

MANAGING PROBLEMS WHEN TRANSLATING ECONOMIC TEXTS

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Theoretically, translation may pass as science; practically, it seems closer to art. Translation is a challenging activity requiring a set of abilities and posing few difficulties that appear during the translation process. This paper investigates the extent to which sub-technical vocabulary can constitute a problem to Romanian students of economics reading in English, by looking at the translations produced as independent or pair work during English classes and analyzing the various errors which may appeared. The exigencies required by the efficient business communication have increased in the past few decades because of rising international trade, increased migration, globalization, the recognition of linguistic minorities, and the expansion of the mass media and technology. All these led us to approach the topic of translation which is actually a job that requires skills, stages of research necessary for disclosure of transfer characteristic into the target language, training, experience and a good sense of languages. The paper defines the theoretical issues and terminology: translation, types of translation, economic texts and then focuses on the presentation of the practical work carried out throughout the academic year of second year students and it also describes the basic skills and strategies that students as translators need to master in their daily experiences with translation tasks. The main skills proposed are: reading comprehension, researching, analytical, and composing skills. Considering that only 28% of the entire European population can read English, and even less people in South America and Asia can, it is obvious that an effective communication of business matters relies on an accurate understanding of terminology. Economics is a field of knowledge in accelerated scientific and technological development. As there is a permanent and ever increasing need to quickly update their knowledge, economists read and learn directly in the original language of the publication and stick to it in daily usage, including conferences, scientific events and articles written in Romanian. Besides researching properly the markets, finding distribution channels, and dealing with legal issues, a successful business person should not neglect the language aspects, be it spoken or translated. These are some of the main reasons why we consider that our students as future graduates should be well-equipped with some of the skills necessary when reading and translating technical texts, be it for personal progress and development or for the job requirements.

Keywords: translation, terminology, skills, problems.

JEL Code: Y90.

1. Introduction

Marketerii consideră că piața locală se canalizează într-un mod mai degrabă natural decât educat, în direcția paid-earned-owned-media.

Pentru a aplica, concurenții trebuie să rezolve un brief dat de Ursus, trebuind să livreze un print și o idee sau un concept de campanie online. (<http://www.roafaceri.com/k>)

... scontarea acreditivelor de export, factoring-ul intern și scontarea biletelor la ordin...(<http://www.scribd.com/doc/21280306/Analiza-SWOT-a-BancPost>)

... proiectate să aducă îmbunătățiri semnificative în condițiile de finanțare a acestui segment online de credit revolving, un credit pe afacere non-revolving. (<http://www.scribd.com/doc/21280306/Analiza-SWOT-a-BancPost>,

That is how it is said in Romanian! Or at least that is the best way to make it understood in the economic or maybe more accurately, banking environment. It shows, once again, how little economic terminology is settled into Romanian language. And this is a fact not only with economic terminology but also with other scientific fields (mathematics, physics etc.) as we lack the translations of various basic bibliographical texts. Moreover, there are cases when at conferences in Romania, doctors held their presentations in English and not in Romanian due to the absence of the appropriate Romanian terminology. This is where the difficulties in translating specialized texts begin: the use of terms in foreign languages — especially English — is so common that if we wanted to substitute them it means to urge the specialist reader to “untranslate” an important part of the text to be able to understand it. On the other hand, keeping these terms in their original language may render the text unintelligible to the layman who enters a bank or other institution, who wants to be part of an online contest or anybody else who has little knowledge of the foreign language. So, what is to be done?

For instance, the French Academy has been striving against the ever increasing use of English neologisms, requiring that many words borrowed be replaced with French equivalents, Daily Mail reports. The struggle has come to the point that they started to list words that are prohibited on the very official site of the Academy. Some find the actions ridiculous, considering French language, as all languages in the world, as a living thing and thus undergoing natural changes; while others argue that it is exactly the French Academy that have to protect the French language(1). Moreover, there was a law passed in 1994 requiring that all government publications, all advertisements and contracts to be in French exclusively.

As far as Romania is concerned, there was an article on the protection of the Romanian language published in ‘Romania Liberă’ newspaper from September 16, 2007 entitled ‘Draft resolution on protection of the Romanian language to the European Parliament’. Obviously, loans will continue to enter the Romanian language, but we ought to get us informed regarding their use and limit ourselves to those that facilitate understanding, learning and information acquisition as well as the cultural exchange. It means to make use, not abuse only for fashion sake. We must not forget that a language lives as long as it changes and it ‘dies’ when it stops evolving. (Coseriu 1997:9).

2. What is translation?

As Webster’s New World dictionary defines it, ‘to translate’ means:

1. to move from one place or condition to another; transfer;
2. to put into the words of a different language;
3. to change into another medium or form to translate ideas into action;
4. to put into different words; rephrase or paraphrase in explanation.

Even if we can speak of translation beginning with the Tower of Babel (Finlay, 1971:17) etymologically, we observe that ‘translate’ comes from Latin ‘trans+latus’ meaning ‘carried across’ (Lewis 1958:265).

Nevertheless, translation is an activity performed for specific purposes, no matter which they may be, its main purpose being ‘to serve as a cross-cultural bilingual communication vehicle among peoples’ as Constanza Gerding-Salas rightly emphasizes. (2)

The importance of the translation activity has greatly developed due to many reasons: rising international trade, globalization, migration, the impressive development and the expansion of the mass media and technology. Consequently, the translator finds himself playing an important part in this process of huge changes, becoming ‘a bilingual or multi-lingual cross-cultural transmitter of culture and truths by attempting to interpret concepts and speech in a variety of texts as faithfully and accurately as possible’.(3)

2.1 Types of translations.

There are the main types of translation: a. word-by-word translation;
b. word-for-word translation; c. literary translations; technical translations.

The word-for-word translation, that is also named literal translation, is used as the basis for further work with the text; this type of translation can only give a clue on the overall meaning, and it might well be misleading.

In the word-for-word translation or 'for information' translation, it is necessary to accurately transfer the main idea of the translated text from the source language to the target language. This translation is used to understand the structure of the original text; it is accurate, still sometimes sloppy, not polished enough.

The translation of literature should give the notion of the original text rendering not only the concept, but also the vision, atmosphere, style, and emotion. In this type of translations, the fluidity of the text prevails over accuracy.

Technical translations should always start by assessing the target reader and the end user of the translated text. This is an exact translation; the people reading it need to be able to accurately and totally understand and use the information given.

2.2. Translating economic texts

As a subdivision of technical texts, the translation of economic texts is highly demanded at banks, companies, professional accountants, and multinational corporations and so on; it covers financial, accounting, marketing, and management matters. Therefore, a qualitative translation requires specialists with a certain background and expertise in the field. The person in charge with the translation of such specialized texts should be familiar with economic terms at the same time being capable of understanding their meanings, and be aware of many facets of the economic field. It has often been underlined that the main obstacle to fully understanding technical texts is not technical vocabulary itself as one may expect (highly specialized words usually used only by specialists), but an intermediate lexical category between the general and the fully technical one, constituting the largest proportion of scientific and technological texts and known as *sub-technical*, *semi-technical* or *nontechnical vocabulary*. This consists of items of vocabulary from normal English operating within a science context.

Another problem is that translators have a hard time to transfer the same meaning to the other languages, especially when it is about new concepts or technical terms that have no Romanian equivalents. For example, Liviu Ornea admits that during his lectures he uses a lot of English technical words like 'produs warped' or simply 'warped product' as the Romanian version 'produs răsucit' is less scientific; or, another sample is 'twistor' the notion introduced by Roger Penrose, which would be 'răsucitură', or 'încolăcitură' in Romanian. So, the only solution is to keep the English version until there is going to be a common corpus of terminology scientists could rely on. (4) Regarding this problem, Delisle (1981) illustrates what a subtle form of torture translation is: '*Translation is an arduous job that mortifies you, puts you in a state of despair at times, but also an enriching and indispensable work, that demands honesty and modesty.*' (5)

Economics is a field of knowledge in accelerated scientific and technological development that each year incorporates a large number of new terms into the specialized vocabulary. As there is a permanent and ever increasing need to quickly update their knowledge, economists read and learn directly in the original language of the publication and stick to it in daily usage, including conferences, scientific events and articles written in Romanian. There are many ways through which business terms have entered the Romanian vocabulary: contacts between business people, specialised business journals and newspapers, and books, as well as TV programmes on business. The number of specialised terms borrowed from English into Romanian in the field of Economics is extremely high, and their necessity cannot be contested, although many of them are present only in the jargon of specialists. Nevertheless, a great number of these loan words will not last in the Romanian language, and for those that will stay, it will take some time before they are really adopted and adapted to the Romanian language.

It is only later on that the first attempts to translate these terms start to appear timidly, and this leads to further problems such as finding the suitable corresponding Romanian term. This process is often carried out by people who have no translating experience. They can also be carried out by professional translators who are not familiar with the associated vocabulary or economic practice, resulting in seriously distorted meanings. Amateur translators seldom perform very thorough in-depth proofread research into terms that have already been translated in economic literature, which results in highly heterogeneous translations from one publication to another. Training translators becomes vital not only in the acquisition and command of languages and translation strategies and procedures, but also in specific knowledge areas and, in professional ethics as well. Inadequate translations can not only lead to minor confusions, but it can sometimes prove to be a matter of life and death if we think about cases of serious inadequacy in knowledge areas such as science, medicine, legal matters, or technology.

A good option, in certain cases, would be to keep the original English term in brackets to increase the reader's comprehension.

e.g. Începând cu controversa doctrinară dintre suporterii băncii centrale și cei care favorizează libera activitate bancară sau *free-banking-ul*, [...] teoreticienii Școlii monetare („*Currency School*”) și cei ai Școlii bancare („*Banking School*”). (6)

Extensive bibliographical research must always be undertaken to search for terms that have already been published in earlier publications, making an effort to stick with the choice made by the first translator. In Holland, for instance, there was a group linguists who gathered and worked out a minimal economics lexicon agreed throughout the country and intensively used by specialists and widely understood by everyone. This could be a useful hint for our country as well as we lack such generally agreed and unitary corpus of special business terms.

Last but not least, the economic translation is a poorly paid field, which is inevitably reflected in the quality. We have to admit that poorly paid work leads to rush jobs, consequently lowering the quality of the final result. All these difficulties could explain the economists' reluctance to adopt translated terms. Perhaps some of the above mentioned measures could really help improve the quality of economic text translations, whether they decide to leave the terms untranslated or not.

3. Practical Aspects

Besides researching properly the markets, finding distribution channels, and dealing with legal issues, a successful business person should not neglect the language aspects, be it spoken or translated. There are numerous instances when companies get themselves into trouble with translations that are inaccurate or culturally inappropriate.

These are the main reasons why we consider that our students as future graduates should be well-equipped with some of the skills necessary when reading and translating technical texts, be it for personal progress and development or for the job requirements.

Here are some examples of translation problems encountered during our regular English classes taught to students at the Faculty of Economics, University of Oradea.

English classes are held weekly; students have an intermediate/ upper intermediate level of English knowledge (they have been tested prior to establishing the English groups); we work from a book conceived especially for second year students that approaches different fields of business so as to let students get used to the specialized vocabulary.

Besides reading, writing and solving a great amount of vocabulary exercises, we have tried our hand at translating some short texts from English into Romanian. Certainly, in order to produce an acceptable translation, you must find acceptable words in the other language. Even though everything seems a piece of cake at a first glance, there appeared a number of difficulties when actually producing a correct and coherent Romanian translation.

Here we will make a very important distinction between two kinds of language: general language and specialized terminology. In general language, it is undesirable to repeat the same word over

and over unnecessarily. Variety is highly valued. However, in specialized terminology, consistency (which would be called monotony in the case of general language) is highly valued. Indeed, it is essential to repeat the same term over and over whenever it refers to the same object. It is frustrating and sometimes even dangerous to change terms for the same object when describing how to maintain or repair a complex machine such as a commercial airplane.

Now, returning to the question of acceptable translation producing an acceptable translation requires finding acceptable words. In the case of specialized terminology, it should be the one and only term in the other language that has been designated as the term in a particular language for a particular object throughout a particular document or set of documents.

By means of some workshop activities, our attempt is to develop some translation skills as a cooperative activity with the students—through a graded and sequential procedure. We must assume that students have sound linguistic knowledge, both theoretical and practical, and a wide cultural bilingual background, achieved during their first years in college.

After reading the text (reading comprehension is actually the first preparatory step), students are advised to practice the following basic reading comprehension skills: scanning, skimming, reading for gist and main ideas, reading for details, identify the meaning of new words and expressions paying attention to structural aspects (prefixes, suffixes, roots, word order), identify the meaning of new words and expressions by finding synonyms, antonyms, identify cultural references in the choice of words in the text.

When coming across unknown words, students are encouraged to use dictionaries as ‘the most commonly heard advice to translators is ‘if you don’t know the meaning of a word, look it up in *the* dictionary.’”(Enani 2001 as cited by Antar S.Abdellah, 2002). Students use both bilingual dictionaries for looking up meanings of new words and monolingual dictionaries to check the usage of the new words in the source language and in the target language; they are also advised to refer to specialized magazines and journals to follow the use of the particular word.

The next level of translation refers to the accuracy and sound aspect of the translation and for that students are supported to pay special attention to aspects like: the correct word order in the target language, the ideas of the text should be conveyed in clear sentences in the target language, sometimes they are invited to rephrase certain sentences or even make changes to the text so as to render the overall meaning translated.

The most obvious mistakes students have made in carrying out the translation tasks was to take it for granted that they know all the meanings of business words, based on a familiarity with the central or more general meaning that these words possess: *stock* was mostly translated *stoc* and only seldom as *as actiune/titlu de valoare*, *interest* was rendered as *interes* and almost never as *dobinda*, *balance* was considered *balanta* and only a few students translated it as *bilant*, while *maturity* was translated like the easy to guess Romanian equivalent *maturitate* instead of its more specialized meaning *scadenta*, *security* became *securitate* most of the times even if it had nothing to do with the text, instead of *garantie* which gave meaning to the text..

While in some cases these translations produced smiles due to the insufficient awareness regarding the full knowledge of a word, there were cases when the translation sounded absurd (security, *agreement- agreement*) or even obstructed the understanding of the text.

4. Conclusions

Terminology or the so-called sub-technical vocabulary is an important area in business English and it needs to be approached as such when it comes to learning and rendering it. Whether these words are created by a process of homonymy or polysemy, there is no perfect overlap between English and Romanian when it comes to translate them. Thus, such linguistic differences may create confusion in translation and it is the task of the English teacher to deal with them and to enable or facilitate understanding, by using different learning strategies and translation techniques.

Notes:

- (1) “Academia Franceză listează cuvintele englezești pe care le vrea interzise”, Ziarul National 31 March, 2010, available at <http://www.enational.ro/uncategorized/1270055533-francezii-vor-s-scape-de-cuvintele-engleze-ti-11544.html/#ixzz1m9UoTd8l> enational.ro
- (2) Gerding-Salas, C., “Teaching Translation Problems and Solutions”, in Translation Journal, Volume 4, No. 3 July 2000, available at <http://www.bokorlang.com/journal/13educ.htm>.
- (3) Idem, ibidem.
- (4) Ornea, L., “Bifurcații. Din nou despre traducerea textelor științifice” in Observator cultural, available at http://www.observatorcultural.ro/BIFURCATII.-Din-nou-despre-traducerea-textelor-stiintifice*articleID_25457-articles_details.html
- (5) Apud Gerding-Salas, C., “Teaching Translation Problems and Solutions”, Translation Journal, Volume 4, No. 3 July 2000, available at <http://www.bokorlang.com/journal/13educ.htm>.
- (6) Huerta de Soto, J., “Băncile centrale și sistemul de free-banking cu rezerve fracționare. O analiză critică din perspectiva Școlii Austriece”, p. 3, available at <http://mises.ro/255/>.

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Internet Resources:

1. “Academia Franceză listează cuvintele englezești pe care le vrea interzise”, Ziarul National 31 March, 2010, Accessed April 12, 2012. <http://www.enational.ro/uncategorized/1270055533-francezii-vor-s-scape-de-cuvintele-engleze-ti-11544.html/#ixzz1m9UoTd8l>
2. Gerding-Salas, C., “Teaching Translation Problems and Solutions”, Accessed March 16, 2012 <http://www.bokorlang.com/journal/13educ.htm>.
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5. Huerta de Soto, J., “Băncile centrale și sistemul de free-banking cu rezerve fracționare. O analiză critică din perspectiva Școlii Austriece”, Accessed March 27, 2012. <http://mises.ro/255/>.
6. Antar S.Abdellah, “What Every Novice Translator Should Know” in Translation Journal, Volume 6, No. 3 July 2002, Accessed April 12, 2012 <http://translationjournal.net/journal/21novice.htm>.