Abstract

A translator requires a double-sided ability to translate a specialized text. Firstly, the management of a non-native language which must be learnt and fluently used in its written form, and secondly, the comprehension of the specialized content synthesized in its terminology. This study aims to demonstrate how students one-sidedly concentrated on the latter have overlooked the former, thus making serious linguistic mistakes.

1. Introduction

When facing the challenge of translating an economic text from Spanish into English, translators encounter several difficulties and to tackle these, knowledge of the languages per se (in this case, Spanish and English) does not guarantee the production of a correct text into the target language. Undergraduates must become aware that the translation activity is a complex process demanding the ability to use the appropriate translation techniques and strategies as well as specialised terminology and awareness of any extra crucial meaning to the source text (ST).

To demonstrate how the above-mentioned difficulties quite often arise and are a stumbling block for future professional translators, two of the most common non-specialized language mistakes made while doing reverse
translation, namely, the correct usage of linking words and articles is analysed. Real examples extracted from a class assignment will be used to illustrate how 14 students might have overlooked the proper use of general English due to their concern about the specialized content which needs to be transferred. Gallego Hernández and Barrajón López (2012) have succinctly stated this previous idea:

Economic translation in a training context involves added difficulties due to the different sort of mistakes made by trainee translators. Although it might be possible to think that most of these mistakes are related to specialized aspects (terminology, concepts, specialized phraseology) of Economy, Finance, Commerce, etc. (and, in fact, there are numerous studies, for example, in the translation of terminology), it is also possible to identify mistakes actually related to language in general, whether maternal or foreign.

(My translation)

Not only the right transfer of the specialized aspects of the source text (ST) onto the target text (TT) but also the right basic English will result in the creation of a professional assignment as will be seen herein.

2. Introduction to the economic reverse translation (Spanish>English) module

For clarity, a brief outline of how the subject of Economic Translation (Spanish-English) is offered at the University of Vigo is described below.

Planning is one of the key elements in the teaching activity. As Roberto Mayoral Asensio (1997) has noted:

The learning process demands an enormous deceleration of the translation process in so far as the student must acquire an awareness of the process, which the professional follows automatically and unconsciously. (My translation)

Throughout this learning process, Mayoral also emphasizes the importance of establishing some quality objectives which are essential for training inexperienced translators who lack knowledge of the topic and how to find the right sources.

With this in mind, the main aim of this course is to introduce the specialization of translating economic and commercial texts through the theoretical and practical study of direct and reverse translation. Approximately 60 students are conveniently divided into three small groups of about 20. Numbers might vary depending on registration for each academic year.

This subject is taught in the fourth and final year compulsory for the Translation and Interpreting degree with reverse translation courses into English previously offered (6 ECTS). So, language in use has been exposed to these future translators, yet, in real practice there is evidence that the incorrect usage of general language hinders the production of adequate translations as will be seen in this paper.

Concepts such as GDP, inflation, unemployment, taxes or social security are familiar to some students. However, these concepts are presented again to avoid any basic voids taking place during their training. Special attention is also paid to document research by using parallel texts and resource hunting to ensure credibility and accuracy.

Speaking English in class is also recommended and promoted via 10-20 minute student presentations. The themes of these presentations are suggested by the professor, and guidance is offered during office hours.

3. Methodology

Hypothetically, the lack of a proper decision-making process due to overlooking general language while translating results in firstly, a poor translation into English, secondly, a misuse of terminology and thirdly, in consequence of these previous two, the production of a text which does not reach professional quality standards. This concerns professors preparing undergraduates about to enter the market demanding reverse translations into English.

The method followed to carry out this case study had the collaboration of 14 subjects who regularly attended the Economic Reverse Translation sessions (Spanish>English). These 14 undergraduates were asked to translate at home the first eight paragraphs of the document titled Radiografía del gasto público en España written by Prof.
Fernando C. Ballabriga and Prof. Josep M. Comajuncosa and available online as part of the 2012 publication *Informe Económico Esade (Temas de Economía Española)*.

Participants were allowed a week’s time limit for their final printed versions. The specifications regarding the layout of these translations were as simple as possible to allow them enough time to concentrate on the texts and the content. Graphics and tables, which are commonly used in the explanation of the data included in any economic text, were not part of the assignment.

Participants could make use of any of the resources available, that is, paper and online dictionaries, glossaries produced by them or by others, parallel texts, machine translation programmes, etc. These tools were accepted so that the production would be more expedient for them. Participants were told they could also compare their versions among themselves or with a professional translator.

3.1. Methodology: The four points under study

For analysis attention was focused on the following 4 points:

- The use or lack of use of the article before percentages.
- General use of the article: a/an/the/ø.
- Use of discourse markers.
- Translation of the specialized terminology.

**Point 1.** Refers to the use of the article before percentages which act as nouns in clauses. This example is taken from subject #1:

E.g. ST: (...) lo que supone un 45,6% del total del PIB (...)  
TT: This meant 45.6% of the total GDP (...)

**Point 2.** Refers to the use of both definite and indefinite articles. Any mistake, even the production of 1 error of this type, throughout the 8 translated paragraphs will be accounted for. Subject #7’s version reads:

E.g. ST: (...) se inició el actual proceso de ajuste fiscal (...)  
TT: (…) despite the fact that (the*) tax adjustment had already begun.

**Point 3.** Analyzes discourse markers in terms of three parameters. The quantity used in the students’ versions. The literality with regard to the ST and the correct usage of these markers. An example of the ST’s influence in the produced TTs can be read as follows (Subject #11):

E.g. ST: Finalmente, la inversión pública aumentó a una media anual del 9,9%.  
TT: Finally, the* public investment increased at a* annual rate of 9.9%.

**Point 4.** Is focused on the selection of the right terminology in a chosen sentence:

ST: Finalmente, las transferencias al sector privado incluyen una diversidad de conceptos como las pensiones públicas de jubilación, el subsidio de desempleo, otras pensiones y ayudas por enfermedad (...)
TT: Finally, transfers to the private sector included a diversity of concepts like* retirement public pensions, unemployment benefit, other pensions and sickness subsidies* (...)

The difficulties students came across with regard to these points were classified. Notes have been taken for each subject and summarized in tables below.
4. Results

Point 1

Out of the 14 versions offered, only 2 showed mistakes (×) regarding this particular point. Exactly 85.71% of the subjects had no difficulty with articles when using percentages (√).

Table 1. Use of articles with percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Point 1: Article and %</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 ✓ TTs</td>
<td>85.71% ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 × TTs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Point 2

However, the results for Point 2 are quite different as seen in the chart below. All subjects except for 1 presented mistakes in the general use of the definite and indefinite article:

Table 2. General Article Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Point 2: General Article Use</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 ✓ TT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 × TTs</td>
<td>7.14% ✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Point 3

Regarding the use of discourse markers (DM), three situations have arisen, which are summarised below in Table 3. 12 subjects used finally in the same sentence and initial position as in the ST while 6 out of 14 only used finally as a way of linking paragraphs rendering the text more coherent in English. This use literally imitated the source text. One must note that the text in Spanish only used finally twice and no other discourse markers were introduced.

8 out of 14 used more than 1 discourse marker but 6 of these subjects did not use these markers correctly. The markers chosen by the subjects were moreover, besides, in addition, however, and, eventually, on the contrary. There were some register discrepancies, but they were correctly used in the TT.

Table 3. Use of discourse markers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(3.1) Literal TT DM</th>
<th>(3.2) “Finally” as the only DM</th>
<th>(3.3) Use of several DM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 = DM</td>
<td>6 TTs out of 14</td>
<td>8 out of 14 TTs Used Several DM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 ≠ DM</td>
<td>42.85% Imitated the ST</td>
<td>6 × Use of DM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85.71% Used the same DM as in ST</td>
<td></td>
<td>Out of those 8 TTs with several DM, 75% Wrong use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Point 4

This point deals with the correct translation of a set of specialized terms which appear in paragraph #2 of the source text (included as an example in Point 4).

The results regarding the translation of this sentence revealed that 8 subjects out of 14 translated these terms without any difficulties. 3 subjects made 1 mistake regarding the term they chose. 2 subjects had difficulties with 2 terms in this sentence and only 1 participant made 3 mistakes. In other words, 57.14% did not make any mistakes while translating the terminology found in this particular sentence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(4.1) 0 Term. Errors</th>
<th>(4.2) 1 Term. Error</th>
<th>(4.3) 2 Term. Errors</th>
<th>(4.4) 3 Term. Errors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 ✅ TTs</td>
<td>11 ✅ T Ts</td>
<td>12 ✅ T Ts</td>
<td>13 ✅ T Ts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 ✗ TTS</td>
<td>3 ✗ TTS</td>
<td>2 ✗ TTS</td>
<td>1 ✗ TTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57.14% 0 Errors</td>
<td>21.42% 1 Error</td>
<td>14.28% 2 Errors</td>
<td>7.14% 3 Errors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Conclusions and further research

The starting hypothesis presented at the beginning of this paper can be confirmed with this case-study, namely, translation trainees are so concerned with the use of terminology in the specialized economic text that they overlook general English usage.

As seen in Point 1, participants were able to deal with the correct translation of a specific use of the article which is studied and analyzed in depth during class sessions.

However, in Point 2 the fact that all except one of the participants had several difficulties with the use of the article (the/a/an/ø) in general reveals that attention must be paid to this particular grammar point. Thus, the correct use of the article is essential in the translation and production of adequate versions in the target text complying with the expectations of the target readers in terms of correct language in use, coherence and cohesion.

Point 3 shows how subjects imitate the source text structure. Especially under (3.1), the discourse marker chosen was a literal translation of the word “finalmente” in Spanish. The lack of variety in the markers chosen (3.2) and the wrong usage of some of the attempts to introduce this type of word in some of the target texts (3.3) demonstrate that there is a need to work more on English general language acquisition in class before translation students concentrate on specialized translation.

This last matter is linked to the data obtained while analyzing Point 4. Participants showed fewer difficulties in the research of the terminology required for the sentence provided above. More than half of the participants offered good versions of this part of the text, which means that their attention was focused on the specialization aspects of this type of text but they overlooked basic general English language matters, resulting in a poor translation.

The results of this case-study demonstrate the need for setting further objectives in course programs which grant the general use of English far more importance in the learning and practice of reverse translation into English.

In order to provide the economic reverse translation sessions with the contents which fit the needs of translation trainees, further research must be conducted in the form of case-studies which can count on a higher number of participants and include other research methodologies. The information obtained in this way will enable the training of better future professionals.

References

