WHY DO TECHNICAL TEXTS HAVE TO BE HANDLED BY A TECHNICAL TRANSLATOR?

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Abstract: The present article aims to find out why technical texts require technical translators. Technical translators make texts with technical jargon readable for a wider audience. We have taken into consideration the role of the technical translator in the shipbuilding industry, when and where is he/ she needed, by who, e.s.o. Another issue to be discussed is the multifaceted background and a high level of knowledge of the subject and relevant terminology required from the translator since 5-10% of the technical document are highly specialized terms. All the issues to be discussed will allow us to draw a profile of the ideal translator of naval architecture texts in nowadays society taking into account the fact that engineers are competent users of English and one might wonder if a translator is needed.

Keywords: technical translator, audience, translator, competence, performance

Starting from G. Steiner's striking assertion that "inside or between languages, human communication equals translation" (G. Steiner 1975:47), one could say that all communicators are translators. This is possible because as receivers (whether listeners or readers), they face essentially the same problem: they receive signals (in speech or writing) containing messages encoded in a communication system which is not identical with their own. We consider matters do not stand like this with the translator.

According to G. Steiner (1975:45), "any model of communication is at the same time a model of translation of a vertical or horizontal transfer of significance". No two historical epochs, social classes, localities use words to signify exactly the same thing, and neither do two human beings.

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This underlies particular views of reading according to which making sense of a text means is to deconstruct it and then to reconstruct it (R. Bell 1991:14).

A question may arise regarding the difference between the translator (or the interpreter) and the normal communicator. It is the re-encoding process which makes the translator differ language communities (House 1977:1). It means that the translator decodes messages transmitted in one language and encodes them in another.

If it is, in any sense, true what P. Newmark (1988:85) said that "any fool can learn a language ..., but it takes an intelligent person to become a translator", then the investigation of what this "intelligence" implies is worth making.

First, the translator is an applied linguist who has certain obligations to the furthering of our understanding of language and of our ability to explain the acts of communication in which we are continually engaged.

Secondly, as translation "lato sensu" is one of the most powerful means of negociation between communication partners, the translator has meta-communicational status, being a sort of a third party to the initial communication on the one hand, and having to establish a hypothetical situation of communication in the LC_2 on the other.

He is a mediator between intercultural situations of communication. This is based on his personal perception of the Cultural Equation and on cultural competence. This competence is objective, i.e. based on interlinguistic techniques accumulated through practice and instruction, and subjective, i.e. the mediator creates both the translation options and the conditions in which they are to be inscribed.

He mediates between two situations; he "will take it upon himself to define the norms and options that need to be established between two Language Cultures", as L. Hewson and J. Martin mention (1991:27).

Thirdly, at first sight, it seems that the translator, called the Translation Operator (TO), explores LC_2 with the aim of finding the "equivalent" to what he has discovered in LC_1.

The TO's attention must be drawn to the LC_1 - specific elements of the text, as his reading is always situated at the level of difference. He will pay special attention to certain elements which take on a particular importance when considering the text from the LC_2 perspective.

One of the translator's major problems is to analyse the surface syntax of the ST with its explicit clause structures coming to the implicit, underlying, universal meaning

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carried by the propositions, given the fact that there is no simple one-to-one relationship between the syntactic and the propositional structure.

It is obvious that the translator needs:

-syntactic knowledge, i.e. how clauses are used to carry propositional content and how they can be analysed to retrieve the content embedded in them;

- semantic knowledge, i.e. how propositions are structured;

-pragmatic knowledge, i.e. how the clause can be realized as information bearing text and the text decomposed into the clauses.

Lack of knowledge in any of these areas affects the translator's competence.

As a communicator, the translator must possess the knowledge and skills which are common to all communicators.

The professional (technical) translator, as Johnson and Whitelock (1987:137), quoted by Hewson and Martin 1991) underline, has access to five distinct kinds of knowledge:

1) SL knowledge;

2) TL knowledge;

3) text-type knowledge;

4)subject area, and cultural knowledge;

5) contrastive knowledge.

In addition, he needs the decoding skills of reading and encoding skills of writing, all of them making up the translator's competence.

The fact must be added here that it is important to point out the danger of working at a micro - textual level. The temptation is to divide the ST into very small units and to look for "equivalents" for each and every unit. Although equivalence does have a certain use it prevents one from clearly seeing what the operations involved in the translating process are. This is very dangerous for students who tend to work at the level of the word anyway. The only option open to the TO is to try to judge the overall effect of the use of words and thus to solve the problem at a macro - textual level.

The TO does not look for an "equivalent", but he seeks to express the "same" reality through LC_2, although a "full" cultural context is replaced by one which is virtually empty, and differently structured anyway. He has to analyses very minutely the various elements which go to make up the overall effect of the ST, such as he comes to interpret it.

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After this analysis, he is faced with what might be called the "concave - mirror effect" of trying to express such elements through another culture. This is explained by: 1) the distorting effect produced by the changing cultures, and 2) by the automatic series of connections which are made within the second culture, and which interfere with the network of connections originally operating in LC_1, as L. Hewson and J. Martin point out (1991:152).

The translator (TO) needs to have bilingual and bicultural competence. The production of homologous sets in LC_2 is closely related to the translator's bilingual and bicultural competence. His contribution is decisive because it clarifies the difference between what is acquired and what is generated in the translating process, between competence and production. Homologizing procedures are useless without bicultural competence. Homologies correlate structures by establishing global correspondences of factors within different relational systems, as L. Hewson and J. Martin (1991:49) point out. They also consider that concerning lexical problems, the syntagmatic or "definitional" paraphrase enables the translator to pass over the arbitrary boundaries between lexis and syntax. Their opinion is also shared by L. Levițchi (1975, 1993:6)

No reformulation is conceivable without a mediator. Besides his function as the vehicle of a certain cultural equation, his specific intervention can be defined according to two different lines of consideration.

He represents a distinctly psycho-socio-cultural stance which he reflected in his productions. That is why translations are bound to be renewed in keeping with the cultural changes; they also bear the imprint of the translator.

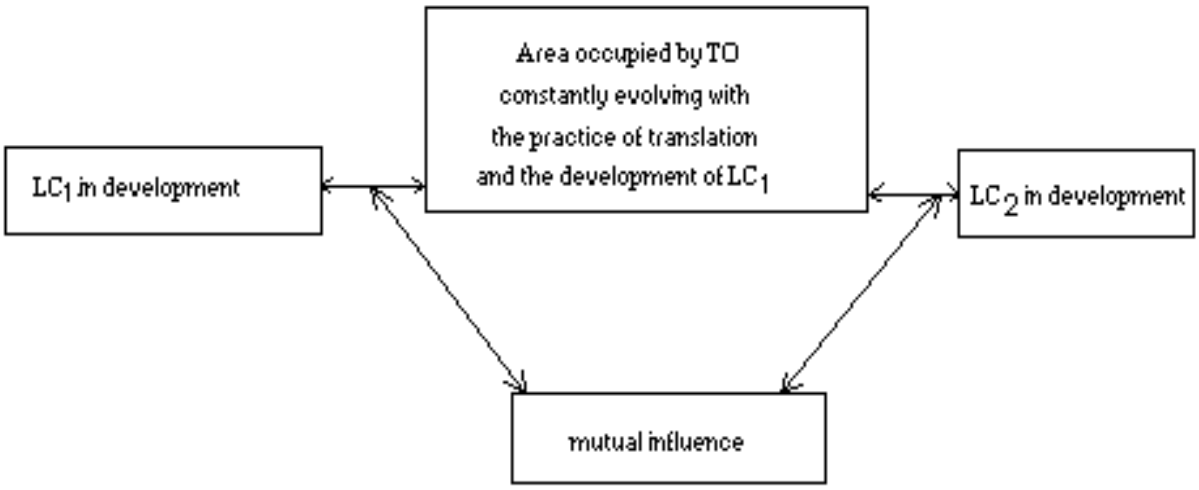
TO's position. The TO must be competent in two LC_s, that is he must have the knowledge and practice of two independently developing entities. He must have a position from which he can compare and convert from one LC into the other. The area he occupies is a no-man's land whose boundaries, LC_1 and LC_2, are changing shape and size, because the LC_s evolve and influence each other.

However the translator is not midway between the two. He is always anchored, to a greater or lesser extent, in one LC. His being in the middle ground involves competence.

The TO's position was represented by L. Hewson and J. Martin (1991:135) as follows:

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The area occupied by the translator
(source Croitoru 1996:142 apud L. Newson and J. Martin 1991:135)

Consequently, the TO's competence is measured by his ability to analyse, compare and convert two cultural systems, while respecting both the conflicting forces within one LC, and the interplay of these forces as the LC_s are brought into contact.

The translator must be aware of the difficulties in grasping or feeling the intentions, in identifying the allusions, in achieving the equivalence besides overcoming the resistance opposed by the tradition of non-translation (A. Bantaș, 1994:81).

As a conclusion, we could say that we agree with A. Bantaș who both as a translation theorist and as a professional translator, suggests that translators should be bound by their obligation as servants of two masters: selling to customers (readers or spectators) the original product (the writer's work) without cheating in either quantity, or in its original form, including colours, musicality, etc. He adds that "to push the metaphor further, translators should pack coffee without decoffeinizing it and also preserve its full flavour" (A. Bantaș 1994:81).

Consequently, translation depends upon the interpretive as well as linguistic, semantic and creative ability and cultural knowledge of the translator.

1)The translator's work is more difficult than that of the original author.

2)A restricted view of translation as the replacement of a SL textual material by an equivalent TL textual material at the levels of grammar and lexis goes hand in hand with the low status accorded to the translator.

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3)The translator seeks the universal through the particularity of languages.

4)The different translations of the same ST largely depend upon the initial choices made by the translator.

5)The translator, i.e. translation operator (TO), is a mediator between two different language communities, between two intercultural situations of communication.

6)The translator must have syntactic, semantic and cultural knowledge. Thus, he needs bilingual and bicultural competence.

7)The TO's competence is his ability to analyze, compare and convert two cultural systems, respecting both the conflicting forces within one language culture (LC), and the interplay of these forces as the LC_s are brought into contact.

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