# PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF TRANSLATION: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

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**Abstract**

*In the context of globalization the question of translation is fundamental. Translation studies and various interdisciplinary links to other related fields have built a solid theoretical foundation, which should constitute a starting point for real-life translation work. However, many times we get "lost in translation" and a basic question arises. How can we bridge the gap between what we learn and what we practice in the field of translation? This paper tries to answer the question.*

## Introduction

Translators are vital for dialogue, being central figures in the process of exchange and cultural cross-communication. In addition, translation is a tool and a medium for the freedom to express difference. The expression of cultural and linguistic diversity is of great importance. Indeed, translation permits each and every one of us to use our language of preference – our mother tongue, without having to borrow a lingua franca with which we may not be very familiar. In this sense, translation leads to understanding without reducing variety of expression. It accordingly expresses the variety and nuances of linguistic and, hence, of cultural diversity. By promoting translation, we can better serve the cause of cultural diversity and dialogue between cultures.

The role of mediation played by translation is all the more effective in an age of globalization, when the local and global are moving closer together and, sometimes, merging. We are witnessing, on the one hand, an undeniable rise in the value of all languages because of their uniqueness while, on the



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other hand, we see a steadily growing need to communicate beyond linguistic and territorial frontiers. The two requirements can coexist peacefully thanks to translation which, in this situation, becomes a unique means of expressing the local and the global, a tool for promoting openness and a common ground for the specific and the universal to meet.

In the contemporary world, the practice of translation has become as widespread as the use of one's first or second language. This can be seen particularly well in areas where people use one or two languages to make themselves understood in everyday life. Transylvania is one such region, where the mixture of ethnicity and cultures is a factor that influences people's lives, behavior and attitudes. In a place where people who have different native tongues, cultures and backgrounds, translation comes as naturally as leaves to a tree. Considering only two (the Hungarian minority, the German minority) of the many nationalities we have around us, we can see that from a very early age the people here are confronted with transposing realities of their own language into words from a different language. In this way we are assigning meanings to the most common of things, such as names of objects we use everyday. This word by word translation from the early life stages has become a basic cultural transfer, which is then applied in later life by individuals as they learn how to adapt in a global society. Foreigners from countries where one language is predominant and the cultural mix is not so widespread have noticed the ease in dealing with concepts and language issues, which frequently occurs here.

Moreover, language acquisition seems to be an easy task for Romanians, especially if we refer to the learning of English. English language skills of Romanians are assessed yearly, as many young people sit in for language proficiency examinations, such as the CAE, where in 2004 Romanian exam takers had a total pass rate of 80% in March and 79% in December. These results demonstrate a high interest as well as proficiency and they demonstrate the good abilities for learning. Taking the Cambridge tests is also a recommendation found on a site used by translators in Romania, www.tradu.ro

**Background of Romanian translators**

The competencies of translators in our country are tested and certified in two ways. One can become an authorized translator by graduating a Philology Profile at one of the universities in our country and sending in the documentation to the Ministry of Justice, together with some recommendations. Another way is to take an exam organized by the Ministry of Culture in one of the



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fields offered. These tests cover a range of fields from Law to Engineering, Medicine, etc. This certificate can then be used to apply for the authorization from the Ministry of Justice, which is required everywhere as a proof of competence and is the only recognized instrument in Notary Public offices.

Obtaining certification is the easiest task a translator is faced with. Many times Philology graduates do not realize the complexity of the profession they choose when they apply for the certificate from the Ministry of Justice. Their background is far from practical, in the sense that translation work at university for philology students is limited to some general topics and literary translations, which will prove to be scarce when they start work in an office or as freelance natural persons. Students attending Applied Modern Languages courses will be luckier in the sense that their studies are sometimes more practically oriented, tackling a variety of subjects and doing some terminological work. Even so, universities and courses offer mainly tools and instruments that will have to be applied later in practice.

**Challenges**

Translators and interpreters need to be aware of what they have to deal with in their work. A translator must remember that he/she needs to be a learner at all times.

The relative accuracy of lexical equivalents has long been recognized as problematic in translating and interpreting. Moreover, translation presents particular difficulties for the translator, considering the "cultural asymmetry" between different systems. Whereas in English-speaking countries concepts, procedures and rhetoric have been moulded by a certain history and experience, this will not necessarily be shared by speakers of target languages. Similarly, French terms reflect concepts and practices of the system and thus cannot be considered as exact equivalents of the English terms. The interpreter and translator must therefore find the means of overcoming the lack of lexical equivalents that are articulated differently in other systems.

A huge challenge is the preservation of one's identity, particularly in the case of interpreting, in dialogues. Interpreters may choose to project themselves in terms of their status as participants in the exchange. The global society, the overuse of the English language may play a role in the destruction of identity. The dominance of English in so many domains may be leading to erosion of language-specific discourse norms and conventions and a superimposition of English-language ones. The relationships



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between translators and their patrons can also be difficult at times, if they don't work on their on. These are only a few of the things that courses do not cover. Moreover, a critical issue for the global society and the specificity of tasks for translators is the ability to meet clients' requirements. A key factor is the realization that we can never claim to be able to translate everything. As translators who constantly have to learn, we must focus not only on language but also on socio- economic and cultural norms that are constantly changing. The major task is to be concise, clear and coherent, as this is what the market requires. Furthermore, you have to have an attitude. "The translator who says nothing, doesn't phone, doesn't ask any questions — who carries on as if everything is crystal clear and doesn't bother making suggestions, highlighting nuances, or making corrections to the original" is rarely one that is successful in the long run. (Durban, 2002)

**Some practical examples**

What does a translator do on any given day in his office? They translate birth certificates and other similar documentation, letters of invitation, technical specifications, bid offers, balance sheets, car registration documents, criminal records, etc. Most work requires acknowledgement of the translator's signature before a Notary Public, which means that legal language is used to a large extent. What problems can occur?

The relative accuracy of lexical equivalents has long been recognized as problematic in translating and interpreting. (Stern, 2004) Moreover, the translation of legal texts presents particular difficulties for the translator, considering the cultural differences between different legal systems. Whereas in English-speaking countries legal concepts, courtroom procedures and rhetoric have been moulded by a certain history and experience, this legal culture will not necessarily be shared by speakers of the target languages. Similarly, Romanian legal terms reflect concepts and practices of the civil law system and thus cannot be considered as exact equivalents of the English terms. The interpreter and translator must therefore adapt to the terminology for legal practices, articulated differently in other systems.

Certain conditions might lead to a better handling of obstacles to effective translation. Such conditions would include the interpreters' higher level of qualifications and expertise experience in translating and interpreting legal deliberations, opening and closing addresses, etc. The availability of



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background and reference materials and interaction with specialists is a must for translators in the contemporary society.

The Romanian Tribunal doesn't essentially employ professionally trained and/or linguistically educated simultaneous interpreters. Moreover, the quality of their work is not appreciated by the legal professionals, whose effective communication with their own witnesses, the other party and each other largely depend on the quality of the interpreting.

The lack of exact legal equivalents between English and Romanian is one of the most difficult aspects of translating from English into Romanian. For example, Romanian lacks equivalents for everyday terms and concepts, such as allegations, cross-examination, pre-trial, to plead guilty/not guilty, beyond any reasonable doubt or balance of probability. Even cognates such as appeal, charges, objection have a different significance in the target languages. Such discrepancies are particularly challenging during the translation into Romanian of official legal documents and judgments. Translators base their strategies for overcoming these linguistic lacunae on thorough research and reliance on reference materials. This can lead to the creation of a language-hybride, a jargon.

Whereas cognates may be helpful in technical areas and often provide single equivalents to technical terms (in medical or scientific discourse, for example), in the legal context this literal approach to interpreting terms more often leads to a semantic discrepancy between the original term and the equivalent in the TL. Instead of ensuring accuracy, the use of cognates leads to an unintended semantic addition or to the stripping of the legal term of some aspects of its original meaning. A loss of intended meaning can also be observed in other cases of word for word translation of collocations, even when these exclude cognates. Thus, translating legal advice as **sfat legal** fails. In Romanian, **sfat legal** is neither a legal term nor the term for a researched, often written, consideration by the party's lawyer.

For technical translations, terminological databases are essential. The stylistic variety and the different layouts and approaches to types of scientific discourse urge translators to learn mother tongue typologies for discursive elements. The rich and highly specialized vocabulary can never fully be mastered but attempts of systematizing knowledge and language equivalents must be a constant concern in the process of transposing meanings in scientific context. Problems occur in technical translations when identifying proper word order, which substantially differs in technical expressions in various languages, using gerunds and infinitives to subscribe to levels of formality or technical register. In technical translations vocabulary items must ensure accuracy of the message to be conveyed. While background knowledge of the subject matter may not be familiar, the effort to translate these texts is



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doubled, as translators need to understand and only then recreate the intended message, in order for clarity to be achieved.

## Conclusions

Not only legal texts need to be acknowledged by the Notary Public. Technical specifications, bid documentation and accounting documentation must be officially recognized as well. Terminological databases can be useful, but it's the direct cooperation with the client that can be of greater help. But sometimes it is challenging to work with Romanian specialists who don't speak English, but have learnt a few terms in their field of expertise. They have a vague idea and have heard or read the terms, but an accurate variant is hard to find. The task at hand may become even harder, consulting a specialized vocabulary. Sometimes, too much information can still leave you in the dark. Such would be the case of a useful site dictionary.4romania.com, where many terms occur, but it is not the kind to explain terminology or give instructions to the use of the terms. In addition, constant reading and keeping informed with the latest tendencies should be a translator's golden rule. The Internet is a rich resource to find information and equivalents for tricky issues. Teamwork would be essential, with specialists from other disciplines, as well as with colleagues from the same field. Personally, I recommend individual study. Give yourself time to explore the great diversity offered by this wonderful tool for translators, the world wide web. Some useful sites: http://www.foreignword.com, for literary translations try The British Councils's Literary Translation page http://www.literarytranslation.com Accessing http://www.linguabase.com/tips.asp, you fill find a pertinent list of things suggested for consideration. You won't be sorry to read it.

Translators and interpreters need to be aware of the features peculiar to specific types of language. This awareness can be achieved through training in workshops, focussed presentations by specialized trainers and ongoing exchange with professional colleagues.

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