Assertiveness and Prediction of Marked Structures in the Translations of Undergraduate English Students

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Abstract

Markedness in linguistics is the state of being distinct, peculiar or complicated in comparison to a more usual or common form. Markedness has been widely studied in the literature. However, almost no study has ever explored the relationship between translators' assertiveness and their preference of marked structures in translation. This article aims to investigate the relationship between the assertiveness level of Iranian undergraduate English students and their preference for using lexical and grammatical marked structures in their Persian translations. To this end, 60 undergraduate English students completed the Assertiveness Scale developed by Alberti & Emmons (1995), and rendered ten short statements taken from the story "Child by Tiger" into Persian. The translation test was scored by two raters, based on the use of marked lexical (e.g. wrong collocations, plurals) and grammatical (e.g. reduced clauses) structures in the students' translation, and a high inter-rater reliability was achieved. Results revealed a significant positive relationship between the test-takers' assertiveness and their preference to render English marked structures into Persian marked structures. The findings have implications for translation instructors.

Keywords: assertiveness, marked structures, lexical, grammatical, translation.

1. Introduction

As Battistella (1990) puts it, the notion of "markedness" in linguistics is used to refer to the situation of being easily distinguished as bizarre or challenging compared to more familiar or normal varieties. From among marked and unmarked structures, one is usually more common and fashionable. The usual form which is often used with little effort is regarded as unmarked; and the other form is considered as marked. Markedness deals with the specification of an ordinary linguistic usage compared to the possible non-ordinary ones.

Linguistically speaking, markedness can be used to refer to phonological, structural, and lexical binaries, explaining them in aspects such as semantic opposites, e.g. *regard* (unmarked) vs. *disregard* (marked) (Battistella, 1996). Markedness might be merely semantic, or might be regarded as a morphological feature. The concept originates from the marking of a structural core with affixes or other components, and has been used to refer to contexts where no morphological difference is found. As the field of social sciences is concerned, markedness is often used to explain two senses of an entity, where one sense is more fashionable (unmarked meaning) and the second sense is used specifically in some special social and lingual contexts (marked meaning).

According to Chandler (2005), when we talk about semantic opposites, we should consider the fact that markedness is associated with unusual forms, often those with affixes. For example, from among positive and negative forms, negative ones are regarded as marked. On the other hand, unaffixed structures are considered to be unmarked compared to affixed ones: lion/lioness, host/hostess, automobile/automobiles, and child/children. An unmarked language element is the one that is assumed to be used in general contexts. The default essence of unmarked structures makes it possible for unmarked words to be easily distinguished. In binary oppositions such as *large* and *small*, the first one is regarded as unmarked, and most questions are built using these unmarked words.

As Alberti and Emmons (2001) put it, assertiveness refers to an individual's state of being self-confidant and certain without using violence (p. 66). Psychologists regard assertiveness as a method of communication and conduct that can be instructed and learnt. They define the construct as a type of conduct associated with a confident statement or confirmation of thoughts without feeling any necessity to provide evidences for them. In other words, a person supports his ideas without violating the rights of other people (Bower & Bower, 1991). In the late twentieth century, assertiveness was basically regarded as a skill that could be instructed by those skillful in the subject. It is mainly associated with self-esteem.

Assertiveness often comes with respecting the rights of oneself and other people. It also assumes a desire to achieve one's desires and necessities

through communication. Assertive expression of one's ideas, wants, and boundaries is regarded as a moderate behavior posited between passive responses and violent reactions (Bower & Bower, 1991). Assertiveness as a mode of behavior involves expressing emotions straightforwardly, without using violence. If an individual feels that other people are threatening his rights by their behaviors, he starts effective communication to prevent the current situation (Lioyd, 2001).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Literature on Markedness

Markedness as a linguistic concept has been widely discussed in the literature. Al-Amri (2015) conducted a study to analyze and identify markedness in the Holy Quran, and to realize how it affects translator's performance. In this regard, he mainly focused on the sound-meaning opposition. His findings revealed the effect of markedness on translator's performance and language choices.

Barzegar (2012) studied the translators' consideration of the notion of thematization and markedness in their rendition of literary works, to understand if they tend to render source marked structures into target marked structures or not. His data analysis revealed some differences between the translators' rendition of marked and unmarked structures, as perceived by the translation readers.

Hassan (2015) conducted a study to investigate thematization in the translations of Edgar Allan Poe and Virginia Woolf's stories. His study aimed to analyze the problems originating from the differences between English and Arabic in terms of their degree of using marked structures. His findings revealed the way markedness can be regarded as an obstacle in translation into Arabic.

Sughair (2007) conducted a descriptive analysis of the translation of collocations in the literary works rendered into Arabic, in terms of markedness. His findings indicated that calque translation was the most used technique in rendering collocations into Arabic. According to the findings of this study, collocations are often changed in translation and, as a result, all collocations are rendered into unmarked ones. Sometimes, they might be changed to structures other than collocations.

Bayati Doosti (2015) conducted a corpus-based study to analyze markedness thematization of titles of the English books rendered into Persian. The corpus consisted of marked titles of English books and their Persian parallel texts. His findings revealed that most marked structures had been rendered into marked ones in Persian and that the thematic structure of source text had been transferred into Persian (see also Rostampour, 2009; Farghal, 2010; Cheetham, 2011; Karoly, 2011; Vahedifar & Koosha, 2015).

2.2. Literature on Assertiveness

A wide scope of literature can be found on the role of assertiveness in education. Mahyunddin (2006) conducted a study to explore the relationship between students' self-efficacy and their success in acquiring English language structures. The findings of his study revealed that success in acquiring English language improves when learners enhance their level of assertiveness in classroom.

Juretic and Kastelan (2012) explored the relationship between active listening and assertive communication in ESP setting. One hundred students of economics participated in his study and took the active listening test. The findings of his study revealed the significant positive relationship between test-takers' assertiveness and their active listening abilities.

Mohammadi Dalari and Moinzade (2014) investigated the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' assertiveness and their writing ability. The test-takers filled an assertiveness scale and completed the writing section of Paper-Based TOEFL. The correlation results revealed a statistically significant relationship between assertiveness and writing ability of the test-takers (see also Fahim & Kharrazi, 2012; Ketabdar, Yazdani, & Yarahmadi, 2014; Mamat & Yusof, 2013).

Significance of markedness as a sociolinguistic notion in translation has been widely studied in the literature. On the other hand, implications of assertiveness for language teaching and learning have been thoroughly elaborated on by the previous studies. However, almost no study has investigated the possible relationship between assertiveness and recreation of markedness in translation. This study, therefore, aims to find answers to the following research questions:

1. Is there any significant relationship between the self-perceived assertiveness of the undergraduate translation students and their performance on recreating markedness in translation?
2. Does gender have a significant mediating effect on the relationship between assertiveness and markedness recreation?

3. Method

As mentioned earlier, this article aims to investigate the relationship between assertiveness of translation students and their performance on recreating markedness in translation. To this end, 60 undergraduate translation students at the University of Zabol (30 males and 30 females) completed the Assertiveness Scale developed by Alberti and Emmons (1995) and rendered ten short statements of the English story "Child by Tiger" into Persian.

Test-takers were also given a translation task to fulfill at their homes. The text consisted of 10 short statements of the English short story "Child by Tiger" by Thomas Wolfe. The Child by Tiger is a moving story about the

nature of good and evil, innocence and experience. "The Child by Tiger" is interpretive literature because of the way the author presents the story, the way it ends the way it educates us, and especially how it helps us understand man's darker nature(Perrine, 2012: 47).

The reason for choosing the Child by Tiger was to focus on the marked structures used by Dick, a Negro and the main character of the story, and to investigate the way it was going to be recreated by the students. Test-takers were given comprehensive details about the story, its main character, and their mission to recreate the markedness of Dick's speech in their translations. Students were asked to perform the task in a week.

Students' performance on recreating markedness of speech was rated by two raters for the inter-rater reliability of the two sets of ratings to be investigated. Students' performance was rated according to the use of marked lexical (wrong collocations, plurals) and grammatical (shortened clause) in their translations. The students' self-perceived assertiveness scale consisted of 13 five-point Lickert items (ranging from strongly disagree to Strongly Agree) measured at a 13-52 point range. Collected data were stored on SPSS22 software.

4. Results and Discussion

As mentioned earlier, 60 undergraduate translation students at the University of Zabol participated in the present study. Participants were given a translation test to be fulfilled at their homes. The translation test was later scored by two raters. Descriptive statistics for the markedness scores are given in Table 1.

Table 1
Scores Obtained for Recreation of Markedness in the Students' Translations

	N	*Mean*	*Std. Deviation*
Markedness	60	110.35	25.142

As seen in Table 1, the mean score for markedness recreation is 110.35 with a Standard Deviation of 25.142 and a Standard Error of 3.285. To determine the reliability of the sets of scores dedicated by the two raters, the inter-rater reliability was used. The obtained correlation results are given in Table 2.

As seen in Table 2, a significant relationship exists between the two sets of markedness scores, which reveals the high inter-rater reliability of the scores (0.863). On the other hand, the descriptive statistics for the Self-perceived Assertiveness Scale are given in Table 3.

Table 2
Inter-Rater Reliability of the Two Sets of Tenor Scores

		Markedness1	*Markedness2*
Markedness1	Pearson Correlation	1	.863**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	60	60
Markedness2	Pearson Correlation	.863**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N		
		60	60

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for Assertiveness Scale

Gender		*Statistic*	*Std. Error*
Female	Mean	30.17	1.623
	Variance	87.193	
	Std. Deviation	8.696	
Male	Mean	29.32	1.527
	Variance	83.119	
	Std. Deviation	8.549	

As Table 3 indicates, the means of assertiveness scores for males and females are 29.32 and 30.17, respectively. To investigate the first research hypothesis regarding the relationship between assertiveness and performance on markedness recreation in translation, a Pearson Correlation Coefficient was run. The obtained results are provided in Table 4.

Table 4
Pearson Results for Assertiveness and Markedness Scores

		Markedness 1	Markedness 2
Markedness	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	1	.731** .000
	N	60	60
Assertiveness	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.0731** .000	1
	N	60	60

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

As shown in Table 4, a significant positive relationship exists between the Self-perceived Assertiveness of the test-takers and their performance on recreating the markedness of speech in their translations (0.731). Pearson results are significant at a 0.01 level of significance, which proves the first hypothesis of the present study. Our findings are in line with some of the

studies in the field of TEFL as assertiveness is a factor affecting applied aspects of language (Juretic and Kastelan, 2012; Mahyunddin, 2006).

As to the second research hypothesis regarding the mediating effect of gender on the Assertiveness-Markedness relationship, the effect of gender was controlled. The obtained results are provided in Table 5.

Table 5
The Effect of Gender on Assertiveness-Markedness Relationship

Control Variables			Assertiveness	Markedness
Gender	Assertiveness	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	1	.742** .000
		N	60	60
	Markedness	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.0742** .000	1
		N	60	60

As shown in Table 5, the two-tailed observed value for the effect of gender is less than 0.05, which proves the significant effect of gender on the relationship between assertiveness and markedness. Our findings reject the second hypothesis of the study and prove a significant effect for gender in mediating Assertiveness-Markedness relationship. To elaborate on these results, an Independent Samples T-test was run between males' and females' scores. The T-test results are given in Table 6.

Table 6
Independent Samples T-test between Males' and Females' Scores

T-Test for Equality of Means		
t	df	Sig(2-tailed)
-1.037	58	0.273

As Table 6 indicates, there are no significant differences between males and females in terms of their assertiveness and markedness recreation scores. However, males have relatively outperformed females in recreating markedness of speech in translation. This fact explains the significant effect of gender on the relationship between assertiveness and markedness translation. Generally, our findings support a line of research in which markedness and its implications for translation have been investigated (Liu, 2008; Figueiredo, 2010).

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between the undergraduate translation students' self-perceived assertiveness and their performance on

recreating the marked structures used in the speech of Dick, the main character of the story "Child by Tiger". Our findings revealed a significant positive relationship between the participants' assertiveness and their success in recreating markedness of speech in translation. In other words, students with higher levels of assertiveness outperformed their peers in fulfilling markedness recreation task. On the other hand, gender had a significant effect on the relationship between the two mentioned variables as males relatively outperformed females in recreating markedness in translation.

This study has implications for translation instructors as they should consider the assertiveness level of their undergraduate translation learners in selecting teaching materials and designing literary and on-literary translation tests. On the other hand, translation learners should be made aware of the effect of their assertiveness levels on their ability to recreate markedness in their translations of mostly literary texts into their native language.

Like any other study, this research is limited in some aspects. Firstly, it was focused on undergraduate translation students at the University of Zabol. Future studies are expected to focus on post-graduate students and also students of other geographical areas in Iran. Although participants of the present study came from various parts of the country, our results should cautiously be generalized to other parts of Iran.

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