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TRANSLATION AS A BALANCE OF ART AND SCIENCE

Axunbabayeva Nargiza. Xamidjanovna,

*Namangan Institute of Engineering and Technology.
senior teacher of the department of "Foreign Languages"*

e-mail: vinniethepooh@mail.ru

Yunusova Nilufar Maxmudjanovna.

teacher of the department of "Foreign Languages"

e-mail: nilufaryunusova20@gmail.com

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Abstract: Technical translation is the medium through which language, discourse and communication can exist in a global world. As technology creates easier and faster means of communication and the world moves toward becoming a global community, the need to communicate with people from multiple language backgrounds also grows. Rather than working with multiple languages, some have proposed the idea of using English as the primary language for global communication, making English the lingua franca—or a common world language. However, English as a lingua franca has various implications for the field of technical communication. Particularly for technical translators who are native speakers of English, there is the tendency to assume a unilateral stance on translation. In other words, the technical translator's objective is to translate to and from English, with the English message being the main focus. While English is a language of global communication, it is not the only language being used for communication, highlighting the importance of moving away from "singular perspective" of only communicating in English. The concept of maintaining technical communication in languages other than English is of

particular significance in countries with high volumes of multilingual speakers

Keywords: art, discourse, medium, multiple, significance, linguistic features, global communication

INTRODUCTION

Technical translation covers the translation of many kinds of specialized texts and requires a high level of subject knowledge and mastery of the relevant terminology [1] and writing conventions.

The importance of consistent terminology in technical translation, for example in patents, as well as the highly formulaic and repetitive nature of technical writing makes computer-assisted translation using translation memories and terminology databases especially appropriate. In his book *Technical Translation* Jody Byrne argues that technical translation is closely related to technical communication and that it can benefit from research in this and other areas such as usability and cognitive psychology [1].

In addition to making texts with technical jargon accessible for a wider ranging audience, technical translation also involves linguistic features of

translating technological texts from one language to another.

Translation as a whole is a balance of art and science influenced by both theory and practice [2]. Having knowledge of both the linguistic features as well as the aesthetic features of translation applies directly to the field of technical translation.

Stemming from the field of translation studies, the field of technical translation traditionally emphasized much importance on the source language from which text is translated. However, over the years there has been a movement away from this traditional approach to a focus on the purpose of the translation and on the intended audience. This is perhaps because only 5–10% of items in a technical document are terminology, while the other 90–95% of the text is language, most likely in a natural style of the source language [2]. Though technical translation is only one subset of the different types of professional translation, it is the largest subset as far as output is concerned. Currently, more than 90% of all professionally translated work is done by technical translators, highlighting the importance and significance of the field.

The role of the technical translator is to not only be a transmitter of information, but also to be a constructor of procedural discourse and knowledge through meaning, particularly because often, the technical translator may also take on the role of the technical writer [3]. Research has demonstrated that technical communicators do, in fact, create new meaning as opposed to simply repackaging old information. This emphasizes the important role that technical translators play in making meaning, whether they are doing technical translation in one language or in multiple languages.

Much like professionals in the field of technical communication, the technical translator must have a cross-curricular and multifaceted background. In addition to grasping theoretical and

linguistic orientations for the actual translation process, an understanding of other subjects, such as cognitive psychology, usability engineering, and technical communication, is necessary for a successful technical translator [3]. Additionally, most technical translators work within a specialized field such as medical or legal technical translation, which highlights the importance of an interdisciplinary background. Finally, the technical translators should also become familiar with the field of professional translation through training.

Translators might read the document to understand what they will be translating, and determine the context of the text. In technical translation, the register and tone would then be determined based on the type of text and the context, although generally the tones of technical texts are neutral. The register can be very formal and scientific, or made to be easily understood by the general public [4]. A translator might also need to use documentation techniques find resource materials as aids in order to translate the text.

Translators may bounce back and forth between steps, depending on their time constraints and their experience in translation. For instance they might revise at the same time as they are translating. A translator may also go through their reference materials and research depending on how familiar they are with the type of text [4]. If they need to find the closest matches for clients, they may use translation memories or machine translation software. The translation process also depends on the laws and ethics codes put into place in certain regions, as well as any ensorship, which might affect the outcome of the text.

Revision may depend on the translator's experience or nature of the text. In translation agencies, revisers may be hired to do the revising, but a freelancer may have to revise their own work.

In the case of a pharmaceutical text, depending on the laws, it would require revision since the information in the source text could cause potential harm if mistranslated. There also may be certain style guides that the translation agencies may use that must be followed.

Although technical writing and technical translation may be similar in the content they work with, they are different as translators translate what the technical writers produce [5]. The purpose of technical writing is to explain how to do something. Technical translating is similar; however it attempts to communicate how someone else explains how something is done. "The technical translator, like the technical writer, wants to produce a document that is clear and easy to understand". Translators may also consider controlled language and whether it applies in their target language culture.

While no machine translation device is able to replicate or replace the dynamics of a human translator [5], machine translation certainly poses important advantages. In fact, there are many practical uses for and implications of machine translation for the field of technical translation. Machine translation has major cost advantages as compared to human translation. In fields of technical communication where information is constantly changing, for example, the stock market machine translation when paired with human interaction. In a mixed methods experiment, researchers first or jobs related to the weather, the cost of paying a human translator to constantly update information would become quite expensive. Additionally, situations that involve translating massive volumes of information over a short period of time, or situations that require speedy and frequent communication would benefit from machine translation. In such circumstances, a machine translator would be advantageous from a financial perspective [6].

Just as important as proper translation of linguistic qualities of languages is the subject of culture and how specific cultural features are transferred and communicated in the field of technical translation. In fact, a mutual understanding of cultural components is just as important as linguistic knowledge in technical translation [6]. This highlights the complicated nature of working with technical translation. Various cultures can exhibit drastic differences in how communication occurs, even when both cultures are working with the same target language. One Canadian technical translator and consultant working with Russian colleagues detailed difficulties while working with both North American English and global English. Encountering discrepancies in rhetorical writing strategies, differentiation in tones, document formatting issues, and conflicting conceptual goals for engineering reports, the author emphasizes cultural practices, outside of the direct realm of linguistic forms, which can impede proper communication in technical translation [6].

In an example using a commonly translated document, the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a researcher used correlation analyses, including semantic network analysis and spatial modeling, to interpret data describing differences among seven different translated versions of the document. Demonstrating how culture plays an important role in the process of technical translation, the results of the study showed that while the translations were fairly similar, cultural subtleties and differences existed in each language's translated version. For example, across the seven languages, common words such as "people", "individual", "man", "nation", "law", "faith", and "family" had differing levels of importance in relation to other words in the language. While in Arabic the word "man" exhibited high levels of importance in the text, other languages placed higher levels of

importance with words such as "person" or "individual". In another example, the English word for "entitle" and the Chinese word for "enjoy" carried connotations attached to the concept of "rights" [7], demonstrating a linkage of concepts unique to each individual language. These slight differences demonstrate the culturally specific nuances that exist across languages. As with any type of non-MT, it is still a process completed by human beings, making it impossible for total objectivity. International technical communication cannot ignore cultural differences, so seeing how the differences affect translation is fundamental for professionals in the field.

Additionally, one's cultural knowledge base, or lack thereof, can be detrimental to the effectiveness of communication, particularly when communicating warnings or risk factors. Considering how differing knowledge paradigms as a result of cultural factors can prompt people to respond in a variety of ways to different rhetorical strategies, particularly when communicating messages containing warnings of hazards or risks, understanding culture must be a priority in technical translation. One researcher found that a variance of definition of terms and inconsistent paradigms of cultural knowledge highlight the need for a new delineation of what technical writers consider as the target audience while communicating risk factors. What might be appropriate for one audience must be reconsidered for a culturally different audience [7]. Looking at a specific example concerning the hazardous occupation of mining, one piece of research demonstrates how different cultures different perceptions about safety information. Comparing risk communication in mining in the United States and the United Kingdom, the researcher discovered variations among the perceptions of who is responsible for promoting safety in the workplace. While one culture felt that the user or worker was

responsible for promoting his or her own safety in the workplace, another culture perceived the science behind the process or document to be responsible for the promotion of safety. As risks, warnings, or cautions are often important components of a technical document in need of translation, the technical translator will understand how such cultural differences can affect the effectiveness of the translated message [8]. Avoiding assumptions about a culture and allowing one's own knowledge base to consider more diverse populations will create more effective cross-cultural communication not only when working with risky environments, but in general communication as well.

Some research has investigated the possibility of a universal writing style in order to help with the translatability of writing across different cultures and languages. However, demonstrating the difficulty of such a task, one researcher addressed the assumption that unambiguous wording eases effective communication. He gave examples from certain Asian contexts when unclear communication was actually helpful because the unequivocal language forced communicators to rely more heavily on oral discourse than on written documents [8]. The example of the effectiveness about ambiguous language not only shows problems with a universal writing style for technical translation, but also reiterates another example of how culture plays an important role in proper technical translation.

In an age where technology allows for increased accessibility and faster communication, the technical translator must understand the role that culture plays in how people interact with, react to, and utilize technology and how these culturally related concepts can affect communicated messages.

Demonstrating how technology use differs across cultures, one researcher created a presentation that took a holistic look at preparing documents for ethnically diverse audiences, pointing out other non-

linguistic topics that require special attention in communication across cultures. For example, the presenter noted items to be considered including measurement systems, types of graphics and symbols, and types of media presentation tools. The author also pointed out significant differences that would affect communication among English languages including paper layouts, spelling, meaning, and use of humor [9]. This important and practical information can be used by professionals working with technical translation.

Additionally, technical translation involves understanding how the Internet has influenced different cultures across the globe. Varying languages, cultural influences on Internet usage patterns, and media preferences force professionals in the field of technical communication to utilize a number of different strategies in order to effectively reach diverse populations across the globe. With international online populations the technical translator must be culturally diverse in a technological sense [10].

Conclusion

Finally, as technology makes intercultural and international communication easier, the technical translator must understand intercultural communication as it relates to ethics. Traditional models for ethical decision-making can be applied to difficult situations in technical translation, but the professional must avoid stereotyping and ethnocentrism in technical communication and translation [11].

Technical translation is the medium through which language, discourse and communication can exist in a global world. As technology creates easier and faster means of communication and the world moves toward becoming a global community, the need to communicate with people from multiple language backgrounds also grows. Rather than working with multiple languages, some have

proposed the idea of using English as the primary language for global communication, making English the lingua franca—or a common world language. However, English as a lingua franca has various implications for the field of technical communication. Particularly for technical translators who are native speakers of English, there is the tendency to assume a unilateral stance on translation. In other words, the technical translator's objective is to translate to and from English, with the English message being the main focus. While English is a language of global communication, it is not the only language being used for communication, highlighting the importance of moving away from "singular perspective" of only communicating in English. The concept of maintaining technical communication in languages other than English is of particular significance in countries with high volumes of multilingual speakers. For example, research has shown that the English-speaking bias, due to the language's position as the lingua franca, within technical translation and communication has negatively affected native Spanish speakers in the United States [12]. Lacking both in quality and quantity, user manuals for various electronic devices exemplified sub-par translations into Spanish, demonstrating the limited accessibility of certain technical documents to speakers of languages other than English, perhaps partly as a result of English as the lingua franca. Finally, when discussing English as a lingua franca it is noteworthy to mention what some researchers call "untranslatable" words and what that means for technical translation. Such words or phrases are composed of concepts that are not easily translated from one language to another [13]. A word is considered "untranslatable" when there is either no direct corresponding word in the target language, requiring the word to be described or when important cultural connotations from the source language are not properly communicated

through the target word. For example, a common example in English of an untranslatable word is the German word "schadenfreude", which means to exhibit joy as a result of someone else's misfortune. This word exemplifies untranslatability due to the lack of a corresponding word; however words can be untranslatable due to a lack of a corresponding word, loss of cultural meaning, or for both reasons. One study demonstrated that when faced with untranslatable words, technical translators resorted to avoidance tactics that evaded using the words altogether [13].

The implications of untranslatable words and phrases suggest that the technical translation may not benefit from only utilizing English as a lingua franca, and rather, should focus efforts toward having more effective means of translating documents among multiple languages.

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