English Abstracts in Open Access Translation Studies Journals in Spain (2011-12): Errors in the Writing, Editing and Publishing Chain

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ABSTRACT

In this study of 197 abstracts from the ten most prestigious open access Translation Studies journals published in Spain between 2011-12, 73 of 197 abstracts (37%) were found to contain a total of 128 errors (75 grammatical, 42 vocabulary-related and 11 typographical). Three “risk factors” were suspected to correlate with higher error incidence (>40% error rate), namely: 1. when abstracts do not conform to the author’s guidelines for language and length; 2. when abstracts appear in monographic issues or dossiers within issues; and 3. when abstracts appear in journals published only electronically. A higher error incidence was found to correspond with those journals that presented all three risks (3/4 (75%). A correspondence between high incidence of error and individual risk factors was also found: 67% of electronic only published journals, 71% of monographic guest-edited journals and 57% of journals with length non-compliance had higher error incidences. Several recommendations for journal editors and abstract authors are provided.

Keywords: Abstracts, Academic and Scientific Publication, Errors, Specialized Journals, Translation Studies, Visibility

1. INTRODUCTION

Researchers who can provide evidence of the international dissemination of their scientific production can accrue prestige for their careers and become eligible for senior faculty positions and for promotion to positions of academic and research management. In a similar fashion, specialized journals whose articles are widely cited beyond the borders of the countries where they are published can accrue prestige for the publication and the journal editor(s). Undoubtedly, the English abstracts that accompany the articles written in specialized journals in other languages play a significant role in establishing international visibility for the research article authors and the journals where the articles appeared. Swales, who defines research article

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Abstracts as single-paragraph, full-sentence summaries of research reports that can be either indicative (describing the research and methodology) or informative (describing the research, methodology and results), describes how good abstracts can attract readers: “We know from many studies that readers of academic journals employ a vast amount of skimming and scanning. If they like your abstract, they may read your paper, or at least a part of it. If they do not like it, they may not.” (1994: 210)

Abstracts are not marginal and complementary texts, but an essential, integral link to the articles themselves. Given the increasing importance of visibility of scientific production in open access repositories, databases, bibliographies, indexes and other resources on the Internet and the internationalization of expertise through the English language, authors should be aware of the importance of correct translation/revision of English abstracts contributed to journals in the field of Translation Studies (TS). The quality of the abstracts in English that accompany scientific production in TS can arouse interest and lead to researchers receiving international citations. As Sternberg states, “Whether your article will be read by many people, few people, or virtually none at all thus can be largely a function of the title and the abstract.” (37) because “(…) most people will read your abstract only if your title interests them, and will read your article only if your abstract interests them.” (40).

For specialized journals in other languages, the English abstracts are key in this process of international diffusion of scientific knowledge, as they are a nexus of contact between foreign language papers and monographs and the international audiences that can be lured to them by means of their appeal and interest. However, if these English abstracts accompanying articles written in foreign languages contain errors, it is unlikely that readers will “like” or “be interested” in them, and read the articles. Studies by Bielski & Bielska (2008), Busch-Lauer (1995), Johns (1992) and Linder (2013) have pointed to cases in which the English-language abstracts in journals published mainly in foreign languages contain errors.

The case of English abstracts in open access Translation Studies journals in Spain is an interesting locus of interaction for academic authors, journal editors and their potential international readerships. Though none of the Spanish journals are listed in the Arts and Humanities Citation Index, many TS journals are propelling themselves toward international visibility by becoming freely available on the internet (this number has increased from seven in 2012 to ten in 2014; see Linder 2013). For many authors writing about such topics as translation history of Spain, translation into Spanish and the three other co-national languages (Catalan, Gallician and Basque), and the reception of translated texts in this vast multilingual and multicultural territory, local journals are where the audiences they want to reach are located, though authors also want these articles to have the international repercussions that the English abstracts accompanying them can generate. The dynamics of both authors and journal editors seeking greater international visibility makes the Spanish TS journal scenario an important focus for our attention.

The objective of this study is to analyze the quality of the English abstracts published in Spanish open access journals within the field of Translation Studies in Spain. This analysis is the second approach to the subject, a much more thorough study, not merely a “snapshot of a moment in time (October, 2012 in Linder 2013), but a study of the entire body of abstracts published in 2011 and 2012 in ten major TS journals. The study consists of the detection of grammatical, vocabulary and typographical errors in a corpus of 197 abstracts as well as an examination of each journal’s language policies and author guidelines for abstracts as well as the adherence to these policies and guidelines in actual practice. Both the errors detected and three “risk factors”, including the (non-)compliance with journal policies and guidelines, will be compared and contrasted in an attempt to