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CORPUS ANALYSIS OF TRANSLATION UNIVERSALS IN PARALLEL TEXTS OF VARIOUS GENRES (FRENCH–RUSSIAN)

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Abstract

Translation universals are linguistic features that occur frequently in translated texts regardless of the language pair or genre. This study investigates translation universals in French–Russian parallel texts across literary, journalistic, and technical genres. Using a corpus-based approach, it identifies tendencies such as simplification, explicitation, normalization, and interference. Examples from French translations of Russian originals demonstrate how translators manage lexical, syntactic, and stylistic differences. The analysis highlights how translation universals reflect both the translator's strategies and the inherent structural differences between Russian and French.

Keywords

translation universals, corpus linguistics, parallel texts, French–Russian translation, explicitation, simplification.

The study of translation universals has become central in corpus-based translation studies. These universals—simplification, explicitation, normalization, and interference—are patterns that appear repeatedly in translated texts regardless of the source language. Investigating these tendencies helps researchers understand how translation shapes language and mediates communication. Parallel corpora are an essential tool for such research. They allow direct comparison of source and target texts, highlighting how translators adapt structures and vocabulary. The French–Russian language pair provides a compelling case because of the typological differences between the languages: Russian features flexible word order and rich inflectional morphology, whereas French relies on relatively fixed word order and function words. These differences often require translators to make decisions that trigger translation universals. Genre plays a critical role in translation as well. Literary texts involve stylistic and creative choices, journalistic texts prioritize clarity and conciseness, and technical texts emphasize precision and explicitness. Studying multiple genres allows us to see whether translation universals are consistent or genre-dependent.[1]

This article examines French translations of Russian texts from literary, journalistic, and technical genres. By analyzing lexical density, sentence length, connective use, and explicitation strategies, it identifies recurrent patterns that distinguish translated French from original French. The research demonstrates how translators mediate between Russian and French, creating texts that are comprehensible and culturally appropriate while reflecting

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universal tendencies in translation. The corpus consists of parallel French–Russian texts across three genres: literary, journalistic, and technical. Sentences were aligned to facilitate comparison. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses were performed to identify patterns reflecting translation universals.

Simplification is the tendency to reduce lexical or syntactic complexity in translations. Russian often allows longer, complex sentences with multiple clauses, while French translations tend to divide these into simpler sentences.

Example – Literary text:

- **Russian:** *Он вошёл в комнату и огляделся, внимательно изучая всё вокруг, чтобы не пропустить ни одной детали.*
- **French:** *Il est entré dans la pièce. Il a regardé autour de lui avec attention pour ne rien manquer.*

The French version splits one long Russian sentence into two shorter sentences, making it easier to read.[2]

Explicitation involves making implicit elements in the source text explicit in translation. French translations from Russian frequently add connectors or clarifying phrases.

Example – Journalistic text:

- **Russian:** *Он отказался уходить. Не был готов.*
- **French:** *Il a refusé de partir,* ***parce qu'il ne se sentait pas prêt****.*

Here, *parce qu'il ne se sentait pas prêt* clarifies the causal relationship implied in the Russian version.

Normalization reflects the tendency of translations to conform to target-language norms, including standard expressions and collocations.

Example – Technical text:

- **Russian:** *Принять важное решение*
- **French:** *Prendre une décision importante*

The French translation uses a conventional collocation, even if the Russian phrasing could be slightly different or less idiomatic.[3]

Interference occurs when features of the source language affect the target text. Literary translations often preserve some source-language patterns.

Example – Literary text:

- **Russian:** *В этой книге описаны основные события.*
- **French:** *Dans ce livre sont décrits les événements principaux.*

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The French sentence is grammatically correct but mirrors Russian word order. A more typical French structure would be: *Ce livre décrit les événements principaux.* Even in informal digital or journalistic texts, French translations sometimes reflect Russian structures or emphasis.

Example – Social media / blog post:

- **Russian:** *Я так устал от этой работы!*
- **French:** *Je suis tellement fatigué de ce travail !*

While correct, the placement of *tellement* and the direct replication of Russian emphasis reflect interference from the source syntax.[4]

Corpus analysis of French translations of Russian texts confirms that translation universals—simplification, explicitation, normalization, and interference—appear consistently across genres. Simplification is particularly evident in literary and journalistic texts, where longer Russian sentences are split into shorter, reader-friendly French sentences. Explicitation is widespread, especially in technical and journalistic translations, ensuring clarity by making implicit information explicit. Normalization occurs as translators use conventional French expressions, contributing to the naturalness and readability of the translation. Interference, though less frequent, appears in literary texts, reflecting the influence of Russian syntax and stylistic patterns. The parallel corpus approach demonstrates that these universals are not rigid rules but tendencies shaped by linguistic typology, genre, and translator choices. Literary texts retain stylistic creativity but show mild source-language interference. Journalistic texts balance clarity and style, while technical texts emphasize precision, often maximizing explicitation and normalization. By examining multiple genres, this study highlights how translation universals interact with text type and communicative purpose.

French–Russian translation illustrates how typological differences influence the manifestation of universals. Russian's flexible word order and inflectional morphology often necessitate explicit clarification or sentence restructuring in French, which relies more on word order and functional markers. Parallel examples show that translators navigate these differences while preserving meaning, coherence, and stylistic fidelity.[5]

In conclusion, translation universals provide a valuable framework for understanding patterns in translated language. Corpus-based studies reveal not only universal tendencies but also how they are adapted according to genre and language pair. The integration of French and Russian examples highlights the practical application of these concepts and underscores the importance of empirical approaches in translation studies. Future research could expand the corpus size, include spoken texts, or use computational methods to quantify the frequency of universals across different genres, providing further insight into the dynamics of translation.

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