

Some Problems of Specialized Translation at University of Chemical Technology and Metallurgy

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ABSTRACT

Specialized language raise terminology and contextual problems which require certain competences on the part of the translator. The present paper introduces some issues related to specialized translations and analyses the difficulties that students at the UCTM encounter when they translate specialized texts from English into Bulgarian. The paper tries to find a typology of the most common errors that occur and searches for the possible solutions to overcome them.

Keywords: translation, specialized language, error typology.

INTRODUCTION

Specialized translation supposes knowledge and command of the specialized notions and terms specific to the field they belong to. Translators have to keep an eye on the coherence of the terminology in order to synchronize notions to find the possible equivalents and pay attention to the peculiarities coming from the language they translate from. In fact, the students' duty is to master terminology and writing techniques, knowing the conventions specific to each type of text and to be careful with the author's intention. Students

need to overcome polysemy and ambiguity and transfer the information from one linguistic code to another, allowing the message to be conveyed from the source to the target language in terms of communication, mediation or message.

The process of translating a specialized text is characterized by the following stages:

Semasiological stage connected to the text form in the source language when translators have to define their uncertainties, establish the comprehension level, delimitate the semantic and terminological units and conduct terminological research.

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Onomasiological stage connected with the meaning of the text, both in the source and in the target language, when translators have to establish the necessary precision level for the target audience to find the appropriate terminology to render meaning, to choose an appropriate form which is univocal, clear and precise, and control meaning and form in terms of spelling, syntax and terminology.

In order to translate a specialized text, one needs to decode it. The decoding consists of comprehending the conceptual nucleus of the terminological notions used in the text. The concept also makes reference to the extra-linguistic reality which plays a different role as compared to that of the common lexis.

Methodology

Methodology in this paper is related to a detailed macro- and micro-textual analysis of the UCTM students' translations and an identification of the most common types of translation errors students make. However, before discussing the analysis, we should first take a look at the analytical framework followed at this stage.

In this paper, a translation error is defined as an instance of underperformance during a translation act, observed through the lack of message accuracy and text functionality. Message accuracy first and foremost measures the degree to which the target language message corresponds to the source-language message. Since the translator's message is not primarily of his authorship, its production is contingent upon full comprehension of the source-text language. Thus, any propositional mismatch between the source-language text and the target-language text is considered as due to poor linguistic competence in the source-text language. Moreover, inaccuracy denotes a lack of some or all of the other sub-competences of translation competence such as extra-linguistic knowledge about translation, instrumental, strategic and psycho-physiological components.

Inaccuracy is mainly observed through:

- Nonsense - the message delivered doesn't make

any sense at all;

- Wrong meaning - the source message is distorted;
- Wrong lexical choice - use of false friends or other ineffective lexical items according to the context, purpose of the text and target audience; and
- Omission - when a content-rich element (word or phrase) in the source text is unduly removed from the target text.

Inaccurate translations often denote inability to correctly interpret source-text language structures and lexicon, as well as extra-linguistic references. Thus, these types of errors are considered to be source-language errors (SL errors).

Text functionality comes second and affects the target-text language at the same time as it is being affected by it. Text functionality has to do with the message being delivered in keeping with the target-language/culture norms and conventions for producing a meaningful message. Therefore, an effectively translated text must not contain:

- Target-language norm deviations;
- Spelling errors;
- Punctuation errors; or
- Ambiguous/unclear/unnatural expressions.

Since these aspects are usually observable from the target language point of view, they are considered target language errors (TL errors).

In order to determine the types of translation errors among the UCTM students, a macro- and micro-textual analysis is conducted simultaneously as macro- and micro-level errors tend to co-occur. The analysis is based on 3 different texts translated from English into Bulgarian and the translations are conducted by 25 3-rd year students which renders the overall total number of TL texts analyzed to be 75. This number of texts is adequate to ensure more robustness of the study findings.

Discussion of analyzed translations

Macro- and micro-textual analysis of third year-students' translations is performed and the types of translation errors are presented in the

Macro-level Translation Error occurrences

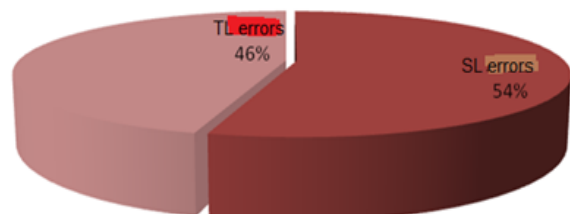


Fig. 1. Macro-level TL and SL translation error occurrences.

form of pie-charts.

The macro-level textual analysis leaves no doubt about the students' tendency to, concomitantly, make two types of errors mentioned at the outset: SL errors and TL errors. However, a glance at Fig. 1 shows that the UCTM students tend to make more SL errors (54 %) than TL errors (46 %). This suggests that the students' ability to correctly analyze and interpret the SL text in English is not sufficient, resulting in their conveying the wrong message into Bulgarian.

On the other hand, micro-level textual analysis suggests that not all micro-level translation errors play an important role in building the students' translation competence. For example, as can be seen from Fig. 2, SL errors are mainly characterized by message distortions (48 %), which often stem from poor understanding of the SL text. At the UCTM, the second main characteristic of SL errors is the wrong selection of lexical equivalents in the TL text (34 %). This also contributes to message distortion. Nonsense errors are less frequent (13 %) and omission errors (5 %) are quite negligible number.

Moreover, the graph in Fig. 3 demonstrates that the main characteristic of TL errors among UCTM students is the presence of unclear, unnatural or ambiguous expressions in the translated texts, which together account for 45 % of the cases. This is followed by the occurrence of norm deviation errors relative to standard Bulgarian (accounting for 32% of the cases). However, it is

Micro-level SL error occurrences

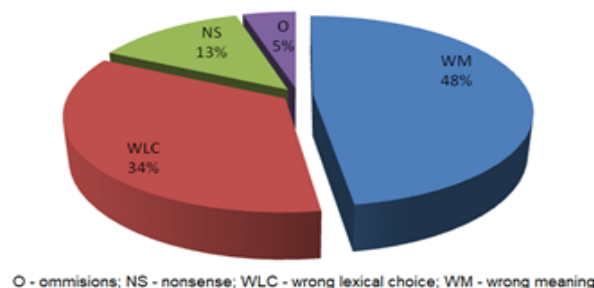


Fig. 2 Micro-level SL error occurrences

important to note that, when separated, the 45% contribution of unclear, unnatural and ambiguous expressions to TL errors loses prominence relative to target-language norm deviation errors. Besides, the micro-textual analysis suggests that most of the problems with unnaturalness, unclearness or ambiguity are due to or are closely related to poor syntactic constructions in Bulgarian.

Finally, it appears from the graph in Figure 3 that poor spelling (17 %) hampers the UCTM students' development of translation skills during their training. Punctuation problems (6 %) do not seem prominent among factors hindering students' development of translation competence, although they nevertheless detract from the students' ability to excel in translation competence development.

Based on the above analysis, therefore, the UCTM students' translation error typology can be constructed as depicted in Table 1, by order of importance.

Micro-level TL error occurrences

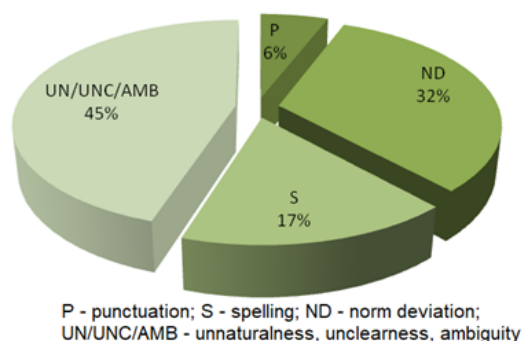


Fig. 3 Micro-level TL error occurrences

Table 1. Typology of UCTM's students translation errors.

Message accuracy (SL errors)	Text functionality (TL errors)
Wrong meaning	Unclearness/unnaturalness/ambiguity
Wrong lexical choice	TL norm deviation
Nonsense	Spelling
Omissions	Punctuation

Key findings regarding SL errors

From the textual analysis conducted, it is possible to draw some patterns. First, it seems that the UCTM undergraduate students tend to massively distort the meaning intended by the source text author. In the texts which have just been analyzed, it is evident that complex structures seem to confuse students, revealing that their English language skills are still inadequate by the time they start practicing translation. Secondly, the students' vocabulary seems to be poor, but, more worryingly, they do not know how to research effectively in order to choose the correct meaning of individual words or phrases. Thus, false friends abound in their translations, or simply they cannot choose the word which is suitable for the context. Thirdly, the students appear to be unaware of expressions above word level such as idioms, which, if translated literally, result in meaningless translations. Likewise, when they translate without understanding the SL text clearly, their resultant sentence in the TL text is sometimes ambiguous or meaningless. Finally, the students use undue omissions, again, resulting in the inaccuracy of the target-text message relative to the source text.

Key findings regarding TL errors

The macro- and micro-textual data analysis also revealed that the UCTM students lack the skills to produce acceptable target-language texts. The first manifestation of poor command of Bulgarian is through a number of cases of unclear, unnatural or ambiguous expressions in their translations. This may be caused by recourse to literal translation as a strategy, or by students attempting to translate a text the meaning of which

they are uncertain about. Secondly, the students' translations are negatively affected by target-language norm deviations, i.e., students tend to disregard grammatical and/or syntax rules. This suggests that the students lack TL competence (in this case, Bulgarian) for otherwise, they would be able to reduce the occurrence of ungrammatical errors in their Bulgarian texts to a minimum. More importantly, target-language norm deviations tend to cause the occurrence of unclear/unnatural and ambiguous sentences. Thirdly, students often make spelling mistakes. This finding raises special concerns considering that most of the texts examined were written on a computer and, as such, the computer software could have aided them in checking the spelling and in editing the sentences. To conclude, their punctuation mistakes also reveal that students do not know much about the rules and conventions of Bulgarian language and culture applicable to text production.

From the analysis of empirical data, this study concluded that, throughout the two-semester-period of translation practice, the UCTM students fail to deliver quality translations, mainly due to two types of translation errors influencing the development of their translation competence: (i) source language errors and (ii) target language errors. The co-occurrence of both types of errors reveals that the UCTM students lack adequate bilingual competence. In other words, the students do not have sufficient source-language text analytical skills and target-language text production skills, resulting in their failure to convey an accurate, clear and natural message.

Significantly, the repeated occurrence of SL errors, where the target-language text was gram-

matically correct, provides compelling evidence that students' translation competence cannot be achieved by simply improving their target-text linguistic competence. The texts that have been comprehensively analyzed in this study could have led to partial conclusions unless they are viewed through the lens of Bulgarian language. The Bulgarian error analysis, content or message errors, due to poor source language text comprehension account for poor assessment of the students' translation competence.

On the other hand, an earlier conducted survey showed that the majority of students perceive their translation competence to be good. Likewise, most students believe they can translate any type of text into Bulgarian, though the number reduces quite significantly when it comes to translating into English. By contrast, most lecturers perceive their students' translation skills to be not very good, especially when translating into Bulgarian.

The study suggests that tackling students' source-language text originated errors could undoubtedly improve their translation competence. Nonetheless, it is evident that the UCTM students still need a significant amount of assistance with their command of English language, and Bulgarian language as well, particularly in relation to text production skills. In addition to improving their bilingual skills, students' translation competence can be achieved by enhancing the other sub-competences, especially their extra-linguistic, instrumental and strategic sub-competences. With regard to the psycho-physiological components, it can be concluded from the study that translation practice instructors should stress the importance of attitudinal aspects such as intellectual curiosity, perseverance, critical thinking, logical reasoning and so forth. Such qualities can help students become aware of when their translations are meaningless, or at least when the message distortion caused by their translation generates inconsistency with the rest of the source language text or even with the target language text.

CONCLUSIONS

All in all, it requires challenge, skillfulness and effort on the part of the students to preserve the meaning of the original text, considering the specific linguistic and cultural features of the equivalent words in the target language. The textual data analysis provided enough proof that the UCTM students have difficulty conveying accurate and well-written translated texts considered both from the source language and target language viewpoints. Moreover, the results of the textual analysis suggest that the students' claim that they feel confident to translate any type of text from English into Bulgarian and vice-versa is ungrounded. To conduct better translations, students need to be very knowledgeable of both the source and the target language not only at general level, but also at scientific level so that they can provide adequate translations for the target audience.

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