

Consistent Terminology in Technical Translation

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Abstract: This article is about technical translation, which is a type of specialized translation involving the translation of documents produced by technical writers (owner's manuals, user guides, etc.), or more specifically, texts which relate to technological subject areas or texts which deal with the practical application of scientific and technological information. While the presence of specialized terminology is a feature of technical texts, specialized terminology alone is not sufficient for classifying a text as "technical" since numerous disciplines and subjects which are not "technical" possess what can be regarded as specialized terminology. Technical translation covers the translation of many kinds of specialized texts and requires a high level of subject knowledge and mastery of the relevant terminology and writing conventions.

Keywords: technical translation, specialized terminology, technological subject, technical text

Introduction

The importance of consistent terminology in technical translation, for example in patents, as well as the highly formulaic and repetitive nature of technical writing makes computer-assisted translation using translation memories and terminology databases especially appropriate. Technical translation is closely related to technical communication and that it can benefit from research in this and other areas such as usability and cognitive psychology.

In addition to making texts with technical jargon accessible for a wider ranging audience, technical translation also involves linguistic features of translating technological texts from one language to another.

Translation as a whole is a balance of art and science influenced by both theory and practice. Having knowledge of both the linguistic features as well as the aesthetic features of translation applies directly to the field of technical translation.

As a field, technical translation has been recognized, studied, and developed since the 1960s. Stemming from the field of translation studies, the field of technical translation traditionally emphasized much importance on the source language from which text is translated. However, over the years there has been a movement away from this traditional approach to a focus on the purpose of the translation and on the intended audience. This is perhaps because only 5–10% of items in a technical document are terminology, while the other 90–95% of the text is language, most likely in a natural style of the source language. ^[3] Though technical translation is only one subset of the different types of professional translation, it is the largest subset as far as output is concerned. Currently, more than 90% of all professionally translated work is done by technical translators, highlighting the importance and significance of the field.

The role of the technical translator is to not only be a transmitter of information, but also to be a constructor of procedural discourse and knowledge through meaning, particularly because often, the technical translator may also take on the role of the technical writer. Research has demonstrated

that technical communicators do, in fact, create new meaning as opposed to simply repackaging old information. This emphasizes the important role that technical translators play in making meaning, whether they are doing technical translation in one language or in multiple languages.

Conclusion

Much like professionals in the field of technical communication, the technical translator must have a cross-curricular and multifaceted background. In addition to grasping theoretical and linguistic orientations for the actual translation process, an understanding of other subjects, such as cognitive psychology, usability engineering, and technical communication, is necessary for a successful technical translator.^[5] Additionally, most technical translators work within a specialized field such as medical or legal technical translation, which highlights the importance of an interdisciplinary background. Finally, the technical translators should also become familiar with the field of professional translation through training.

References:

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