

DISCREPANCIES AMONG TRANSLATION

A Comparison Between English and Japanese Linguistic Properties

翻訳間の不一致：英語と日本語の言語単位の意味的連関の比較

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Abstract · 概要

Millions of people rely on computational translators to facilitate communication between languages, but even with powerful computational structures, translators produce unreliable translations. Conversely, multilingual humans have always produced reliable translations with corresponding meaning and nuance—making it one of the few tasks in which humans outperform computers. To understand this outperformance, one must understand humans' capability in identifying and managing discrepancies between languages that manifest in an array of unique linguistic attributes. Therefore, for computational translators to advance, they must account for discrepancies and manipulate them, which will produce translations with one-to-one correspondence in meaning and nuance.

Background · 背景

Translation is a process of converting speech from a source language (SL) to a target language (TL). The production of translation should attempt to achieve a natural translation, which are more meaningful than literal translations.

Literal Translation	Translating speech from a SL without adjusting properties of a phrase.
Natural Translation	Translating speech from a SL with modifications to sound natural in the TL.

Currently, computational translators lack natural translations due to the inherently complex task of natural language translation. However, if there was an encoding of managing linguistic discrepancies, far more natural translations can be achieved.

Discrepancy	a property of a SL that doesn't exist or function the same in a TL.
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These discrepancies come in diverse types, but there are many procedures that work to manage discrepancies. However, the translator's task is not just to find equivalent phrases. They have the responsibility to respect the SL's culture and language and not subvert their way of speaking. There are a few attributes a translator should have for natural translations to occur:

- 1 an extensive reading of the SL and TL;
- 2 an extensive knowledge on the linguistic and lexical properties of the SL and TL
- 3 a thorough record of translation writing practice
- 4 a thorough record of listening practice.

In this research it is theorized that with the required knowledge, and the appropriate use of translation strategies, then many discrepancies of translation can be resolved—yielding a natural translation. In this paper we utilize Japanese and English for investigation due to their relative isolation of each other which is sure to reveal much more discrepancies that exist—opposed to comparing English and another European language.

Discrepancy Types 不一致の種類

Idioms are difficult discrepancies to translate. They are cultural and break linguistic conventions—only understood in the SL. This form of speech is often unintelligible when translated literally. There is a range of idioms that achieve different tasks (see figure).

Types of Idioms · イディオムの種類	
Colloquialism	Geographically limited and casual figurative speech
Proverb	Phrases of wisdom passed on generations
Slang	Informal phrases to lower dignity of or emphasize speech
Allusion	Comparisons to cultural concepts for emphasis
Phrasal Verbs	Combination of verb with other parts of speech to contrast

Furthermore, culturally specific terms (CST) which are words unique to a language. CST is utilized by people who are speakers of the same language and share traditions, habits, activities. Thus, there are strict rules for classifying a CST: only when its linked culturally, unrecognizable to a target culture, and lacks equivalent terms in a TL. Furthermore, realia are terms that relate to a specific domain of culture. These domains are helpful in classifying CST.

Realia Domains of Cultural Terms 文化用語の「リアリア」領域	
Geographic	Terms relating to the SC's environment
Vernacular	Terms relating to common objects and activities
Folklore	Terms of famous stories and traditions
History	Terms of religious or state affiliations

Other discrepancies of language include the word order in which languages express phrases in certain orders. English uses a SVO order, while Japanese uses a SOV order. Thus English-Japanese translation requires a correct reordering of the objects and verb of a phrase.

English-Japanese translation revealed discrepancies among determiner POS in the two languages. While Japanese has determiners that describe ownership like “their house” or “her house” they do not have articles for nouns such as “the house” and “a house.”

Additionally, pronouns and respectful speech have different representations in Japanese and English. In Japanese there are multitudes of pronouns that are used depending on the context of whom the speaker is talking to. Also, Japanese has different constructions based on the required level of respect. These are often hard to translate into English which lacks a similar linguistic structure where respect is conveyed through actions over speech.

Managing Discrepancies 不一致の管理

There are 4 main translation procedures to consider when translating an idiom (see figure). The procedure vary in terms of the idiom's difficulty and some procedures are preferred over others:

Idiom Translation Procedures イディオム翻訳の手順	
Equivalency	Finds an equivalent idiom in TL with correspondence in meaning and lexical items.
Near-Equivalency	Finds an equivalent idiom in TL with correspondence in meaning but not lexical items
Paraphrase	Replaces idiom with an explanation
Omission	Removes idiom for readability purposes.

As for CST's, there exist around 15 translation procedures, but there exist 4 main procedures that are preferred the most (see figure). They have two approaches to translation which either tries to favor the readability in a TL or respect the CST from the SL:

Foreignizing Approach	Preserving a CST so that the SL can be exposed to the SC.
Domesticating Approach	Substituting a CST to improve understanding in TL, Removes most of the cultural meaning.

In terms of respecting the SL and SC, it is advised that a foreignizing approach be implemented. However, in cases where a CST is perceived as very difficult, domesticating can help improve understanding in the TL.

Cultural Term Translation Procedures 文化用語の翻訳手順		
Procedure	D/F	Description
Adaptation	D	Creating a phrase with equal situational equivalence
Borrowing	F	Retaining a word from SL with no or minimal modifications to the word's morphological or phonetic properties
Description	D	Creating a paraphrase or explanation of a phrase
Equivalence	D	Using an established phrase with equivalence in meaning

When approaching other discrepancies, translators with knowledge on both languages can easily manage discrepancies. For example, with sentence order, a translator knowledgeable on English and Japanese can mentally rearrange lexical items without having to reference translation procedures. However, for a computer to do the same effect, they must employ procedures that human translators. So, for sentence order, a computer needs to manually encode what parts of speech need to be reordered.

Conclusions · 結論

There are a plethora of discrepancies in the linguistic properties of English and Japanese that are difficult obstacles in achieving natural translation. These discrepancies range in difficulty and sensitivity. For example, Idioms and CSTs are highly difficult and highly sensitive discrepancies holding the potential to subvert a SL and SC when a translator lacks appropriate efforts to provide natural translations. Conversely, discrepancies pertaining to things like a lack of determiners are relatively easy discrepancies that require minimal efforts.

Furthermore, discrepancies have procedures that should be honored. However, there are many procedures which results in different procedures being employed by different translators. We recommended translators employ techniques that preserve cultural meanings and linguistic functions first, and then default to procedures that cater towards understanding in the TL. This is important because the exchange of language should also be an exchange of cultures. This exchange allows the listener to discover new concepts to explain things and linguistic functions that do not exist in their language.

The existence of translation procedures and their stark contrasts in difficulty imply the possibility of a computational system to mimic the psychological process of translation. Simple tasks, such as removing nonexistent determiners in the TL, can be implemented as routines with ease. For difficult tasks, the system might need a more complex approaches that employ high-level concepts in computing, such as Machine Learning or Statistical Corpus Translation. Nevertheless, information on managing discrepancies is the crucial link for any translator—human or computer—to achieve natural translations.

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