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# On dope

## Christophe Declercq looks at the challenges for translators working in the field of anti-doping texts

Although it is generally accepted that specialised translation requires thorough topical knowledge and, preferably, a network of specialists, few specific fields offer as many cross-cultural sensitivities as doping. The most important body of texts that involves doping as a subject are scientific reports and research reports on substances with performance-enhancing capability. In the controlled environment of research and development (R&D) labs, both the research process (including medical reports and specialised papers) and the research outcome (ie, the product itself), as well as its documentation, are written in a specific scientific style.

Representations of R&D outcomes must be accurate as well as truthful;<sup>1</sup> unsupported opinions are to be excluded and any language that could cause a potential reader to question the authority of the scientist or the validity of the research should be avoided. Pharmaceutical-scientific texts are, by default, disinterested and not emotive, as can be seen in the following e-publication on CERA, a substance I will discuss in more detail later on:

*Stimulation of erythropoiesis by the third-generation erythropoietin drug CERA, a pegylated derivative of epoetin  $\beta$ , has provided valuable therapeutic benefits to patients suffering*

*Translators will often be confronted by a mixture of styles and registers: legalese, slang, technical jargon*

from renal anaemia, but has also rapidly found application as an illicit performance-enhancing strategy in endurance sports.<sup>2</sup>

Translating a text such as this would not pose too many difficulties, as typical translation solutions, for example addition, are already included in the source text. The translator is also helped by the fact that specialised texts are, more often than not, informative rather than instrumental.

### Ethics and the media

The wider media are also eager to tap into the world of doping. Many arguments have been printed in the media to defend or accuse an athlete who is under suspicion but did not test positive. An article from *The Times*, which, at first sight, seems perfectly disinterested, reads as follows:

*Ricardo Ricco [sic], Saunier Duval's Italian rider, has tested positive for erythropoietin (EPO), according to the French national anti-doping agency (AFLD). The 24-year-old who has won two mountain stages in this year's race, tested positive for the banned substance CERA (Continuous Erythropoietin Receptor Activator) after a urine test.<sup>3</sup>*

But did Ricco test positive right after those mountain stages? If so, the statement explication is truthful rather than emotive. If not, the addition is biased and the translator has to take that into account. Intratextual ethics then come into play as to whether or not to keep the bias, rectify the statement or add a translator's note.

The text on Ricco is typical of a newspaper text on doping issues in that acronyms are explained or paraphrased, bringing into a general text some more specialised terminology and clarifying information, which is seemingly additional but possibly more comment-like.

This is not popular scientific writing only. The text assumes that the reader has a working knowledge of how EPO and CERA act, both as drugs and as doping products.

In addition to a level of specialisation, journalistic texts on doping use regularly combine the approach of popular scientific writing with procedures also known to translators, such as addition, paraphrase, explicitation and the translator's note.

**When science marries law**

Another feature of texts on doping is of a legal nature. Translation involving material for court cases, documentation for sports associations or national sports federations, and contracts for athletes (which usually contain stipulations concerning the consequences of getting caught using performance-enhancing drugs or methods) will have more in common with legal translation than with translating journalistic or scientific texts.

In a more legal take on doping issues, translators will often be confronted by a mixture of styles and registers: 'the legalese of the professional lawyers, the everyday language of the witnesses and litigants', the slang of the athletes and 'the often extremely technical jargon of the reports' and testimonies.<sup>4</sup>

Translators need a solid working knowledge of the legal systems concerning the field of doping use and anti-doping violations of both the source and target culture. Furthermore, they are often out on a limb, vulnerable in their choices regarding attributing equivalence as well as nuances in the translation (take the possibly emotive addition in the Riccò text).

Luckily, for that reason, translations used in official and legal documents are very often accompanied by labels such as 'unofficial translation' or 'provisional translation'.<sup>5</sup> Not

only do translators of texts on doping become invisible, but they also gain a more redundant pivotal language stature, instead of a key mediator one.

**A 'divorce' between cultures**

With disinterested yet legally sensitive texts on doping, the possibility of translators offering phrases that are not entirely equivalent seems too troublesome for many official bodies to deal with. The main anti-doping agency in the world, WADA (World Anti-Doping Agency), publishes a glossary of doping terminology in various languages. However, the glossary clearly stipulates: 'The English version shall prevail in the event of any conflict of interpretation.'<sup>6</sup> Despite all the efforts to design an elaborate glossary on doping in Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish, the most important organisation in the world in combating doping use restricts itself to the safe haven of English if the need arises.

English then acts as a 'get out clause'. As such, the translation moves from a merely provisional intermediate step in the communication chain to a near redundant one, an act of assimilation only. Distribution is no longer essential, let alone publication.

Both WADA and the French Minister of Health, Youth Affairs and Sport took part in the UCI's 2007 Conference on Doping in Cycling. The language to prevail in case of possible misunderstanding was not English but French. This was quite a move away from the front-end multilingualism of the event, with a monolingual legal core maintaining English as the one key language.

If a transparent language policy is in place, establishing a cross-organisational and cross-cultural anti-doping fight might very well be flawed at its communication and information core. Proof of this can be found in the fact that, although it provides a 20-page bilingual French-English glossary, the UCI does not specify what happens in the case of a conflict. Also, the UCI's cycling regulations elaborate on the procedure of the analysis of B samples, stating:<sup>7</sup>

*The opening and analysis of the B Sample may be attended by the Rider, an expert designated by him or his National Federation, a representative of the Rider's*

*National Federation, a representative of the UCI and a translator.*

Other than that this profile suits an interpreter more than a translator, it must be emphasised that the translator's task should not be taken lightly, as many possible conflicts of interpretation abound.

**Flirting with disaster**

Whereas definitions of scientific and/or medical concepts traditionally effectuate a framework of confidence within which translators feel comfortable to work, the absence of a definition of what in fact constitutes doping convolutes the entire field even further.

The lexicographical issue of not being able to pin down what doping effectively is, is also demonstrated in the often conflicting approaches of official anti-doping bodies and

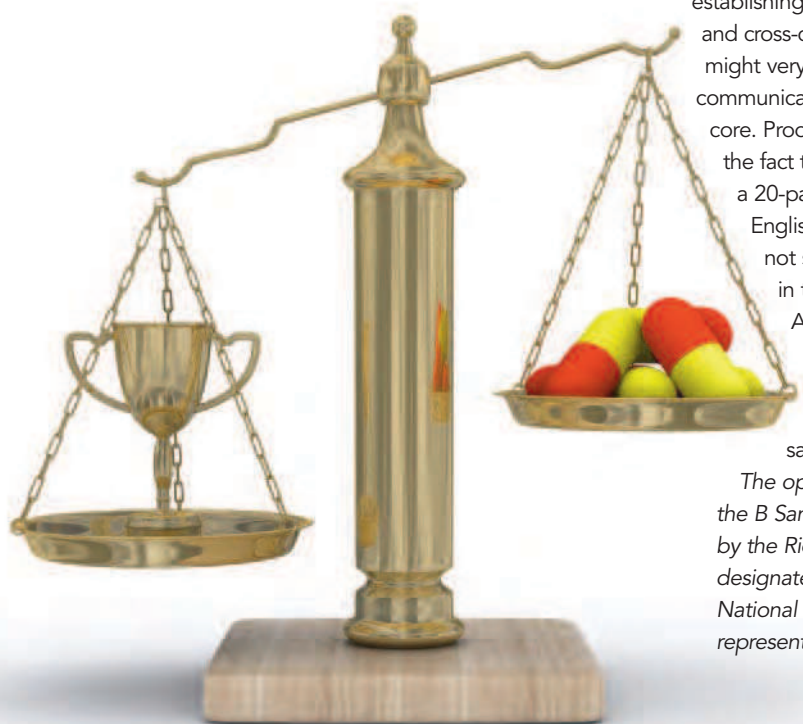
*Translators are often out on a limb, vulnerable in their choices regarding equivalence*

in different national approaches. What used to be a threshold for an athlete's haematocrit (red blood cells count) and was still considered 'healthy' in cross-country skiing, would trigger doping cases in cycling.

One well-known Spanish cyclist implicated in the Operacion Puerto doping ring was cleared by the Spanish judiciary due to lack of evidence but convicted on the basis of the same material by the Italian Olympic Committee (CONI). The rider was banned from competing in Italy but went on to win the 2009 Vuelta d'España.<sup>8</sup>

Besides the specialised terminology and translation procedures used in any branch of science or medicine, such as paraphrase and addition, texts on performance-enhancing drugs are characterised by the incremental encyclopaedism of the genre.

Arguably the major doping trend of the last two decades concerns blood doping, in particular blood boosting drugs known as erythropoietins, such as EPO, Aranesp and CERA. These products constitute three 'generations' of erythropoietin, which stimulates the production of oxygen-carrying red blood cells. The difference between





ALEX LEE, 'RICCARDO RICCO', 1/6/08 via Flickr, (CC BY 2.0)

the various generations is that the drugs have become more and more refined, with fewer injections required and longer lasting effects.

### Communication is key

Although translating texts on doping poses many peculiar issues, the realisation that clear communication is key for the future – for creating new cycling events for instance – is a major step forward. This is asserted by Alain Rumpf, Director of Global Cycling Promotion, who has stated that avoiding misunderstanding is key.

When participants' English is not up to a functioning level, a local language consultant is brought along. The Lausanne-based organisation SportAccord (formerly the General Association of International Sports Federations) is also promoting communication and cooperation among various international sports federations, and has an ever growing number of members.

To sum up, while translating texts on doping, the translator is put in an awkward position. He or she needs a solid scientific background in the substances involved as

## *The absence of a definition of what constitutes doping convolutes the entire field even further*

### TESTING TIMES

*Riccardo Riccò rides the 2008 Giro d'Italia as team leader for Saunier Duval. He later tested positive for the banned substance CERA*

well as in the medical consequences. Translating texts on doping includes two other important layers: one of legal sensitivities and another involving possible cross-cultural differences, as well as the cultural context, which may be construed as near superfluous. This can be seen as a difficult situation, with the translator applying a truthful relationship to a particular and challenging field.

### Notes

1 Although this concerns the source texts initially it also applies to target texts.

2 Van Maerken, T, Dhondt, A and Delanghe, J R, 2010, 'A Rapid and Simple Assay to Determine Pegylated Erythropoietin in Human Serum' in *Journal of Applied Physiology*, e-publication ahead of print, 21/1/10. Available at <http://jap.physiology.org/cgi/reprint/01102.2009v1.pdf>

3 'Tour de France Faces More Controversy after Ricardo Ricco Tests Positive' in *The Times*, 17/7/08

4 Alcaraz, E and Hughes, B, 2002, *Legal Translation Explained*, Amsterdam, St Jerome Publishing, 14

5 This is not uncommon. See, eg, Wathélet, M, 2007, 'Sport Governance and EU Legal Order: Present and future', available at [www.ielaws.com/Wathélet\\_EN.pdf](http://www.ielaws.com/Wathélet_EN.pdf), whose footnotes refer to 'unofficial translations' from French into English

6 'WADA Glossary: Translation of common terms used in the field of anti-doping in sports', available at [www.wada-ama.org/rtecontent/document/glossary.pdf](http://www.wada-ama.org/rtecontent/document/glossary.pdf)

7 UCI Cycling Regulations, part 14 Anti-Doping, 2011, 39, available at <http://tinyurl.com/cva9wj>

8 This happens on an intranational level. Eg, in Italy a cyclist was convicted in one judicial district for an infringement but not in another.