

Between tentativeness and certainty: Research into one aspect of translator behaviour

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Presenting the results, both quantitative and qualitative, of analysis of 3 parallel non-literary texts at the level of lexical choice on the cline from tentativeness to certainty, the paper contributes to the translational debate about the third code (Frawley, 1984). The sets of ST segments and their TT handlings covered in the analysis include adjectival and adjunct intensifiers as well as common attitudinal disjuncts. The argument is made that these rather frequently occurring and rather automatically used lexical choices can be just as revealing of the idiolect of the author of the original (Ertel) as of its third code counterpart employed by the translator.

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My study of translator behaviour between tentativeness and certainty was inspired by a mediated account of research by the German sociologist Suitbert Ertel, who was concerned with determining the so-called ‘dogmatism quotient’ characterising texts, and, consequently, their authors. I attempted appropriating his method, exploring some of its possibilities in translation research and interpreting the results in the context of the ongoing debate concerning the ‘third code’, i.e. the specific code arising in translation from the bilateral consideration of the source and target codes, as the term has been coined by William Frawley.¹

As Anthony Kenny reports,² Ertel studied the use of lexical items expressive of the different degrees of tentativeness on the one hand and confidence on the other. He singled out six categories of words within which authors have a choice between dogmatic and tentative alternatives, such as words expressing e.g. frequency, or degree. In the frequency category, for example, the dogmatic words such as *always*, *whenever* or *never* are contrasted with the less confident *often*, *sometimes* or *occasionally*. By quantifying occurrences of these words in texts he arrived at what he called “the dogmatism quotient”. His results, although perhaps not too surprising, are not uninteresting: among philosophers, Marx and Heidegger have a high dogmatism quotient while Russel and Locke have a low one. The dogmatism quotients of individual authors can be studied over time: Ertel has shown how Hitler’s dogmatism quotient depended on the political and military situation or how the dogmatism quotient of Immanuel Kant developed along with his philosophical thought.

My immediate aims were less ambitious than those of Suitbert Ertel. No matter how useful would such a comprehensive analysis of all means of expressing confidence / tentativeness in parallel texts be, it would be rather difficult to handle without some experience gained from studying the separate layers of lexis contributing towards the overall degree of dogmatism/tentativeness first. I, therefore, limited my analysis to just one group of the lexical means in question, namely adjectival and adverbial intensifiers and attitudinal

disjuncts. My small corpus of texts included substantial stretches of three non-literary texts of the expository type and their translations.³ All the three texts were published as books determined for the general educated public. The respective fields were philosophy with Erich Fromm, sociology with David Riesman, and feminist developmental psychology with Carol Gilligan.

The lexical choices on the cline from tentativeness to confidence I was interested in included both adjectival and adverbial intensifiers and a selection of attitudinal disjuncts. The criteria on which I based my decision were a relatively high frequency of occurrence combined with a certain degree of lexicalisation and automatism of use. I believed I would be able to profit from the fact that the lexical choices would be largely unconscious and would characterise the producer of the text in a specific way.

As far as adjectival and adverbial intensifiers are concerned, Quirk and Greenbaum⁴ distinguish between emphasisers, amplifiers and downtoners: emphasisers have a general heightening effect while amplifiers scale upwards from an assumed norm, denoting the upper extreme of the scale or a high point on the scale; downtoners have a lowering effect on the force of the word they modify. A further division of the categories with some typical examples is shown in Chart 1. Attitudinal disjuncts, one of the two subgroups of sentence modifiers, many of which have their homophones among adverbial intensifiers, fall into two basic categories: those which are the speaker's comment on the extent to which he or she believes that what he or she says is true, and those which are comments other than on the truth-value of what is said. For reasons that are easy to see from the chart, only the former were considered in the analysis.

In the case of the two texts by Fromm and Riesman, passages containing 200 occurrences of the above were dealt with, which were roughly 18,300 and 11,800 words long respectively. The density of the phenomena under examination was much lower in the text by Gilligan. For this reason, a stretch of text of approximately 19,800 thousand words was analysed, which, however, contained 66 occurrences only. To obtain numerical values comparable with those of the other two text samples, the numbers of occurrences were scaled up by three.

Table 1
Marker density

	Length of sample (words)	Occurrences	Confidence/tentativeness density
Fromm	18,300	200	1/91
Riesman	11,800	200	1/59
Gilligan	19,800	66	1/300

I recorded the occurrences I was interested in by the categories they fell in and evaluated them, using a division of the categories analysed into confidence markers (emphasisers, boosters, and maximisers) and tentativeness markers (compromisers, minimisers, diminishers, and approximators). An overview of this part of analysis is represented in Table 2. Attitudinal disjuncts were subsequently divided into three groups: confident (e.g. *of course, indeed, at any rate*), neutral (e.g. *in fact, probably, rather*), and tentative (e.g. *perhaps, tentatively*), and their occurrences were counted separately, to be recorded in Table 2 and then added to the overall numbers of confidence markers (confident and neutral attitudinal disjuncts) and tentativeness markers (tentative attitudinal disjuncts). The values producing the final sum of confidence and tentativeness markers are shown in brackets.

Table 2

	CONFIDENCE MARKERS				TENTATIVENESS MARKERS				total/
	EMPHASISERS		BOOSTERS		MINIMISERS		DIMINISHERS		AT. DISJUNCTS
			MAXIMISERS				APPROXIMATORS		
FROMM	ADJ/ADV distribution subtotals incl. at. disj.	18 26 44	27 15 42	24 15 39	11 3 14	5 1 6	7 7	39 19 14 6 39	200
		(125 19 14)	158		(36 6)	42			
RIESMAN	ADJ/ADV distribution subtotals incl. at. disj.	24 12 36	56 20 76	7 1 8	4 2 6	7 7 7	5 5 50	30 15 10 5 30	200
		(120 15 10)	145		(50 5)	55			
GILLIGAN	ADJ/ADV distribution scaled up subtotals incl. at. disj.	6 10 16 48	20 10 30 90	3 1 4 12	1 1 2 6	1 1 1 3	1 1 1 30	6 0 6 0 0 18 0 18	66 x3 198
		(150 0 18)	168		(30 0)	30			

Chart 1

INTENSIFIERS	EMPHASISERS	actually, indeed, really, obviously, of course, simply certain, pure, real
	AMPLIFIERS	completely, entirely, fully, utterly complete, entire, full, utter deeply, a lot, very much deep, great, high, intense
	BOOSTERS	
	DOWNTONERS	quite, rather, more or less relative, comparable somewhat, partly, slightly partial, slight hardly, little, not in the least limited, scant almost, nearly, all but
	COMPROMISERS	
	DIMINISHERS	
	MINIMISERS	
	APPROXIMATORS	
DISJUNCTS	STYLE DISJUNCTS	strictly speaking, briefly, personally, generally <i>*not considered</i>
	ATTITUDINAL DISJUNCTS	COMMENT ON TRUTH-VALUE certainly, perhaps, possibly, clearly, actually, indeed, in fact
		COMMENT OTHER THAN ON TRUTH-VALUE fortunately, surprisingly, hopefully, naturally, luckily <i>*not considered</i>

The text by Fromm is characterised by a relatively even distribution of markers of confidence between emphasisers, boosters and maximisers (44, 42, and 39 respectively). His use of tentativeness markers is relatively even, too. In contrast with him, Riesman shows a clear preference for boosters among confidence markers (76 vs. 36 and 8), but also for compromisers among markers of tentativeness (32 vs. 6, 7, and 5).

Despite these differences in distribution, the overall values characterising these texts do not differ as much as one might expect. As Table 1 and Table 2 together show, Fromm makes a slightly sparer use of the markers under analysis while arguing with more force—at least as far as confidence markers are concerned. Riesman, whose density of markers of confidence/tentativeness is the highest, remains not so confident. The general prevalence of confidence markers over markers of tentativeness is not as surprising as it might seem at first glance: In the type of texts I was dealing with, the authors present what they believe is true—and they do it with some argumentative force.

The situation with Gilligan might be interpreted as influenced to a high degree by her scant use of confidence and tentativeness markers, which is, undoubtedly, part of her feminist strategy aiming at presenting her observations and conclusions in a most objective way, i.e. as dry facts, without appealing to the reader by the use of the lexical means we are looking at. This decision, on the other hand, enables her to use markers of confidence much more frequently than markers of tentativeness (168 vs. 30, scaled up) without giving the impression of being obtrusively dogmatic. Her proportion of markers of confidence is the highest.

When studying the Czech renderings of these markers, it was, firstly, interesting to see the distribution of zero translations:

Table 3
Zero renderings

		Emp	Boost	Max	Compr	Min	Dim	Appr	At. D.
Fromm	39/200	8	11	6	2	0	3	2	7
Riesman	25/200	6	5	1	4	0	1	0	8
Gilligan	12/200	3	3	3	0	0	0	0	1
	(4/66)	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	3

By comparing the table with the one surveying the situation in the English originals we can see that these reductions do not change the picture in any radical way. Supposing, for the moment, that the boundaries of the categories are not crossed on a massive scale, we arrive at a similar distribution of the markers as the original one was. Boosters and compromisers remain typical of Riesman. Deletions are, nevertheless, most numerous in Fromm, not Riesmann with his highest marker density. It is mainly the generally most commonly used confidence markers, which Fromm uses especially often, such as *very*, *whole*, *great* or *fully* that get lost in the translation of the text by him. The combination of his rather repetitive use of some of the markers with the relatively high density seems to have been felt as redundant by the translator and dealt with by deletion. Hardly any need to censor the use of these markers got reflected in the translation of the text by Gilligan: her spare use of confidence / tentativeness markers was preserved to a high degree.

Another feature of the text pairs that called for attention was the size of the overall marker repertoires. (See Table 4.) The adjectival and adverbial counterparts, e.g. *full* and *fully*, were counted as a single marker and a similar approach was adopted in Czech, too, whereas stylistic or subtle morphological distinctions such as *spíš/spíše*, *velmi/velice* or *více méně/více či méně* were regarded as aiming at differentiation and were counted as separate types. While

the limited repertory in Gilligan hardly needs explaining (we are talking of the 66 occurrences here), the fact that stands out is the evident increase in the number of different Czech renderings that occurred with Riesman in contrast to the just slightly increased repertoires observed with Fromm and Gilligan.

Table 4
Size of marker repertoires

	English	Czech
Fromm	73	77
Riesman	79	101
Gilligan	44	47

We have seen that specific categories of confidence and tentativeness markers were typical of each of the three individual authors. Within these categories, there were markers that were typical of the authors more than other ones. When assessing the prominence of these markers, we must, however, take into account not only the absolute number of occurrences, but also the general frequency of the particular lexical unit in the language and the particular stylistic register. If, say, *very* and *substantially* have the same high number of occurrences, it will be *substantially* rather than *very* that should be perceived as typical of the author of the text. The markers most characteristic of the three authors were therefore *entirely* (10) and *fully* (10) for Fromm, *more or less* (7) and *very* (16) for Riesman, and *increasingly* (4; 12 scaled up) for Gilligan. The question that comes to mind immediately, i.e. what happened to these multiple occurrences in translation, may be extended to an even broader question: What was the target language distribution of the multiple occurrences and how different was it from the distribution of source language multiple occurrences? Table 5 suggests the answer.

Table 5
Distribution of multiple occurrences

		16	13	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	coefficient
Fromm	E		1	2		1	1	1	1	4	3	84
	Cz						2	2	4	6	2	76
Riesman	E	1				1	1		5	4	8	96
	Cz							1		5	8	50
Gilligan*	E									2	2	14
	Cz									1	1	7

* not scaled up

In all three cases the coefficient that may provide us with a provisional quantitative measure of the density of multiple occurrences⁵ got reduced and the salience of the markers that stood out in the originals (or of their target language replacements) got suppressed. The same tendency observable with all the three translators was, probably partly thanks to the wide range of markers used, most prominent in the translation of Riesman. With approximately the same number of markers as in the English original, the translator of

Fromm, however, achieved a similar, if not so marked effect. The low number of multiple occurrences in Gilligan makes her text difficult to compare with the other two in this respect.

To sum up: Rather than dealing minutely with the individual target language renderings of markers of confidence and tentativeness and assessing their adequacy, the aim of my study was to provide an overall picture of the general transformations these markers undergo. We saw that deletions, along with the use of larger repertoires of confidence and tentativeness markers, resulted in generally more even distributions of the individual markers. Two competing interpretations, plus a possible combination of these, need to be considered. The shift may either be interpreted as a consequence of a different norm for distribution of these markers in Czech that informed the translators in their translation decisions—or as a proof of the existence of the third code, which may also be regarded as a projection of the so-called translation universals. Of the translation universals that have been pointed out by a number of scholars, it is especially avoidance of repetitions present in the source text and tendency towards normalisation that need to be considered in this case. Avoidance of repetitions has been reported e.g. by Blum-Kulka and Levenston, by Shlesinger in the context of courtroom interpreting, and also by Toury, who claims that the tendency is ‘one of the most persistent, unbending norms in translation’.⁶ Normalisation, in its turn, consists in a general tendency towards textual conventionality. In other words, it may well be the case that although the texts in question were far from the norm (understood as the ‘average text’), their translators were pulled towards more stereotypical solutions—which, in fact, takes us back to the first hypothesis. The answer to the dilemma which of the two hypotheses is valid or how they combine to produce the picture we observed can be found only after supplementing this analysis with research of the use of tentativeness and confidence markers in a comparable corpus of original Czech texts of a similar type.

Notes:

- ¹ Frawley, William (1984) *Translation. Literary, Linguistic & Philosophical Perspectives*, Newark.
- ² Kenny, Anthony (1982) *The Computation of Style: an introduction to statistics for students of literature and humanities*, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 10.
- ³ See the List of texts analysed.
- ⁴ Quirk, Randolph and Greenbaum, Sidney (1976 [1973]) *A University Grammar of English*, Longman, 121-2, 214-8, 243-6.
- ⁵ The coefficient was computed as a sum of the products of the number of repetitions and the number of their occurrences, e.g. for the English original of Fromm: $13 \times 1 + 10 \times 2 + 8 \times 1 + 7 \times 1 + 6 \times 1 + 5 \times 1 + 4 \times 4 + 3 \times 3 = 84$.
- ⁶ Baker, Mona (ed.) (1998) *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, London & New York: Routledge.

List of texts analysed:

Fromm, Erich (1980 [1978]) *To Have or to Be?*, London: Sphere Books Ltd.
Fromm, Erich (1994) *Mít nebo být?*, Praha: Naše vojsko, translation by PhDr. Vlastislava Žihlová.

Riesman, David (1989 [1961]) *The Lonely Crowd*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press.

Riesman, David (1968) *Osamělý dav*, Praha: Mladá fronta, translation by Igor Hájek and Marcela Mašková.

Gilligan, Carol (1998) *In a Different Voice*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press.

Gilligan, Carol (2001) *Jiným hlasem*, Praha: Portál, translation by Eva Klimentová.