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Text organization in literary discourse: an analysis of the effectiveness of different translations of the same source text

This paper addresses the problem of making effective language choices in literary discourse by examining different translations into Spanish of “The Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin. The contrastive analysis involves on the one hand published translations, and on the other translations by a group of fifteen fourth year students at a national university in Argentina. In this latter case the translations were ranked from ‘most effective’ to ‘least effective.’ At a later stage, the translations were also ranked by the students. The study of text organization based on the analysis of thematic structure and thematic patterns in different genres has been prominent in Systemic-Functional Linguistics. Halliday and Hasan (1989), Hasan and Fries (1995), and Berry (1995, 2013), among others, have described and characterised lexico-grammatical and discourse aspects of Theme. For the purpose of the present work, of particular interest are comparative studies of the functions of Theme in English and Spanish such as McCabe (1999), Taboada (2004), Montemayor-Borsinger (2009), Arús (2010), Quiroz (2015) and Moyano (2016) that take into consideration various types of discourse. The results of the contrastive analysis show that certain features in the source text, in particular a clearly dominant reference chain of grammatical subjects referring to the main character of the story, prove to be a special challenge in translations to a pro-drop language such as Spanish. The analysis, combined with information from the text ranking, illustrates that translations pointed out as having made effective choices tend to be organized via comparatively more “contentful” Themes (Berry 2013) that provide far stronger methods of development than translations identified as having made less effective choices.

References

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