

31 Translation

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1 Introduction

Communication between different individuals and nations is not always easy, especially when more than one language is involved. The job of the translator and / or interpreter is to try to bridge the gap between two foreign languages. This can also include translation problems arising from historical developments within one language. In this chapter, translating and interpreting will be characterized as a communicative device (section 2). After defining the modes of interpreting (section 3), the principles influencing the transfer of messages from one language to another will be outlined (section 4). In order to illustrate some of the lexical problems faced by the translator and / or interpreter, particular attention will be paid to the area known as “false friends” (section 5). As will be emphasized, each act of translation is conditioned by many factors (with various functions) which govern the choice of a target-language rendition of a given source-language text (section 6). In the final section, a brief survey of recent developments in machine translation will be presented (section 7).

2 Translation: a Communicative Device

Translation is undoubtedly a communicative device; moreover, as John Rupert Firth (1956: 135) put it, “The fact is, translation is a necessity on economic and on general human grounds.” Some researchers postulate an autonomous status for translation studies, arguing that these studies bring together work in a wide variety of fields, including literary study, anthropology, psychology, and linguistics. Others claim that the domain of translation studies is an important sub-branch of applied linguistics. Proponents of both opinions would have to admit, however, that the field of translation studies has multidisciplinary dimensions and aspects.¹

The term “translation” normally refers to written materials but is also an umbrella term used for all tasks where elements of a text of one language (the source language, SL) are molded into a text of another language (the target language, TL), whether the medium is written, spoken, or signed. There are specific professional contexts where a distinction is made between people who work with the spoken or signed language (interpreters), and those who work with the written language (translators). Although usually the two roles are seen as quite distinct, there are hybrid situations that blur this distinction. When, for instance, a court interpreter reads a legal document in one language while reciting it aloud in another s/he is said to be sight-translating. On the other hand, prosecuting authorities and law enforcement agencies often call on translators to transcribe and translate foreign language-conversations that were taped during investigations.

3 Modes of Interpreting: Consecutive and Simultaneous

There are two highly specialized modes of interpreting: *consecutive* and *simultaneous* interpreting.

One typically speaks of *consecutive interpreting* when the person requiring the interpreter participates in the communication directly. In such cases the interpreter waits for the person to finish speaking, or until the amount of information approaches the limit of the interpreter’s retention capacity, and then the interpreter gives a translation. Interpreting skills include note-taking techniques, although the method and degree of reliance on note-taking as a memory aid varies from one interpreter to the other. Consecutive interpreting is usually bidirectional, i.e., from language X to Y and vice versa; it is commonly used for informal meetings, tours, business negotiations, etc.

The mode of *simultaneous interpreting* is typically used when the person who requires an interpreter is not participating in the communication directly. At international conferences with bilingual or multilingual audiences simultaneous interpreting is an effective method for helping to overcome language barriers; it allows presentations and discussion to proceed at the same pace as an ordinary unilingual conference. Simultaneous interpreting is usually performed using technical equipment to relay the sound to those delegates who do not speak the floor language. The interpreters work in soundproof booths, while the delegates listen to the language of their choice via headsets connected to multichannel wireless receivers. In such cases the translation is usually unidirectional, i.e., from language X to language Y but not vice versa.

Strictly speaking, however, the term “simultaneous interpreting” is misleading in that the word “simultaneous” suggests that the interpreter is interpreting a message at the same time as hearing it. In fact, there is a delay between the

moment the interpreter hears a number of SL expressions and the moment s/he renders them into the TL, because it takes time to understand the SL message and turn it into the TL. Meanwhile, the speaker goes on to the next utterance, so the interpreter must generate the TL version of the first utterance while processing the second, and so on. This delay is known as *décalage*, from the French word for “time lag.”

In simultaneous interpreting, the time factor is generally more crucial than in consecutive interpreting or in translation performed in the written mode. The decisive factor in simultaneous interpreting is how early the simultaneous interpreter can actually start speaking. Wilss (1978: 346) says, quoting Mattern (1974: 28) in order to specify that moment: “[T]he optimal moment of interpretation will differ depending on the subjective and objective factors involved; the objective or speech-language-linked factors being those which originate from the SL text and from relations of equivalence existing between SL and TL, and the subjective factors being those which depend on the interpreter himself.”

In view of the time pressure under which the simultaneous interpreter has to work, one crucial subjective factor is the interpreter’s memory. How long s/he is able to wait before s/he starts interpreting each sentence will depend upon the capacity to retain what was said by the SL speaker. S/he should be in a position to start interpreting as soon as possible to avoid being confronted with an information overload. But there are cases in which the simultaneous interpreter seems to be forced to wait for the conclusion of a long SL sentence before s/he can even start interpreting it. To evaluate this claim let us take a sentence from Wilss (1978: 348):

- (1) a. *Namens meiner Fraktion darf ich den beiden Herren Berichterstatlern für die Arbeit, die sie geleistet haben, sehr herzlich danken.*

It is true that, upon hearing the first three words, the German-English simultaneous interpreter can immediately start saying: “*On behalf of my political party.*” On hearing the next two words s/he might add: “*I may.*” Since the full verb follows the modal in English, the interpreter would have to wait until the very last German word of the complex sentence is uttered, i.e., the full verb *danken*. Such a late take-off or late continuation is “an extremely heavy stress on the short-term memory of the interpreter” (Wilss 1978: 347). Couldn’t there be a solution providing a shortcut in this situation?

Mattern (1974: 3) suggests one such strategy, as reported by Wilss. If (1a) is uttered in an EU debate the experienced interpreter will know that “the German segment ‘*Namens meiner Fraktion darf ich (danken)*’ is a standard phrase which is frequently used as an opening gambit in a follow-up speech statement . . . Once the simultaneous interpreter has heard ‘*Namens meiner Fraktion darf ich,*’ he can legitimately infer from previous experience that some form of saying ‘thank you’ can be expected” (Wilss 1978: 348). This is why,

having heard only the first five words, the interpreter can start or continue his TL rendition.

This form of “intelligent textual prediction,” referred to by Wilss (1978: 348ff) as “syntactic anticipation,” has yet another advantage. It saves the interpreter from mistakenly rendering the German *dürfen* by the English *may*, which would be appropriate in many other cases. Instead *would like to* has to be employed, as the following complete rendition of (1a) shows:

- (1) b. *On behalf of my political group, I would like to thank the two spokesmen very cordially for their work.*

Even though *may* is in many cases the adequate rendition of *dürfen*, in the present case this principle has to be revised due to the modal's being part of the syntactic construction “*darf . . . danken*” which has to be considered as a whole. This construction may therefore be called a “revision factor” – the standard equivalence (English *may* = German *dürfen*) does not apply here but has to be revised. This shows that it is by no means invariably sufficient to go by a modal alone in order to render it; rather, there are different translation units which may be relevant to different SL texts.

Syntactic anticipation is but one of the interpreter's skills. Both interpreters and translators must be skilled in such generalized professional techniques, and they must also be intimately familiar with the material under discussion in a given text. This holds true for all types of interpretation and translation but is especially important in the areas of technology, medicine, and the law, where terminological accuracy is of paramount importance. Because of the rapid development of science and technology having resulted in a significant increase in the amount of knowledge being transferred across languages and cultures, it is imperative for any translator to have access to multilingual terminology databases.

For court interpreters, who have to deal with lawyers, court personnel, and the public, it is imperative that they have an understanding of the terminology and procedures used in court as well as an extensive vocabulary ranging from formal legal language to colloquialisms and slang expressions.

In the last few years there has been an increasing awareness of the importance of using trained professionals rather than well-intentioned amateurs for community interpreting. Many hospitals, courts, and other institutions in the USA (but fewer in Europe) now have staff positions for interpreters and translators to aid immigrants in communicating with and in gaining equal access to legal, health, and social services. It is especially for these positions that interpreters are required who are able to act as paranative speakers and biculturalists and are aware of the fact that “no language can impartially transmit information independently of particular forms of culture and knowledge . . . [and that] English therefore inevitably carries the biases and presuppositions of certain cultural traditions” (Hyland 1997: 20).

4 Translation Principles

Much valuable work has been carried out by translato­logists on the methodical scrutiny of translation, establishing interesting but often contradictory translation principles. Savory's (1968: 54) collection includes the following:

- a translation must give the words of the original;
- a translation must give the ideas of the original;
- a translation should read like an original work;
- a translation should read like a translation;
- a translation may add to or omit from the original;
- a translation may never add to or omit from the original.

The idea underlying these statements is to postulate what is "right," but contradictory statements such as these can obviously not all be right at the same time. However, each of these postulates can be valid in its own right. To take an extreme interpretation of the first pair of principles as an example: The demand that "a translation must give the words of the original" preserving the successive units of the source text and arranging them in order of occurrence irrespective of the "normal" grammatical sequence of units in the TL (i.e., an *interlinear translation*) is justifiable if the aim is to carry out comparative linguistic research:

On the word level, Dutch *daarmee*, for instance, corresponds to English *therewith*, cf.

- (2) a. *Daarmee hebben we het gedaan, niet met de hamer.*
b. *Therewith have we it done, not with the hammer.*

The English sentence gives "the words of the original." If, however, the main purpose of a translation is to describe to the hearer a certain state of affairs as closely as possible, then "a translation must give the ideas of the original." Along these lines, Hannay (1989: 224ff) points out that the standard translation of Dutch *daarmee* "is not the archaic *therewith* but *with it* / *with that* / *with them*, depending on the nature of the referent . . . :

- (2) c. *'That's what we did it with, not the hammer.'*

Note the two "ifs" used above: the statements just made are no longer as absolute and unconditional as those quoted by Savory; but rather, they are made relative to different target factors specifying the purpose of the translation. In this way the age-old question whether a translation should be literal ("word for word") or free ("sense for sense") is no longer a matter of controversy – it

turns out to be not so much a question of arguments to be adduced for deciding which of the two principles is better or right per se; rather, opting for one or the other of the two principles – and, indeed, for any translation principle – is a matter of clear-cut requirements relative to a given purpose or target resulting from a specific commission. Or, to put it differently, the arguments in favor of each principle result from a set of factors that were previously defined. Taking these factors to constitute counterarguments against (an)other principle(s) is a futile endeavor since it is of no relevance to practical translation work.

Sándor Hervey et al. (1995: 43) recently referred to an extraordinary example of a translation where the sound of the source text was chosen to be the decisive factor “allowing the sense to remain at best a vague and suggested impression.” Here is part of one of Catullus’ (Latin) poems (3a), followed by Celia and Louis Zukovsky’s “phonemic translation” (3b). They are attempting to replicate in their rendition the sound sequence of the source text:

- (3) a. Ille mi par esse deo videtur,
 ille, si fas est, superare divos,
 qui sedens adversus, identidem te
 spectat et audit
 dulce ridentem, misero quod omnis
 eripit sensus mihi; . . .
- b. He’ll hie me, par *is* he? The God divide her,
 he’ll hie, see fastest, superior deity,
 quiz – sitting adverse identity – mate, in-
 spect it and audit –
 you’ll care ridden then, misery holds omens,
 air rip the senses from me; . . .

What becomes obvious here is that this “translation” sets out to imitate as closely as possible the actual sound sequences of the original, while the content is only vaguely incorporated in the English rendition.

Be it such a phonemic translation, or a word-for-word translation, or a free translation – preferring one principle to another one is a matter of relevance to the target group as viewed by the client. Gutt (1991: 121) says that “the different ‘translation principles’ do reflect differences in what different readers consider to be relevant . . . Thus the contradictions can be resolved when each principle is not stated in absolute terms, but qualified by the condition: ‘when required for consistency with the principle of relevance.’”

As we have just seen in the above example, the most important factor is not always required to be the original meaning of the text, but can be, for example, the original sound. This leads us to another important factor that involves sound – words that are identical or at least very similar in spelling and / or sound in two or more languages. I am referring, of course, to “false friends.”

5 False Friends

You come across false friends more often than you would like to – not only in real life, but also in linguistics, especially when you happen to be doing a translation.

When someone refers to the so-called “translator’s false friends,” s/he means the English adaptation of *faux amis du traducteur*, a French expression that has been used since 1928, when Maxime Kœssler and Jules Derocquigny published a book in Paris with the title *Les Faux Amis ou les trahisons du vocabulaire anglais* (“False Friends or the treacherous pitfalls of the English vocabulary”).

The fact that “false friends” sound alike often leads to the incorrect assumption that they have the same meaning; however, that is sometimes only partially the case, and often not at all.

We can safely say that these false friends are a serious linguistic problem which belongs to the field of *interference* (sometimes also called *negative transfer*). *Interference* is the phenomenon that we experience when linguistic structures that we have already learnt interfere with our learning new structures. Interference between two languages exists in all areas – for example, in pronunciation and spelling. Incidentally, interference exists not only between two languages, but also within one language. In semantics, one therefore refers to *intra*lingual and *inter*lingual *false friends*. Since a word may change its meaning in the course of time, this problem cannot be viewed only in the light of the current (i.e., *synchronic*) situation. Because the historical (i.e., *diachronic*) development must also be taken into consideration, there are altogether four types of false friends.

At this point it might be interesting to look at some illustrative examples of how the meanings of words can be confused because of misleading similarities in two languages. In the examples, the language pairs German-Italian, English-Italian, and English-French will be used.²

5.1 *Synchronic interlingual false friends*

Ronnie Ferguson, author of *Italian False Friends* (1994: ix), rightly emphasizes that “[a]ccurate translation . . . as well as the proper appreciation of advanced Italian texts, hinge on the confident handling of key words”; among other examples he mentions key words such as *attuale* (*present / topical, never actual*), and *eventuale* (*not eventual but possible*), which – like their German “true friends” (*aktuell*, and *eventuell*) – are false friends of the English words resembling them in form. Similarly, anyone who would translate the German *luxuriös* and the English *luxurious* with the Italian expression *lussurioso* would be committing a big *faux pas*. The correct translation would be *lussuoso* and not the Italian word *lussurioso*, which has the same meaning as the German word *lasziv* and the English *lascivious*.

5.2 Diachronic intralingual false friends

We can encounter *diachronic intralingual false friends* if we translate linguistic elements from one historical period into another period, when the process of shift in meaning has to be taken into account. A spectacular case in point is the word *nice*: In Old French, which gave the word to English in the thirteenth century, it meant “simple,” “silly,” and in turn was based on Latin *nescius*, which meant “ignorant.” In the fourteenth century, *nice* in English acquired the meaning of “wanton,” “loose-mannered,” even “lascivious.” This sense occurs, for instance, in line 1285 of Geoffrey Chaucer’s “The Romaunt of the Rose” (1366): “Nyce she was, but she mente Noone harme ne slight in hir entente, But oonely lust & jolyte.” So translating Chaucer’s *nice* with the modern English *nice* (meaning “friendly, agreeable, pleasing”) would be incorrect.

5.3 Diachronic interlingual false friends

Since language changes constantly, the meaning of expressions can broaden as well as narrow down, and can denote something “better” as well as something “worse.” For this reason, words in two languages that were originally true friends can develop into false friends (and vice versa). Carlo Milan highlighted *diachronic interlingual false friends* in an essay in a 1989 volume of the journal *Sprachwissenschaft*, where he compared the German words *Artist* and *realisieren* with their Italian counterparts. He pointed out that the German word *Artist* was derived from the French expression *artiste*, meaning “artist” in the general sense of “somebody performing an art.” However, the meaning of this expression was gradually narrowed down in German to *Artist* in the sense of “acrobat,” and thus became a false friend because the Italian word *artista* has preserved its original meaning (and can even be modified, such as in *artista di circo* or *artista di varietà*); the correct modern German equivalent of the Italian word *artista* (denoting “somebody performing an art”) is *Künstler*. We can see then that a gradual intralingual change in meaning leads to the creation of interlingual false friends.

As indicated above, words that are false friends at a certain point in time can later become true friends. One factor that plays a decisive role in this change is the increasing tendency to internationalize certain words which sound the same in two or more languages although they originally had (at least partially) different meanings. An interesting example is the German *realisieren* and the Italian *realizzare*, which were originally both used exclusively in the sense of “to realize profits, projects, hopes or dreams” or “to make.” Both words were greatly influenced by the English *realize* in that their meanings today also include “to comprehend.”

In their book *Faux Amis & Key Words: A Dictionary-Guide to French Language, Culture and Society through Lookalikes and Confusables*, Philip Thody and Howard

Evans pointed to a similar development. They commented on the English equivalents of the French verb *réaliser*, stressing that the verb originally meant “‘to achieve (one’s ambition),’ ‘to realize (one’s assets),’ but not – at least for the purists – ‘to realize (become aware),’ which is *se rendre compte que* or *de*, though most French people do, in conversation, use *réaliser* in the latter sense” (1985: 78). We can therefore conclude that the English verb *realize* is in the process of becoming truly international.

5.4 *Synchronic intralingual false friends*

Further problems for the translator are caused by *synchronic intralingual false friends*, even by native speakers. For instance, in German one has to distinguish between *fremdsprachiger Unterricht*, i.e., “teaching in a foreign (or target) language” and *fremdsprachlicher Unterricht*, i.e., “foreign-language teaching.”

Many English words that appear to mean the same can also lead to confusion and make life very difficult for translators and interpreters. It would be extremely dangerous, for example, to assume that *inflammable* is the opposite of *flammable*; in fact, both words mean the same. The 1992 edition of the *BBC English Dictionary* defined the two words as follows: “An *inflammable* material or chemical ‘burns easily.’ – Something that is *flammable* ‘catches fire easily.’”

Nevertheless, even in England *inflammable* is incorrectly used in the sense of “non-flammable” because many people believe that the *in-* at the beginning of the word gives it a negative meaning, similar to the *in-* at the beginning of *incomplete* and *indirect*. In an attempt to avoid any grave errors, the British Standards Institution issued the following warning in 1959: “It is the Institution’s policy to encourage the use of the terms *flammable* and *non-flammable* rather than *inflammable* and *non-inflammable*.”

The fact that even in England often the wrong meaning “non-flammable” was ascribed to the word *inflammable* shows that the word *inflammable* is both an intralingual and an interlingual false friend.

We have seen that there is a host of factors affecting the act of translation and that the translator should take them all into consideration when translating – in other words, s/he should “translate by factors.”

6 Translating by Factors

Each act of translation is conditioned by a huge variety of factors – factors that can and must be identified for the act of translation to be taught, learnt, and practiced.³

A worthwhile endeavor of translation theory would be to do research into the ways and means of creating optimum TL renditions of (different kinds of) SL texts in the light of different factors which have to be taken into account.

As was pointed out in section 3 (“Modes of Interpreting: Consecutive and Simultaneous”), rendering the German modal verb *dürfen* by English *may* is adequate in many cases but inappropriate in the context where sentences (1a) and (1b) are uttered. In section 5 (“False Friends”), another “revision factor” was mentioned which comes into play when the translator wrongly believes in false friends, words which look or sound similar but do not have an identical meaning.

As was shown, translating by factors does not mean taking prescribed factors into account as such but bearing in mind the specific roles or functions these factors fulfill. Gutknecht and Rölle (1996: 5ff) list a number of basic functions of translation factors. Besides revision factors as exemplified above, every translator / interpreter is, for instance, faced with “blocking factors” on which the revision factors are based. These blocking factors make a specific TL rendition impossible. An example will make this point clear.

An indefinite number of English combinations of the form *adjective plus noun* can safely be translated into German:

<i>red rose</i>	<i>rote Rose</i>
<i>interesting film</i>	<i>interessanter Film</i>
<i>beautiful house</i>	<i>hübsches Haus</i>

In English, also the expression *simultaneous interpreter* may be added to the list, but in German the structurally corresponding construction *simultaner Dolmetscher* is not possible. The reason is that it would suggest that the interpreter himself is simultaneous. In German the rule is that for an adjective to premodify a noun it must denote a characteristic of the referent of that noun; otherwise the formation will be ungrammatical. So in the case of the SL expression *simultaneous interpreter* a semantic factor (viz., the information that *simultaneous* is no characteristic feature of *interpreter*) will act or function as a blocking factor to the TL rendition **simultaner Dolmetscher*: the correct German version would be *Simultandolmetscher*.

In addition to revision factors and blocking factors, there are, among others, “invariance factors,” which make an SL feature reappear in the TL rendition (e.g., the English expression *This book is a must* can be rendered into German by *Dieses Buch ist ein Muss*). “Change factors” make an SL feature disappear or a new or additional feature appear in the TL rendition: in German *ein Muss* cannot be pluralized the way *a must* can, such as in *three important musts*. Change factors often become effective in everyday language and in specialized communication whenever concepts from different languages differ considerably in their characteristics, or when a concept exists in only one language. Lynne Bowker (1994: 184) has outlined “five strategies for handling such ‘untranslatable concepts’: use of footnotes, use of the closest corresponding TL equivalent, paraphrasing the SL term, use of loan words and loan translations, and creation of neologisms.”

“Target factors” relate to the target or purpose of the translation as determined by the client, for instance, carrying out comparative linguistic research or describing to the hearer a certain state of affairs as closely as possible (see section 4, “Translation Principles”). It is the client who makes basic choices in each act of commissioning and who prescribes how to translate. For instance, the client is the one to decide how faithful or how free the translation is to be, whether the target is an interlinear translation, a phonemic translation (both exemplified above), or another kind of rendition.

7 Machine Translation and Computer-assisted Translation

Because factors are objectifiable, the factor approach is an ideal tool for machine translation. Machine-aided human translation (MAHT) is to be distinguished from fully automatic machine translation (FAMT). MAHT, also known as computer-assisted translation (CAT), involves some interaction between the translator and the computer. In contrast, FAMT, better known as machine translation (MT), is characterized by the absence of any human intervention during the translation process. Judith Klavans (in William O’Grady et al. 1997: 656) rightly emphasizes that “[t]he purpose of a machine translation system is the same as that of any translation system: taking text written or spoken in one language and writing or speaking it in another. . . . Translation poses challenging problems both for the human translator and for the machine attempting to do what the human does.”⁴

Tests conducted at the offices of many international organizations, for instance at the Pan American Health Organization, the WHO Regional Office for the Americas, have demonstrated that in its present stage of development, fully automatic translation technology is not considered cost-effective because its resulting output needs extensive revision work (post-editing). The machine-aided human translation approach, on the other hand, seems to be more suited to the needs of many organizations which have to handle the translation of documents. Computer-assisted translation systems are based on “translation memory.” With such systems (that are sometimes combined with terminology databases), translators have immediate access to previous translations of portions of the text, which they can then accept, reject, or modify. By constantly archiving their final choice, translators will soon have access to an enriched “memory” of ready-made solutions for a wealth of translation problems. Other recent developments in computer technology also help the translators to perform their job. There is, for instance, a new and very effective productivity tool available for PC-based translators: automatic dictation software. At the present state of speech-recognition technology, however, to use dictation effectively the translator must master a new foreign language: “paused” speech that—the-computer—can—understand.

Regardless of the degree of usefulness of machine translation, there seems to be unanimous agreement that translators cannot be replaced, either now or in the foreseeable future. Only the human translator as an expert will be able to fully survey all the factors relevant to felicitous translation processes.

NOTES

- 1 Two useful collections of readings on general aspects of translating and interpreting are Owens (1996) and Sofer (1997); for a comprehensive overview of translation studies as an academic discipline, see Baker (1997).
- 2 From the mass of literature dealing with false friends, I select the following for additional mention:
 - The *Cambridge International Dictionary of English* (CUP, 1995) is unique in that it uses special symbols to warn its consultants about false friends and contains lists of false friends for 16 languages (Czech, Danish, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, and Thai).
 - For the English-speaking translator of German, Fred Bridgham (1996) is especially interesting since his explanations are illustrated with examples from literature, the press and everyday life.
 - Henri van Hoof (1989) offers most valuable hints for the English translator of French.
- 3 For an attempt to verify this statement, see Gutknecht and Rölle (1996: chapters 2–7).
- 4 For further reading on human and machine translation, consult the following translation periodicals: *Babel* (Amsterdam), *Interpreting* (Amsterdam), *Language International* (Amsterdam), *Lebende Sprachen* (Berlin), *Machine Translation* (Dordrecht / The Netherlands and Norwell, MA), *Meta* (Montreal), *Multilingua* (Berlin and New York), *Perspectives* (Copenhagen), *Target* (Amsterdam), and *The Translator* (Manchester).