

# BEYOND AND ACROSS SCIENCES, LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

## TOWARDS SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SPECIALISTS IN BIOLOGY AND TRANSLATION SPECIALISTS

*Nadia Nicoleta Morărașu*

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Translators are primarily seen as linguists and not as people with technical expertise. Danile Gouadec (2007) recommends to us to make a distinction between:

- the *translator-with-technical-expertise* (with perfect knowledge of two languages, and the necessary technical background in any area his translations refer to) and the '*linguist who does translations*' on the one hand;
- the *technical expert-with-expertise-as-translator* (has a technical background, a perfect knowledge of two languages and/or experience in professional translation) and the *specialist who has done languages* on the other.

When confronted with the task of translating a variety of scientific texts, scholarly articles and didactic materials from the fields of biology studies, linguists may have the opportunity to work in teams with specialists and terminologists in a cooperative and fruitful effort or, if they are the less fortunate, they have to fight against prejudice and reluctant attitudes and prove that they can produce quality translations.

In writing about translation as a profession, Gouadec has perfectly summarized the main "**challenges**" most translators face:

- the general lack of consideration for their work, the complexity and technicality of the tasks involved;
- lack of understanding that translation is the result of a demanding and ever more complex technical activity;
- the impact of the technological revolution on their working practices;
- the increasing advance of language engineering applications;
- the disruption caused by the Internet;
- the rivalry between 'linguists' and 'technicians'/specialists;
- the fight for official recognition of a professional status.

We may add that there are also some common **prejudices** that translators have to cope with:

- translation is just a matter of 'languages' and translating is something rather easy and straightforward;
- all you need to translate, is knowledge of the language and a good dictionary;
- translating simply means changing the words and sentences from one language into another.

As translation aims at allowing effective communication to take place by overcoming obstacles such as the language barrier, the ignorance of a code system or physical impairments, **the translator** is attributed some important **roles** (Katan, 1999; Baker, 2001; Gouadec, 2007):

- key actor in the process of importing or exporting ideas, concepts, thought processes, discourse structures, pre-conceived ideas, etc.;
- critical agent facilitating economic, strategic, cultural, technical, literary, legal, scientific and ideological exchanges throughout the world;
- cultural mediator responsible for successful cross-cultural communication and for the creation of functionally optimal target texts;
- go-between in operations and actions involving international co-operation. The point at which both specialists and professional translators meet is that quality translation should be:
- *accurate* (true to the facts and to the interpretation of those facts within the limits of the domain or specialist field concerned);
- *meaningful* in the target language and culture even though concepts or their interpretations may vary from one culture to another;
- accessible (readable, coherent, logical and well written);
- *effective* in terms of communicating a message and of making sure that the message fulfils its initial purpose;

- compliant with any applicable constraint in terms of target communities' linguistic and cultural standards and usages.

If the final outcome of the translation activity is quality translation, the factors that contribute to reaching this goal are also related to the subject matter, the degree of specialization, the function and the media (that may require the use of highly specific environments, tools and procedures), the end users of the translation, etc.

The most common classification of translations takes into consideration the **subject matter or "domain"**:

- translation of literary works (*literary translation* with possible subcategories as theatrical translation, translation of poetry, of children's books, etc.);
- translation of technical documents (*technical translation*);
- translation of medical documents (*medical translation*);
- translation of documents relating to the economy (*economic translation*), to banking and finance (*financial translation*), translation of marketing and promotional documents;
- translation of legal or legally binding documents such as laws, directives, standing orders, regulations or contracts (*legal translation*);
- other types of translation specific to various sciences and subject areas.

On the basis of **their end purpose or function** (or end-use) in a particular environment or activity, translation theorists and practitioners set up other classes:

- *judicial* translations (translated for use in, or in relation to, court proceedings);
- *medical* translations (for use by physicians and healthcare professionals);
- *commercial* translations (for use in a sales or marketing context: invoices, contracts, transport documentation, customs documents, etc.);
- *editorial* translations (any type of material designed for general publication);
- *marketing / advertising* translations (translations for use in marketing/advertising campaigns or drives).

Translations may also be categorized **according to the types of media** (Gouadec, 2007):

- *multimedia* translation (translation of documents involving images, sound, text and code, e.g. Web sites and CD-ROMs),
- *audio-visual* translation (subtitling, dubbing, voice over translation or translated speech that is heard with the original speaker's voice

in the background, over-titling).

- *localisation* (the adaptation of Web sites or software and documentation to a specific local linguistic and cultural environment).

Closely related to this classification is another typology from the point of view of **the degree of specialization**:

*General translation* refers to the translation of documents and materials that do not belong to any specific type or domain area and do not entail a specific translation process. It therefore covers a relatively wide range of materials such as letters, biographies, monographs, treatises, recipe books, tourist brochures, tourist guides, user guides, etc.

- *Semi-specialised translation* includes documents that require a minimum amount of knowledge in the subject area or field of competence concerned.

*Specialised translation* implies the translation of materials from a specialised field or domain, which are targeted at a particular audience or public and/or embedded in a particular medium (e.g. multimedia technology, film, video, etc.). The most widely-known sub-categories of translation are those of materials with specialised subject matter mentioned before: technical, commercial, financial and legal translation, as well as special target/channel/purpose translations (e.g. judiciary/court translation, community translation, Internet translation, institutional translation and editorial translation).

- *Highly specialised (and high-tech) translation* in which the degree of specialisation required (both in terms of mastery of relevant communication skills and in terms of knowledge of the leading edge technology and procedures involved) restricts the field to a handful of very experienced translators.

Translators now use a number of software tools specifically designed to speed up or improve the translation process: dedicated resources, search engines, 'translation memory systems', specialist software, translation management software or translation systems requiring some degree of human intervention.

Depending on the tools used, we may speak of four other types known as:

- all-through human translation;
- translation-memory-assisted translation;
- computer-assisted human translation;
- part or full automatic translation or machine translation.

In order to understand the complexity of the process of translation, we need to make some reference to **the activities involved in providing a translation service**. We may conceive them as

organised into three phases:

1. **Pre-translation** includes anything that takes place up to the moment the translator actually receives the material for translation.
2. **Translation** is subdivided into three stages:
  - *Pre-transfer* includes all operations leading up to the actual 'translating': analysing the material for translation and choosing the translation options, looking for information and clarifying the material for translation, preparing the raw materials (terminology, phraseology, models and templates), setting up the version for translation in the appropriate environment.
  - *Transfer* is the well-known core activity of shifting to another language-culture combination. Transfer naturally means transfer of contents, formats, and form, with all necessary changes and adaptations required by linguistic, cultural, commercial, technical, moral, etc. differences between source and target.
  - *Post-transfer* covers anything that has to be done to meet the quality requirements and criteria prior to delivery of the translated material. Once translated, the material has to be checked, proofread, revised to make sure that it complies with: language use and usage, the work provider's specifications, the principles of convergence between the source material and ultimate target material. It also includes formatting and various preparations for delivery.
3. **Post-translation** covers all activities that follow delivery of the translated material. These include possible integration of the translated material (as in simulation of subtitles, layout prior to publishing, etc.) but also consolidating the terminology for future uses, and much more.

When the *translator is working alone*, he receives the material for translation, searches for relevant information on key concepts, processes the terminology, translates, proof-reads, revises, formats the document, delivers the translation, and stores the translated material in appropriate files and archives.

When *translating in a team (assisted translation)*, the work is done by:

- someone in charge of physically preparing the material (scanning, extracting the terminology, etc), of subsequently re-assembling the material after translation and taking care of all the back-ups and archiving;
- a terminologist or phraseologist (in charge of

dealing with all the terminology and language-related problems);

- one or several information suppliers (of necessary technical or language-specific information);
- one or several proof-readers in charge of correcting errors or mistakes and of overall quality control.

*Working in pairs* is seen as the collaborative effort, where each partner uses and builds on the material provided by the other. Another form of collaboration implies that the translation (done by a specialist or by a specialized translator) be improved and upgraded (brought up to standard) by a reviser who is expected to be more competent either because he has the technical expertise, or because of greater experience and/or specific training.

In academic communities and in translation agencies, we do meet translators with technical expertise and technical experts with translating expertise working in partnership. The role assumed by such experts is mainly checking and technically revising the work done by the translators. As Gouadec rightfully points out, there are still other environments where "the ideal of a mutually beneficial working partnership between translators and technical experts is still largely wishful thinking, but experience shows that this is the way forward".

## CONCLUSIONS

In this attempt at encouraging the "symbiotic relationships" between biologists and translators and at collaborating towards quality translations, we conclude this article by acknowledging that:

- Good translators must all share the following **qualities**: absolutely perfect mastery of the *languages used*, *multi-cultural competence*, perfect familiarity with the domains they specialize in and very good knowledge of *what translation means*, *what it requires* and *what it implies*.
- What is needed beyond linguistic proficiency is a perfect knowledge of the relevant cultural, technical, legal, commercial backgrounds, and a full understanding of the subject matter involved. Of all these, good knowledge and the use of the appropriate terms and phrases is an indicator of technical competence and of the fact that the translator is not an outsider, but a member of "the narrow circle of specialists in a given field" (Gouadec, 2007).
- Not all translators are "experts in multilingual multimedia communication engineering" (as Gouadec claims about professional translators), but they definitely need to be

technically skilled, too, both on account of the translatable material and of the sophisticated IT tools and software they should use if they strive for efficiency.

To achieve an acceptable and effective translation, the translator must also take into account:

- the cultural context (national, local, institutional) within which the message will be received and interpreted;
- the commonly accepted conventions in the target culture;
- language stereotypes (*i.e.* standard terminology and phraseology).

Both specialized translators and specialists who use translation services should have social skills and the ability to relate effectively and smoothly, both professionally and personally, with numerous partners: colleagues, suppliers of information and terminology, revisers, Internet access providers, and many more.

#### ABSTRACT

There has always been a gap between specialists from different fields, a gulf enlarged by some stereotypes, misconceptions and serious misunderstandings that have led to the manifestation of some antagonistic tendencies in their interactions. Our plea throughout this article is in favour of bridging this gap and of developing and strengthening "symbiotic" relationships (based on mutual benefit) between biologists and translators.

We know that it is difficult not to take sides and equally promote views of both parties involved, but we trust that we will succeed in contributing to "a better understanding of the nature, challenges and complexity of the whole process of translating" (Gouadec, 2007) specialized texts.

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#### AUTHORS' ADDRESS

MORĂRAȘU NADIA NICOLETA -  
"Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau, 8 Spiru  
Haret, Bacau, Romania,  
e-mail: [n.morarasu@yahoo.com](mailto:n.morarasu@yahoo.com).