Cognitive grammatical constructs in Translation Studies: enabling interdisciplinarity and multimethods research

Research into translation processes primarily draws on theoretical constructs from cognitive psychology or the situated cognition paradigm (Muñoz 2013). In other areas of translation studies, cognitive linguistic constructs are employed in the analysis of other forms of translational data (e.g. papers in Rojo and Ibarretxe-Antuñano 2013; Halverson forthcoming, 2003; Serbina 2015). In a more recent development, scholars with different starting points are beginning to bring together theoretical tools from different sources, and to incorporate a range of data types to test cognitive theoretical hypotheses. An important challenge for cognitive theoretical work combining different theoretical frameworks and methodological paradigms is ensuring the commensurability of the disparate parts. In multi-method studies, the challenge lies in ensuring that the constructs chosen to ground the studies lend themselves to testing in very different ways. In this presentation, I argue that theoretical constructs from cognitive grammar are particularly well suited to establish links to theories of bilingualism and to ground multi-method studies.

Two sets of studies involving translation phenomena will serve as examples of these bridging and grounding functions. Both are based on the theory of cognitive grammar (Langacker 1987/1991, 2008), which posits a complex cognitive network structure for both lexical items and grammatical constructions. Several elements of this account are analogous to some network models in the bilingualism literature (e.g., de Groot 2011; Firkbeiner 2004, Brysbaert et al 2014). The first set of studies draws on both of these starting points, and investigates the hypothesis that salience patterns within the networks will have specific translational outcomes (Halverson forthcoming, 2003). The studies demonstrate how salience effects may be investigated in various types of data, including observational data, e.g. corpora or elicitation tasks, and translation process data such as keystroke logs or eye-tracking data. This first set of studies thus demonstrates how the salience construct links a linguistic theory to a psycholinguistic one, and how it can ground the integration of product and process data.

The second set of studies also investigates translational outcomes of network structure, but these studies focus on patterns of connectivity within the network rather than on salience phenomena. In this work, effects of bilingual network structure in the semantic field of possibility/permission is investigated in a language pair (English-Norwegian) where the modal auxiliaries do not completely correspond semantically and where cognate status is implicated. The case is Norwegian kunne and English can/might/may. The empirical studies make use of learner and translational corpus data, which is analyzed using multivariate methods. Hypotheses for keystroke data are also derived and integrated.

For the purposes of Translation Studies, the presentation of these studies suggests that linguistic theories can serve as a valuable complement to some cognitive psychological frameworks and as a bridge between theoretical frameworks. For linguistic theory, studies of authentic translation data can shed new light on questions that have previously been considered from a monolingual perspective alone.
References: