[From: *Term banks for tomorrow's world: Translating and the Computer 4.*
Proceedings of a conference ... 11-12 November 1982, ed. Barbara Snell. (London: Aslib, 1983)]

TERMINOLOGY FOR TRANSLATORS

Professor Nigel Reeves
University of Surrey, United Kingdom

Should a technical translator be a subject specialist with additional linguistic skills? Or a trained linguist with some specialist knowledge? It is an old debate and plainly in practice successful translators can derive from both categories. Indeed in the past entry into the profession was often largely determined by personal circumstances - an engineer who had acquired linguistic knowledge through overseas postings might turn later in his career, or as a side-line, to translating engineering texts. A language graduate, finding him or usually herself, confined to earning a living from the home, acquired knowledge of a technical area in a self-teaching process. Today, however, the enormous growth of scientific discovery and technological innovation together with the internationalisation of trade make, as we all know, the systematic training of translators a necessity. Decisions therefore have to be taken about the most efficacious methods to be adopted in the training process and the old question of linguist versus specialist recurs with fresh urgency.

Or at least it would appear to. But there is a further complicating factor: the technical translator is principally concerned with the language in which the message is expressed, whereas the sender was principally concerned with the topic of the message. The sender used the special language of his area to describe and analyse the extra-linguistic reality that was his primary interest. But the translator's primary interest is the special language itself: in short a subject's terminology assumes first importance for the translator. And the moment we speak of terminology in this context as 'an aggregate of terms representing the system of concepts in an individual subject field'(1), we are reminded that the translator also needs to understand the principles according to which a particular terminology is established, the relationship between various monolingual terminologies and between the specialist terminologies of one language and those of another language(2). Thus the technical translator has to be an expert in three discrete disciplines: translation itself, a technical specialism and the theory and practice of terminology.

This clearly sets the teacher a daunting task. I do not wish here to consider in detail the structure of an appropriate course in terminology - Professors Sager in a recent issue of Fachsprache(3) and Arntz at the Infoterm Symposium in Moscow in 1979(4) have both put

forward detailed programmes as taught at Manchester and Saarbrücken, providing us with useful models. The issue which I wish to examine briefly is to what extent terminology may itself be the mediator between the linguist translator and a specialism in which he has not hitherto been trained. I choose the linguist as my starting-point in the training process for very practical reasons, though I have to admit that they may be parochial. In the UK, and particularly England and Wales, the national school examination structure is such that a pupil will normally only enjoy a wide-ranging education that includes languages, mathematics and a science up to the age of 16. The specialisation that in other European countries commences at University level begins here in the senior classes of school. Thus it is unusual for a British graduate engineer to have studied foreign languages after he is 16, and then it is rarely any language other than French(5). This phenomenon seems to have been exacerbated by the introduction of the comprehensive school, curiously enough, in that there is evidence of sex polarisation between subjects, with technical and scientific areas (with the exception perhaps of biology) becoming still more male-dominated and languages becoming almost exclusively female-dominated. This latter trend, in my observation, holds true for most West European countries with the result that students of translation are to a very large proportion females. The consequence in this country at least (which is more extreme than elsewhere because of the early specialisation) is that our trainee translators are not equipped with any specialist technical knowledge and often not even any adequate grounding in methods and approaches of scientific research.

In this context the study of terminology and special terminologies assumes a key role in the training of translators. It may provide the means to acquiring expertise in the special areas themselves. As Pinchuck has argued, 'the terminology of a science is part of its method, of its processes of discovery. It is an essential element in the conceptual framework of the science'(6). Since the translator is never going to be an innovator in the scientific or technical area as such, the understanding of the subject provided by the systematic linguistic definition of its concepts should be adequate(7).

But here I have to introduce a caveat, and it is a major caveat. This adequacy of terminology as the principal pedagogical method for training translators in special areas is restricted. It is restricted to those texts where the extra-linguistic conditions determining text-production are identical to those conditions determining text-reception, where the source language and the target language of the translation refer without ambivalence to the same concepts, processes or objects(8). If as a working hypothesis, we accept Coseriu and Bühler's three principal text types(9), informatics, representational or referential as the first, expressive, affective or emotive as the second, and appellative, conative and inductive as the third, and then restrict our present comments only to informatics texts we are still skating on thin ice. Even if we do not go so far as Albrecht Neubert in suggesting that an instruction manual may need radical emphasis shifts, additions and omissions(10), we can only be concerned with scientific, technological or medical texts that denote exclusively realities unaffected by culture or ideology. Fortunately, this still covers much of the translation work in technical areas.

But still remaining within the informatics text type we are confronted with many texts deriving from special areas that are determined to a lesser or greater extent precisely by the cultural and ideological circumstances of the sender and the associated connotations of the source language. The classic examples are economic, political and legal texts (11). Here the translator is forced into the role of interpreter and cultural intermediary. Furthermore it could be argued that there is no totally common subject area that is shared between specialist exponents deriving from different linguistic and national backgrounds. The concepts and definitions of each of the monolingual terminologies do not correspond and if a translator forces a source language text into the target language terminology he may have falsified the meaning - a clear example would be a legal text deriving from a system based on the Napoleonic code that is transposed into English legal terms. Not only is the court system in which the document will be used different, but the conceptualisation also.

We must also remember that terms in the social sciences are not of the same nature as scientific terms. While is it true of both categories of terms that the concepts to which they refer are open to revision and that redefinition and the creation of new terms are the linguistic record of change within the subject areas, in the social sciences the concepts are open to interpretation and dispute in a far higher degree. Indeed as John Swales has shown in the context of English for Academic Purposes, the very function of definition in science, the social sciences and law differs significantly (12). And despite the most strenuous efforts, a connotative layer of meaning adheres to the conceptual layer (13) thanks to the culture-specific origins of any interpretative framework.

Of course terminology work as part of the training of translators in such specialisms remains essential. Building bilingual glossaries, for example, where definition may be supplanted by explanation is an excellent teaching and learning method. Nevertheless culture-specific texts call for translators both in the target language culture and the source language culture. This view underlies the training programme in my own Department of Linguistic and International Studies where students are trained not only as linguist translators but also as fully fledged English lawyers with two years of training also in aspects of French, German or Soviet law (taught in the foreign language). Students may alternatively choose parallel courses in economics or politics. Thus while terminology is probably the most systematic and reliable method for introducing trainee translators to scientific and technical areas at the informative text level, it is more problematic in those areas where the function of the translator is less to transpose an unequivocal conceptual content from one language to another, than to interpret a message deriving from one culture for another with different values, assumptions and systems.

What, however, if the length of training time is shorter, perhaps only a year, as often in the case of postgraduate Diploma courses? In these circumstances a combination of introductory or background lectures with systematic terminology work is certainly the most practical approach, provided that the trainee translators are fully aware of the inevitably interpretative nature of their translation. Probably the most effective way of achieving this awareness is to insist that the student on the one year course should work not only in a legal, economic or

political specialism but also in a scientific or technical area. In this way, even if an intercultural expertise is not fully achieved, the different nature and value of terminology work in the two areas will become quite apparent. That in itself brings the student to the heart of the translation problems in both.

REFERENCES

(1) FELBER, H. Some basic issued of terminology. The Incorporated Linguist, 21, 1982, 12.

(2) WÜSTER, E. Die Ausbildung in Terminologie und terminologischer Lexikographie. Lebende Sprachen, 20, 1975, 34-35,

(3) SAGER, J.C. Approaches to terminology and the teaching of terminology. Fachsprache, 3, 1981, 102-106.

(4) ARNTZ, R. Terminology as a discipline in the training of translators and interpreters in languages for special purposes. In: Infoterm Series 6. Theoretical and methodological problems of terminology. Proceedings of the International Symposium, Moscow, 1979. Munich, New York, London, Paris: K G Saur, 1981, 525-529.

(5) Undergraduate courses, combining engineering or a science with language studies have, however, been devised, notably at the Universities of Bath and Aston. At the University of Surrey the 1981 UGC cuts have forced the closure of courses in chemistry or metallurgy with French or German regional studies. Also at Surrey, however, the Engineering Employers Federation have financed 12 scholarships annually for engineers to be given a special language course culminating in a year's industrial placement in France or the Federal Republic of Germany.

(6) PINCHUCK, I. Scientific and technical translation. London: Andre Deutsch, 1977, 177.

(7) as SAGER (1981) p. 102, implies.

(8) Cp. SCHMITT, C. Translating and interpreting, present and future. The Incorporated Linguist, 21, 1982, 98; and KOLLER, W. Einführung in die Übersetzungswissenschaft. Heidelberg: UTM, 1979, 78.

(9) COSERIU, E. Textlinguistik. Eine Einführung. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1980, pp. 53-68.

(10) NEUBERG, A. Pragmatische Aspekte der Übersetzung. In: Neubert, A. (ed). Grundfragen der Übersetzungswissenschaft. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift Fremdsprachen II. Leipzig: VEB Verlag Enzyklopädie, 1968, pp. 21-33.

(11) I would place legal texts that serve a referential function in this text category rather than in the appelative or vocative category as NEWMARK has recently in: Translation and the vocative function of languages, The Incorporated Linguist, 21, 1982, 31,34. I fully share, however, his analysis of the intercultural problems of

translating legal texts exemplified by the English rendering of Quebec legal concepts.

(12)SWALES, J. Definitions in science and law - evidence for subject-specific course components. Fachsprache, 3, 1981, 106-112.

(13)LEECH, G. Semantics. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974, pp. 10-27.