

## Coming to Grips with Rather Elusive Adverbs: On English *rather* and French *plutôt*

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### Abstract

This parallel corpus study looks into the contrastive connective and degree modifier uses of two cognate adverbs that can be considered each other's crosslinguistic counterparts, English *rather* and French *plutôt*. These adverbs have very similar functional profiles, both being able to act as compromisers and to express the same range of contrastive relationships—reformulation, preference, replacement and antithesis. This study confirms earlier findings regarding the predominance of the contrastive uses over the degree uses and the overall trend for the contrastive markers to mostly be translated by each other. In addition, however, this study has shown that despite the adverbs' cross-linguistic similarity, translators often opt for alternative renderings of these adverbs rather than their immediate corresponding forms in the target language. Whereas omission is sometimes opted for, especially for the contrastive uses and for degree *rather*, explicitation could often be observed.

Keywords: contrastive connectives; degree modifiers; translation strategies; explicitation; implicitation; adverbs; English/French

### 1. Introduction

Cross-linguistically, in both Germanic and Romance languages, adverbial constructions can be attested which have both contrastive connective and degree modifier uses. Examples from the Germanic language family include English *rather* (*than*), Dutch *eerder* (*dan*) and German *eher* (*als*). All three adverbs were formed from a temporal adjective + comparative morpheme (OE *hraep-er*, DU *eer-(d)er*, DE *e-(h)er*), but while the Dutch and German adverbs have retained a temporal meaning 'sooner, earlier', the temporal uses of English *rather* have become obsolete (cf. Oxford English Dictionary s.v. *rather*; Rissanen 2008). The Romance languages

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French and Italian have similar adverbs consisting of the unified combination of an analytic comparative form and a temporal adjective, namely *plutôt* and *piuttosto* respectively (FR *plus-tôt*, IT *piu-tosto*). Like English *rather*, these Romance adverbs have lost their temporal functions and can today only be used as contrastive and degree adverbs. Although many of the abovementioned adverbs have already received some attention in the literature, a number of gaps remain; gaps which this paper aims to fill to some extent through a detailed study of parallel corpus data on EN[GLISH] *rather* and FR[ENCH] *plutôt*.

As argued in Ghesquière and Brems (2017) and Brems, Ghesquière, and Vanderbauwhede (2020), the English adverbial marker *rather* (*than*) and its French equivalent *plutôt* (*que*) can both express contrast (1) and degree (2).<sup>1</sup> In (1), the adverbial constructions *rather than* and *plutôt que* are used to indicate a preference to contact one person in contrast to another person. In (2), *rather* and *plutôt* function as degree modifiers of an unbounded adjective meaning ‘short’.

- (1) Therefore I would ask that we should perhaps consider writing to the Minister of Justice *rather than* to President Mugabe ...  
C’est pourquoi je voudrais que nous considérions l’éventualité d’écrire au ministre de la Justice *plutôt qu’au* président Mugabe ...
- (2) It is a normal Nordic approach: *rather* short but straight to the point.  
Voici une approche nordique classique: *plutôt* courte, mais qui va droit au but.

*Rather* and *plutôt* have already been the object of quite a few studies, both diachronic and synchronic. Diachronically, a pathway of grammaticalization has been suggested for *rather*, leading from the temporal over the contrastive to the degree uses (e.g., Traugott and König 1991: 203–204; Rissanen 2008). Interestingly, for *plutôt*, Mokni (2008) similarly posits a development from temporal to contrastive use, but fails to mention the degree use of the adverb, which is, however, clearly listed in, for instance, the *Trésor de la langue française*, with examples dating

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<sup>1</sup> All examples are from EuroParl-Direct; <https://www.idiap.ch/en/scientific-research/data/europarl-direct>.

back to 1908 (TLFi, s.v. *plutôt*). The degree uses were also clearly attested in recent synchronic corpus studies such as Brems, Ghesquière, and Vanderbauwhede (2020) on EN *rather*, FR *plutôt* and DU *eerder*, and Marion, Ghesquière, and Vanderbauwhede (forthc.) on the three former adverbs plus German *eher*. Brems, Ghesquière, and Vanderbauwhede (2020) studied *rather*, *plutôt* and *eerder* by means of data extracted from the Dutch Parallel Corpus (DPC), which features Dutch, English and French data. This allowed them to look into how the Dutch adverb *eerder* is translated into French and English, and how *rather* and *plutôt* are translated into Dutch respectively. However, as Dutch is a pivot language in the DPC, they were not able to study the translation of the French adverb into English and vice versa.

Although past monolingual and contrastive study of these adverbs has already gone some way in disentangling the different language-internal uses of these adverbs, including *rather* and *plutôt*, as well as in mapping out crosslinguistic morphosyntactic and pragmatic-semantic differences and similarities, this translation study further contributes to our understanding of these adverbs. As Zufferey (2016: 265) notes '[c]onnectives are well known to be volatile items in translation, and translators often add, rephrase and remove them'. It fills a gap in the literature by exploring the hitherto neglected French-English language pair as well as helps account for contextual clues triggering a certain reading, and hence translation, of the adverbs concerned. As such, this paper aims to fine-tune and complement earlier work and find further proof for the relevance of using parallel corpora and translation data for the study of semantic shifts, as argued for already in Beeching (2013). The questions that the study aims to answer are (i) to what extent the functional profiles of the adverbs *rather* and *plutôt* are similar or different in original language, and (ii) whether or to what extent that changes in translation. In other words, we will check whether they are used to translate each other and, if not, then what alternative is chosen and why.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 describes the methods applied to study *rather* and *plutôt*, section 3 describes the different uses of these adverbs attested in our data, and sections 4 and 5 discuss the findings and conclusions from this study.

## *2. Methodology*

For our research purposes it was necessary to use a parallel corpus which would allow us to study the English-French language pair, and which would contain both original and translated material in both languages. In addition, as degree markers, like all subjective, evaluative language features, are more commonly attested in spoken than written language, a spoken language corpus was selected, a type of data that is less commonly used in contrastive and translation studies. The corpus that best met this study's needs were the Europarl-direct EN-into-FR and FR-into-EN subcorpora (Cartoni, Zufferey, and Meyer 2013). These are directional subcorpora of the Europarl corpus (Koehn 2005), a large multilingual corpus containing both the original version of the minutes of the debates and speeches at the European Parliament and its translations.

This corpus grants access to original language data—the speeches as delivered in the European Parliament—which is what we need for the contrastive component of the study. In addition, the corpus allows for a translation study to be carried out, as it provides access not only to the transcribed speeches but also to their official translations. Importantly, the target texts are indeed the result of translation, not interpretation, and so avoid any potential conflicts caused by the interpretation process ‘in which a great deal of non-essential information is constantly being transformed, shifted, or even omitted’ (Mikhailov and Cooper 2016: 210, as quoted in Troughton 2024). This is particularly important to a study on adverbs, especially the degree modifiers, which could be considered mere expressive elements devoid of or not conveying much propositional content. In addition, as Zufferey (2016: 270) states, the data in the Europarl corpus are ‘produced by a variety of different speakers and translated by a large team of expert translators, thus avoiding individual biases in language use’.

The register of the Europarl corpus also fits the aims of this study, as it is traditionally considered ‘written to be spoken’ or edited or ‘transcribed spoken language’. An oft-cited problem with the Europarl corpus, however, is that ‘it can be difficult to assign the status of “source text” to one of the language versions’ (Olohan 2004: 25). The Europarl-direct tackles this problem, as it consists of directional subcorpora of the Europarl Corpus consisting of parallel data for which the source and target languages have been clearly identified. The directional sentence-aligned data sets are consequently smaller than the original Europarl subcorpora

but for translation studies much more appropriate and reliable. The English-to-French subcorpus consists of 1,410,121 words, the French-to-English corpus of 1,179,530 words. Randomized data samples of 150 hits per translation direction were drawn from the sentence-aligned directional subcorpora using AntPConc (Anthony 2017).

These translation data were used to draw up fine-grained typologies of the different uses of *rather* (*than*) and *plutôt* (*que*) in terms of their pragmatico-semantic as well as syntactic properties. The parameters used to analyse the data sets were based on previous studies, both our own (Ghesquière and Brems 2017; Brems, Ghesquière, and Vanderbauwhede 2020) and others (e.g., Traugott and König 1991; Mokni 2008; Rissanen 2008) and included structural patterning (e.g., position of the adverb in the sentence, presence or absence of an explicit contrastive element introduced by *than/que*, and whether that precedes or follows the adverb), the nature of the modified element (e.g., lemma, word category or syntactic category, polarity in the case of degree use), the presence or absence of negation, collocational patterning and any contextual clues triggering a particular pragmatico-semantic reading of the adverbial constructions. This qualitative analysis was then quantified to allow comparison of the English and French constructions and to assess their degree of intertranslatability.

### 3. Results

The data study confirmed that *rather* and *plutôt* have the same functional range, being able to convey both contrast and degree. In sections 3.1 and 3.2 we discuss the adverbs' functions from a contrastive perspective, before turning to the findings from the translation study in section 3.3.

#### 3.1. Contrastive uses

For our analysis we applied the same categorisation as in Brems, Ghesquière, and Vanderbauwhede (2020) and Marion, Ghesquière, and Vanderbauwhede (forthc.), which was taken from Quirk et al. (1985: 638–639) who suggested a fourfold classification of the textual relations expressed by contrastive conjuncts, namely reformulation, preference, replacement and antithesis.

### 3.1.1. Reformulation

In their reformulation uses, *rather* and *plutôt* signal the introduction into the discourse of a more precise formulation than one offered in the preceding or, occasionally, following context. In (3), for example, the speaker specifies that the people concerned are more appropriately referred to as girls than as women. Example (3) also illustrates the tendency for *rather* and *plutôt* to co-occur with a disjunctive connective such as *or* and *ou* respectively, which overtly marks the reformulatory rather than purely opposing contrastive meaning of the adverbs in these uses.

- (3) The customers, or ‘clients’, are predominantly males who feel that they have a right to buy women, or *rather*, girls.  
Ces ‘clients’ sont essentiellement des hommes qui estiment avoir le droit d’acheter des femmes, ou *plutôt* des filles.

### 3.1.2. Preference

As discourse connectives of preference, *rather* and *plutôt* point to a preferred option which is explicitly contrasted with a contextually available less preferred option. In (4), the option of starvation is preferred over that of giving away sensitive information about someone’s whereabouts. As noted by Salkie (2014) for *rather*, and as could be observed for *plutôt* in this study, in their most easily recognisable realisations, the preference markers co-occur with a verbal construction which reiterates the preference meaning. In the example below, for instance, *rather* is used in combination with *would* to form the modal construction *would rather*, expressing preference. In the French translation the preference reading is rendered explicit through the use of the verb *préférer* ‘to prefer’ in combination with *plutôt*.

- (4) They live a very basic existence and sometimes go without food for days (...) : they would *rather* starve than give away any clues to the Laos authorities of their whereabouts.  
Il mène une existence très sommaire et doit parfois rester des jours sans manger (...). Il préférerait mourir *plutôt que* de donner aux autorités laotiennes la moindre indication sur le lieu où il se trouve.

### 3.1.3. Replacement

The third contrastive use that *rather* and *plutôt* share is a replacive one in which they serve to ‘withdraw an item to replace it by a more important one’ (Quirk et al. 1985: 639) or at least a more relevant or more appropriate one in a particular context. In (5), for example, the option of harmonisation is not entirely discarded, but the option of cooperation is signaled to be the prime underlying factor in the process.

- (5) We need to stress that cooperation *rather than* harmonisation must underlie any measure in this area.

Il faut souligner que c’est la coopération, *plutôt que* l’harmonisation, qui doit sous-tendre toutes les mesures en la matière.

### 3.1.4. Antithesis

The contrastive relationships expressed by the adverbs *rather* and *plutôt* in their reformulation, preference and replacive uses are a matter of degree. One option is signaled to be the better or more precise formulation, the preferable or more desirable option and the more important or more relevant option respectively. When they express antithesis, however, *rather* and *plutôt* ‘introduce a direct antithesis’ (Quirk et al. 1985: 639), a clear opposite, which is typically explicit in the context. They indicate that only one option is appropriate, not another one. In (6), it is argued that only the reward aspect of the carrot-and-stick approach is acceptable, not the punishment aspect.

- (6) By using the carrot, *rather than* the stick—that is a very important principle, the carrot encouragement *rather than* the big stick of rules and regulations—you will get buy-in from farmers to this agenda.

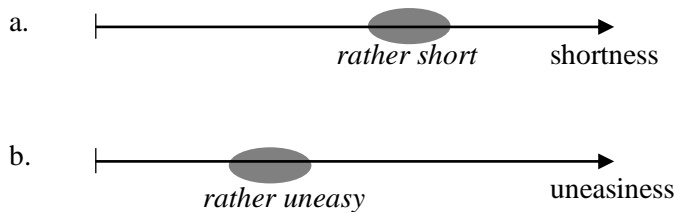
En utilisant la carotte *plutôt que* le bâton—il s’agit d’un principe très important, l’encouragement de la carotte *plutôt que* le grand bâton des règles et des réglementations—nous remporterons l’adhésion des agriculteurs à ce programme.

### 3.2. Degree uses

As adverbs of degree, *rather* and *plutôt* function as scalar degree modifiers, indicating that an unbounded, scalar quality or quantity is present to a moderate degree. Unbounded properties are construed as degrees or regions on an open-ended scale (cf. Paradis 2001; Ghesquière and Davidse 2011; Ghesquière 2014) and what *rather* and *plutôt* do is place these properties in a range that is neither low nor high on the scale. In Quirk et al.'s (1985: 466) classification *rather* and *plutôt* would be labelled compromisers, and more specifically, downtoners which 'have a general lowering effect'. Nuancing that, we would like to argue that with unbounded adjectives compromisers, including *rather* and *plutôt*, locate qualities and quantities roughly in the middle region of an open scale, indicating their presence to a moderate degree, be that slightly below or above a certain norm (cf. Brems, Ghesquière, and Vanderbauwhede 2020). Analysis of the adverbs as either downscaling or upscaling the unbounded properties modified proved particularly challenging (cf. OED, s.v. *rather* II, 6) and we follow Davidse, Njende, and Ghesquière (forthc.) in saying that the mild downscaling or upscaling effect seems 'mainly to be due to context and rhetorical effects such as using understatement to convey upscaling'. In (2), *rather* and *plutôt* seem to be expressing upscaling, indicating that the Nordic approach is shorter than usual, thus falling within a moderately high range of shortness on an open-ended scale of shortness, as illustrated in Figure 1(a). In (7), the situation referred is not uncomfortable enough to simply be called 'uneasy', yet coming close to that range (cf. Figure 1(b)). In such downscaling uses, *rather* and *plutôt* seem to serve as face-saving or politeness items, whereby using the adjective alone, without the modifying adverb, could come across as harsh or insulting.

- (7) Mr President, I find myself in *rather* an uneasy situation ...  
Monsieur le Président, je me trouve dans une situation *plutôt*  
inconfortable ...



Figure 1: *Rather* and *plutôt* as adverbs of degree

### 3.3. *Rather* and *plutôt* in contrast

For the contrastive study, only the source texts of the Europarl-direct corpus were taken into account, i.e., the speeches as they were delivered in the European Parliament in the speaker's L1. In these data, both *rather* and *plutôt* are attested in both their contrastive and their degree uses. As Figure 2 shows, the general functional profiles of the two adverbs are very similar, with degree and contrastive uses being attested in the data to comparable proportions in the English and French datasets. For both adverbs, the contrastive uses are largely predominant, taking up 64.7% of all uses of *rather* and 75.0% of all uses of *plutôt*. Notably, whereas the general contrastive vs. degree analysis was quite straightforward for *rather*, there were a few instances of *plutôt* that were necessarily analysed as vague or unclear. In (8), for example, the status of *plutôt* was analysed as unclear, mostly due to lack of context.

- (8) Autrement, j'estime que ce sera *plutôt*—ce sera l'avis de mon groupe en tout cas—un vote négatif.  
I think that the vote is likely to be negative—that is the opinion of my group, in any case.

Interestingly, *likely* seems to translate *plutôt*, but the context in the French example is underspecified, making a definitive analysis of *plutôt* as contrastive marker impossible or at least challenging. In the English translation it seems that the translator has disambiguated things and gone for a contrastive reading (drawing a contrast with an unmentioned positive vote), even though a degree reading is possible as well here, as in 'a rather negative vote'.

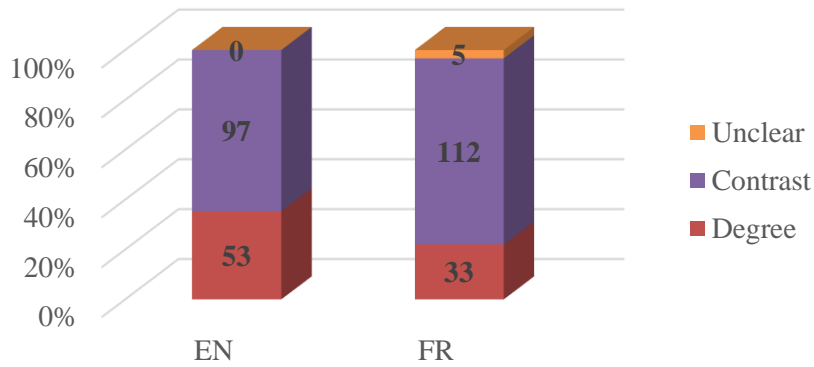


Figure 2: The distribution of contrastive and degree uses of *rather* and *plutôt*

Zooming in on the contrastive uses, we can see that again the functional profiles of contrastive *rather* and *plutôt* are highly comparable (see Figure 3). The replacive ‘X more than Y’ uses predominate, taking up 52.3% in the English dataset and 40.2% in the French. In both languages, the antithetical ‘X, not Y’ use is the second most common, at 24.7% for English and 29.5% for French. The preference and reformulation uses are less common in the datasets at 16.5% and 6.2% respectively for English and at 11.6% and 18.8% for French.

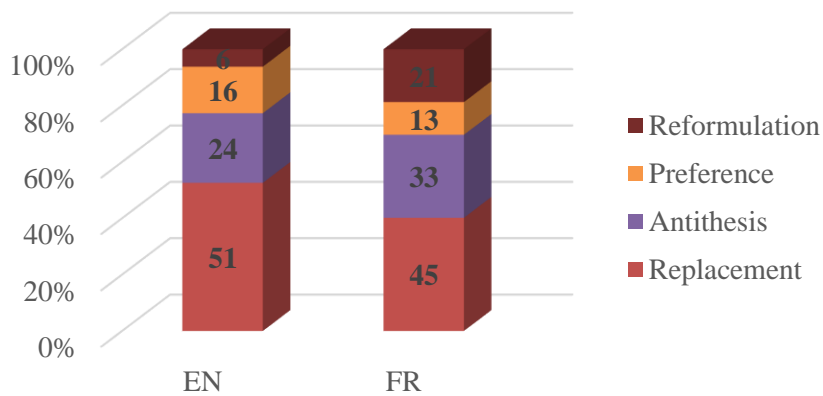


Figure 3: The distribution of the different contrastive uses of *rather* and *plutôt*

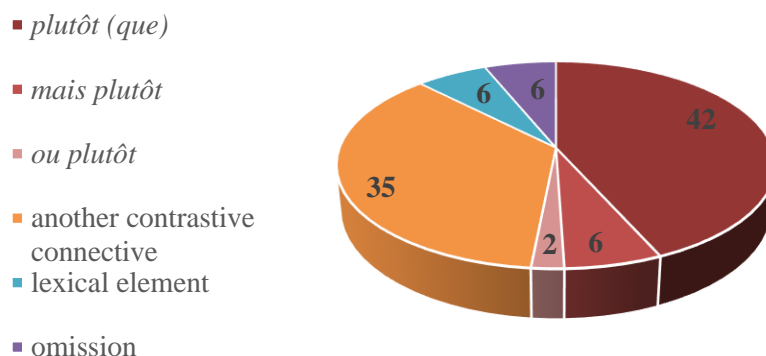
On the basis of the observed similarity between the functional profiles of *rather* and *plutôt* in the English and French source data, it could be hypothesized that translators would opt for the immediate counterpart when rendering these adverbs in the other language. Our analysis of the parallel data sets, however, has shown this not to be the case, as will be discussed in the following sections.

### 3.4. *Rather and plutôt in translation*

In the following sections, we will discuss the translation of *rather* and *plutôt* in their contrastive (sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2) and degree uses (sections 3.4.3 and 3.4.4). The translation data clearly show that translators feel these adverbs when used contrastively can hardly be omitted in translation. In addition, despite their very similar functional profiles, the English and French adverbial equivalents are not always translators' first choice when faced with these constructions. For both the contrastive and the degree uses, translators often turn to more explicit alternative constructions.

#### 3.4.1. *Contrastive rather in translation*

Figure 4 shows the most frequently attested translations for contrastive *rather* in the Europarl-direct data. Surprisingly, only about half (51.5%) of the instances of contrastive *rather* are rendered by a construction featuring its immediate counterpart *plutôt*, as in examples (3) to (6) above and represented as the reddish areas in Figure 4. This means that translators, despite the availability of an equivalent form in the target language, in just under 50% of the cases opt for a different strategy. Most often in that case they prefer another connective expressing contrast (36.1%), as in (9), where the antithetical meaning of *rather than* is made more explicit in the French translation through the use of the connective *au lieu de* 'instead of'. The translators sometimes also choose to use a lexical element that clarifies the type of contrastive relationship expressed, such as the verb *préférer* 'to prefer' in (10), or omit the contrastive element altogether, as in (11).

Figure 4: Contrastive *rather* in translation

- (9) And if Irish farmers were to follow the letter of the directive and spread slurry when allowed, they would cause pollution *rather than* prevent it.

Et si les agriculteurs irlandais devaient suivre la lettre de la directive et répandre le lisier lorsque c'est autorisé, ils causeraient la pollution *au lieu de* la prévenir.

- (10) Terrorists choose violence *rather than* the ballot box, inflicting death and pain on innocent civilians, justifying their actions by flying the banner of religion, race or political sovereignty.

Les terroristes *préfèrent* la violence aux urnes, infligeant mort et douleur à des civils innocents et justifiant leurs actes en brandissant l'étendard de la religion, de la race ou de la souveraineté politique.

- (11) To engage the national parliaments in this is not lobbying; *rather*, it is shaping the European agenda.

Faire participer les parlements européens n'est pas du lobbying, c'est façonner notre agenda européen.

Table 1 summarizes the findings for contrastive *rather* in its different uses. When we have a closer look at the translation strategies used to render the different contrastive uses, we observe that there are considerable

differences between them and that the overall picture in Figure 4 was actually skewed by the predominance of the replacement uses.

Only in its replacive uses is *rather* predominantly translated by a construction featuring the adverb *plutôt*. In its reformulatory, preference and antithetical uses *rather* is also translated as *plutôt*, but the data indicate that the translators often opt for a more explicit translation which clarifies the exact contrastive meaning conveyed. The reformulatory meaning of *rather* is in the French parallel data set often foregrounded by the addition of the disjunctive connective *ou* ‘or’ or by choosing a lexical alternative to the adverb *plutôt*, such as the expression *voire*, as in (12), which is used to introduce the possibility of a stronger, more correct alternative to what has just been said. In its preferential use, *rather* is translated as *plutôt* in 31.2% of the cases, but again there is a clear tendency toward more explicitly preferential constructions in the target language, most often featuring a form of the verb *préférer* ‘to prefer’, as in (10) above. Similarly, for the antithetical uses explicitation can again be observed, as the radically contrastive semantics of these uses is rendered in French through other connectives than *plutôt* that are limited to expressing this antithetical relationship, e.g., *et non/pas/ne* (29.2%), *au lieu de* (12.5%), and *au contraire* (8.3%). Interestingly, whereas replacement and antithesis are perhaps stronger contrastive relationships than reformulation and preference, omission is only attested for the former two, as in (11) above. A possible explanation might be that the translators feel the contrastive semantics is clear from the context, even without an overt marker.

- (12) Paradoxically, the role of the European Parliament is minimal, *or rather*, non-existent in this area.  
Paradoxalement, le rôle du Parlement européen est minime, *voire* inexistant dans ce domaine.

Table 1: The different contrastive uses of *rather* in translation

	Reformulation (n=6)		Preference (n=16)		Replacement (n=51)		Antithesis (n=24)	
<b>Plutôt</b>	2	33.3%	5	31.2%	28	54.9%	9	37.5%
		<i>ou plutôt</i>		<i>plutôt (que)</i>		<i>plutôt (que)</i>		<i>plutôt (que)</i>
	1	16.7%			5	9.8%		
		<i>mais plutôt</i>				<i>mais plutôt</i>		
<b>Other contrastive connectives</b>	0	0.0%	2	12.5%	10	19.6%	7	29.2%
				<i>au lieu de</i>		<i>au lieu de</i>		<i>et non/pas/ne</i>
							3	12.5%
								<i>au lieu de</i>
							2	8.3%
								<i>au contraire</i>
<b>Lexical alternatives</b>	3	50.0%	9	56.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
		<i>voire; ou; pour être tout à fait correct</i>		<i>préférer; préférable; au plus vite</i>				
<b>Omission</b>	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	4	7.8%	2	8.3%

### 3.4.2. Contrastive *plutôt* in translation

The picture that emerges for contrastive *plutôt* is not much different from that for contrastive *rather*, as is clear when we compare Figures 4 and 5.

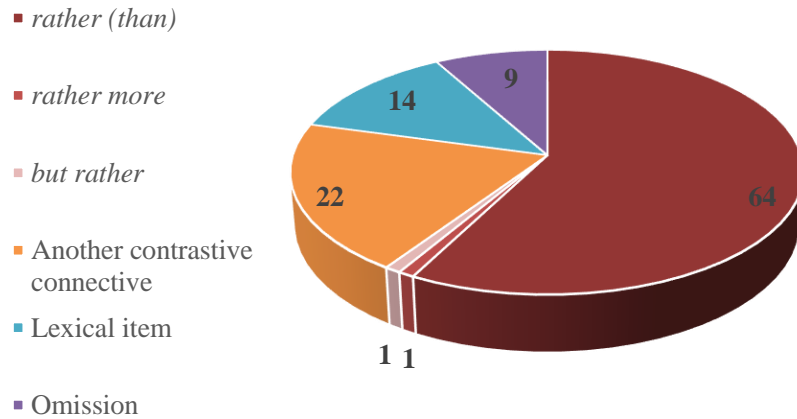


Figure 5: Contrastive *plutôt* in translation

In 59.5% of its contrastive uses in the Europarl-direct data set, French *plutôt* is translated as *rather*, its direct English counterpart. The percentage is slightly higher than for the reverse translation direction, but still lower than could be expected. Again, the translators quite often prefer to use another, more explicit contrastive connective than *rather* (19.8%), a lexical alternative (12.6%), or even omit the contrastive connective in the target language altogether (8.1%). These three alternative translation strategies are illustrated in (13) to (15) below respectively.

- (13) Ce traité ne facilitera pas l'élargissement, il le compliquera *plutôt*.  
This Treaty will not facilitate enlargement—*on the contrary*, it will complicate the issue.
- (14) Il s'agit *plutôt* d'accabler les pays—le club du 1%—qui veulent, comme on dit familièrement le beurre, l'argent du beurre et le sourire de la crémière.  
*The real targets* for criticism are those countries—the members of the one-per-cent club—which want to have their cake and eat it, to put it colloquially.

- (15) Il n'est pas dans notre intention de modifier la structure duelle existante, mais bien *plutôt* d'en optimiser le fonctionnement.  
It is not our intention to alter the existing dual structure; the main task is to optimise the way it works.

Table 2: The different contrastive uses of *plutôt* in translation

	Reformulation (n=21)		Preference (n=13)		Replacement (n=45)		Antithesis (n=33)	
<b>rather forms</b>	16	76.1%	6	46.1%	23	52%	18	54.5%
		<i>rather</i>		<i>rather than</i>		<i>rather (than)</i>		<i>rather (than)</i>
	2	9.5%			1	2.2%		
		<i>but rather</i>				<i>but rather</i>		
	1	4.8%						
		<i>rather more</i>						
<b>Other contrastive connectives</b>	1	4.8% <i>in fact</i>	3	23.1%	8	17.8%	6	18.2%
				<i>instead of</i>		<i>instead</i>		<i>instead</i>
	1	4.8% <i>in particular</i>					2	6.1% <i>on the contrary</i>
						1	3.0% <i>though</i>	
						1	3.0% <i>unlike</i>	
<b>Lexical alternatives</b>	1	4.8% <i>really</i>	1	7.7% <i>favour over</i>	6	13.3%	1	3.0%
				<i>better</i>	2	4.4% <i>tend to</i>	1	3.0%
				<i>prefer</i>	1	2.2% <i>the real target</i>		<i>more like</i>
<b>Omission</b>	0	0.0%	1	7.7%	4	9.0%	3	9.1%

Table 2 shows that forms with *rather* are the most frequent translations for all uses, especially the reformulation uses. Other contrastive connectives are mostly used in the preference, replacement, and antithesis uses, especially *instead* in the latter three uses. For reformulation, *in fact* and *in particular* are often used as translations, or *really* as a lexical alternative.



In the reformulation use, *plutôt* is never omitted in translation, whereas in the other uses it sometimes is. Lexical replacements are most frequent in the replacement uses, with, for instance, *more (like)* and *tend to* as some examples.

### 3.4.3. Degree rather in translation

As for the contrastive uses, we can observe that again fewer than half of the translations feature a form of *rather*'s immediate French counterpart *plutôt*. The quantified results are presented in Table 3, which lists all of the translations of degree *rather* found in the data in order of frequency.

Table 3: French translations of degree *rather*

	n	%
<i>plutôt</i>	23	43.4
OMISSION	12	22.6
<i>assez</i>	6	11.3
<i>relativement</i>	3	5.7
<i>un peu plus</i>	2	3.8
<i>fort</i>	1	1.9
<i>très</i>	1	1.9
<i>plus</i>	1	1.9
<i>pour le moins</i>	1	1.9
<i>relative</i>	1	1.9
<i>un petit goût</i>	1	1.9
<i>un peu</i>	1	1.9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Whereas *plutôt* is the chosen translation in 43.4% of the cases, other degree expressions are used in 34.0%, and the degree element is omitted in 22.6%. When a degree element other than *plutôt* is used in the target text, two main strategies can be discerned.

The first strategy is one in which the translators opt for a distinct yet equally vague compromiser, such as *assez* or *relativement*, which can also be used to express slight downscaling or upscaling depending on the context in which it is used. In (16), for instance, *rather* is translated by *assez* 'enough' and indicates that the adopted strategy is slightly higher on the scale than what would be considered the norm for it to be called 'good'. In (17), in contrast, *rather* is also translated by a compromiser, but here

*relativement* ‘relatively’ is used as a slight downscaler, to reduce the strength of the negative adjective *shadowy*.

- (16) ... we actually have a *rather* good strategy on the Western Balkans.  
... nous disposons d’une *assez* bonne stratégie en la matière.
- (17) Now I want to touch briefly on the *rather* shadowy side of globalisation ...  
Je souhaite ensuite aborder brièvement le côté *relativement* obscur de la mondialisation ...

The second strategy attested in the Euro-parl-direct data is the use of a degree adverb with a more clearly upscaling or downscaling meaning, such as *très* ‘very’ in (18) and *un peu* ‘a little’ in (19). Such explicitation was also observed for the contrastive uses of *rather*, so there seems to be increasing evidence toward a general such trend. Whether the explicitation strategy is successful in (18) and (19) and is a correct rendering of the implicit meaning of *rather* is open to discussion.

- (18) It is *rather* unusual to talk about the policy intentions of the Commission ...  
Il est *très* inhabituel d’évoquer les intentions politiques de la Commission ...
- (19) While this report points to a *rather* less awful CFP than the monstrosity we have now, it nevertheless recommends leaving fisheries under the predatory control of the undemocratic and anti-democratic ‘European Union’, and, for this reason, cannot be endorsed by UKIP.  
Bien que ce rapport tende vers une PCP *un peu* moins horrible que la monstruosité que nous avons à l’heure actuelle, il recommande néanmoins de laisser les pêcheries sous le contrôle prédateur de la non-démocratique et antidémocratique ‘Union européenne’, raison pour laquelle l’UKIP ne peut le soutenir.

In addition to a ‘literal’ translation by means of *plutôt* and a translation by another degree modifier—compromiser, downscaler or upscaler—a third translation strategy can be found in the data, namely omission, as in (20), where the degree meaning is completely absent from the target text. Although not carrying much informational value, degree adverbs do contribute to the discourse in terms of nuancing and/or emotional value, so it is striking that they are omitted in translation in more than 1 out of 5 cases. Perhaps even more so, as there does not seem to be a general trend toward downtoning or attenuation in the translation process, as is clear from our discussion above. It could it be that translators, especially when dealing with political written-to-be-spoken language data, feel that the semantico-pragmatic value of degree adverbs such as *rather* and *plutôt* is negligible. Or perhaps these omissions are revelatory of translators’ uncertainty as to the correct interpretation of these inherently vague compromisers, which leads them to opt for either equally vague constructions or for complete omission rather than for a possibly mistaken translation that may convey a lower or higher degree than the source language construction. It falls outside of the scope of this paper, but a study into the translation process could certainly prove insightful here.

- (20) So I will discard some of my remarks that would otherwise have been *rather* repetitive ...  
Je m’abstiendrai donc de formuler certaines de mes remarques qui, sinon, auraient été répétitives ...

#### 3.4.4. Degree *plutôt* in translation

In 55% of the cases, the translation of degree modifier *plutôt* features *rather*, as in (21). Other translations occur once or twice only, such as the compromisers *somewhat* and *more or less* in (22) and (23), and the maximizer *perfectly* in (24).

- (21) Sur le fond, ce texte est *plutôt* bon. et nous l’avons soutenu, puisqu’il institue des règles strictes ...  
In terms of content, the text is *rather* good, and we supported it, since it introduces strict rules ...
- (22) Que l’application du règlement s’est *plutôt* améliorée, a été simplifiée et a quand même accélérée la coopération entre

les juridictions sur l'obtention des preuves en matière civile et commerciale.

That the application of the regulation has *somewhat* improved, has been simplified and has speeded up cooperation between the courts on the taking of evidence in civil and commercial cases.

- (23) Le rapport de Mme Randzio-Plath respecte *plutôt* bien cet équilibre entre indépendance et contrôle démocratique.  
Mrs Randzio-Plath's report *more or less* respects the balance between independence and democratic accountability extremely well.
- (24) S'agissant de la dénomination, je trouve que 'accord de partenariat économique' convient *plutôt* bien.  
With regard to the title, I find 'economic partnership agreement' *perfectly* appropriate.

In (24) *plutôt bien* is translated as *perfectly appropriate*, where the inherently vague degree marker is translated by a maximizer, which is interesting as the translator has opted for a marker expressing a higher degree than implied by the original.

As opposed to the *rather* data, there was never omission in the degree translation of *plutôt*, which might seem surprising, since in the literature it has been suggested that pragmatic markers are more often left untranslated. Aijmer (2008: 98) claims that pragmatic markers 'do not translate well', and found that many translators omit them altogether.

Table 4: English translations of degree *plutôt*

	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
<i>rather (than/more)</i>	18	55.0
<i>more or less</i>	2	6.0
<i>somewhat</i>	2	6.0
<i>tend to</i>	2	6.0
<i>come to terms</i>	1	3.0
<i>on the whole</i>	1	3.0
<i>perfectly</i>	1	3.0
<i>pretty</i>	1	3.0
<i>quite</i>	1	3.0
<i>really</i>	1	3.0
<i>good</i>	1	3.0
<i>more</i>	1	3.0
<i>thriving</i>	1	3.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>100.0</b>

#### 4. Discussion

It is clear from the parallel data that, overall, using the corresponding forms in the target language is a common translation strategy for the contrastive uses of *rather* and *plutôt*, the former being rendered as the latter in 51.5% of all cases and the latter as the former in 59.5%. More specific trends can, however, be discerned when we take the type of contrastive relationship expressed into account. For English, for example, the replacive uses push the overall percentage of *plutôt* translations up as they are most frequent and they are translated by a form of *plutôt* 65% of the time. In its three other functions, contrastive *rather* is much more likely to receive a more explicit translation in French, clarifying the specific subsense. In other words, there is explicitation of the contrastive (sub)meaning. Explicitation is, of course, a well-known concept in translation studies that goes back to at least Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) and was more recently defined by Olohan and Baker (2000: 142) as the providing of ‘extra information’ or the ‘spelling out of information otherwise implicit in the source language’. As such, explicitation is very much a reader-oriented process, targeted at facilitating the understanding of the target text for the new readership. Through explicitation, sentences

become ‘less dependent on the context or the situation’, which ‘frees the reader from referring to either’ (Vinay and Darbelnet 1995: 70). Similar explicitation of the contrastive meaning was observed for the French-to-English parallel data set, which showed that, although almost 60% of all subsenses of contrastive *plutôt* were translated with *rather*, translators again often resorted to using more explicitly contrastive conjunctions or lexical alternatives. The tendency for explicitation in both directional data sets is also in line with the observation that the contrastive meaning conveyed by *rather* and *plutôt* is only rarely omitted in the target language. Omission always accounts for less than 10% of all the translations, and is even absent altogether for the reformulation uses. Put differently, implicit translation or implicitation (cf. Zufferey 2016) is a rare phenomenon in the translation of contrastive *rather* and *plutôt*. This seems consistent with Zufferey’s (2016: 268) statement that ‘all coherence relations that involve a discontinuity due to shifts between mental spaces cannot easily be conveyed implicitly’, but further study of the exact relations expressed would be needed to confirm this. Also, unlike in Zufferey (2016: 275), implicitation is not significantly more common in English than in French.

Turning to the degree uses, we attested, as for the contrastive uses, fewer corresponding forms in the target languages than might be expected: in the EN-to-FR data only 43.4% of the degree uses of *rather* were translated with a construction featuring *plutôt*, and in the FR-to-EN data 55.0% of the degree realisations of *plutôt* were rendered as *rather*. As for the contrastive uses, a considerable amount of explicitation could be observed both for *rather* and *plutôt*, with translators choosing to use a more clearly upscaling or downscaling degree modifier instead of their immediate translational counterpart or another compromiser. In contrast to what was observed for the contrastive uses, omission is relatively frequently attested for degree *rather* in the English-to-French data set. For degree *plutôt*, however, omission was found in the French-to-English data just once. As the omission of degree modifiers is a form of attenuation, reducing the subjective and evaluative value of the discourse, this observation ties in with previous findings that suggest that French translators tend to soften strong stylistic and evaluative markers (e.g., Demissy-Cazailles 2007; Schreiber 2015: 711).

### 5. Conclusions

The corresponding forms *rather* and *plutôt* are used as each other's translations in both their degree and contrastive uses, and in the various subsenses of reformulation, replacement, preference and antithesis.

For English *rather*, however, there are distinct translational tendencies per contrastive use: replacement is the only one where *plutôt* is the predominant translation. All other subsenses are also translated by *plutôt*, but more often a more explicit translation is chosen, clarifying the exact contrastive meaning. For degree uses, only in the French translations is there often omission, which might seem surprising.

In Brems, Ghesquière, and Vanderbauwhede (2020) it was also shown that *rather* and *plutôt* (and Dutch *eerder*) are now predominantly used as textual markers expressing different types of contrast—reformulation, preference, replacement and antithesis. Interestingly, the items were argued to express these different types of contrast to differing proportions, with *rather* most easily expressing stark contrast and *plutôt* still being used more to express weaker meanings of preference and reformulation. As contrastive markers, the items were also shown to mostly be translated by each other in Brems, Ghesquière, and Vanderbauwhede (2020). The present study hence confirms the former corpus study.

What this article has added is a comprehensive study of corpus translations of *rather* and *plutôt*, which showed that using the corresponding forms in the target language is a common translation strategy for the contrastive uses of *rather* and *plutôt*. As to degree uses, we attested, as for the contrastive uses, fewer corresponding forms in the target languages than might be expected.

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