

Conservatism in edited and translated language

Keywords: mediation universals – editing – EPICET corpus – *due to/owing to* – *who/whom*

This study investigates a hitherto underresearched type of mediated language – edited language – using a corpus of unedited and edited texts from the European Parliament (EP) Editing Unit, and compares it with translated language.

Baker's (1993) theory of 'translation universals' characteristic of all translated texts has been tentatively extended, e.g. by Ulrych and Murphy (2008), to other types of mediated, including edited, language. Edited language has hitherto been relatively little studied, with inconclusive results (see, i.a., Kruger (2012: 282 and 383). A problem facing researchers is the lack of corpus data, necessitating new corpora of edited language. One such is the European Parliament Corpus of Edited Texts – EPICET.

EPICET is a monolingual corpus of texts in English under construction by the author, formerly head (2012 to 2016) of the EP Editing Unit. It consists of one subcorpus of texts drafted by EP officials who are native speakers of any of the 24 EU official languages (individual L1s unidentifiable), and another containing the same texts edited by native speakers in the EP Editing Unit. The corpus consists of a single text type (resolutions in own-initiative reports and opinions), offering a high degree of data comparability. Each subcorpus contains some 440,000 tokens, to be enlarged approximately fivefold.

The conservatism or normalisation feature of translated language – defined by Baker (1996: 176-7) as 'the tendency to conform to patterns and practices which are typical of the target language, *even to the point of exaggerating them*' (my emphasis) – has attracted particular research attention in connection with edited language (e.g. Kruger (2017: 146) and Anselmi (2011), who both note a normalising tendency in editors). A first study (Swallow 2018) based on EPICET and a subcorpus of Europarl (Cartoni et al. 2013) and focused on split infinitives showed a high degree of conservatism in edited, but not translated, language. This paper explores that finding further through an investigation of the two pairs – one lexical, the other grammatical – *due to vs owing to* and *who vs whom*. The *due to/owing to* and *who/whom* distinctions are blurred even in formal written British English. Some style guides defend them, others regard them as obsolete.

I will explore the extent to which editors and/or translators, in comparison with unmediated native speaker reference texts, observe the traditionally prescribed distinctions between *due to* and *owing to*, *who* and *whom*, in line with Baker's (1996) conservatism universal, more specifically investigating the following two questions:

- (a) Does a comparison of the edited and unedited texts show editor bias towards upholding the distinctions between *due to* and *owing to*, *who* and *whom*?
- (b) To what extent does a comparison of usage in the unmediated reference corpus (British National Corpus) and the edited and translated corpora substantiate the presence of a 'conservatism' universal in mediated language? Is there a significant difference between the two types of mediated language in this respect?

The results will be interpreted in the light of EU-internal and external style guides with a view to assessing their possible impact on editors' and translators' practice.

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