

Chapter 5

Basic Translation Techniques

Direct Translation:

Involves strategies which require less invention by the translator and less deviation from the ST. direct translation strategies such as literal translation, borrowing and calquing are useful in a range of scenarios.

- Literal translation: often confused with word-for-word translation. With this approach, we may start by translating individual words but, when we reach a point where the TT no longer complies with the grammatical rules of the TL, we move to translating group-by-group or clause-by-clause-

It involves producing a TT which reflects the content and features of the ST as closely as possible and only deviating from this where necessary in order to produce a TT which is grammatically correct and intelligible.

Typically avoid any additions, omissions, paraphrasing or other translation techniques to produce what could be described as a faithful and simple translation.

One of the most frequently used translation strategies in technical texts.

Sometimes it may not be appropriate in the TT.

- Borrowing: Simplest form of exchange between languages as it involves transferring an SL lexical item into the TT without modification. Often borrowing is used because there is no existing word or concept in the TL but it can be used deliberately in order to create a particular effect in the TT, for example to make the TT seem more foreign or “exotic”.

Examples: Internet, e-mail, píxel, diskette

- Calque: involves the literal translation of the individual constituent parts of a SL word or phrase to create a new term, or neologism, in the TL.

Introducing new words without any reason is inadvisable.

Examples: * log in (German: *einloggen*) * skyscraper (Spanish: *rascacielos*)

Oblique Translation:

Oblique translation is used when the grammatical, pragmatic and lexical differences between the SL and TL are too significant to allow direct translation.

It describes 4 translation procedures: Equivalence, Transposition/Recategorization, Modulation and Adaptation.

- Equivalence: Process of replacing elements in the ST with corresponding elements in the TT so as to “replicate the same situation as in the original whilst using completely different wording. Involves finding the TL counterpart for a particular SL word or phrase.

Examples: * Danger! → Risk of Death!
* Wet paint → Freshly Painted

- Transposition/Recategorization: Process of replacing one word class in the ST with another class in the TT without changing the meaning. Can be OBLIGATORY (where the SL may have a noun describing a particular process or object, while the TL can only convey this information using a descriptive phrase) or OPTIONAL (to improve the style or flow of the TT).
Examples: * NOMINALIZATIONS (noun to verb): “*The regulation* of the heating system is carried out by the main computer.” vs. “The main computer *regulates* the heating system.”
* PASSIVE TO ACTIVE: “The new standard was approved by all member states.” vs. “All member states approved the new standard.”
- Modulation: Process of changing the form of information by presenting it from a different point of view. It can also be COMPULSORY (or fixed) or OPTIONAL (or free).
At the most basic level, it involves changing a sentence from POSITIVE to NEGATIVE.
“Easy to use” vs. “Not difficult” — “Protects against viruses” vs. “Only allows a few viruses through.”
Others involve replacing ABSTRACT concepts with CONCRETE concepts:
Reboot → Restart, Start again — Hardcore → Crushed Stone
And others involve replacing a concept “part for the whole” or “whole for the part.” Example: in cars *transmission* (whole) with *gears* (part).
- Adaptation: Strategy of last resort as it may involve a significant amount of deviation from the ST. Makes use of three key procedures: Cultural substitution, Paraphrasing and Omission.
Used when the ST describes a situation or concept which does not exist in the TL culture or because it does not have the same connotations or relevance to them.

Expansion and contractions.

Depending on the subject and your target audiences’ background knowledge, we may need to add explanations to the translation or remove unnecessary detail so that it meets the readers’ expectations.

Expansion: Also known as explicitation, involves making something which is implicit in the ST explicit in the TT to make the TT clearer, more relevant to the target audience, or to compensate for some perceived lack of background knowledge on the part of the TT audience. May involve adding explanatory phrases or clarify terms or statements or adding connectors to improve the flow of the text and to make it more readable.

Contraction: Refers to the practice of making something less detailed in the TT. It has the same motivations as expansion and the aim is to adapt the TT to the perceived expectations and background knowledge of the TT audience.

Recycling information: A useful way of clarifying information in a text is to expand a translation by recycling information provided elsewhere in the text. Recycling does not involve introducing new information into a text; it simply involves reusing information and wording which is already present in the ST.

Generalizing and particularizing

Generalizing is used to describe the practice of making information in the ST less detailed when it is transferred to the TT. This strategy can take the form of omitting information or replacing a specific word with a word which has a less specific meaning.

Particularization is where we use a more specific term to the one contained in the ST. We may need to do this because the generic term used in the ST is simply too broad in the TL, introduces too much uncertainty or ambiguity in the TT or has connotations associated with it which are undesirable in the TT.

Compensation.

Particular features cannot always be recreated in the TT but it may be possible to add similar features elsewhere in the TT to make up for it.

Four types:

- Compensation in kind: involves replacing one type of textual feature in the ST with another type of feature in the TT. If the syntax or tone of the ST indicates a level of formality which is not reflected by the same structure in the TL, you may need to add other syntactic or stylistic devices to recreate this effect.
- Compensation in place: is used to make up for the loss of a particular feature or effect at a particular point in the ST by recreating it elsewhere in the TT. Involves taking information which was originally found in one part of a text and using or reusing it somewhere else.
- Compensation by splitting: may be used where the ST contains a word for which there is no corresponding TL word which conveys the same range of meanings.
- Compensation by merging: allows us to condense features of information presented in the ST over a fairly long stretch of text and to present it in a shorter phrase or even in a single word.

Restructuring.

Information in a technical text is presented in a logical or chronological sequence. Such sequencing is particularly true in the case of instructional texts or texts which describe processes and procedures which need to be

carried out. This will involve presenting information in the order in which it is required and the sequencing is fairly stable because it depends on real-world objects or processes.

There are instances where cultural expectations and norms take priority and it will be necessary to rearrange the sequence of information in a text.

ST may not always be well written, with the result that information which should have been presented in a particular order, even for the SL audience, appears in some other sequence.

As a result, we may need to rearrange the information within sentences, paragraphs or even chapters. We cannot move entire chapters or sections within a document unless we get permission to do this.

Iconic Linkage

In certain types of technical texts, emphasis is often placed on the usability of the information. Usability refers to how easily and effectively readers can assimilate and act upon information that is presented to them in texts. Using diagrams, structuring chapters, including examples are ways of improving the usability of texts. These strategies are more commonly associated with the work of technical writers.

Translators can improve the usability of texts by implementing a strategy known as Iconic Linkage. It involves reducing the number of ways in which the same information is presented in a text. It takes the idea of parallelism – using grammatically parallel structures for parts of a sentence which are similar in meaning- and expands it to include matching sentences and phrases throughout an entire text.

This strategy improves the effectiveness of texts by minimizing the amount of cognitive effort and problem solving needed in order to understand a text. It also improves predictability and aids learning by taking advantage of the human tendency to form habits.

What type of translation are you producing?

Translators may be asked to produce:

Selective translations: we may be asked to translate certain sections of the text. This particular type of translation job may be motivated by issues such as budget (i.e. the client can't afford to have the whole text translated) or speed (the client cannot wait for the whole document to be translated and wants the most relevant information). Our job is to read through the document, identify the relevant sections and translate them.

Gist translation: is typically motivated by the factors of budget and time also, but rather than translating selected sections of the text, our job is to provide a rough translation that summarizes the text. The aim is to give the client a general idea of the content of the text.

Information purposes translations: we are not expected to produce polished and stylistically appropriate texts but we are, however, expected to make sure that all of the information is translated. This type of translation is generally used internally within the company.

Publication purposes translations: we need to produce the best translation we possibly can in terms of content and language because the text will be used for publication, inclusion on a website, etc. This is the most time-consuming and demanding type of translation.

Updates: projects where the document to be translated is an updated version of a document which has already been translated. We may be asked to translate a document containing 10.000 of which 630 are new. We may be provided with a translation memory which was produced when the original document was translated.

If the translated text was used as the basis for other translations, any changed you make will have a knock-on effect on all of those translations. So you should only translate the new sections, trying to replicate the style and tone of the existing translations.

Instrumental translation: our translation will be used in place of the ST; it will be expected to perform as a freestanding, autonomous text in the TL. In this regard, any errors will need to be corrected.

Documentary translation: is intended to describe what was said in the ST and how it was said. This approach is used where there are questions over the quality of a translation produced by somebody and you are asked to provide a back translation of the text.

Approaches to assessing translation quality:

- Pragmatic revision: involves a close comparison of the ST and TT in order to improve the quality of the text. No contact between the reviewer and the translator. No feedback.
- Didactic revision: involves a close comparison of the ST and TT to improve the quality and educate the translator. The reviewer justifies and explains proposed changes and provides a feedback to the translator.
- Translation Quality Assessment: used to determine the quality of a TT, not to improve it. Can be carried out on a whole text or section of text.
- Quality Control: similar to TQA but is only carried out on a numerically calculated number of words from one or more sections of a text.
- Fresh-Look Revision: examining the TT from the point of view of the target audience to ensure that the text complies with TL norms. Not compared with the ST and the translation may or not be provided a feedback.

Translation brief

A set of instructions and guidelines for producing a translation.

A useful strategy is to compile a short list of standard questions which you can ask a client at the start of a translation project. You should know what language variety you are translating into, what the purpose of the translation is, what the deadline is, and whether there is a specific terminology you are expected to use.

When not to translate

- Where a technical text quotes text from another publication.
 - a) *Authoritative translation*
 - b) *Present a paraphrase translation which explains the content of the quote [in brackets] but which does not purport to be the official translation or text, accompanied by the original text in the source language.*
 - c) *Omit the quote if the nature of the document permits this.*
- When the text reproduces a section from a publication written in a language which is neither the source nor the target language.
- Official translations and proper names: *Related document, Technical standards, Legislations, Organizations, Government bodies.*
- Laws
- European Directives

Writing within limits

A controlled language (CL) is a subset of a natural language which is created using various rules to restrict the grammar and vocabulary which can be used in a text. The purpose is to reduce ambiguity and complexity in texts and it does it by limiting the ways in which information can be expressed.

- Human-Oriented Controlled Languages: used to improve readability and comprehensibility for human readers.
- Machine-Oriented Controlled Languages: used to make texts easier to process by computers, for example using machine translation systems.

Many companies and organizations seek to standardize the language used in their documents by means of style guides. A style guide is a set of standards, or guidelines, which govern the way in which documents are written and presented. They are less strict than CL and their aim is to provide a clear set of guidelines for writers to help them produce documents which are consistent and which are easy to understand. Style guides specify grammatical constructions, sentence structures, preferred terminology and rules on using punctuation, etc.

Terminology: Selecting the most appropriate term can sometimes depend on more than just good research skills

Many large companies have their own preferred terminology.

Translators → The appropriate way of translating is not what is expected.
Advice → check customer's website.

Clarity, readability and usability:

We have to produce texts that are accurate and which the intended audience will find easy to read.

Clarity and comprehensibility has been assessed by measuring their **readability** (short sentences and simple structures).

In recent years, the emphasis in technical communication circles has shifted towards **Usability** → How well a reader can: Read a text, understand it, perform the task and remember information. → How satisfied or stressed the reader is afterwards.

Strategies which can make texts more usable

1. *Use terminology consistently and avoid polysemy*
2. *Use clear and simple language*
3. *Write instructions in chronological order*
4. *Use direct, active language*
5. *Do not provide unnecessary information*
6. *Implement Iconic Linkage*
7. *Keep the number of tenses at the minimum*

Editing and proof-reading.

Making final quality checks and improvements before you submit your translation.

Reviewing the work of another translator

- Highest standards are needed
- Check information is translated correctly
- No replace things
- Provide suggestions and overall evaluation

General hints for editing and reviewing translations.

- Provide two copies of the edited translation
- Distance yourself from your translation
- Don't be bitter
- Be constructive
- Don't be a bully