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DIFFICULTIES IN TRANSLATING PASSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN NAVAL ARCHITECTURE DISCOURSE

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Abstract: Our research article is an insight into passive constructions present in the naval architecture discourse. The present research article aims at identifying difficulties encountered in translating passive constructions in naval architecture texts. In order to achieve this aim, passive constructions are identified and the Romanian equivalent is analyzed to discover if and why is the best choice for the translator of naval architecture text.

Keywords: difficulty, active/stative verbs, passive constructions, naval architecture

1. Introduction

According to some linguists, *difficulty* and *difference* are synonymous. This is by no means self-evident, because what is often identified as a difference and predicted as a difficulty often turns ont not to be so. A particular feature of the TL which is different from the SL is not necessarily difficult to translate. S.P. Corder (1987) considers that in learning a foreign language, difficulty is "clearly a psycholinguistic matter, whereas difference is linguistic". We consider that in translating and interpreting, difficulty is at least both a psycholinguistic and a linguistic matter, if not linguistic to a much greater extent.

Any stretch of language may offer one type of difficulty or another, if not more. It is almost impossible to work out hard and fast rules for translation covering all subtleties and difficulties, but an evaluation can be made, as A. Banta_ puts it, from a "conscious, global thoroughgoing contextual analysis to a realistic translation" (A. Bantaș: 1994).

Translation difficulties involve the difficulties of learning to use a language both receptively and productively. This, of course, is rooted, in the distinction between productive (encoding) and receptive (decoding) linguistic performance and competence.

2. Materials and Methods

In order to study the way(s) passive constructions can be translated into Romanian, a corpus of 22,000 words has been consulted, taken from different subjects of E S T, i.e. welding technology and equipment, machine building technology, robotics, metallurgy, ship architecture, electrical engineering, machine-tools, mechanics and physics. We have also used all the bilingual newsletters from Damen Shipyard Galati which are no longer available on the shipyard's website, but are available at the shipyard's library.

3. Results

Because of its widespread use in technical and scientific English, the passive has had a strong influence on similar registers in other languages through translation. The high frequency

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of the passive constructions in scientific and technical English is due to the impression of objectivity they must give, to the distance between the writer and the statements he makes in the text. The more pervasive a structure becomes in a given context, the more difficult it becomes for speakers and writers to select other structures or to depict events differently (M. Baker: 1992). So much the more difficult it becomes for the translators, because rendering a passive structure by an active one, or conversely an active structure by a passive one in translation can affect the amount of information given, the linear arrangement of semantic elements such as agent and affected entity, and the focus of the message. That is why, one of the translator's tasks is to differently (M. Baker: 1992). So much the more difficult it becomes for the translators, because rendering a passive structure by an active one, or conversely an active structure by a passive one in translation can affect the amount of information given, the linear arrangement of semantic elements such as agent and affected entity, and the focus of the message. That is why, one of the translator's tasks is to weigh the potential change in content and focus against the benefits of rendering a smooth, natural translation in context where the use of the passive would be stylistically less acceptable than the use of the active or an alternative structure in the TL. The tendency, however, to translate English passive structures literally into a language which normally uses it less frequently is often criticized.

The strategy of voice change may be used, and it consists in changing the syntactic form of the verbs to achieve a different sequence of elements. Thus, the active may be substituted for the passive and vice versa. The strategy of substituting the active for the passive raises the problem of supplying a subject for the active clause. The subject of the active clause must preserve the impersonality usually associated with passive structures. There are many cases when a Romanian writer would use active, but the translator would use the passive. For example, the active sentence *Acest studiu prezintă o serie de proprietăți ale materialelor folosite în inginerie.* associated with passive structures is more frequent than its passive counterpart *S-au studiat / au fost studiate o serie de ...*

But the translator into English would prefer a passive structure because of its high frequency is English: *A number of properties of the engineering materials were studied.* instead of its active counterpart: *This study reports on a number of properties of the engineering materials.*

The fact must be added here that Romanian does not favor the formulae or semi-fixed expressions used in formal English correspondence which rely heavily on using the passive for distancing, for turning the writer into an agent of an objective process.

Such phrases in Romanian make use of the active voice. For example, in a conference circular, an expression such as *Vă invităm....* sounds much more natural in Romanian than *You are invited,* although both are possible. The active verbs in the Romanian formula *Așteptăm lucrări ...*, or *Sunt binevenite ...* are translated into English by the passive:*Papers are invited on all aspects of.../Papers related to the latest researches on such technologies will be particularly welcome.*

The English passive construction often favors the use of a modal, unlike the modal / future passive / reflexive alternation in Romanian:

SOURCE LANGUAGE	TARGET LANGUAGE
Rezumatele trebuie trimise / vor fi trimise / se vor trimite ...	*The abstract should be sent ....* *Individual presentations should be timed ...* *A response must be sent ...* *Any other correspondence can be addressed to ...*

In the technical and scientific rhetoric of descriptions, the passive is very common and clauses are often "nominalized". Thus, such constructions as,

e.g. *Rectification of this fault is achieved by insertion of a wedge.*

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are very frequent in EST.

4. Discussion

R. Quirk et al. (1985) relate the frequency of the passive forms to the distinction between informative and imaginative prose: "the passive is generally more commonly used in informative than in imaginative writing, and is notably more frequent in the objective, impersonal style of scientific articles and news reporting".

In addition, the passive sentences in EST are much clearer, because no mention is made of "people". A scientist does not find it necessary to refer to people, because the mentioning of such a subject as *the turner, the fitter, the experimenter*, etc. does not provide the reader with any useful information.

Another reason for using the passive in EST texts is that in passive sentences, the subject takes front position, and it is into the subject that scientists put much information, if not the essential one. This is in close connection with the focus, as well as with the impersonal, objective nature of the technical and scientific discourse. For example,*A long metal bar is fixed in a retort stand by one end. The other end is heated in a flame until it becomes red. The bar and the stand are then moved away from the heat. The temperature of the hot end of the bar is found to fall rapidly.*

The subjects of these sentences contain a lot of information which catches the reader's attention taking front position. If the subject were animate, i.e. *the experimenter*, or *he*, or *someone*, that is if the sentence were active, the reader wouldn't be given very much useful information, and the subjects would be "repeated in an unhelpful and uninteresting way", as J. Swales puts it (1975:41).

Nevertheless, J. Hitchock (1978:41) criticized this point of view, considering that "it was previously thought that passives were used to de-personalize statements - to make the prose more objective. This view seems to be erroneous and the choice of passive does not seem to be for impersonality in communication, but for focus ... Initial position in the English sentence is normally the strongest for focussing the attention of the reader".

I agree to the last remark only, namely to that concerning focus, which I have already mentioned. As a matter of fact, this is the common mistake in translating. It is due to the English word order which is different from the Romanian one. Thus, while the English sentence begins with the subject, the Romanian one begins with the predicate. The sentences above will be translated as follows: *Se fixează o bară de metal. Se încălzește celălalt capăt. Se deplasează apoi bara și suportul. Se constată că temperatura capătului încălzit al barei scade rapid.*

Another very important argument which should be put forward in favor of the passive is that passive sentences are a little shorter, this being closely related to the conciseness of EST discourse.

One of the difficulties in translating the English passives concerns the syntactic subcategorization principle, one of its variants being the *idiom chunk argument* (or set-phrases). Such *idiom chunks* as *to take advantage of, to take note of,* etc., take front position in the passive sentences in EST, the NP becoming the subject of the passive construction. But in their active counterparts these object idiom chunk NPs occur only immediately after the verb. For example,

SOURCE LANGUAGE	TARGET LANGUAGE
Note must be taken of these drawbacks.	*Trebuie să se ia în considerație aceste inconveniente. / Aceste inconveniente nu trebuie ignorate.*
Advantage must be taken of such long-term	*Trebuie să beneficiem / să se profite de astfel*

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contracts	*de contracte pe termen lung.*

There are also difficulties in translating constructions where passive subjects have the same role, i.e. *goal*, as the corresponding active objects, because the superficial subject NP in a passive sentence is originally in the deep structure the object of the passive sentence. For example, the active counterpart of the passive sentence:

SOURCE LANGUAGE	TARGET LANGUAGE
Your company will soon be sent some samples.	*Se vor trimite companiei dvs câteva mostre / Vi se vor trimite*

As regards the translation of the constructions specific to English in general and to ESP in particular, non-natives find it difficult to understand and translate the "middle constructions", as S.J. Keyser and T. Roeper (1984) call them, i.e. the traditional passivals (verbs active in form but passive in meaning), which are usually translated by the Romanian "reflexiv-pasiv". In these constructions, the deep direct object becomes subject, but the verb remains active. The agent (deep subject) cannot possibly be expressed:

SOURCE LANGUAGE	TARGET LANGUAGE
This surface cleans well.	*se curăță*
Your report reads easily.	*se citește*
The new Chevy is selling badly.	*se vinde prost / nu se vinde bine*
The ore will not transport easily.	*nu se transportă ușor/ nu este ușor de transportat*

The other type of passivals consisting of a *verb of perception (to feel, to taste, to smell* and *to sound*) + *adjective* is rather difficult to translate, because the Romanian syntagm has a different structural pattern. For example, *The finish surface feels rough- este aspră (la pipăit / atingere.* These three verbs of perception (*to feel, to taste, to smell*) occur more frequently in EST passivals than the verb *to sound*. The fact must be added here that meaning and grammar do not always go together, as M. Swan puts it (1985), in the sense that all passive verbs have passive meanings: some English passives cannot be translated by passive constructions. The sentence *English is spoken here.* is often translated by the Romanian passive - *este vorbită-*, which is wrong: * Engleza este vorbită (pe) aici./ Este vorbită engleza (pe) aici./ (Pe) aici se vorbește englezește / engleza.

The active-ing form required by some verbs such as *need, want* and *require* has a passive meaning, which is also difficult to translate *The engine needs repairing.- Motorul trebuie (să fie) reparat / are nevoie de reparații*

Another translation difficulty may be the infinitive structure with the verbs of saying and thinking, such as: *to say, to repair*- Motorul *trebuie (să fie) reparat / are nevoie de reparații.*

Another translation difficulty may be the infinitive structure with the verbs of saying and thinking, such as: *to say, to know, to assume, to expect, to report,* etc.:

SOURCE LANGUAGE	TARGET LANGUAGE
He is said to be a skilled technician.	*Se spune că este un tehnician priceput.* * *El se spune că este ... (Unless emphasis is laid on the subject).* * *(Lui) i se spune c_ este ...*

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Compositional gradients are also known result of the oxygen solubility.	*Se crede / se consideră că mărirea procentului de oxigen este rezultatul solubilității acestuia.* **Creșterea oxigenului este știută / se crede a fi rezultatul ...*
The compositional variation is expected to follow the straight lines for an arc weld.	*Este de așteptat ca variația elementelor componente să urmeze / Ca de obicei, variația elementelor componente urmează / urmărește liniile drepte specifice sudurii cu arc (conform figurii)* ** Variația compozițională este așteptată să urmeze ...*

Adverbs such as *likely, unlikely* occurring in such structures are also difficult to translate *They are likely to be used in fatigue loaded structures.- Sunt probabil folosite ... / Se folosesc probabil .../ E probabil să fie folosite ...*

Non-natives also face a difficult problem in translating passive constructions including the verb *to require*, which are very frequent in EST. The translations may differ function of the subject being animate or inaminate: *The designer is required to use an official standard.-Ii se cere să / trebuie să/ este necesar să folosească un standard oficial.*

The passive is used instead of the imperative form in instructions, which allows the translator to avoid specifying the subject of the verb altogether. For example, *Fix the spindle as usual./ The spindle is fixed as usual.* Romanian favors the passive in such cases: *Se fixează tija ca de obicei.* In translating such sentences, students usually choose the order specific to English (subject-predicate order) which does not sound natural in Romanian.

One of the most frequent problems in translating is that concerning the opposition passive-stative or pseudo-passive. Stative verbs are called by R. Quirk (1985)"pseudo - passives" because "it is chiefly only their superficial form of *verb + - ed participle* that recommends them for consideration as passives". Thus, in terms of meaning, the active sentence corresponding to the passive *The vice is already mounted* is *(Someone) has already mounted the vice*, but not * (Someone) already mounts the vice. It means that *mounted* denotes a resultant state, referring to a state which results from mounting, rather than to the act of mounting itself. R. Quirkat al. (1985) call this construction "statal passive". They include it within the subclass of pseudo - passive verbs with "current" copulative verbs, i.e. *be, feel, look*, etc., and verbs with "resulting" copulative verbs, i.e. *get, become, grow*. On the same ground, M. Swan (1991) includes among the "stative verbs" the verbs *have, lack, fit, suit, resemble*; because they refer to states not to actions. One important point is that such verbs cannot be applied the well-known test of active - passive transformation. When non-natives come across a stative, they misunderstand it, because they assume that any form of *to be + past participle* is passive and take it as agentless passive. That is why they first try to apply the passive - active transformation and make a subject for the active verb by using *someone* or *something*, which was not intended by the writer. As L. Trimble (1985) mentions, "while it is possible to transform a stative sentence into an active one, the result is neither logical nor semantically acceptable as it does not provide the information the writer intended ... It would be a statement of an activity; the writer, however, is not describing an activity but giving a physical (and therefore static) description of the result of an activity" (L. Trimble: 1985). For example,

Passive verbs

e.g. *The heat exchanger assembly is lowered from the compartment while resting on the platform.*

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The platform is lowered and raised by the hoist crank.

This paragraph contains three passives: one without an agent (i.e. *is lowered* in sentence 1, the verb *to lower* marking an activity), and two with an agent (*is lowered* and *raised* in sentence 2, where they also mark an activity).

Stative verbs

e.g. The system *is composed of* an undersea acoustic beacon, a surface-vessel mounted array and a control unit. The sensor *is housed in* a support assembly.

This paragraph contains three *to be + past participle* structures. They appear to be agentless passives, but they are clearly descriptive.

Therefore, in order to see the difference, the passive is contrasted to the stative: in the former, the activity is meant, while in the latter the verbal forms are used descriptively, i.e. they describe the state or the condition of the grammatical subject.

5. Conclusion

To summarize, the most important aspects in translating passives are:

1. the frequency of use of passive and similar structures in the two languages in contact;
2. the stylistic value of such structures in different types of texts;
3. the functions of the passive and similar structures in SL and TL.

The idea is not to render a passive form by a passive one and an active form by an active one, but it is always the function of a category not the form it takes that is of utmost importance in translation. It is very important for the translator to know how to select the appropriate structures in rendering the passive because any change can affect the amount of information given, and the focus of the message.

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