

PROPERTIES AND QUALITIES OF TECHNICAL TRANSLATIONS IN ROMANIAN

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Abstract: The results of this study present the extent to which technical translations in Romanian follow the recommendations regarding the properties and qualities of target texts. Cases of acceptability, faithfulness, informativity, grammaticalness, connectedness, clarity, and naturalness are analysed on a series of texts, and several recommendations are made, useful to curricula developers, translation scholars and translation students.

Keywords: translation properties, translation qualities, technical translation, Romanian translation market

1. Introduction

The importance of technical translation on the market and as a field of research has been highlighted recently in a series of reports or scientific papers, which claim that 90% of the translations on the global market are technical translations (Kingscott 2002, 247) and that technical translation has been neglected in the literature of translation theory (Byrne 2006, 1). This study is in line with the research topics on specialized translation developed within the Department of Communication and Foreign Languages at *Politehnica University of Timișoara*, builds on recent research (Dejica 2016) and aims to contribute to the existing studies in the field of technical translation.

We started from the hypothesis that on the Romanian translation market as well, most translations are technical translations; given the volume and the requirements on the market for technical translations, we wanted to analyse their properties and qualities in the Romanian language. Even if this is a small-scale study, we believe that the research findings would be useful to curricula developers, but also to clients or professional translators working with technical texts.

2. Properties and qualities of target texts

There are many accounts in the specialized literature dealing with what should count as a good or bad translation, or with the role of the translator and the translation purpose, including, but not limited, to Newmark (1993), Gutknecht (2003), or Nida and Taber (1969), as detailed in Dejica (2009, 134-42).

According to these translation scholars, translators should “explain and mediate between cultures, respecting their strengths, implicitly exposing their weaknesses” (Newmark 1993) or bridge “the gap between two foreign languages” (Gutknecht 2003, 692), whereas “a good translation focuses on the meaning or content as such and aims to preserve that intact; and in the process it may quite radically restructure the form: this is paraphrase in the proper sense” (Nida and Taber 1969, 173).

Nida and Taber claim that a good translation relies on three factors:

- “1. The correctness with which the receptors understand the message of the original (that is to say its faithfulness to the original as determined by the extent to which people really comprehend the meaning);
2. The ease of comprehension;
3. The involvement a person experiences as the result of the adequacy of the form of the translation” (Nida and Taber 1969, 173).

More recently, Al-Qinai (2000) presented a series of parameters, which should be observed by translators to produce good translations. His model for Translation Quality Assessment, as Al-Qinai states, is based on a series of parameters brought forward by Newmark (1988), Hatim and Mason (1993), Steiner (1994) and House (1997), which include:

- Textual Typology (province) and Tenor: i.e. the linguistic and narrative structure of ST and TT, textual function (e.g. didactic, informative, instructional, persuasive, evocative, etc.);
- Formal Correspondence: Overall textual volume and arrangement, paragraph division, punctuation, reproduction of headings, quotation, mottos, logos, etc;
- Coherence of Thematic Structure: Degree of referential compatibility and thematic symmetry;
- Cohesion: Reference (co-reference, proforms, anaphora, cataphora), substitution, ellipsis, deixis and conjunctions;
- Text-Pragmatic (Dynamic) equivalence: degree of proximity of TT to the intended effect of ST (i.e. fulfilment or violation of reader expectations) and the illocutionary function of ST and TT;
- Lexical Properties (register): jargon, idioms, loanwords, catch phrases, collocations, paraphrases, connotations and emotive aspects of lexical meaning;
- Grammatical/Syntactic Equivalence: word order, sentence structure, cleaving, number, gender and person (agreement), modality, tense and aspect.” (Al-Qinai 2000, 499)

In the same vein, in an extended chapter, Superceanu (2009, 31-8) presents an overview of target text types and of target text properties and qualities, based on Sager (1994), Toury (1995) and Chesterman (1997).

Translation properties, “defining characteristics of the target text” (Superceanu 2009, 35), include acceptability and source dependence. Acceptability is seen as “the property which ensures acceptance from the translation initiator or the target readers since the TT conforms to their idea of translation and is coherent with the target situation of communication” (Superceanu 2009, 35), and source dependence as “the property of a TT of being derived from a source of information in another language” (Superceanu 2009, 36). Source dependence, leads to two more properties, faithfulness and informativity. As the name implies, faithfulness refers to “the property of reproducing the ST meaning with accuracy”, whereas informativity to “the property of reproducing sufficient information from the source text to ensure understanding” (Superceanu 2009, 36).

As for translation qualities, according to (Superceanu 2009, 36), fall into two classes, which include

1. Linguistic qualities:
 - Accuracy: the intended meaning of the source text is preserved with precision in the target text;
 - Grammaticalness: the sentences are formed according to the rules of grammar of the target language;
 - Connectedness: the quality of a target text of being coherent and cohesive;

- Appropriacy: the language of the target text is appropriately chosen to suit the situation of communication.
- 2. Stylistic qualities:
 - Clarity: the sentences in the target text are logically formulated;
 - Naturalness: the linguistic forms of the target text are compliant with the target language usage;
 - Fluency: the target text is expressed in a way that facilitates its reception.

The list of translation properties and qualities, or of what counts as good or bad translations is by far exhaustive. Other useful insights are given by Juliane House (2008), who makes a very useful presentation of good translation and compares various translation approaches as seen in time by different translation theorists.

Some of the principles presented by these translation scholars overlap, being used under various similar or synonymous terminologies (for example Al-Quinai and Superceanu). In other cases, different qualities under the same classification are identical, or it is very difficult to spot the differences between them. Examples in this respect include *acceptability* and *appropriacy*, *faithfulness* and *accuracy*, or *connectedness* and *fluency*, as defined above in Superceanu's classification.

Without claiming to be critical or innovative, or to create an exhaustive list of evaluation parameters, we selected some of the parameters that we considered relevant for the analysis of the qualities and properties of translations. They preserve the definitions given by their proponents and are synthesized in the following series: *acceptability*, *faithfulness*, *informativity*, *grammaticalness*, *connectedness*, *clarity*, *naturalness*. These parameters will be used in the present article for the analysis of properties and qualities of technical translations.

3. Description of corpus

The terms technical and technical translation are used in this paper to refer to different genres translated or used in various branches of engineering, for a general or specialized audience, including product descriptions, users' manuals, technical brochures, technical drawings, technical forms, technical projects, etc. We do not use technical as synonymous with a specialized text used for example in economics or legal discourse.

Technical genres and sub-genres that are translated are numerous and their investigation would be very useful, but would require a quantitative analysis, which would exceed the aim of our study. As such, we narrowed our research to technical descriptions and users' manuals. We selected twenty technical translations accompanying different electronic devices developed by different manufacturers and marketed in the past two years. Since the users' manuals or product descriptions ranged from minimum two pages to maximum thirty pages, we selected randomly two pages for analysis from each translated text. Overall, our corpus for analysis totalled forty pages and we assumed that all the translations were interdependent translations (Sager 1993, 177-82).

4. Results of analysis

To assess the properties and qualities of technical translations, we used the following parameters exemplified and defined in Section 2 of this article: *acceptability*, *faithfulness*, *informativity*, *grammaticalness*, *connectedness*, *clarity*, *naturalness*.

Overall, all target texts conformed to the idea of translation and were coherent with the target situation of communication (production of interdependent translations, as assumed above). In isolated cases, given the translator's choice regarding the translation of some terms, we considered that acceptance could not be ensured by the translation initiator or target readers. Examples include the terms *slot* (Figure 1) or *dock* in the Romanian translation of a cell phone user's manual. In English, according to Cambridge Dictionary, in IT, the term *slot* refers to a small, narrow opening for something to be put in. In Romanian, the largest monolingual explanatory dictionary (DEX) does not list this term, while WordReference or Hallo, two online bilingual dictionaries, offer two translations that could have successfully been used in the Romanian text, namely *fantă* or *spațiu*. We believe that such examples, based on the translator's choice of borrowing terms into Romanian, instead of using existing and acceptable equivalents, lead to the creation of barbarisms and impede text understanding, which in turn do not ensure its acceptance by the client or target audience.

- (1) Introduceți cartela principală SIM sau USIM în *slotul* 1 pentru cartela SIM (1) și cartela secundară SIM sau USIM în *slotul* 2 pentru cartela SIM (2) (Samsung. GT-S6312)



Figure 1. Example of unaccepted translation

The lack of diacritical marks is another example that does not contribute to the assurance of acceptability of the Romanian translations. In four different texts, the translators did not use any diacritical marks, which is in contradiction with existing translation standards (Dejica 2016), shows lack of professionalism, and disregard for the target audience and for the translation profession.

In most translations, the source text meaning was reproduced with accuracy and faithfulness was ensured in the target texts. We divided the isolated examples of non-assurance that we identified into two classes.

Firstly, the meaning was not reproduced with accuracy due to cases of omissions (Example 2, Acer. Aspire):

- (2) ST: Follow *the onscreen instructions* to complete set up.
TT: Urmați *instrucțiunile* înainte de a finaliza configurarea.

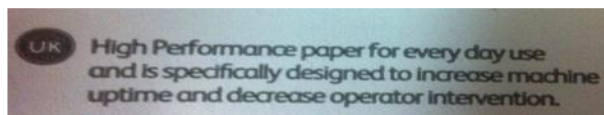
The term *onscreen instructions* was translated into Romanian with *instrucțiuni* instead of *instrucțiunile de pe ecran*, an under-translation, which however did not alter the meaning and would not fall under the category of translation errors.

Secondly, there were cases in which the meaning was not reproduced with accuracy, which lead to the creation of translation errors. Examples include typos (Example 3, Gorenje),

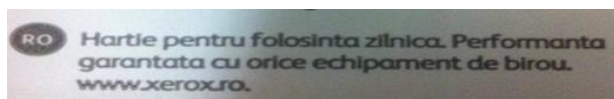
- (3) ST: Weight (net): 90 kg / 79 kg
 TT: Greutate (net): 90 kg / 76 kg

or shifting determiners, qualifiers or quantifiers at sentence or paragraph level, a procedure usually performed by machine translation services, which, without proper assessment by professional translators during the revision stage, leads to cases of misinterpretation or incorrect meaning (Example 4, Apple Inc. *iPhone*):

- (4) ST: *High Performance paper for every day use and is specifically designed to increase machine uptime and decrease operator intervention.*



TT: Hartie pentru folosinta zilnica. Performanta garantata cu orice echipament de birou.



In the target text (Ex. 4) there are cases of under-translation (High Performance paper ≠ hârtie), omissions (specifically designed to increase machine uptime and decrease operator intervention), additions (performanță *garantată*), and diacritical marks are not used, which overall leads to a bad translation. Faithfulness, or reproducing the source text meaning with accuracy, is a functional property which all target texts should observe, and which should not be mistakenly interpreted as a procedure for creating literal translations. Translators can create free translations, which are good and faithful to the meaning of the source text.

In the examples we analysed, the sentences were formed according to the rules of grammar of the Romanian language, the target texts were coherent and cohesive, and the sentences were logically formulated.

The linguistic forms of the target texts were compliant with the Romanian language usage. However, there is one case which we believe needs further research and investigation, namely the preference of the Romanian language for what in English is already a standard and natural formulation, namely referring to various products in personal and familiar ways. Examples include *your* washing machine, *your* Samsung/LG/Philips TV, register *your* product, *your* new TV is smart, to mention just a few. Apparently, there is no agreement among Romanian translators with regard to the translation of what in English seem to be clear and natural formulations, regardless of the genres in which they are used; the texts we analysed displayed different stylistic preferences, which related to the variety of linguistic resources in Romanian, would make any translator's choice a difficult one. With regard to this particular case, we extended our analysis to other parallel texts in Romanian, by performing a Google search. A quick analysis of the results displayed no less than five different stylistic formulations used when describing or referring to various technical products in Romanian texts (Example 5, Source text, Arctic):

| | |
|---|---|
| (5) ST: <i>Your washing machine</i> | - personal, inclusive |
| TT: <i>Maşina de spălat</i> | - impersonal, neutral |
| TT: <i>Maşina ta de spălat</i> | - personal, possible mark of impoliteness (personal pronoun, second person, singular), informal, non-inclusive |
| TT: <i>Maşina voastră de spălat</i> | - personal, possible mark of impoliteness (personal pronoun, second person, plural), inclusive |
| TT: <i>Maşina dumneavoastră de spălat</i> | - personal, (too) polite, formal, non-inclusive, awkward formulation when the polite form of the pronoun is repeated frequently |
| TT: <i>Maşina dvs. de spălat</i> | - personal, polite, informal |

Such formulations could not necessarily be interpreted as a mark of unnaturalness of the Romanian target texts, but due to the potential implications or interpretations of their illocutionary force, as highlighted in Example 5, translators should be extremely cautious when selecting any of these five possible versions. Further studies should be definitely useful since they might reveal the preference of different genres for particular stylistic formulations; advertisements or product descriptions might exhibit a more personal style, while users' manuals a more impersonal or neutral one. If this hypothesis is confirmed, then a mark of unnaturalness in Romanian target texts would be represented by cross-genre formulations such as the use of a personal and polite style in users' manual or the use of an impersonal, neutral style in advertisements.

5. Conclusion

The examples analysed showed that translation properties and qualities were met in most technical translations. Isolated cases of non-acceptance were due mainly because of faulty borrowings, which led to the creation of barbarisms. Other cases of non-acceptance included the lack of diacritical marks in the Romanian translations (25% of the analysed texts). A small number of texts lacked accuracy due to omissions, under-translations, or typos. Inaccuracy was also due to the inadequate assessment of translations produced by machines in the case of modifiers and determiners – a case that we believe deserves special attention and further investigation. We could not identify cases in which grammaticalness, connectedness and clarity were not observed in the target texts. The linguistic forms of the target texts were compliant with the Romanian language usage. We identified lack of agreement regarding the naturalness of several formulations, especially in the case of personalization or animation of certain technical products.

Overall, the properties and qualities of the texts we analysed were met; however, given that we performed only a small-scale study, the range of errors (10% - 25% in the analysed texts) should be alarming if confirmed by a quantitative analysis, in the context in which technical translations are predominant on the market.

Curricula developers and translation scholars should focus on the investigation of at least two directions of research: ways of improving assessment techniques of texts produced by machine translation software, and technical genres' preferences for certain linguistic and stylistic forms in Romanian.

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Webography

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Sources of examples

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5. ST: Arctic. AE1000A+, AE800A+, AE1200A+. *Washing Machine*.
TT: Arctic. AE1000A+, AE800A+, AE1200A+. *Mașina de spălat automată*.
<http://www.arctic.ro/media/products/manuale/AE800A+.pdf>