SPECIALIZED TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION

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Abstract: *Translation and interpretation are complex activities, with common characteristics and clear differences. The aim of this article is to point out some of the main similarities and differences between these two branches of the language industry and to present the diverging opinions regarding the issues of specialization in a certain subject area and comprehension of specialized texts and speeches.*

Keywords: *translation, interpretation, comprehension of specialized texts and speeches.*

Basic differences and similarities between translation and interpretation

Translation and interpretation are complex professions. The activities performed by translators and interpreters seem very much alike, but there are many differences between translation and interpretation as processes, on the one hand, and between translators and interpreters, on the other.

As shown by Padilla and Martin (1992, apud Iliescu Gheorghiu, 2006:26) these differences regarding translation and interpretation may be grouped into four categories: a. the understanding of the message in the source language; b. the relationship between the author – translator - reader and speaker – interpreter – public; c. the expectations of the „consumer" in the target language and d. the limit of structural modifications and elimination of details.

Setton (1994:59, apud Iliescu Gheorghiu, *ibidem*) claims that they are in fact independent approaches. In his opinion, the interpreter's ability is not conditioned by his/ her linguistic knowledge. The idea is also sustained by Gile (2009:86), who points out that "the vast majority of speeches made in technical and scientific conferences and most scientific and technical texts probably do not require an extensive knowledge of stylistic and cultural aspects of the source language", as opposed to literary, diplomatic and political Texts, where the contribution of good linguistic knowledge is essential. It is well-known that a translator studies written material in one language (the "source language"- SL) and reproduces it in written form in another language (the" target language" – TL), while an interpreter listens to a spoken message in the source language and renders it orally, consecutively or simultaneously, in the target language (cf. Nolan, 2010:2).

But before getting into more detail, the first aspect that should be mentioned is the difference that resides in their physical capacities. It stems from the roles they have to play: the translator is more like a writer, while the interpreter's performance is like that of an actor. Del Pino Romero (1999, apud Iliescu Gheorghiu, *ibidem*:32) considers that an interpreter must meet the following fundamental requirements: a. a good knowledge of the active/ A language (or mother tongue); b. a good knowledge of the passive/ B set of languages; c. a good memory; d. an extensive general knowledge; e. knowledge about past and current national and international events; f. the ability to synthesize; g. intellectual curiosity; h. quick thinking in order to generate an immediate and effective response and i. increased concentration ability.

First, it is important to answer the question: "Is it useful to specialize in a particular subject area?" The answer is valid in both translation and interpretation. Most

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specialists agree that „it is essential for translators to know the area they are translating well. It is not enough to count on bilingual and monolingual dictionaries, if we want to produce a good specialized translation." (Talaván Zanón, 2011:14). The same opinion is shared by Nolan (*op. cit*.: 4):

> It is easier to translate or interpret with an understanding of the subject. Some tarnslators, for example, specialize in medical translation and obtain regular work from pharmaceutical manufacturers. Some tarnslation agencies specialize in technical, business, or legal translation and rely on translators and interpreters with expertise in those areas."

The author also mentions that specialization in a certain field/ subject area is not always applicable in reality. Thus, most translators and interpreters are generalists out of necessity (still, many more translators than interpreters are specialized). The explanation is logical since the number of specialized fields is huge and it is impossible for a translator or interpreter to be an expert in every field in which there is a demand for translation/ interpretation. (cf. Nolan, *ibidem*:5) Both professionals should possess the ability to assimilate quickly the basic issues and vocabulary of a certain field.

As regards the similarities, the most important characteristics that apply to technical and scientific written communication/ translation (i.e. clarity and conciseness)[78] also form the bases of a good interpretation:

> This is particularly true when interpreting into English, because clarity, concision, and parallelism are positive stylistic values in English. There is nothing "elegant" about a complicated run-on sentence in English, especially if the meaning gets muddled because the speaker or the interpreter has lost track of the syntax. It is better to get the meaning – or at least most of it – across even if some "elegant flourishes" are lost in the process. (Nolan, *ibidem*:25)

It is also easier for the interpreter when speakers use short declarative (and sometimes even more complex) sentences delivered at a moderate speed. The situation is different in the case of long, complex sentences, when a lag of a single sentence or phrase can lead to an omission and inability to catch up. However, there are a few strategies that can be employed in order to cope with such situations. We have chosen to present only two of them, which occur very often and pose problems in both translation and interpretation.

One of the main solutions is to simplify the syntax, "breaking up any long and convoluted sentences into shorter ones, identifying whole ideas or units of meaning, clarifying the relationship between the sentences, […] deleting superfluous and/ or ambivalent conjunctions, and organizing lists of items by means of parallel constructions." (Nolan, *op. cit.*)

Special attention should be paid when we deal with enumerations and especially with that type of structures called "shopping lists". Then "the problem arises because the speaker may or may not use parallel construction in rattling off a long list of items, or because not all of the items may be translatable in the same parallel grammatical form, e.g. with verbs, nouns, or gerunds, in the target language" (Nolan, *ibidem:*33). It is generally accepted that parallelism is only a stylistic requirement and not a hard-and-fast rule. Still, general translation does not consist of reproducing the formal structures of the source language into the target language, but of transferring both the content and the style of the text (Talaván Zanón, *op. cit*.:14).

However, even if failure to observe it does not affect the meaning, the effect is slightly odd. Our attention should clearly be focused on rendering all the items of the

[78] "A paper will be more readable if words are used economically. […] Using fewer words to convey a message almost always improves readability" (Yang, 2008:3).

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"shopping list", but the recommendation is to preserve parallelism, if possible, in the target language, even if it is missing in the source language. This is an easy task for translators and it is also possible in interpretation when the speaker pays attention not only to the information s/he wants to convey, but also to advance signalling of the topic and organisation of the talk: "The introductory sentence or „chapeau" should make it clear that what follows is a list of items. The, the interpreter will have some freedom to maneuver, and can, if possible, maintain parallelism, or, if it is not possible, rephrase the list as necessary." (Nolan, *ibidem*:34).

Specialized translation and interpretation

Compared with general translation, specialized translation implies at first sight at least one additional step, generated by some extra features of the specialized discourse:a. understanding the ST first; b. identifying the specialized linguistic elements or terms that belong to the area of specialization we are dealing with and c. rendering the meaning into the target language (Talaván Zanón, *ibidem*:14 and Iliescu, *op. cit.*:26).

In regard to specialization, in contrast with the opinions presented in the beginning of the article, Gile (*op. cit.*:89) asserts that "sentences in specialized texts and speeches can be represented mentally as logical and functional networks thus making it possible to translate them with limited background knowledge." Comprehension can be achieved if the translators and interpreters rely on their linguistic knowledge and analysis. The time allocated for the analysis of terms is not usually a problem in translation. The challenge appears in the interpretation process, when „cognitive pressure and the limitations of our short-term memory make even such short processing times sufficient to generate serious difficulties and to actually jeopardize the feasibility of the interpreting task."

Further, our analysis will be focused on two diverging types of discourse: the economic and legal discourses.

Economic discourse

Nolan (*op. cit.:*236) approaches the problem of economic discourse and the problems it poses in the interpretation process. He points out that even though writings and oral presentations on economics can be highly technical, "much of the vocabulary of business and economic commentary consists not of technical terms (e.g. "demand elasticity"), but of conventional descriptors (e.g. "a sluggish market")". To reinforce the idea, he argues that many general presentations, especially at the international specialized meeting are based on economic descriptions, as part of the speaker's justification for a statement of position or a policy argument.

That is why the translator or the interpreter must have a good command of the basic vocabulary for economic description. The description is usually derived from mechanistic or organic analogies and the above-mentioned descriptors are not technical terms in the strict sense.

e.g. a market may "soar" or "skyrocket" (mechanistic analogies) or it may "thrive" or "flourish" (organic analogies); on the negative side, an industry might be "anemic" or "sluggish" (organic analogies) or described as "treading water" or "in a state of inertia" (mechanistic analogies). The analogies and metaphors used in the economic discourse are drawn from many other fields, such as graphics ("margin"), geometry ("spiral"), navigation ("in its wake", "budgetary ship", "anchor currency country"), transport ("engine of growth"), medicine ("shock therapy", "symptoms", "diagnosis", "on the mend"), architecture ("foundation", "cornerstone"), meteorology ("stormy", "calm"),

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sports (“level playing field”) and aviation (“take-off point”), physics (“gain momentum”), gastronomy (“hot potato trading”), etc. (cf. Nolan, *ibidem*:237).

Legal discourse

In the field of legal translation and interpretation, terminology is of paramount importance. Chromá (2008:304) emphasizes the fact that legal terminology consists of abstract terms deeply and firmly rooted in domestic culture and intellectual tradition. The first step for a legal translator is the preparatory stage, when s/he has to decode the “culture-dependence” of the terms (or to understand the source text fully). As mentioned before, there are three stages we must take into account for an effective specialized translation: a. basic knowledge of the respective legal systems; b. familiarity with the relevant terminology and c. competence in the target language’s specific legal style of writing.

> Our experience suggests that the translation of legal texts should not be undertaken without an extensive knowledge of the respective legal topic in both the source language and the target language, i.e. the knowledge of concepts, terms denoting these concepts, sentence patterns visualizing the information, genre classification of the text[79], legal culture and so on, in both languages and legal systems.

Furthermore, Joseph (1995:33-34, apud Chromá, *op. cit*.:308) clearly underlines the fact that translators should interpret rather than merely translate (sometimes by interrupting the translation with informed commentaries). He suggests that they should intervene in the text semantically, stylistically and intellectually, to a certain extent, required for a better reading and understanding of the legal text in the target language.

Standardization of terms is the best method to promote specialized knowledge and efficient communication and to avoid the ambiguity of terms. Standardized terms help us remove synonymy and alternative representations of the same concept (e.g. *recklessness, wilful blindness, and ordinary negligence*), and reduce polysemy and homonymy (cf. Tessuto, 2008:297). For many years, the legal vocabulary has been regarded as the only representative part of the language of law, but the terms of art make up only about 25% of the vocabulary (depending on the genre) (cf. Chromá *ibidem*).

In conclusion, the brief analysis of the specialized literature that we have performed reveals that there are no clear-cut criteria or guidelines in the field of translation or interpretation. However, despite the differences between them, the translation and interpretation activities and processes are based on a series of core principles that must be applied to ensure their feasibility.

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[79] Bhatia (1983:2, apud DudleyEvans and St. John, 2007:50) divides legal writing into three main areas: academic legal writing (legal textbooks and research journals), juridicial writing (court judgements, case-books and law reports) and legislative writing (Acts of Parliament, statutory instruments, contracts, agreements, and treaties)

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