Self-corrections of Genre-related Errors in Japanese-to-English Translation Drafts

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Abstract

Difficulties with Japanese-to-English translation faced by native-speaking Japanese translators can be roughly categorized into two: linguistic difficulties and difficulties that are related to the genre of the translation job. This means that J-E translators need to acquire skills to identify such genre-specific features, in addition to general English skills. When teaching translation, it is important to examine not only the students' first drafts but also their final drafts, because the translation process also involves revision and editing. This study compared the first and final drafts of translator trainees to investigate which genre features the translator trainees can improve/correct in their final drafts. The participants were five adult learners who were enrolled, for different periods of time, in a J-E translation course at a language institution in Japan. The course used a genre-analysis-based approach derived from concepts in the field of English for Specific Purposes, and the translation assignment dealt with by the students was a press release of a pharmaceutical company. Among five genre features of the press releases investigated in the study, two features, ordering of the title and subtitle, and the verb tense of the first sentence of the lead, were very likely to be self-corrected. The use of the third person to represent the company that released the press release was unlikely to be self-corrected. The results also suggested that students' awareness of genre did not differ depending on the duration of enrollment in the translation course.

Introduction

Translation involves two languages, the source and target languages, and it is usually done from the translator's second language to the first language. In Japan, however, Japanese-to-English translation is often done in the opposite direction, largely because there are few native English-speaking translators who can deal with J-E translation. Roughly speaking, native-speaking Japanese translators face two types of difficulties with J-E translation: one is linguistic difficulties, and the other is difficulties that are related to the genre of the translation job, which involve the rhetorical structure, words, and collocations that are frequently used in the genre of the translation text. This means that J-E translators need to acquire skills to identify such genre-specific features, in addition to general English skills.

Translation also involves revision and editing. Thus, when teaching translation, it is important to examine not only the students' first drafts but also their final drafts. Comparison of the first and final drafts should provide information on the errors that were corrected and those that were not. However, evaluation of students' drafts is a difficult and time-consuming task for teachers. Unlike ordinary tests, numeric grading of translation drafts requires much effort and tends to be subjective. However, in translation classes, providing students with feedback on errors is expected. In the case of Japanese students training to be J-E translators, the situation in many respects, is similar to that of error correction in second language writing, where much research has been done. Lee (2004) points out that error correction is a complicated process and part of the evaluation of writing, but that teachers are not always competent enough to correct errors, and that inaccurate error correction feedback may be misleading. There is also a controversy as to whether error correction feedback is effective or not. Results of meta-analysis by Truscott (2007) suggest that error correction feedback is ineffective and can even be harmful. However, as some feedback is necessary, teachers need to know what types of error learners make and what kind of feedback would be effective.

The present study was done to examine genre-related errors and self-corrections found in Japanese-to-English translations drafted by native-speaking Japanese translator trainees at a language institution in Japan. Errors associated with the characteristics of genre were identified, and analyses were conducted as to whether or not such errors found in the students' first translation drafts were corrected in their second drafts. Identification of genre-related errors should offer insight into what aspects remain as weaknesses of advanced learners of second language writing, e.g., translator trainees in this study. Examination of self-correction of genre-related errors should reveal whether or not the students' awareness of genre had increased through the classwork. For these purposes, the study dealt with the following research questions:
1. Which types of genre-related errors are more likely to be produced, self-corrected, or remain uncorrected?
2. How does students' awareness of genre differ according to the duration of enrollment in the translation course?

Methodology

1. Data Collection and Participants
The data for this study were from the first and second translation drafts of one assignment produced by five students (Table 1). The assignment, or the Japanese source text, was a press release of the Japanese affiliate of a Swiss pharmaceutical company that markets diagnostic reagents. The topic was the launch of two reagents for diagnosing cancer.

2. Corpus of Press Releases
To evaluate students' translations, a corpus of 20 English press releases of pharmaceutical companies was created.
• 2 press releases from10 pharmaceutical companies chosen from a list of "The world's top 50 companies by their total R&D investment in the 2012 Scoreboard" in The 2012 EU Industrial R&D Investment Scoreboard (Scoreboard, E. U. R. D., 2012).
• Topics: Launch of a new product, receiving authority approval to market a new product, development of a new product, development plans, and the publication of studies.

3. Genre Features Examined
Among the features of press releases, this study focused on the following:
1) The place of the dateline, i.e., the place of the dateline city and the date;
2) The order of the title and subtitle(s);
3) The use of the words "announced" and "today" in the 1st sentence of the lead;
4) The verb tense of the 1st sentence of the lead; and
5) The use of third person to represent the company that issued the press release.

4. Analysis
Translations that involve the five genre features in the students' first and second drafts were analyzed in terms of appropriateness, and the findings of the first and second drafts were compared. Judgment of appropriateness was based on the corpus of press releases created for this study. Table 2 shows the criteria of assessment of self-corrections.

Table 1 Profiles of Students

Student	Gender	Age	Enrolled
AF	Female	50s	7 years
BF	Female	30s	4 years
CM	Male	40s	6 months
DM	Male	30s	6 months
EF	Female	20s	1 month

Table 2 Criteria of Assessment of Self-corrections

1st draft	2nd draft	Score
Appropriate	More appropriate	3
Appropriate	Not changed	2
Inappropriate	Appropriate	1
Inappropriate	Not changed	-1
Appropriate	Inappropriate	-2

Table 3 Scores of Likelihood of Genre Features to be Learned

Genre feature	Student AF	BF	CM	DM	EF	Total
Place of dateline	3	2	2	3	2	12
Order of title and subtitle	1	2	1	2	-1	5
Use of "announced" and "today" in 1st sentence	1	-1	-1	-1	2	0
Verb tense of 1st sentence	2	1	-1	1	2	5
Use of third person to represent the company	-2	-1	-1	-1	-1	-6
Total score of each student	5	3	0	4	4	

Results

1. Place of Dateline
Placing the dateline either at the top of the lead or above the title was assessed as appropriate. Although the dateline is located at the top of the lead in 14 press releases in the corpus, it is often located somewhere else. The dateline city and the date are often indicated together, but sometimes they are shown separately. In three press releases, the dateline city was not indicated.
• AF moved the dateline from the top of the whole text to the top of the lead.
• DM relocated the dateline from the top of the whole text to between the subtitle and the lead.
• BF, CM, and EF did not change the appropriate placing of the dateline above the title in their second drafts.

2. Order of Title and Subtitle
The Japanese source text had two titles in two lines, one in each line. These were indicated in the same way in terms of formatting, and the second one seemed to be the main title: The first one expressed how the products are useful, and the second one indicated the main topic, i.e., the launch of the products. In the corpus, all of the titles summarize the main topics that are explained in the first sentences of the leads, and each press release uses an identical or similar subject, verb, and object or complement in the title and the first sentence—mostly in its "that" clause—of the lead. Therefore, in translation to English, the order of the first title and second one needs to be the opposite of the Japanese source text.
• AF and CM changed the order of the first and second title appropriately in their second drafts.
• BF and DM had already changed the order of the two titles in their first drafts.
• EF did not change the order of two titles either in her first or second draft.

3. Use of "Announced" and "today" in 1st sentence of Lead
In 19 of the 20 press releases, the verb "announced" was used in the past tense in the first sentence of the lead. It was used with the word "today" before or after it in all of the 19 press releases, and it was followed by either a "that" clause or a noun phrase.
• AF used "announced" with a "that" clause in her first draft and added "today" between "announced" and "that" in her second draft.
• BF used the word "announced" without "today" and with a noun phrase in both the first and second drafts.
• CM did not use the word "announced" but used "will launch" in both his first and second drafts.
• DF used the word without "today" and with a "that" clause in both the first and second drafts.
• EF used the word "announced today" with a "that" clause in both the first and second drafts.

4. Verb Tense of 1st Sentence of Lead
The verb of the 1st sentence of the lead was "announced" in the past tense in 19 of the 20 press releases.
• AF and EF used the tense appropriately both in their first and second drafts.
• BF changed the tense of the word "announce" from present to past in her second draft.
• CM used the phrase "will launch" in both the first and second drafts.
• DM initially used the phrase "will launch" but changed it to "announced that" in his second draft.

5. Use of Third Person to Represent the Company
The company that releases the press release is not referred to as "we," "our," or "us" in press releases, except in quotes and in the section of company information that follows the main text of the press release. Errors were made by all participants with this genre feature.
• AF used the actual company name in her first draft but changed it to "our" in her second draft.
• BF, CM, DM, and EF used "our" to refer to the company or the analyzer manufactured by the company.

Discussion

1. Which types of genre-related errors are more likely to be produced, self-corrected, or remain uncorrected?
1) Place of Dateline
The results suggest that the students were aware of the location of the dateline even for first draft. This is partly because the place of the dateline is relatively flexible. In their second drafts, however, two students improved their translation with respect to this genre feature.
2) Order of Title and Subtitle
This genre feature was also easy to learn. Two students had grasped this genre feature even when producing their first drafts. Other two noticed this genre feature when producing their second drafts. One failed to reproduce this genre feature in both her first and second drafts.
3) Use of "Announced" and "Today" in 1st Sentence
For the students, it might be difficult to notice that in the first sentence of the lead, the word "announced" is typically used with the word "today." Only one student noticed this genre feature when producing her first draft. One student added "today" in her second draft.
4) Verb Tense of 1st Sentence of Lead
This genre feature was also very likely to be learned quickly by the students. Two students used the past tense in both their first and second drafts. Other two changed the tense to the past in their second drafts. One failed to do so.
5) Use of Third Person to Represent the Company
The results suggest that the most difficult genre feature was the use of third person for the company that releases the press release. All students except AF failed to use third person for the company in both their first and second drafts. AF used the third person in her first draft but changed it to the first person in her second draft.

2. How does students' awareness of genre differ according to the duration of enrollment in the translation course?
The total scores of each student in Table 3 indicate that there was no obvious difference depending on the duration of enrollment in the translation course. However, the results could differ, because these total scores indicate only the likelihood that the genre features dealt with in this study were learned; other genre features were not dealt with in this study.

For further research, other genre features of press releases should be examined so that the students' performance can be assessed in more detail. For that purpose, it is also necessary to collect more press releases in English of the same companies on different topics other than those of the press releases of the current corpus. In the present study, the course enrollment lengths of the participants were compared to examine their influence on awareness of genre features. Further work should be done, for example, in a longitudinal manner on a small number of students, to examine their growth in terms of awareness of genre features.

With the increasing global connectivity of business and other professional fields, a greater demand for good Japanese to English translation can be expected. More work needs to be done to raise the efficiency and effectiveness of translator training. Using a genre-based approach can help identify specific features with which to quantitatively evaluate translations and thus aid the training procedure.

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