

Many roads lead to Rome: An empirical study of high-quality summary translation processes, with and without machine translation

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In recent years, several scholars (e.g., Dam-Jensen, Heine & Schrijver, 2019) have called for more comparative research on writing and translation. Such research, when focused on cognitive features, may provide more insight into how various acts pertaining to the superordinate category of text production (Dam-Jensen & Heine, 2013) differ and coincide in terms of cognitive processing. A form of translation in which writing and translation appear to converge is summary translation. Summary translation differs from “normal full translation” in terms of the level of deliberate semantic reduction and linguistic compression/expansion relative to the source text, the extent of source text-target text correspondence and the differential weighing of content (Shreve, 2006). As such, one can argue that it resembles to some degree source-based writing tasks (also called reading-to-write and integrated writing tasks; Spivey, 1997; Gebril & Plakans, 2016; Chan, 2017). In these tasks, writers must read one or multiple sources, select information from those sources that is relevant to the text to-be-produced, and present it in a coherent and sufficiently detailed manner, appropriate for the designated audience.

Comparative research on writing and translation is scarce, as are studies on summary translation. This paper aims to help filling these research gaps by examining the planning and composition strategies in summary translation processes, primarily those leading to high-quality products. For this study, keystroke logging data were collected among 50 third-year BA students in Applied Linguistics in two consecutive academic years. Although all of these students were asked to produce a summary translation of a Spanish argumentative text into Dutch, one part of the sample was allowed to use machine translation (MT), whereas the other was not. Translation products were assessed by taking into account the extent of semantic reduction as well as linguistic and semantic accuracy of the target text. Data analysis will examine the global process profiles of all students. Additionally, a more in-depth analysis will be carried out of the planning and composition strategies of those students whose translation product scores were in the top 20% of each sample. Special attention will be paid to source interaction (i.e., number of sources consulted and switches between sources and the text to-be-produced) and source-use variation in the various process phases. Preliminary results regarding the sample using MT suggest that there are two distinct process profiles, so-called adaptive translators and writer-translators, each potentially leading to high-quality translation products.

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