

TEACHING MEANING, COMPREHENSION AND TRANSLATION

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Introduction

One of the main issues that translators have to cope with is the plain concept of the meaning of words. The main difficulty lies in grasping that meaning is not an isolated concept, but a complex entity in which the context of occurrence is crucial. Thus, it depends on the text type, its functional role, its co-text, its user and his/her intentions, the specific situation of communication and last but not least, the specific cultures in contact. According to specialised literature, "the meaning of a given word or set of words is best understood as the contribution that word or phrase can make to the meaning or function of the whole sentence or linguistic utterance where that word or phrase occurs" (Zaky 2003: 1).

In other words, it is an important part of the translator's competence to be able to distinguish between the meaning of reference (also called referential/ lexical/ conceptual/ denotative meaning) which is to be found in dictionaries and glossaries, and the associated meaning (also referred to as connotative/ stylistic/ affective/ reflective or collocative).

1. Semantic problems in translation

From a didactic point of view, the comprehension process is extremely difficult to pinpoint, therefore students should be faced with tasks which require them to adequately decode and re-interpret the meaning of a given text, being aware of all the possible nuances of meaning visible at the top-down and bottom-up approaches. The possible specific objectives the teacher may envisage could be formulated as follows:

- a. identification of the referential meaning of the key words;
- b. delimitation of the potential phraseology and identification of the idiomatic meaning;
- c. isolation of the semantic features relevant in the given context;
- d. selection of the appropriate semantic features;
- e. selection of the accurate equivalent in the target language;
- f. addition/suppression of semantic features in the equivalent in order to obtain a similar effect on the reader as the source term.

2. Communicative functions of translations

It goes without saying that, especially in specialised discourse translations, prominence should be given to the communicative function of the source language text, rather than its signification, as expressed by mere denotative meanings. The level of language use, more than language usage should prevail, so that the given linguistic system is used for actual communication purposes, leaving aside the level of referential meaning or formal language structure. The main didactic objective is to make the translator aware of the necessity to convey the textual effect of the original, in keeping with the idea that a text is a unit, to be translated as a whole.

3. Text types

Obviously, in the translation process, students need to be aware of the textual genres, thus the teacher should develop their ability to recognize and properly deal with various text types of a standardized format.

In this respect, Kelly (2005) focused on a special subcategory of the translator's competence, which she termed communicative and textual sub-competence, related to the bilingual and extra-linguistic sub-competence. It comprises the ability to understand and accurately analyze a wide range of oral and written texts produced in the target and source languages, as well as the ability to understand that the features and conventions of the discourse genres are made known in the distinct target and source cultures.

Definable as a communicative phenomenon that is recognized and shared by the members of a socio-professional community, genre employs various elements that should be familiar to translators, such as the agents, the degree of specialization, the situational context, the standardized norms governing the specialized field in question, the interaction purpose, the relevant social and cultural dimensions.

Thus, the teacher may raise the awareness of the students upon the constraints of genre by asking questions of the type:

- a. who are the participants and what is their status?
- b. what is the purpose of the communication?
- c. what is the socio-professional community that the text belongs to?
- d. what are the norms governing this particular genre?
- e. are there any relevant general cultural and/or social aspects?
- f. what is the structure of the text?
- g. how is the reader addressed?
- h. what are the connectors and what logical relationships do they establish?
- i. how is modality dealt with?

4. Sample worksheet

The following example is taken from a class in ESP, in the field of Law. The students are given the assignment to translate into Romanian the following authentic excerpt from a specialized text in English:

In the popular mind, the distinction between barristers and solicitors is that the former are concerned with advocacy in court while the latter are concerned with legal work out of court. This is not 'quite' the case. Barristers are primarily concerned with advocacy and they have an exclusive right of audience, in the High Court, the Court of Appeal and the House of Lords; but they are not confined to advocacy and may devote a deal of their time to giving expert opinions on legal matters. Nor are solicitors exclusively concerned with out-of-court work for they have a right of audience in magistrates' courts, county courts and, in some instances, in the Crown Court. This division of the legal profession is a curious one and is unknown even in many Commonwealth countries which might have been expected to adopt the English professional model along with their adoption of the common law.

(Hogan, Seago and Bennett 1988: 32-33).

The requirements which precede the actual process of translation consist in discussions centering on the following issues:

- a. what type of text is the source text? Are there any specific constraints/ structure/ register / terminology requirements?
- b. what is its communicative function and effect on the reader?
- c. find the referential meaning of the key terms *barrister* and *solicitor*. How do their semantic spheres overlap? Which are the common/ differentiating semantic features?

- d. manage the semantic representation of the terms *High Court*, *Court of Appeal*, *House of Lords*, *Crown Court*, *magistrates' court*, *county court*. Point out the differences in organisation of the source and target legal systems, discuss the possible cultural implications and find the equivalent institution in the target culture.
- e. in the case of the culture-bound elements *Commonwealth* and *common law*, provide possible (explanatory) equivalents.
- f. discuss the opposition *advocacy/ legal work* as apparent in the first sentence of the text. Are the terms false friends? What would be their appropriate equivalents?
- g. may *rights of audience* be considered a phraseological unit? Is its meaning on the whole the sum of the meanings of its components taken individually?
- h. detect the connectors and the logical relationships they establish.
- i. what semantic features do the modal verbs contain? How should they be rendered in Romanian?

After extensive discussions and analysis of the variants provided by the entire group of students does the actual process of translation take place; the result is subsequently proofread and compared in point of effect, function, register to other texts pertaining to the same textual genre (informative textbook discourse).

Conclusions

In brief, meaning and all its possible facets is of utmost importance in tackling the process of translation, at the level of single units as well as larger phrases, and ultimately the text as a whole. When making their choices out of the set of potential equivalents, translators should always bear in mind the text genre and its standardized format, as well as the communicative function of the product of translation.

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THE ROLE OF COMPUTERS IN DEVELOPING STUDENTS' TRANSLATION COMPETENCE

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Introduction

Computers nowadays provide great help to linguists, especially if we are to think of text manipulation techniques: large storage, quick search and retrieval as well as networked communication. As a result, the styles and efficiency of text processing, language learning and translation can be greatly improved. Especially the existence of extensive electronic corpora offers examples and generalisations of language usages, which in turn will contribute to better language teaching and produce high-quality translation. Electronic tools such as dictionaries, concordancers, encyclopaedias and Web page search engines offer instant returns to inquiries about word or phrase usages. Secondly, upgraded machine translation technology has turned into a helpful tool, not only to business and industry, but also for translators and language learners. We can therefore say that the machine-aided translation technology also has beneficial effects both on translation and on language learning.

Different computer programs, combining the characteristics of human intelligence in providing guidance with the machine capacities to manage resources and solve tasks, have the potential to become good assistants for translators and language users and learners in the future. Nowadays educators' needs in language and translation teaching cannot be met without orienting the courses and the curricula in the same direction as the new computer era takes us in all other aspects of life. I will in the following make a short presentation of computers' benefits to translation and language learning, from the translator's workstation to the translation memory applications, the machine translation technology and computer assisted language learning. I will try to analyse the interrelatedness of concepts such as translating, language learning and the role the computer can play in this environment.

1. Translator workstation

The reality of modern times is such that a translator does not have to go to the library to find reference materials any more: a computer with Internet access can provide answers to the majority of questions arising in the translation process. Among the reference tools readily available on the Internet or on different specialised software mention should be made of: electronic dictionaries, terminology banks, encyclopaedias, concordancers, collocation finders, Web search engines, etc. All these tools contribute to the creation of a computerised working environment, which has been traditionally called the translator's workstation (Melby 1992, Hutchins 1997, Freigang 1998) or the translator's workbench (Trujillo 1999).

According to Melby (1992) there are three levels of functions for a translator workstation. Level one functions comprise word processing, terminology management and telecommunications. Level two functions consist of text analysis, automatic dictionary look-up, and synchronized bilingual text retrieval. Level three “provides an interface to machine translation systems” (218).

We have all encountered and are familiar with the use of electronic dictionaries, encyclopaedias and bilingual terminology files at the lower levels; therefore we will not spend too much time on this aspect. A less obvious tool, but similarly helpful for the beginner translator is the Web search engine. For example, in attempting to translate the expression *Bakugan battle brawlers* into Romanian, the Romanian equivalent may not be found in the dictionary or in a terminology bank. The translator may know what the word means, but it is another thing to translate it into Romanian, because an established translation could exist which the translator may not know.

(1) Bakugan Battle Brawlers are action-figure warriors, that are tucked into spheres that pop open when they're rolled onto a game card, where they gather points.

The definition we can find on <http://www.thefreedictionary.com> is **brawl** *intr. v.* brawled, brawling, brawls 1. To quarrel or fight noisily. 2. To flow noisily, as water; **brawler** *n.* a fighter (especially one who participates in brawls). It stands to reason that a warrior brawls in a battle.

In such cases it is useful to resort to a localised Web search engine like Google Romania, which can help retrieve relevant national Web pages with the accepted translations for the term we need.

(1) Luptătorii Bakugan sunt figurine ascunse în sfere care explodează atunci când sunt aruncate pe cărțile de joc, unde acumulează puncte.

Level two functions include text analysis which includes mostly the tool of concordancers (Melby 1992). A concordancer is useful to the translator mainly in the target language domain, as it primarily assists the translator in the processes of rendering target texts (as opposed to understanding the source texts). The concordancer can search a large native-speaker corpus and find lines of texts containing the query word whose usage the translator, as a non-native speaker, is unsure about. The concordance lines provide the translator with a set of contexts that the target word is used in so that she can be more certain about how to integrate the word in her own sentence. For example, suppose our task is to translate the Romanian fragment (2).

(2) Dacă în străinătate cerșim de foame, acasă am ajuns să "negociem" cu marile companii din domeniul petrolului de frica frigului. Și asta pentru că guvernării s-au trezit în prag de iarnă surprinși de avalanșa prețurilor la gazele naturale, care tinde să îngroape speranțele multora dintre români de a trece cu bine peste sezonul rece.

In what follows there is a ‘literal’ translation of the passage above, which doesn’t seem to sound well, at least to a native speaker.

(2') If abroad we beg of hunger, at home we've come to "negotiate" with the big companies in the oil field for fear of cold. And this because governors woke up at the beginning of winter surprised by the avalanche of prices for natural gases which tends to bury the hopes of many Romanians to get well over the cold season.

First of all, the literal translation of „cerșim de foame” - “we beg of hunger” may sound awkward, and the translator may want to check in a concordancer based on large corpus how the verb ‘to beg’ is used by native speakers. The following is a snapshot of the BNC output:



Fig. 1. Snapshot of ‘beg’ concordances

As can be seen from the above selection, the phrase ‘having to beg for food’ is used in a similar context, referring to starvation and poverty. Conversely, the phrase ‘governors woke up at the beginning of winter surprised by the avalanche of prices for natural gases’ does not seem to sound too native-like. A simple search through the BNC corpus would return more natural associations: ‘surprised to find/see’.

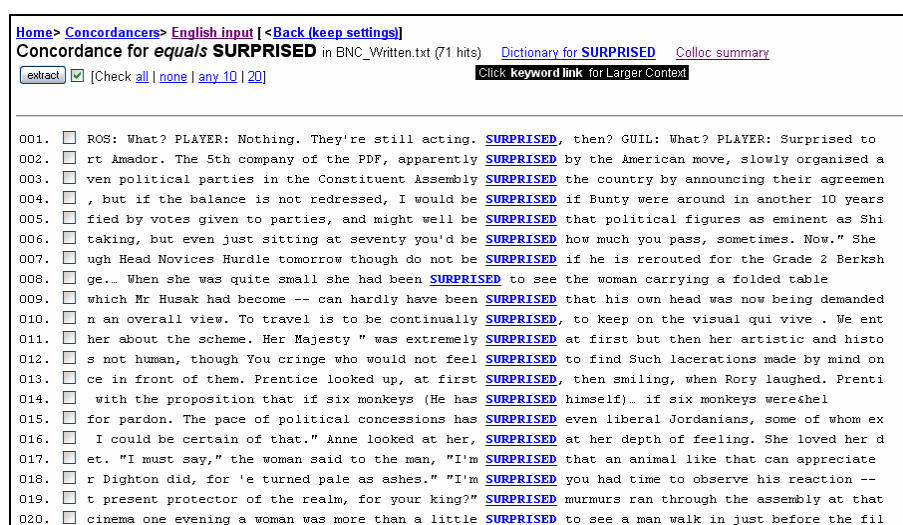


Fig. 2 Snapshot of ‘surprised’ concordances

Moreover, the expression ‘avalanche of prices’ needs improvement too. Our search through a concordancer would return the collocation ‘soaring prices’, which would retain the meaning in Romanian, and would at the same time sound more appropriate.

100.	<input type="checkbox"/>	e cheapest fuel available. It has to keep its own PRICES down so that it can compete with other majo
101.	<input type="checkbox"/>	nificant" and one in two have increased their own PRICES to cover the extra costs. Profit margins ha
102.	<input type="checkbox"/>	ogart's Treasure of The Sierra Madre look paltry. PRICES of individual coins start at 650. A spokesm
103.	<input type="checkbox"/>	her, it is that there exist people willing to pay PRICES lower than Pm, but which are in excess of t
104.	<input type="checkbox"/>	a clearer differential between diesel and petrol PRICES . Alan Wiggins, managing director of Vauxhal
105.	<input type="checkbox"/>	costs for companies, but said the rise in petrol PRICES would hit delivery and distribution costs f
106.	<input type="checkbox"/>	oys an extra 200 staff. MINUS: Increase in petrol PRICES , which will push up Project's transport cos
107.	<input type="checkbox"/>	placed with even more substantial hikes in petrol PRICES than the 12p a gallon (unleaded) and 15p (l
108.	<input type="checkbox"/>	ple, there has been a lot of evidence that petrol PRICES have a marked effect on rates of rural recr
109.	<input type="checkbox"/>	has a shortage of office space, soaring property PRICES , huge traffic problems and relatively high
110.	<input type="checkbox"/>	there is no noticeable Tunnel effect on property PRICES and rents. Where these are rising the main
111.	<input type="checkbox"/>	n, the creation of the UDC has pushed up property PRICES in the area, making it even more difficult
112.	<input type="checkbox"/>	ompany's income at the relevant time. Buyers push PRICES up SHARES hit new highs on speculation of a
113.	<input type="checkbox"/>	ent and indicate to GEMMs a need to adjust quoted PRICES . Further room for manoeuvre is provided by a
114.	<input type="checkbox"/>	e amounts of stock, other market makers may raise PRICES . By dealing through brokers who have access
115.	<input type="checkbox"/>	rupt and others would prosper unfairly by raising PRICES rather than output. Social tension would re

Fig. 3 Snapshot of 'prices' concordances

The same strategy may be applied for all the word associations which seem awkward-sounding. We have not included all snapshots of the concordancers we have used, but the final version of the translated text we revised reads like this:

(2'') If abroad we beg for food, at home we've come to "negotiate" with the big companies in the oil field for fear of cold. And this is because at the beginning of winter our governors were surprised to see the soaring prices of natural gases, which tend to crush/kill off the hopes of many Romanians to successfully withstand the cold season.

Another level-two function in Melby's frame of a translator workstation may be what he dubs the 'synchronized retrieval' of bilingual text files. A widely accepted contemporary term for this process is the 'translation memory', which is much more complicated than what we have covered before and therefore would deserve special attention in another context.

2. Translation memory

According to Hutchins (1997: 116), translation memory represents a facility which "enables the storage of and access to existing translations for later (partial) reuse or revision or as sources of example translations". In his opinion, "the sales of translator workstations incorporating translation memories are increasing rapidly, particularly in Europe". On the other hand, in Asia, some translation companies also advertise the use of translation memory software as a useful tool on their Web pages. The practical value of translation memory software to translators is proved by its world-wide use, especially by international enterprises, freelance translators and translation companies.

One example of modern translation memory software is the TRADOS Translator's Workbench, which usually has the following modules:

- translation memory
- terminology management
- sentence alignment

The translation memory module will record the user's translations sentence by sentence in a translation memory file. It also has a fuzzy-match algorithm which will search the memory to find any (partial) match for a new source sentence and retrieve the corresponding target sentence for the translator to analyse. In contrast, the terminology management module will keep a bilingual terminology bank and, upon the activation of a source sentence, will search and retrieve the target language parts of any terms that exist both in the source sentence and in the database. Finally, the sentence alignment module will enable the translator to import an existing piece of translation (from a source text file and a corresponding target text file) that has not been previously treated by the translation memory module, and align the source texts with the target text on a sentence-to-sentence

basis. The results of the alignment can then be exported to a translation memory file in order to enhance its contents.

The use of such software means that several translators working together can pool all their translation texts and terms together, including those from the present and the past, in the form of translation memory files and terminology database files. In this way, the tasks of translation and maintenance will be easier and more efficient, while the translation of terminology and recurring patterns will be more consistent across persons and organisations.

3. Machine translation

The history of machine translation (MT) has been rather contradictory since its origin in the 1940's (Hutchins 1995, Somers 1998b), from the following perspectives:

- the methodology it has used: from the direct translation method to the transfer method, the interlingua method, to the more recent corpus-based method (see Somers 1998b, Arnold et al. 1994, Trujillo 1999);

- the expectations of MT: from FAHQMT (fully automatic high-quality MT), to no prospect at all in the late 1960's, to the current limited and realistic goals and expectations (see Hutchins 1999);

- the platforms and users for MT: from the translation companies' desktops to the real-time Internet service for the general public (Yang & Lange 1998) to its possible roles in the fully-fledged "teletranslation industry" conceived by O'Hagan (1996).

Researchers in MT have underlined that the success of MT depends on the restrictions of the domain, the input, the readers and purposes, and the language pair used (Hutchins 1995, 1999, Somers 1998a, O'Hagan 1996: 26-35, Manning & Schütze 1999: 463).

Research into MT from Romanian into English and vice versa is still in its incipient stages. Free translation software is at the same time inefficient. Let us consider a part of the extract we analysed above:

Dacă în străinătate cerșim de foame, acasă am ajuns să "negociem" cu marile companii din domeniul petrolului de frica frigului.

The Google Translate facility (©2009 Google) will provide the following translation:

If abroad begging hunger at home have come to "negotiate" with big oil companies in the field of cold fear.

As can be seen, some problems are to be found at the grammatical level. First, in Romanian we don't usually express the subject when this is a pronoun, as it is implicit in the verb endings ('*cerșim de foame*' = **noi** *cerșim de foame*; '*am ajuns*' = **noi** *am ajuns* - 1st person pl.). However, the translation in itself is a faulty one, and does not convey any meaning whatsoever. The combination '*in the field of cold fear*' is hilarious, to say the least. Interestingly enough, the idea of oil companies was rendered, although the works field was preserved and wrongly associated with the following semantic unit.



Fig. 4 Google Translate translation

Although in the future MT will play a more and more important role in linguistic services, it will definitely not replace human translators in the foreseeable future. According to specialists, automatic translation cannot, unaided, produce anything better than 'rough' (occasionally barely comprehensible) 'translations' (see above). In order to get higher (publishable) quality, the solution will remain with human translators, supported by all the computer aids that are appropriate (Hutchins 1998).

O'Hagan (1996: 35), shares the same view, considering that "users are recognising the potential benefits of MT and are beginning to make use of the technology within restricted environments".

This is to say that MT "must no longer be put forward as a 'solution' to people's translation needs, but it must be seen as no more than a 'useful aid'" (Hutchins 1999: 32). Increasingly, not only is MT used by the general public for dissemination (of information), communication, entertainment and language learning purposes (Yang & Lange 1998), it is also used by translation professionals. It doesn't come as a surprise that students also find that MT can help them do their foreign language homework. Moreover, even for a language teacher, MT can become a useful teaching aid too. One useful exercise would be for the teacher to use the faulty translation provided above and have the students correct it and find explanations for why the machine has generated such grammatically and semantically flawed text.

Conclusions

If we consider all the educational and translational technology aids mentioned above, it appears that we can find bridges between computers, translation and language learning. We have seen how translation can be combined with computers in the implementation of a translator's workstation. We have also seen how language learning can be integrated with a computer system in the CALL environment. What is more, the possible combination of translation (especially translating into L2) and language learning is also strongly implied from the general working environment language learners and trainee translators share (i.e. both benefit greatly from the use of computers), the tools and resources they use (e.g. concordancers and corpora) and their common goal of interaction (i.e. to produce high-quality written language, close to native speakers' proficiency).

Therefore, we would like to suggest that translating into L2 and L2 learning activities should be carried out in an integrated computerised environment and both will benefit doubly as a result of mutual reinforcement and other factors such as varied resources and increased interest.

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