TRANSLATING SPECIALISED TEXTS:
AN OVERVIEW OF KEY FACTORS INVOLVED IN TRANSLATOR TRAINING FOR SPECIALISED TRANSLATION

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ABSTRACT. Translators wishing to work on translating specialised texts are traditionally recommended to spend much time and effort acquiring specialist knowledge of the domain involved, and for some areas of specialised activity, this is clearly essential. For other types of translation-based, domain-specific of communication, however, it is possible to develop a systematic approach to the task which will allow for the production of target texts which are adequate for purpose, in a range of specialised domains, without necessarily having formal qualifications in those areas. For Esselink (2000) translation agencies, and individual clients, would tend to prefer a subject expert who also happens to have competence in one or more languages over a trained translator with a high degree of translation competence, including the ability to deal with specialised translation tasks. The problem, for the would-be translator, is persuading prospective clients that he or she is capable of this. This paper will offer an overview of the principles used to design training intended to teach trainee translators how to use a systematic approach to specialised translation, in order to extend the range of areas in which they can tackle translation, without compromising quality or reliability. This approach will be described within the context of the functionalist approach developed in particular by Reiss and Vermeer (1984), Nord (1991, 1997) inter alia.

Keywords: Specialised translation, functionalist approaches, domain specificity, adequacy, quality, corpora

Introduction

This paper claims that through a process of developing awareness, translators (trainee and practising) can develop a systematic approach to translation of specialised texts, which will facilitate production of a target text that is adequate for purpose, as stipulated in the translation brief. The theoretical framework for this approach is grounded in the functionalist approaches proposed and developed over recent decades, from Reiss and Vermeer (1984) (skopos), to Nord (1991, 1997) (functionalism in translator training), also Honig (1995) and Chesterman (1998).

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The paper will begin with a brief reminder of key tenets of functionalist approaches, followed by consideration of key factors involved in specialised translation, including translation competence, culture-specificity and text type conventions and expertise in the domain. Examples from texts taken from medicine, law and airline regulations will be given to demonstrate these issues, using Nord's four types of potential problem (1997), These will be followed by consideration of basic research and reference sources for specialised translation.

All of this will establish the framework for a systematic approach to the translation of specialised texts, which is used to teach basic survival skills in specialised translation at Aston University.

Functionalist Approaches – Basic Tenets

Functionalist approaches consider translation as a form of deliberate communicative action, for a fixed purpose, to communicate information in a written document to a new group of addressees in a target culture, drawing on Action Theory and the link between intention of the actor, the perception of the object of the action, and the form of communication chosen. The purpose – or *skopos* (Vermeer 1984) - of the target text, together with awareness of the presumed knowledge of the target language addressee (concerning source culture and the subject of the text) will guide the translator in making decisions about how much of the ST to carry over to the TT, whether or not further explicitation will be needed, and how best to achieve this. This principle is equally applicable in any translation situation, regardless of the genre and type of text. Adopting a functionalist approach to translation should lead to production of a functionally adequate text, that is, a text which is fit for the purpose for which it was commissioned (which is detailed in the translation brief provided by the client).

Reiss (1984) sketches a basic taxonomy of text types, in terms of their communicative function (informative, appellative, expressive), arguing that awareness of the primary communicative function of a text will both set up expectations as to its structure and use of language, and act as the basis for translation decisions. For example, if a text is primarily appellative (e.g. advertising) but also contains factual information (e.g. advertisement for a car), then where translation decisions involve resolving a clash of priorities, the primary function will take precedence. Other scholars (Beaugrande and Dressler 1981, Nord 2005) use the label "text type" to denote the genre or type of communicative event (letter, newspaper report, official bulletin, contract….).

Neubert (2000) describes key attributes of a competent translator. These include language and cultural competence, subject, textual and transfer competence, all of which add up to an overall translation competence.

- Language competence for specialised translation will assume basic native speaker fluency in SL and TL (ST interpretation and TL production). We will not discuss this in this paper.

12

- Cultural competence will integrate awareness of previous key texts on a subject and associated culture-based institutions, as well as familiarity with the relevant body, or bodies, which regulate the domain and the sharing of information within this.
- Subject competence relates to a degree of familiarity with domain-specific concepts, processes and objects, and their interaction with a knowledge structure.
- Textual competence is often overlooked in favour of the other five sub-skills, and yet this is an integral element of any translation task, not least for specialised translation. This is about knowing HOW to organise the WHAT in the written text, to be discussed in our consideration of text type conventions.
- Research skills include the ability to search for useful sources to inform the translation process, and this will be discussed under the subject of Corpora.

For would-be translators of specialised texts, the challenge is to identify the minimum degree of awareness, familiarity and knowledge necessary for adequate understanding and transfer of the message, in the most appropriate forms (cf Neubert and Shreve, 1992: discussion of Standards of Textuality: *acceptability and intentionality*).

Culture-specificity and text type conventions

Communication is a culturally-defined activity, often conventionalised through repeated refinement of practice, in order to achieve maximum clarity and economy, through the application of patterns of text production and use of language which both conform to reader expectations and serve to embed even further these patterns in the collective archive of expectations.

In considering culture-specificity of behaviour, the following definitions may be useful.

> Rice (1993): culture is the "values, attitudes, beliefs, artefacts and other meaningful symbols represented in the pattern of life adopted by people that help them interpret, evaluate and communicate as members of a society"
>
> Geertz (1973): culture is a "set of control mechanisms for governing behaviour"
>
> Hofstede (1991): culture is "the collective mental programming of the people in an environment.....conditioned by the same education and life experience".
>
> De Mooij (2005:36): culture includes the things that have worked in the past. It includes shared beliefs, attitudes, norms, roles and values […[Culture is to society what memory is to the individual.
> *And*
> (idem:45): Culture is the shared ability to recognise, decode and produce signs and symbols, so culture also is a combination of semiotic habits. Differences in semiotic habits delineate cultures.

13

Texts are described by Chandler (2002) as a collection of signs, and as "complexes of signs which cohere both internally and within the context in and for which they were produced" by Kress & van Leeuwen (1996, 40-41). Texts are sub-sets of genres, which are exemplars of communicative events in a given culture. The culture-specificity of genres, and their normative effect in terms of conventions, are discussed by Schäffner (2000:212). Schäffner (idem) also notes the need for a translator to "produce the TT as an instance of the genre for the target culture". Culture-specificity in texts is discussed by Nord (1997, 2005), in terms of cultural references to people, places, institutions and intertextual references. This concept also applies in relation to formal conventions for macro-textual features: organisation of informative content or development of an argumentative process. The translator's awareness of how culture shapes text production and content is fundamental to successful target text production:

> The translator is not the sender of the ST message but a text producer in the target culture who adopts somebody else's intention in order to produce a communicative instrument for the target culture or a target culture document of a source culture communication (Nord 2005:13)

For specialised translation, the primary communicative function (cf Reiss 1984) is usually informative, as text producers seek to share information about the specialist domain of activity with others, usually their peers (equivalent level of expert knowledge) but also sometimes with a wider public (for example through semi-specialised reports in the press, on television or radio). Information is delivered through use of correct labels for concepts, objects and processes (terminology and collocations) and this is often perceived as the major, or indeed sole, translation challenge. However, in addition to accurate transfer of informative content and correct use of terminology, the translator will need to understand how the (written) information should be articulated in the target language – because, as Nord notes:

> Being culture-bound communicative signs, both the source and the target text are determined by the communicative situation in which they serve to convey a message (Nord 2005:8)

Texts-in-culture tend, over time, to adopt ever-more standardised or conventionalised ways of presenting the message, otherwise known as text type conventions. These will guide and determine a range of text production criteria, including structure and organisation of macro-textual features (chunks of information), syntax, style, register, use of punctuation, lay-out etc.

Communicating intentions, attitudes, facts

Domain-specific communication often involves particular use of syntactic forms to signal communicative intentions, which can be described using the concept of Speech Acts (Austin 1962, Searle, 1977), for example: *to declare,*

14

promise, forbid, give or deny permission, or to indicate obligations, possibility, conditional actions, warning, emphasis, inter alia. In English these may be realised as follows:

- *Declare:* declare, state, affirm, reiterate, emphasise; *promise*: pledge, swear, promise, commit to, future simple (we will do this); *forbid*: is forbidden, cannot be done, will not happen; *give or deny permission*: the service-provider <u>may</u> increase the rental charge, subject to prior notice/ provided that (conditions) the lessor is given advance notice of this intention; the tenant <u>may not</u> alter the current state of decoration of the premises without prior permission of the owner; *obligations*: bills <u>must</u> be paid by the first of the month; tenants <u>are required</u> to give three months notice of intention to terminate the contract; notice <u>shall be given</u> of any changes made to the vehicle; the employee <u>shall give</u> one month's notice of intention to leave the employment.
- *possibility*, the new Act <u>may</u> also encompass regulations on the subject of additional payments for renewal of ….;
- *warning,* if bills are not paid by the due date the tenant will incur additional costs; non-payment of bills will result in prosecution; in cases of non-payment of bills, the tenant will be prosecuted.

Use of correct language forms to convey relevant communicative intentions, or speech acts, is essential to an adequate target text which will have the desired force, impact and message content for the target reader.

Producing an adequate translated text will therefore include consideration not just of terminology and encyclopaedic knowledge, language and conceptual structure, but equally importantly, of text type conventions (style, lay-out, use of language), as deviation from expected forms will impede the smooth flow of message reception and discourage the reader from playing his part (as projected by Grice 1975 in his Principle of Co-operation). Trosborg (1997) also discusses the importance of text type conventions in the production of functionally adequate texts

Domain-specific knowledge

As noted by Bowker and Pearson (2002:28), "Because LSP users have different levels of expertise, there are different levels of LSP communications". Some specialised subjects will be more easily accessible to the translator than others, depending on the complexity of subject knowledge and the intricacy of conceptual interaction. Some apparently densely packed texts (conceptually) may often turn out to be an accumulation of LSP terms linked by LGP words, and knowledge of what the terms refer to will often suffice for an adequate translation. On the other hand, subjects relying on development of complex lines of reasoning (e.g. mathematics, quantum physics) may prove inaccessible even when armed with appropriate terminology, due to conceptual organisation. Bowker and Pearson remind us that, "there is a difference between knowing/learning and subject and knowing/learning the LSP used to discuss

15

that subject" (2000:29). They advocate use of a specialised corpus to develop domain-specific expertise (more of this later).

To be competent to translate texts from some domains, the translator may require a degree of formal training in the subject (e.g. law), since breakdowns in communication may entail serious consequences (financial or diplomatic). For example, culture specificity of the system and its operating principles (e.g a country's legal system) may mean that there is no equivalent TL concept to express an SL principle or process. Documents intended to carry equal status in law in source and target cultures (contracts, patents), will require expert knowledge of the two systems. However, for translation for informative purposes only, and also sometimes for highly formulaic documents attesting to simple information (e.g. birth certificates), careful research (expert corpora) should generate sufficient understanding to enable the translation to be completed successfully.

Domains which may appear to be based on specialised knowledge may in fact be more accessible to a wider public, thanks to mass media communications and a general intention by the media to 'educate' the viewing and reading public, who, as a result, have become more aware of specialist concepts in fields which interest them. National broadsheets often carry quite specialised reports on the environment, telecommunications and IT, the finance industry (shares, loans, credit, investment, banking), cars, health, sport, etc. Readers do not usually consider these as specialised texts but in so far as specialist labels (terms) are required to discuss and understand the domain, there is a degree of domain-specificity. Translators who read widely and regularly in the quality national press will acquire passive awareness of a number of subjects, which can form the basis for further research. Being aware of the degree of subject knowledge that <u>can</u> be assumed to be held by the target language addressee is another key factor, and this can be determined by careful analysis of the translation brief, including the intended source for publication of the TT; consider the difference in reader knowledge between readers of a text to be published, for example, in a specialist journal, and readers of a text on a similar subject, to be accessed via the internet or the weekly press.

For example: the subject of the following extract from an advertisement for broadband, although a specialist domain, is widely familiar to readers of the UK broadsheet, the Independent. Special effects include direct address, rhetorical questions, use of CAPITAL letters, listing of names of other companies. The text type is advertising, the communicative function appellative, and the subject is semi-specialised. This is just one example of how specialised subjects have become 'common-place'.

> Notice how you didn't have to wait for all these words to load? You just turned the page and there they were. Now why aren't web pages that quick?
> Thing is – they can be, if you get your broadband (T) from us.
> Only VIRGIN Media use fibre optic cable (T) to <u>deliver broadband</u> (C) and it's widely available across the UK.

16

> You'll find everyone else – BT, TalkTalk, Tiscali, Orange, Sky (intercultural references) – all use copper telephone wire (T) And that's been around for a hundred years.
> The truth is, copper wire wasn't designed for the internet.

……
The Independent, 03.02.08

Translation problems in LSP texts

Let us now consider the kinds of problems translators may encounter in attempting to translate a specialised text. To do this, we will use the four categories of translation problem described by Nord (1997), with examples from some extracts from specialised or semi-specialised texts.

1. ***Pragmatic problems*** (culture-specific references such as names of governing bodies, laws and statutes, names given to illnesses or processes);

For medical texts, problems may include,:

Eponymous names for diseases: may be used internationally, or may vary from one language to another, depending on who is held to have been the first to name the disease. These can be checked with experts or on-line reference sources:

> Paget's disease of bone is a common disorder in elderly people. The clinical presentation of Paget's disease is diverse. The diagnosis of Paget's disease is primarily radiological.

(http://cmp.mcqi.com.au/ensignia/home/lms/html/Courses/HTML%20Updat es/Pagets%20disease%20of%20bone%2025%20Jan%202008/index.html)

Names of proprietary drugs (using same generic ingredients): these may vary for treatment of same illness, depending on licencing laws in each country:

> Patient coping well the chemotherapy. Abdomen is still slightly distended with ascetic fluid but not uncomfortable on Frusemide 20mg and Spironolactone 100mg daily. Wt is stable 98kg. may require drainage if more symptomatic.
> Cycle 2a given see next week for 2b.

(extract from patient notes: 2008)

2. ***Intercultural problems*** (text type conventions, organisation of macro-structural elements, conventions for measurements);

i. ***organisation of information (macro-textual elements): for example,*** in contracts, consider the (possibly culture-specific) order of inclusion of information about: definitions of names and terms; the signatories, the obligations and rights of both parties; permission or prohibition and consequences of non-compliance. Also, on birth certificates : name of child; of parents; father's occupation; place, date, time of birth; place registered; name of registrar; may also include indication of religious affiliation. It is important to note the order in which such information 'chunks' are presented in genre exemplars from each culture.

17

ii. *realisation of speech acts*: *for example*, contracts, treaties (operative documents) are intended to regulate interaction between the parties signatory to the agreement, formalised in a written document. Conventions exist for recording specific speech acts, which may differ from the way in which language units may be used in LGP (language for general purposes). For adequate TT production it is important to identify not the synactic form used but the underlying illocutionary or perlocutionary force of a speech act.

Communicative intentions can include:

affirmations (A); indicating obligations (O); warning of consequences: (W); promising(P); stating what is allowed (ALL); stating what is not allowed: (NOT); stating what is possible/ likely (Poss)

Examples:

a. extracts**: THE TREATY OF LISBON:**

Article 8 B 1. The institutions <u>shall</u>, by appropriate means,<u> give</u> (A, O) citizens and representative associations the opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action

4. Not less than one million citizens who are nationals of a significant number of Member States <u>may</u> (P) take the initiative of inviting the European Commission, within the framework of its powers, to submit any appropriate proposal on matters where citizens consider that a legal act of the Union is required for the purpose of implementing the Treaties.

Article 8 C National Parliaments <u>contribute</u> (A) actively to the good functioning of the Union

(http://eur-lex.europa.eu/JOHtml.do?uri=OJ:C:2007:306:SOM:EN:HTML)

b. extract**: BT CODE OF PRACTICE (accessed online):**

There are other circumstances when we may (POSS) also send you an interim bill for the calls you have made since your last bill. <u>You must</u> (O) pay any interim bill quickly. <u>If you have not always paid your bills in full or on time, we may also restrict your ability to make outgoing calls until you have brought your payments up to date</u> (W). […]<u>We expect you to pay</u> (O)any deposit before we connect the service. We <u>will tell you</u> (P), in writing, how long we will hold the deposit for (normally one year). <u>As long as you pay your bills in full and on time during this period, we will return the deposit to you</u> (P). If you choose to receive a bill each month, you <u>must </u>(O) pay by direct debit. Business customers <u>will have to (O)</u> pay all charges for the service as often as we tell you at the beginning of your contract.

(http://www.btplc.com/Thegroup/Regulatoryinformation/Codeofpractice/Consumer codeofpractice/ConsumerCodeofPractice.htm)

c. extracts: **RYAN AIR PASSENGER REGULATIONS**:

All electronic equipment will need to be removed from the item of hand baggage and screened separately. (*not necessity but obligation- polite*)
….
Passengers should check in no later than 2 hours prior to their scheduled flight departure, to allow sufficient time to check in and to clear security.

18

Flights cannot wait for passengers delayed at security points. (*implied warning/ perlocutionary effect: If you are late you will not be allowed to board your flight*).

*iii. **measurements: medical reports, patient notes***:

Hb 10 (for 2 units of packed cells),WBC 10.6, Plt500, Ur 4.3, Na 131 Alb 34 Biochem and LFT normal, Mg. 76CEA 60, CA 19-9 19.5.

These can be 'unpacked' through careful consultation of medical databases or with medical experts. Some are abbreviations for SL words: WBC (white blood cells), Plt (platelets) which will have a corresponding abbreviation in the TL. Some are internationally recognised, e.g. symbols used for chemical elements (Na = Sodium). Conventions for measurements of drug doses can be checked in language specific compendia.

3. ***Interlingual* problems** (LGP syntax and lexis, sometimes used in special way for LSP; LSP terminology (T), collocations ©);

The patient <u>presented</u> (*LSP use of LGP verb, used intransitively whereas in LSP this is transitive*) with nausea and mediastinal (T) discomfort, despite the Domperidone and Prednisolone (pragmatic). She has lost quite a lot of weight (50kg). Appetite is poor. I have arranged an urgent <u>CT Scan</u> (T) in case these <u>symptoms</u> (T) are due to <u>disease progression</u> (C) but I am delighted to say that in fact the <u>tumour</u> (T) is <u>significantly smaller</u> (C) than it was prior to the <u>radio-chemotherapy</u> (T) with no disease elsewhere. The <u>stent</u> (T) is <u>fully patent</u> (T/C) and there is no <u>organic cause</u> (C/T) to her symptoms. It is possible that she has been very anxious and I have tried to <u>allay her anxiety</u> (C). I have suggested to take the Domperidone regularly and have substituted Prednisolone with Dexamethozone 4mg per day, also increased her Omeprazole to 40mg per day.

4. Text specific problems: this refers to ways in which special effects are created within a specific text (cohesive devices, metaphors, play on words, other stylistic mechanisms for creating impact) – not so commonly found in LSP texts, particularly those where the dominant communicative function is informative, or operative in an instructional sense. There are some very useful studies of text-specific effects in operative texts such as promotional literature and advertisements (Adab, Valdes Rodrigues 2004, De Mooij 2005). Other text-specific effects will include mechanisms for cohesion, which, for LSP texts, may in fact be more a question of genre and text-type specific conventions (intercultural problems).

Research competence - using sources

We have highlighted a few examples of potential problems for translation of specialised texts. How can a translator ensure that these are all dealt with

19

appropriately in TT production ? The answer should be obvious within a functionalist approach: research is needed to determine TL addressee expectations through analysis of a range of reliable TL exemplars of the genre and text type. The questions to ask are: WHERE and HOW to conduct relevant research, and HOW to identify reliable exemplars. We have already noted Bowker and Pearson's recommendation to use specialist corpora (2002). Corpora can be used for different purposes, such as: subject/encyclopaedic knowledge; terminology; text type conventions. The most reliable source of such information will be authentic examples of use in context, generally in a written text, produced by a reliable and authoritative author and published in an expert source, usually collected to form a custom-made corpus.

Corpora: A collection of texts, known as a corpus, must always be carefully planned, to ensure that any information gathered from these texts is both representative and reliable, up to date, accurate and widely used. Prior to collection, the translator needs to determine the time span for production of the texts (depending on the subject); the text type; the subject content and degree of specialisation; length; geographical location and type of source of publication - this will also point to addressee profile, including degree of assumed domain specific expertise; and any other relevant criteria.

Corpora can be: monolingual in each language in contact (SL and TL), bi- or multi-lingual, or comprise parallel texts (source and target text pairs, or one source text with a range of target language versions). Parallel texts from reliable translation sources can be useful to check previous translation choices, to be tested against authentic texts in the TL.

Corpora can also consist of comparable texts: of the same text type – for checking text type conventions; or texts on the same subject, of comparable authority on the subject area.
It is very often possible to constitute a reliable corpus from selected internet sources, to complement authentic printed exemplars in each language, as long as careful analysis is undertaken to identify any differences between online and printed text type conventions (eg, insertion of additional information through tables, or hyperlinks).

Such corpora will be important to glean sufficient understanding of the subject and the particular aspect of the subject treated in the ST, as well as for identification of relevant terminology.

Terminology can also be checked in on-line terminological databases, garnered from specialist texts and checked against other texts for frequency of use. For company or institution-based translation, it is important to check whether there is an in-house, or institutional (national or international) standardised terminology for the domain (e.g ISO – International Standards Organisation:
http://www.iso.org/iso/home.htm). Dictionaries tend not to be so reliable as they are not updated as often as usage in some disciplines evolve, although this will of

20

course depend on the shelf life of knowledge in the discipline (compare IT software evolution on a short term basis with fixed knowledge base over a longer term for horse-racing). There are some very useful on-line terminological databases covering a wide range of domains, easily found by a KWIC (key word in context) search using your preferred search engine.

Developing a systematic approach to specialised translation

At Aston University we have developed an introduction to LSP translation that is offered both to final year undergraduates and MA students in our translation programmes. The training draws on all the considerations discussed above, and consist of a guided introduction to the approach through sample domain-specific topics, followed by individual research on a domain and genre/ text type of the student's choice (by agreement).

Preparation: Students are required to undertake reading about culture-specific issues, intercultural and interlingual characteristics of the text type for English, as their mother tongue or current language of habitual use. Seminar work involves analysis of exemplars of the text type, from the domain set for that seminar, working in pairs to identify examples in the texts provided of key characteristics on which they have already made notes and which have been discussed at the start of the seminar.

Raising awareness: For groups of international students (MA), the emphasis will remain on identifying text type conventions and use of language from English texts. For groups working between a given language pair (undergraduates), they will then be asked to undertake a similar analysis of exemplars taken from target language sources, seeking always to establish a comparative and contrastive view. Discussion in seminars includes explanation of individual research, to allow sharing of good practice and useful sources. However, guided reading and sample papers are made available so that all students have a common grounding in each domain.

Assessment: To demonstrate their grasp of the challenges of LSP translation, students have to:

a. produce a written project discussing the nature of LSP translation and the challenges involved (giving examples from their corpus/ chosen domain, giving a comparative and contrastive view of similarities and differences between a given language pair (undergraduates) or between English and their mother-tongue (MA and undergraduate).

b. translate an exemplar of their chosen LSP domain/ text type, under exam conditions, using all their notes and project work (undergraduate).

For both groups, projects are accompanied by:

- a corpus or corpora of exemplars of their chosen text type
- comparative and contrastive tables of text type conventions for the two languages studied

21

- ▪ a bi-lingual terminology of key terms
- ▪ all sources consulted, printed or online, including reference sources, terminologies, domain-specific sources and expert writings in specialised and general translation (theory and practice).

By adopting this approach, it is possible to sensitise translators, trainees or practising, to the main challenges of LSP translation and to equip them with relevant strategies to deal with these challenges. Developing awareness also includes sensitivity to the limits to the competence of the individual, based however on the degree of domain-specific knowledge required to understand the ST, and on concomitant legal accountability, not on prior training in the subject. Comparable texts in the TL serve as a basis for translation decisions and also for translation quality assessment, by the translator and by the assessor.

Students are often surprised at what can be achieved through a systematic approach, which includes targeted research to support decision-making, and clear guidance in the stages of the process, can produce functionally-adequate target texts for a range of quite challenging specialised texts, working either from mother-tongue into L2 or from L2 into mother-tongue. Of course, directionality is another debate, not to be addressed here (see, for example, Adab 2005; Kelly 2003).

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23

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