1983), Davis (1991), Levinson (1993), Mey (1993), Yule (1996) and Verschueren (1999), among others.

In this chapter, we constrain the scope of pragmatics applied to translation within the Anglo-American tradition, and, while using Morris’s (1938) definition as a sailing reference, we concentrate on translation-specific phenomena for our considerations applied to translation in general and to the translation–cognition interface in particular.

In Translation Studies, references to the impact of pragmatics on translation can be found in Hickey’s (1998) edited volume, which, building on the Anglo-American tradition, focuses on topics such as speech acts and illocutionary function in translation, politeness, presuppositions, deictic features, discourse connectives, ellipsis, markedness and perlocutionary equivalence, expecting to shed light on “how pragmatics relate to translation and, in particular, […] how pragmatic equivalence may be achieved in the process and product of the translator’s art” (Hickey, 1998, p. 8).

Another trend in Translation Studies, as Tipton (2019) points out, has built on the works of Halliday (1978) and Halliday and Hasan (1985) on systemic functional linguistics. It has been particularly influential in developing communicative approaches to translation (see Baker, 1992, 1993; Hatim & Mason 1990, 1997; House, 1981, 1997, 2006, 2013, among others). However, these works build on a semantics-oriented semiotic theory of language (systemic functional linguistics), which does not include pragmatics as a specific theoretic component but deals with it as semiotic-semantic-related issues.
In Translation Studies, the German functionalist approach (Reiß & Vermeer, 1984) may be considered an original attempt to look at pragmatics-related phenomena. However, the relationship between pragmatics, translation and cognition per se was first explored by Gutt (1991/2000) and later expanded by Setton (1999), Doherty (2002), Alves (1995, 2007, 2009) and Gallai (2019), among others, leading to what Setton and Dawrant (2016, p. 473) call cognitive pragmatics, based on the fact that language is not a logical product but originates from the conventional practice of individuals, which depends on the particular context of the terms used by them.

In this chapter, we follow Gallai’s (2019, p. 51) assertion that “even though other cognitive-pragmatic theories have been developed in the last three decades, relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995) can be considered as the main theoretical framework in the area of cognitive pragmatics (Huang, 2007; Schmid, 2012) as well as the only cognitive pragmatic approach within translation studies”. Thus, for the remaining sections of this chapter, we will build on the relevance-theoretic framework and on Gutt’s seminal application of relevance theory to Translation Studies to ground our thinking.

7.2 Core topics

This section presents a relevance-theoretic approach to pragmatics in general and in its application to translation in particular. It starts by revisiting traditional axioms and looking at the relevance-comprehension heuristics and the notion of cognitive environment applied to translation. Next, considering translation as an act of interlingual interpretive language use, it explores the concept of interpretive resemblance (Gutt, 1991/2000) and looks at processing effort and cognitive effects in translation (Alves, 2007). It also deals with instances of metarepresentation and higher-order representations in translation (Gutt, 2004, 2005), the semantics–pragmatics interface in translation (Carston, 2002; Doherty, 2002) and issues related to explicitation and explicitness in translation (Alves, 2009; Englund-Dimitrova, 2005; Hansen-Schirra et al., 2007). Finally, it looks into experimental pragmatics (Noveck & Sperber, 2004) as a way to test hypotheses and provide empirical evidence to account for how translation functions as a cognitive activity.

7.2.1 Revisiting traditional axioms: The relevance-comprehension heuristics for translation

Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995) introduced relevance theory as an attempt to bring together Shannon and Weaver’s (1949) code model and Grice’s (1975) inferential model. The question they asked was “Should the code model and the inferential model be amalgamated?” (Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995, p. 24). They claim that “there are at least two different modes of communication: the coding-decoding mode and the inferential mode” and add that “complex forms of communication can combine both modes” (Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995, p. 27).

According to relevance theory, both communicator and audience must believe that the information effectively communicated is relevant enough to be worth the processing effort required to understand it. For Sperber & Wilson (1986/1995), every act of communication creates an expectation of relevance. This is achieved through two complementary forms of behaviour (ostensive and inferential), jointly generating what is called ostensive-inferential behaviour. On the one hand, the communicator is responsible for making ostensively manifest what he/she wants to communicate. On the other hand, the hearer must be prepared to dedicate the necessary effort to process ostensive stimuli inferentially. Ostensive-inferential comprehension requires mutual manifestness of a certain level for both communicator and audience. It typically involves several layers of metarepresentation. Relevance theory grounds these assumptions by
formulating two general claims or “principles” about the role of relevance in cognition and in communication:

Cognitive principle of relevance. Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance.

Communicative principle of relevance. Every act of communication conveys a presumption of its own optimal relevance.

Based on these two principles, Sperber & Wilson (1986/1995) assume that the presumption of optimal relevance conveyed by every utterance is strong enough to generate a specific relevance-oriented comprehension heuristic in which there is a supposedly positive relation between the effort needed to process the ostensive stimuli conveyed by the communicator and the cognitive effects generated in this process. There is no need for further effort if there are no extra gains, namely new cognitive effects. Relevance is thus defined as “a property of inputs to cognitive processes and analysed in terms of the notions of cognitive effect and processing effort” (Wilson, 2000, p. 423).

Gutt (1991/2000) builds on relevance-theoretic assumptions to apply them to the study of translation. He draws on the notions of cognitive environment and mutual manifestness to consider translation as a case of interlingual interpretive language use. It results from the relationship between processing effort and cognitive effects, mediated by higher-order representations (metarepresentations). We shall look at these topics in the following sections.

7.2.2 Rethinking context: The notions of cognitive environment and mutual manifestness

Work within social pragmatics has sometimes required the introduction of additional communicative norms to account for the unfolding of communicative processes (Spencer-Oatey & Žegarac, 2010, p. 76). Relevance theory sees it under a different light and assumes that the social factors that influence communication processes are best analysed as instances of a given context; namely, a set of assumptions which participants use in producing and interpreting acts of communication.

Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995) insist that the relevance-theoretic notion of context is different from the standard notion of the term. In relevance theory, context is defined as a mental construct, and it should be seen as effectively contributing to cognitive processes. Contextual input includes external stimuli, which can be perceived and attended to, and mental representations, which can be stored, recalled or used as premises in inference. For Sperber and Wilson, communication processes give rise to shared information, which implies that “some sharing of information is necessary if communication is to be achieved” (Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995, p. 38). Because people speak different languages, entertain different representations of the world and vary in their perceptual abilities, a mental-oriented definition of context should entail those differentiations, which are defined as follows:

A fact is manifest to an individual at a given time if and only if he is capable at that time of representing it mentally and accepting its representation as true or probably true.

A cognitive environment of an individual is a set of facts that are manifest to him.

Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995, p. 39

It follows that a set of facts must be mutually manifested to a group of individuals engaged in human communication processes so that new cognitive effects can arise as modifications
from previous states of an individual’s cognitive environment in a set of facts that are mutually manifested to communicators and audience alike. Cognitive effects are changes in the individual’s set of assumptions resulting from the processing of an input in a context of previously held assumptions. This type of processing may result in three types of cognitive effects: the derivation of new assumptions; the modification of the degree of strength of previously held assumptions; and the deletion of previously held assumptions. The possibility of achieving cognitive effects is what makes an input worth processing. Everything else being equal, inputs that yield greater cognitive effects are more relevant and more worthy of processing. As far as translation is concerned, the notions of cognitive environment and mutual manifestness (see Alves, 2007, 2009; Gutt, 1991/2000) are of paramount importance to the investigation of how translators and interpreters arrive at target products as well as how audiences respond to the target texts (written or oral) they read or listen to.

7.2.3 Interpretive resemblance: Translation as an act of interlingual interpretive language use

Gutt (1991/2000) provided the first relevance-theoretic account of translation. His work caused controversies when it was published but grew to be considered a seminal contribution to Translation Studies. Gutt grounds his considerations on the inferential nature of human communication and on the notions of descriptive and interpretive language use (see also Gutt, 2001). Relevance theory postulates a distinction between descriptive and attributive (or interpretive) uses of language. Whereas a descriptive utterance is an interpretation of a thought, interpretive utterances are interpretations of a thought that is an interpretation of another thought or utterance, and consequently, a thought or an utterance attributed to another person or to a speaker at another time.

Gutt (1991/2000) first looks at the notions of overt and covert translation to make a distinction between “direct” and “indirect” translations. Building on House’s (1981) theory of functional equivalence, in which translations should match the original text in function, Gutt states that for House only covert translations are capable of actually achieving functional equivalence. He disagrees with House’s theoretical claims and suggests that instead one should focus on “direct” translations because of their (explicit or implicit) presumption of interpretively resembling original content. For Gutt, “a receptor language utterance is a direct translation of a source language utterance if and only if it purports to interpretively resemble the original completely in the context envisaged for the original” (Gutt, 1991/2000, p. 171).

The notion of interpretive resemblance derives from Gutt’s view of translation as a case of interlingual interpretive language use. He looks at interpretive resemblances between propositional forms, between thoughts and utterances, and between utterances. Considering that the notion of interpretive resemblance between propositional forms cannot be applied to resemblances between utterances without some modification, Gutt insists that “the crucial point is the sharing of analytic and/or contextual implications” and goes on to claim that “since these implications are assumptions, we can say more generally that interpretive resemblance is characterized by the sharing of assumptions” (Gutt, 1991/2000, p. 46). He argues further that, ultimately, a relevance-theoretic approach could provide a unified account of translation. In other words, translators have the task of interpretively rendering the source text into the target language by providing the audience with communicative cues in the very same way as an original communicator provides the original audience with cues to enable inferential processing. This is the basis of a research programme based on the observation that “human beings have the remarkable ability to tell in one language what was first told in
another language” Gutt (1991/2000, p. 205). Gutt calls it a competence-oriented research of translation (CORT) that “seeks to understand translation through understanding the communicative competence that makes it possible, for both the translator and his/her audience” Gutt (1991/2000, p. 205).

Several translation scholars have responded to Gutt’s call and carried out empirical investigations based on CORT, focusing on aspects of translation process research (Alves, 1995, 2007, 2009; Alves & Gonçalves, 2003, 2013; Alves et al., 2010), translation competence (Alves & Gonçalves, 2007), conference interpretation (Setton & Dawrant, 2016), legal interpreting (Gallai, 2015, 2017), simultaneous interpreting (Setton, 1999, 2006; Vianna, 2005), audiovisual translation (Desilla, 2018, 2019), or other topics. We shall refer to these works in more detail in the following sections of this chapter.

7.2.4 Processing effort and cognitive effects in translation

Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995, p. 265) define a cognitive effect “as a contextual effect occurring in a cognitive system (e.g. an individual), and a positive cognitive effect as a cognitive effect that contributes positively to the fulfilment of cognitive functions or goals”. They identify three types of cognitive effects: (1) cognitive effects that generate a conclusion drawn from old or new information together; (2) cognitive effects that strengthen an existing assumption; and (3) cognitive effects that contradict or eliminate an existing assumption. For Sperber and Wilson, the more cognitive effects one is able to generate, the more relevant is the information conveyed by the communicator.

7.2.4.1 The effort–effect relation in translation

In the relevance-theoretic framework, it follows that information is relevant for the audience to the extent that it generates cognitive effects by means of the necessary processing effort to modify existing assumptions about the world. In other words, human cognition is designed to maximize the generation of cognitive effects at the minimal cost of necessary processing effort. Thus, Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995) postulate a relation between processing effort and cognitive effects, which offers an alternative to empirically investigating the role of effort and effect in translation.

Using translation process data tracked with keylogging in conjunction with retrospective protocols, Alves (2007) carried out an empirical study to investigate the relation between processing effort and cognitive effects. The data analysis looked at segmentation patterns in terms of time taken on the task, including deletions and regressions, comparing keylogged data with metarepresentations of the task at hand, obtained through retrospective verbal protocols. By assessing verbally justified reasons for the output rendered by participants, the results showed that professional translators worked faster and purposefully, revealing meaningful correlations between the type of processing effort undertaken and the corresponding cognitive effects registered in the translation output and their corresponding metarepresentations conveyed through retrospection. Thus, Alves (2007) was in a position to corroborate the relevance-theoretic assumption that, for translation task execution carried out by professional translators, human cognition is designed to maximize the generation of cognitive effects with the least necessary processing effort. On the other hand, novice translators revealed a type of processing effort that showed a linear pattern of segmentation, with little meaningful processing effort and practically no justified retrospection for their translation output, showing weak cognitive effects and pointing to a type of cognitive behaviour that revealed a lack of ability to effectively carry out the translation task.
7.2.4.2 The role of conceptual and procedural encodings in translation
Blakemore (1987) introduced the conceptual–procedural distinction into relevance theory to account for differences between regular content words and discourse connectives. In relevance-theoretic terms, conceptually encoded information is encoded by open lexical categories, such as nouns, adjectives and verbs, to convey conceptual meaning, which is propositionally extendable. It can be enriched and contributes to the inferential processing of an utterance. Procedurally encoded information, on the other hand, is encoded via non-open morphological categories, such as negation, tenses, determiners, word order, etc. It cannot be extended in propositional terms but contributes decisively to the cognitive processing of an utterance by imposing procedural constraints on the construction of intended contexts and cognitive effects.

Wilson (2011, p. 9) argues that what distinguishes the conceptual–procedural distinction from the traditional semantic or pragmatic distinction is that “it carries definite cognitive commitments”. For relevance theory, to say that a certain expression encodes conceptual or procedural meaning is to say that it has implications for the nature of the cognitive mechanisms involved. Additionally, Wilson (2011, p. 12) comments that “there is a fairly widespread view that the conceptual-procedural distinction is intended to be mutually exclusive, so that a single word cannot encode both types of meaning”. She argues, however, that there is little textual evidence to support this interpretation of relevance theory and advocates that conceptual and procedural meaning should not be treated as mutually exclusive.

Alves and Gonçalves (2003, 2013) carried out empirical studies to investigate the conceptual–procedural distinction during translation task execution. Alves and Gonçalves (2003) built on the conceptual–procedural distinction to postulate that there would be fewer problems in the recognition of procedurally encoded information in the source text. Consequently, this would yield similar inferential processing among subjects, and translation decisions would be more structurally oriented. They also postulated that conceptually encoded information would be handled on the basis of individually available contextual assumptions. Therefore, solutions would be inferentially supported by contextual assumptions derived from the translators’ cognitive environments and vary randomly among subjects. However, as Alves and Gonçalves (2003) have shown, procedurally encoded information needed contextual support to be processed effectively. Difficulties in retrieving the communicative clues conveyed by procedurally encoded information hindered the generation of positive cognitive effects, confirming relevance-theoretic assumptions about the hybrid nature of the conceptual–procedural distinction for translation task execution.

Alves and Gonçalves (2013) analysed keylogged data of professional translators when performing direct and inverse translation tasks. The analysis focused on the number and types of conceptual and procedural encodings found in micro /macro translation units (Alves & Vale, 2009, 2011). Results showed that processing effort in translation is greater in segments conveying procedurally encoded information than in segments rendering conceptually encoded information. Hybrid encodings, conveying conceptual information with a procedural function, also had an impact on translation task execution, requiring more processing effort in both direct and inverse translation tasks.

Alves et al. (2014) built on the conceptual–procedural distinction to investigate processing effort in translation task execution using keylogged and eye-tracking data. Their analysis showed that there are statistically significant differences when conceptual and procedural encodings are analysed in selected areas of interest, with instances related to procedural encoding requiring more processing effort to be translated. For Alves et al. (2014), as well as Alves and Gonçalves (2013), effort was not measured temporally in terms of time spent on a given segment but by the
number of edits (replacement of unfinished segments, substitutions, deletions) and the distance of those editing actions from the first rendering of that given segment.

As far as interpreting is concerned, Setton (1999, p. 204) proposed the notion of “pragmatic clues to inference” by drawing on the distinction between conceptual and procedural information and their corresponding inferential computations. In other words, Setton (1999) showed that “the principle of relevance seems to apply particularly well to the real-time performance of simultaneous interpreters” and that “communication is successful when speakers’ utterances are ‘optimally relevant’, i.e., when they give listeners access to maximum cognitive effects for minimum effort” (see Gallai, 2019, p. 63).

Altogether, these works provide empirical evidence that contextual assumptions play a role in handling procedurally and conceptually encoded information and point out that a relevance-theoretic view of translation can account for how implicatures and explicatures are expressed in different cognitive environments and, therefore, in different target texts.

7.2.5 Metarepresentation and higher-order representations in translation

The recognition of informative and communicative intentions depends on specific abilities, such as inferring and predicting the content of mental states. Metarepresentation is “the ability to represent how other people represent states of affairs in their minds” (Gutt, 2004, p. 80). Wilson (2012, p. 231) states that metarepresentation as “the ability to identify speaker meanings is nothing but the general mindreading ability applied to a specific communicative domain”. Metarepresentation, as a mindreading ability, is often wrongly perceived as a misleading term which suggests the decoding of thoughts. According to relevance theory, texts or utterances are interpretive representations of an author’s or a speaker’s thoughts, which necessarily involve at least one level of metarepresentation to allow the recognition of informative and communicative intentions.

Drawing on the concept of metarepresentation, Gutt (2004) discusses translation as a higher-order act of communication. He argues that the primary concern of translators is to convey interpretive resemblance between source and target texts and not a representation of states of affairs. By metarepresenting bodies of thought, translators can achieve interpretive resemblance by drawing on cognitive environments of both original communicators and receptors of target texts. Clearly, the communicator, the translator and the audience have different cognitive environments. However, Gutt points out that “as soon as one recognizes the need to deal with different cognitive environments, it becomes clear that metarepresentational skills must be a core component of translation competence” (Gutt, 2004, p. 13).

Gutt (2005) reiterates the importance of CORT and argues that higher-order acts of communication can be applied to communicative situations in which the communicator and the audience do not share a mutual cognitive environment. In such cases—known as “secondary communication”—Gutt suggests that an additional cognitive level is needed for communication to succeed. Thus, Gutt (2005) claims, the capacity to metarepresent is a cognitive prerequisite for the ability to translate.

Drawing on Gutt (2004, 2005), Alves (2007) has shown that translators tend to regulate the relation between processing effort and cognitive effect on the basis of a multi-level process mediated by the metarepresentations they create. Pause analysis and retrospective data reveal that the relation between processing effort and cognitive effect is also conditioned by the translator’s degree of metacognitive monitoring.

Alves and Gonçalves’ (2007) cognitive model of translation competence emphasizes the central role played by metarepresentation and metacognition in the development of that competence.
Their model embeds translation competence in a comprehensive cognitive theory, claiming that the ability to translate requires highly complex metacognitive skills.

In the field of interpreting, Setton (1999, 2006), Setton and Dawrant (2016) and Vianna (2005) corroborate Gutt’s view of translation and interpreting as attributed thought—stressing the fundamental underdeterminacy of linguistic encoding.

7.2.6 Explicitation and explicitness in translation

Explicitation has been often investigated as a translation-specific phenomenon. Blum-Kulka (1986) was perhaps the first scholar to propose a systematic study of explicitation in translation. For her, translations tend to be more explicit than their source-text counterparts, regardless of whether or not this increase in explicitation is imposed by differences in the linguistic systems of source and target texts. Baker (1993) drew on Blum-Kulka’s (1986) proposal and used the tools of corpus linguistics to compare quantitative patterns between original texts and their translations, observing the type/token ratio. Olohan and Baker (2000) also drew on the explicitation hypothesis to analyse implicit and explicit occurrences of the conjunction “that” in original and translated texts. None of these works, however, were concerned with implications of explicitation for pragmatics.

Approaching explicitation from a cognitive perspective, Englund-Dimitrova (2005) proposed a distinction between explicitation processes that are norm-governed and those processes that have a strategic nature. The former type of explicitation, she claimed, would be determined by the constraints inherent in the linguistic systems in contrast and would not be cognitively relevant for investigations about the translation process. On the other hand, processes of strategic explicitation would arise from the difficulties found by the translator in solving translation problems that go beyond the scope of the constraints imposed by the linguistic systems in contrast. However, Englund-Dimitrova (2005) did not analyse instances of explicitation as renderings constrained by inferential processing.

Building on Steiner (2005), Hansen-Schirra et al. (2007) looked at explicitness, rather than explicitation, from a corpus linguistics perspective. They measured explicitness as a property of the encoding, not as a property of the communicative act as such, which, for them, is in the realm of explicitation. For Hansen-Schirra et al. (2007), although explicitation is of great significance for any attempt at understanding communication, their approach focuses on textual encoding as a means to provide a necessary prerequisite for investigations of translation as an act of communication. They observe that investigations of explicitation in translation from a cognitive pragmatic perspective fall more properly within the domain of relevance theory.

Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995) argue that the explicit side of communication is far more inferential than Grice envisaged. For them, both the explicit and the implicit side of communication involve making inferences from contextual assumptions on the basis of general pragmatic principles. Thus, Sperber and Wilson develop the notion of explicature, which is defined in terms of an inferential development of incomplete logical forms (verbally manifested) into propositional forms. In other words, explicatures serve to “flesh out” incomplete conceptual representations encoded by utterances and thus yield fully propositional content. Unlike explicit content, the implicit content or implicature within relevance theory is seen as an assumption that can only be derived pragmatically by means of pragmatic inferences. For Sperber and Wilson, the difference between explicatures and implicatures consists in the fact that the recovery of the former involves both decoding and inference, whereas the latter involves only inference. The inferential process integrates the semantic representation with contextual assumptions in order to reach an intended interpretation of the utterance, and is guided by the communicative principle.
of relevance. Further, as Carston (2002) argues, the semantic representation is not fully propositional but is just a template for utterance interpretation, which requires pragmatic inference in order to recover the proposition the speaker has intended. For Carston (2002), semantics is a relation between a linguistic form and the information it provides as input to the inference system, rather than a relation between a linguistic form and an entity in the world.

Applying the relevance-theoretic framework to cognitive-oriented empirical investigations of translation task execution, Alves (2009) used translation process data in combination with corpus linguistics annotations to assess the notions of “norm-governed explicitations and strategic explicitations” proposed by Englund-Dimitrova (2005, p. 236, italics in the original). Alves (2009) also looked at differences between processes of explicitness and explicitation proposed by Steiner (2005) and Hansen-Schirra et al. (2007). Drawing on the above-mentioned authors, Alves (2009) offered a process-oriented inferential account of explicitation in translation, which revealed that instances of explicitness in translation were predominantly related to norm-governed issues, whereas instances of explicitation in translation were predominantly strategic.

7.3 Recent developments and future directions

In this section, we look into some recent developments and point to some future directions concerning pragmatics at the interface with translation and cognition. We consider the possibilities offered by experimental pragmatics to investigate the impact of pragmatic factors on cognitive behaviour and the challenges that lie ahead as the field of cognitive pragmatics develops further within Cognitive Translation Studies.

7.3.1 Experimental pragmatics

We have seen in the previous sections that Gutt (1991/2000, 2001, 2004, 2005) has shown that elements of language can encode processing instructions which provide guidance to the audience as to how an expression is intended to be relevant. Gutt has also pointed out that these instructions are empirically grounded and can be used to make testable predictions about the success and failure of human communication. Gutt argues that the cause–effect framework provided by relevance theory can be used to predict problems when the stimuli and/or the audience lack ready access to certain pieces of information that are needed for consistency with the principle of relevance. Based on these assumptions, Gutt suggests that one could set up experiments to investigate cause–effect relations in translation, a suggestion that is well suited for grounding translation as a cognitive activity.

Psycholinguistics has developed sophisticated experimental methods in the study of verbal communication, but it has not used them to test pragmatic theories systematically. A combination of psycholinguistic methods with a pragmatic orientation lays down the bases for experimental pragmatics, a new disciplinary field that draws on pragmatics and psycholinguistics and also on the psychology of reasoning as proposed by Noveck and Sperber (2004), who state that “experimental pragmatics may contribute to linguistics and psychology, and to the cognitive sciences in general” (Noveck & Sperber, 2004, p. 19). They insist that the range of phenomena that pragmatics investigates is part of the much wider domain of psycholinguistics, which has paid very little attention to pragmatics. Noveck and Sperber (2004) define experimental pragmatics as the study of how linguistic properties and contextual factors interact in the interpretation of utterances. It is reasonable to expect that two fields of research dealing in part with the same material at the same level of abstraction would gain strength by joining forces, or at least by interacting actively. For pragmatics, the gain would be twofold. First, experimental
evidence can be used, together with intuition and recordings, to confirm or disconfirm hypotheses. The high reliability and strong evidential value of experimental data put a premium on this sort of data, even though it is hard to collect and is generally more artificial than observational data (and therefore raises specific problems of interpretation).

Testing theories experimentally often leads one to revise and refine them in the light of new and precise evidence. Noveck and Sperber (2004, p. 9) suggest that, for experimental psycholinguistics, the gain from a greater involvement with pragmatics would be in taking advantage of the competencies, concepts and theories developed in this field in order to better describe and explain a range of phenomena that are clearly of a psycholinguistic nature, and to develop new experimental paradigms. Gibbs (2004), Van der Henst and Sperber (2004) and Noveck and Reboul (2008) are examples of works that test linguistic-pragmatic theories using experimental psychological methods. In Cognitive Translation Studies, Alves (2007, 2009), Alves and Gonçalves (2003, 2013) and Alves et al. (2014) present applications of experimental pragmatics drawing on relevance theory.

7.3.2 Emerging topics

As the cognitive pragmatics approach to translation becomes consolidated by applications of relevance theory, some authors have pointed out alternative and complementary possibilities of investigating the translation/pragmatics interface from a cognitive angle.

In contrast with the standard relevance-theoretic view of translation and interpreting as interlingual interpretive language use, Gallai’s (2015, 2016, 2017) interdisciplinary study of procedural elements in interpreting draws a comparison between free indirect style or thought (FIT) representations in fiction and interpreter-mediated utterances in order to reassess the way in which attributed thoughts are represented in face-to-face interpreting. Gallai argues that “procedural elements have an important role to play in creating an illusion of being able to gain entry to the speaker’s mind” (Gallai, 2019, p. 64).

Desilla (2018, 2019) looks at pragmatics and audiovisual translation and provides an overview of three salient pragmatic phenomena (speech acts, politeness and implicature), teasing out their significant role in the construal, translation and reception of audiovisual texts. Outlining Grice’s pioneering study of implicature, Desilla (2018) treats implicatures as a sub-type of non-conventional indirectness and focuses on the cognitive psychological perspective of relevance theory, which, she argues, is equipped with the conceptual tools for understanding context selection. Desilla (2019) looks at how experimental pragmatics meets audiovisual translation by addressing methodological challenges in researching how film audiences understand implicatures.

Finally, Szpak (2017), Alves et al. (2019) and Szpak et al. (2019) look at translation in the brain from a combined perspective, which brings together the relevance-theoretic concept of metarepresentation and the concept of perspective taking used in theory of mind (ToM). Drawing on brain imaging studies, on tenets from relevance theory and on a ToM-oriented approach, the authors try to investigate how perspective taking interposes both metacommunicative and metapsychological processes (metarepresentation, mindreading and ToM) and locate it within a broad brain area, namely the left inferior parietal lobe. Szpak et al. (2019) provide a novel inferential account of neurophysiological data in relation to translation task execution, opening up new avenues for a metarepresentational view of translation. In their account, interpretive resemblance of attributed thoughts (metarepresentations) has proven to entail brain regions related to the identification of the target perspective (a metacommunicative process), which in turn involves brain regions related to the attribution of second-order mental representations to others (a metapsychological process).
The works mentioned here are only examples of new trends emerging in areas as diverse as legal interpreting, audiovisual translation and neuroimaging studies applied to translation task execution that have opened up new frontiers for the study of translation from a cognitive pragmatics perspective. As these new trends unfold, our understanding of the impact of pragmatics-related phenomena on the translation/cognition interface is bound to increase.

Further reading


References


Translation, pragmatics and cognition


