STRATEGIES IN TRANSLATING INFORMATION LEAFLETS

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ABSTRACT. Strategies in Translating Information Leaflets. The study of translation is a very important and complex activity because it extends beyond the linguistic domain, helping us to understand culture and society. The aim of this paper is to analyze the translation of some Romanian information leaflets and to reach new conclusions, while at the same time presenting some translation strategies which must be known in order to enlarge our cultural horizons. By this we intend to underline the fact that translation is a process of communication that requires syntactic, semantic and pragmatic knowledge.

Keywords: translation, translator, intercultural communication, intercultural competence, bilingualism.

REZUMAT. Strategii în traducerea pliantelor cu informații. Studiul în domeniul teoriei şi practicii traducerii este o activitate importantă și foarte complexă, deoarece aceasta depășește domeniul lingvistic, determinându-ne să înțelegem cultura și societatea care ne înconjoară. Scopul acestei lucrări este de a analiza procedeele prin care s-a realizat traducerea unor pliantele și broșurile de interes turistic. Vom încerca să ajungem la noi concluzii și, în același timp, să descoperim strategiile de traducere care trebuie cunoscute pentru a ne lărgi orizonturile culturale. Prin acest studiu, intenționăm să subliniem faptul că traducerea este un proces de comunicare ce necesită complexe cunoștințe sintactice, semantice și pragmatice.

Cuvinte cheie: traducere, traducător, comunicare interculturală, competență interculturală, plurilingvism, multilingvism.

1. Introduction

In recent decades there has been a continuous development on economic, political and cultural levels in every European country and, therefore, researchers...
have shown renewed interest in investigating the field of language use in order to better understand the role of translation and thus to contribute to the development of a stabilized society and culture in today’s European context. We have chosen to study translation because we consider it to be a domain that combines fields such as linguistics, literary studies, cultural history, philosophy and anthropology, which throws new light on much-debated interdisciplinary issues. Furthermore, in recent years there has been an increased awareness of the complexity of translation studies and an enhancement of the status of the translator and of the translated text.

2. Theorizing translation

Throughout history, translation has made inter-linguistic communication between peoples possible. The theory and practice of translation has been in constant change and reinterpretation. Translation has typically been used to transfer written or spoken source language texts to (more or less) equivalent written or spoken target language texts. In general, the purpose of translation has been to ‘reproduce’ various kinds of material such as religious, literary, scientific, and philosophical texts in another language and thus make them available to a wider audience. According to E. Nida, translating consists in “reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style” (2003: 12). However, different cultures and the intercultural competence and awareness that arise out of the experience of different cultures are far more complex phenomena than it may seem, and the more aware the translator can become of these complexities, including power differences between cultures and genders, the better a translator he/she will be (Robinson 1997: 222).

Harris and Sherwood proposed the concept of natural translation, “translation done by individuals in everyday circumstances and without special training for it” (1973: 160, apud Toury 1995: 241), which refers to the ability to translate that develops automatically alongside bilingualism. They emphasize that the degree of translation competence increases automatically to the extent to which a child’s ability to use the two languages involved develops. Toury (1986) agrees with the two researchers with respect to the existence of an innate human predisposition to translate but considers that translational competence is a separate ability which does not necessarily develop automatically with bilingualism, but must be learned and trained independently. Nonetheless, he agrees that bilingualism is a necessary but not sufficient prerequisite for translational competence to develop. In addition to an individual’s bilingual competence, an interlingual or transfer competence must be developed.

Lörscher attempts to reconcile these two views by arguing that translational competence will develop together with bilingualism: “every
individual who has a command of two or more languages (even with various degrees of proficiency) also possesses a rudimentary ability to mediate between these languages” (1997: 2006). In his terms, the type of translational competence needed by professional translators is called *evolved natural translation*.

Translators not only need to know their source language (henceforth, SL) well; they must also have a thorough understanding of the field of knowledge covered by the SL and of the social, cultural, or emotional connotations that need to be specified in the target language (henceforth, TL) in order to convey the intended message. As D. Crystal has argued, “translators aim to produce a text that is as faithful to the original as circumstances require or permit, and yet that reads as if it were written originally in the target language” (Crystal, 1997: 346). A translator is at once a professional and a learner as he/she needs to be able to process linguistic materials quickly and efficiently; but they also need to be able to recognize problem areas and to make efforts to solve them in complex analytical ways (Robinson, 1997: 3).

In his 1971 article “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation”, Roman Jakobson distinguishes three types of translation:

1. **intralingual translation or rewording** (an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs in the same language)
2. **interlingual translation or translation proper** (an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language)

Jakobson analyzes translation from a semiotic perspective whereby the verbal sign is understood as the lexical item or grammatical structure. His distinction between interlingual translation and intralingual translation is useful for TV subtitling for the deaf, while intersemiotic translation is used in multi-medial and multi-modal transfer (e.g., software localization or translation for stage and screen), as also suggested by M. Snell-Hornby (2006: 21).

To summarize, the art and craft of translating consists in the translator’s being able to render a message from a source language to a target language through the closest natural equivalent, which presupposes intercultural competence and attention to the context which depends on questions such as what we are speaking or writing about (i.e. subject matter); where the language occurs (i.e. place or publication); and to whom it is addressed.

**3. Translation Strategies**

Translation is a field of various procedures. In addition to word-for-word and sense-for-sense procedures, the translator may use a variety of strategies that differ in importance according to the contextual factors of both
the source language and the target language. In the present paper, we will try
to define the crucial and most frequent procedures used by translators.

The term “strategy” has been used in many contexts (warfare, business
etc.) as the following terms indicate: military strategy, marketing strategies,
economic strategies, strategic management, football strategy, game theoretical
strategy. According to Baker, strategy is “a course of action undertaken to achieve
a particular goal in an optimal way” (2008: 282). In translation studies, the term
translation strategy has been used by several researchers, but the meaning
they have assigned to it varies considerably. A variety of other terms can be
used to mean the same thing: “procedures”, “techniques of adjustment”,
“transformations”, “transfer operations”.

Most researchers agree that strategies are used by translators when
they encounter a problem - usually this means that a direct, literal translation
is not sufficient for the task they are working on. As mentioned above, different
researchers have investigated and described various types of translation
strategies depending on the aspect of translation they were studying. One way of
categorizing translation strategies is in terms of which phase of the translation
process we are looking at.

two different approaches to the definition of “translation strategy”: the procedural
sense (in psycholinguistic and cognitive approaches to translation) and the textual
sense. According to Lörscher, a translation strategy is “a potentially conscious
procedure for the solution of a problem which an individual is faced with when
translating a text segment from one language into another” (1991: 76 apud Baker
2008: 283). The work on translation strategies has focused on their role of solving
translation “problems”, but the first question to be raised is what constitutes a
problem. Chesterman mentions that “a problem for translator X may not be a
problem for translator Y; but both translators may arrive at the same solution”

Another distinction is made between global translation strategies and
local translation strategies (Lorscher 1991:71). Global translation strategies
(translation method) operate at a more general level and represent the overall
strategy translators apply to a text as a whole (the primary choice they have to
make here is how close to the source text they want their target text to be). Local translation strategies (translation procedure) are applied in the
translation of particular language structures in the source text, such as words,
grammatical constructions, idioms. Yet another dichotomy can be established
between imitative translation, which attempts to retain as much of the purely
formal aspects of the source texts as possible, and functional translation,
which aims at transmitting the message of the source text even if this involves
drastic changes in the formal aspects of the text. Newmark (1981) lists the

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following translation methods, at one pole the focus being on the source text/language and at the other on the target text/language: *word-for-word translation; literal translation; faithful translation; semantic translation; communicative translation; idiomatic translation; free translation; adaptation.*

4. Levels of translation

The key historical dichotomy which has dominated thinking about global translation strategies has been that of *free translation* (the linguistic structure of the SL is ignored and an equivalent is found based on the meaning the text conveys) versus *literal translation* (the linguistic structure of the source text is followed, but it is normalized according to the rules of the target language) (Crystal 1997: 347).

Lörscher makes a distinction between sign or form-oriented translating – where subjects transfer source-language text segments on their forms (succession of signs) and by replacing them by target language forms – and sense-oriented translations, where the sense associated with a SL text segment is made explicit by the translator and thus "separated" from it. Furthermore, the two approaches are considered to be two extremes as “neither exclusively sign-oriented nor exclusively sense-oriented procedures can occur in any human translating” (Lörscher 1992: 154). These dichotomies relate to the degree to which strategies may involve manipulating a source text in its transition to a target text, which is determined by the relation between the target text receivers and the source culture.

5. Local strategies. How to handle translation problems

The translation techniques proposed by two Canadian researchers, Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) are *borrowing, calque, literal translation, transposition, modulation, equivalence* and *adaptation*, each of which can be applied at the linguistic levels of lexis, grammar and text. Chesterman (1997: 92-112) divides local translation strategies into *semantic strategies*, i.e. changes mainly relating to lexical semantics and clause meaning (e.g. synonymy, antonymy, paraphrase and trope changes), *syntactic/grammatical strategies* involving purely syntactic changes of one kind or another (e.g. literal translation, loans/calques, phrase and sentence structure changes), and *pragmatic strategies*. The last involve selection of information in the target text (henceforth, TT) governed by the translator’s knowledge of the prospective readership of the translation (e.g. cultural filtering, information changes, illocutionary changes, partial translation, transediting). There is considerable overlap between some of these categories and, in certain circumstances, it is difficult to tell which strategy or combination of strategies is being used.
5.1. Syntactic Strategies

Chesterman (1997) starts his list of syntactic strategies with the local procedures that change the grammatical structure of the TT in relation to the ST. The first syntactic strategy is labelled *literal translation*. The translator follows the SL form as closely as possible. As Chesterman points out, literal translation means that the target language is “maximally close to the SL form, but nevertheless grammatical” (1997: 94).

The next syntactic strategies are *loan translation* and *calques*. *Transposition* is the term Chesterman has borrowed from Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) to refer to any change in word-class, for example from adjective to adverb or verb to noun. *Unit shift* (when a unit in the source text is translated as a different unit in the target text) is a term borrowed from Catford (1965).

*Phrase structure change* is a strategy that refers to changes which take place within the internal structure of the noun phrase or verb phrase. In the *clause structure change* strategy, the change affects the organization of the constituent phrases of the clause (subject, verb, object, adverbial phrases). The *sentence structure change* strategy refers to changes in the structure of the sentence unit. This usually means a change in the relation between main clauses and subordinate clauses.

Textual cohesion refers to how the parts of a text ‘stick together’ to form a fluent comprehensible whole. The *cohesion change* strategy affects intra-textual cohesion, which mainly takes the form of reference through pronouns, ellipses (leaving out direct reference to something that can be understood from previous text), substitution or repetition. In a *level shift* strategy, the modes of expression of a particular item are shifted from one level to another (Chesterman, 1997).

5.2. Semantic Strategies

Some major semantic strategies are *synonymy*, *antonymy*, *hyponymy*. A hyponym is one member of a larger category (e.g. *dog* is a hyponym in relation to *animal*), while a hyperonym, also known as a superordinate term, is the broader term describing the entire category (*flower* is a hyperonym in relation to *rose*).

Converses refer to pairs of opposite verbal structures which express the same semantic relationship from the opposite point of view. The manifestation of the *abstraction change* strategy can be a shift from using more concrete terms to using more abstract terms, or vice versa. In the *distribution change* strategy, the same semantic component is distributed over more items (expansion) or fewer items (compression). *Emphasis change*, according to Chesterman (1997), is a strategy which increases, decreases or changes the emphasis of the thematic focus of the text in translation compared to the original. The *paraphrase* strategy has the effect of creating an approximate
translation of the source language text, often concentrating on the overall meaning of the message and ignoring certain semantic components at the lexical level (Chesterman, 1997).

5.3. Pragmatic Strategies

Among pragmatic strategies there are: cultural filtering – target culture-centred translation; explicitness change – a strategy that makes the target language text either more (explicitation) or less (implication) explicit, by adding or deleting information that could be deduced from the source text; information change – information is added or deleted which is not implicit in the source language text; interpersonal change – affects the overall style of the text, making it more/less formal, more/less technical; illocutionary change – changes the nature of the source language speech act, for example from reporting to a command, or from direct to indirect speech; visibility change – brings changes which increase the “presence” of either the author of the original text or of the translator; coherence change strategy – involves changes on the higher, textual level and includes rearranging, combining or splitting paragraphs or larger sections of the text (Chesterman, 1997).

6. Information leaflets: a case study

We have analyzed a corpus consisting of eight Romanian tourist information leaflets which are addressed to anyone who is interested in the tourist attractions of certain regions in Romania. Following Chesterman’s classification, we have attempted to identify semantic, syntactic and pragmatic translation strategies by comparing the English translations with the Romanian versions of these leaflets.

Figure 1 represents a leaflet that provides information on the Bears’ Cave in Bihor county (Romania), in which we have identified several translation strategies that we present below.

The syntactic strategies consist of literal translations (e.g., “În imperiul rece al beznii” translated as “In the cold empire of the darkness”; “Privirile oamenilor amortite de admiratie” / “The stares of the man benumbed in admiration”; “într-un joc al oglinzilor” / “in a game of mirrors”; “Ochiurile limpezi de apă străjuite de centuri de calcar numite gururi” / “the clear whirlpools guarded by calcite belts”), calques (e.g., Peștera Urșilor de la Chișcău” translated as “Bears’ Cave of Chișcău”; “o mână ignorantă sau un picior neatent”, in English translation “an ignorant hand or a heedless foot”); transposition – noun to adjective (e.g., “de milenii” / “millenary”), expansion of a preposition by means of a noun phrase (e.g., “de 700 de metri” / “with a length of 700 metres”).

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The above-mentioned examples indicate an overuse of word-by-word transpositions, especially in the case of prepositions. Suggested translations for these examples are: “In the cold empire of darkness/gloom”, “People’s faces numb with admiration”, “Bears’ Cave from Chişcău”, “an ignorant hand or a heedless foot passenger”, “for millennia”, “in a mirror game”. Another word-for-word translation is: “Rezervaţia Sânpetrus este renumită” / “has a world wide renown”, which would be correctly translated as “is of world-wide renown”. As the translations suggest, word order in this leaflet (Figure 1) does not follow the rules of English grammar in most cases, especially with respect to the use of prepositions and articles.

The main semantic strategies employed in these translations are **paraphrase** (e.g. “iată de ce” / “this is the reason for”; “pornind de la asemănările izbitoare” / “because of the striking similarity” instead of “starting with the striking similarities”) and **synonymy** (e.g. “respect profund” / “true respect”, where a more adequate translation would be “deep respect”; “o clipă” / “a second”).

Among the pragmatic strategies we have identified repeated instances of **information change** (e.g., “Unicat, de asemenea, este şi scheletul ursului de cavernă” / “It is unique, as well as the bear skeleton from the cave”).

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3 Taken from *Peştera Urşilor*. Transilvania Tour Agency (ed.), in collaboration with Crişana Hotel, Băile Felix, Iadolina Hotel, Stâna de Vale. The authors take full responsibility for the publication of this figure.
in situ, păstrat într-o perfectă conexiune anatomică" translated as “Unique is also the skeleton of the cavern bear in situ, preserved in a perfect anatomical connection that can be found in the active inferior level”; “muzeu şi necropolă deopotrivă” translated as “museum and necropolis”, instead of “both a museum and a necropolis”; “Peştera Urşilor a fost amenajată şi intră în circuitul turistic în 1980” / “The Bears’ Cave was arranged entering the touristic circuit at July 14, 1980” where “The Bears’ Cave was laid out and has been part of the tourist circuit since July 14, 1980” would be correct; “impresionează (…) prin densitatea unică în România” being translated as “is impressive (…) through its density, unique in eastern Europe” instead of “its unique density in Romania”).

Figure 2. Dealul Cetăţii (10x23 cm)

Figure 2 represents one of a total of seven leaflets on Hunedoara county which describe 17 different tourist attractions. Two of them (i.e. Dealul Cetăţii and

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4 Taken from Rezervaţii Naturale din Judeţul Hunedoara, ed. Muzeul Civilizaţiei Dacice şi Romane, Secţia Știinţele Naturii, Deva in collaboration with Arol Trade SRL, Oradea. The authors take full responsibility for the publication of this figure.
Parcul Natural Grădiştea de Munte) are represented in Figure 2, whereas Figure 3 presents Uibăreşti Gorges and Grohot Natural Bridge, all analyzed below.

The most frequent syntactic strategy resorted to by the translator is word-by-word transposition (e.g. “adăposteşte o vegetaţie” / “hosts a vegetation”, “cu o suprafaţă de 30 ha” / “with over 30 ha surface”). Among the semantic strategies have encountered in Figure 2, we mention synonymy (e.g. “municipiu” – “city”) and compression (e.g. “o vegetaţie de un excepţional interes fitogeografic” – “a very interesting vegetation”). In other instances a pragmatic strategy, explicitness, is applied to the translation of Romanian leaflets into English (e.g. “sec. XIII” – “since the XIIIth century”).

Figure 3. Podul natural de la Grohot, Chelle Uibăreştilor (20x23 cm)\(^5\)

\(^5\) Taken from *Rezervații Naturale din Județul Hunedoara*, ed. Muzeul Civilizației Dacie și Romane, Sectia Științele Naturii, Deva in collaboration with Arol Trade SRL, Oradea. The authors take full responsibility for the publication of this figure.
In Figure 3, the syntactic strategy called *word-by-word translation* can be noticed in “rezervație naturală de tip geologic” / “a geological natural reserve”. The semantic strategies identified in the text are: *expansion* (e.g. “Piatra Grohotului” / “Piatra Grohotului Massif”; “este săpat” / “is naturally carved”) and *compression* (e.g., “lungimea sectorului de îngustare depășește 2 km” / “with 2 km length”). Among the pragmatic strategies we have singled out *information change* as the most frequent procedure (e.g. “in bazinul mijlociu al văii Uibărești” / “in the lower basin of the Uibărești valley”). Another important aspect regarding the translation of these leaflets concerns names, some of which are translated while others are preserved in the target language as they are in the source language.

It is rather obvious that, in addition to translation strategies, most leaflets unfortunately contain simply translation errors (syntactic, vocabulary and semantic errors). For instance, the plural of nouns and the use of the genitive are sometimes incorrect (e.g., “Old Mans Council” instead of “Old Men’s Council” for “Sfătul Bătrânilor”). Among the identified spelling errors, we mention: “Lung de 165 m și cu o lățime medie de 60 metri” translated as “it’s dimensions are 165 m length, and 60 m with” (instead of the correct terms “its”, “length” and “width”). Other syntactically incorrect examples are: “Apa este de milenii artizanul unei vesnicii fragile” translated as “The water is the millenary artisan of a fragile eternity”, instead of “Water has been the artisan of a fragile eternity for millennia”; “frumusețile dălțuite în calcar” / “beauties carved in calcite”, instead of “calcite-carved beauties”; “stâncă sumbră, rece, ternă” translated as “somber rock, cold and tarnished” instead of “sombre cold and tarnished rock”; “mai ales” as “specially”, not the correct “especially”; “fiind declarată rezervație științifică” / “being declared scientifically reservation” instead of “being declared scientific reservation” (Figure 1).

7. Conclusions

Translation is a complex process involving skill, preparation, knowledge and an intuitive feeling for texts. Various strategies opted for by translators in conveying the message from the source text to the target language seem to play a crucial role in translation studies. It seems necessary for a translation to produce the same effects on the target text readers as those created by the original work on its readers. Among translation theorists, Andrew Chesterman’s (1997) work has been influential in the area of local translation strategies. His classification, which distinguishes between semantic, syntactic and pragmatic strategies, has proved to be very helpful for our analysis as it offered a very concise and coherent theoretical framework that could be applied to translation procedures.

The eight Romanian information leaflets we have analyzed exhibit several peculiarities. Their role is to be informative and interesting, and should
be tailored to meet the needs of tourists. However, although the Romanian
texts consist of rich information, the English translations are rather wanting,
lacking a detailed description of specific tourist attractions and being poor in
rendering a complex and coherent text due to various reasons.

We have noticed that a rather low level of information is present in the
majority of target texts analysed above. Thus, there are omitted translations in
several paragraphs (e.g. the translation of “Parcul Natural Grădiștea de Munte
Ciclovina” – the second text of Figure 2). This lexical simplification may be due
to the genre of translation, since information leaflets are not directed at a
specific audience but are intended to hold the attention of a general public,
especially tourists who may be expected to wish to follow the text easily.
Nevertheless, the decision regarding what is of interest to the tourist and what
not should not be taken upon him/herself by the translator. In fact, spelling
and grammatical mistakes are probably motivated by the poor training of the
translator, who opts for an escaping strategy which is most frequently
illustrated by the word-by-word method used in these leaflet translations.

Most of the translations have relied on word-by-word transposition,
the sense-for-sense procedure being less frequent. It is well-known that the
consistent translation of a term of one language by a term in a second language is
impossible. Therefore, the role of word-by-word transposition is to indicate a
departure from word-for-word rendering, since a good translation must convey
all the information, be it scientific or otherwise. Besides being able to transfer
the meaning of the original text, a translation must be made coherent by
means of linking words, which are also scarce in our leaflets.

We consider our text analysis not to be exhaustive; it is of course
possible to apply the above-mentioned translation strategies to other leaflets
as well. For further research we intend to analyze a larger corpus of tourist
information leaflets which have been translated into several languages and to
compare Romanian leaflets to those from other countries. We will investigate
the relative difficulty of translation strategies in different languages and aim to
identify other methods for translating Romanian texts.

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