

# Terminological and Subject-Field Knowledge In Specialized Translation

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## Key words:

*Translation - Terminology- Terminological Competence- Specialized Translation- Specialization- Subject-Field knowledge- subject-field competence- Expert- Contextual Dependence-Conceptual Dependence- Neologism- Translation Brief- Text Type- Hybrid Text*

*Text Genre*

## الملخص

تشهد الترجمة المتخصصة في السنوات الأخيرة نشاطا وإقبالا متزايدا و ملحوظا. و يعزى الأخصائيون ذلك إلى التقدم العلمي و التكنولوجي، وإلى عامل العولمة أيضا الذي يستوجب التمكن من جميع المستجدات والمعطيات العلمية، الاقتصادية، الاجتماعية و السياسية لمواكبة متطلبات العصر.

غير أن طبيعة النص المتخصص يجعله يتميز بالتعقيد الناتج عن المفاهيم والمصطلحات العلمية والتقنية التي يحويها مما يصعب عملية ترجمته خاصة بالنسبة للمترجم غير المختص.

تعددت صعوبات الترجمة المتخصصة بتعدد الاختصاصات و تنوعها، حيث يتمتع كل منها باستقلالية لغوية وعلمية توجب الاعتماد على منهجية ذات صلة بالاختصاص، و تتطلب كذلك كفاءة علمية متميزة.

في هذا الإطار احدث انتشار الترجمة المتخصصة في المجتمع تحفيزا و دافعا قويا بالاهتمام بهذا النوع من الترجمة و بضرورة استحداث منهجية ترجميه جديدة وإدراج تقنيات وأساليب من شأنها مساعدة المترجم على فهم و ترجمة النصوص المتخصصة بطريقة صحيحة تضمن تبليغ الرسالة العلمية التي سعى الكاتب الأصلي إلى نشرها.

يهدف هذا المقال إذن إلى مناقشة نوعين من صعوبات ترجمة النص المختص. يتمثلان النوع الأول في عدم تمكن المترجم من مصطلحات المجال التخصصي، أما النوع الثاني فيكمن في عدم إلمامه باختصاص النص المصدر.

للتطرق لكل هذه الأمور خصصنا الجزء الأول من المقال لمعالجة صعوبة تعامل المترجم مع المصطلحات العلمية. أما الجزء الثاني، فيتناول أهمية إلمام المترجم بموضوع النص الأصلي. خلصنا في الأخير إلى تقديم مجموعة من التوصيات من شأنها مساعدة المترجم على مواجهة هذين النوعين من الصعوبات التي قد تؤثر سلباً على جودة و نوعية الترجمة المتخصصة.

The translation market has been experiencing a tremendous demand for the translation of specialized documents; this subsequently, generates a significant volume of work for translators. What is even more impressive is that the trend is expected to continue increasing noticeably over the coming years induced by a number of factors; we consider the most important ones next up.

Communication of scientific knowledge is among the reasons that urged for the need of a well developed specialized translation. In fact, as the body of scientific knowledge in a given discipline increases; there is pressure for its translation, as an efficient mean for communicating it worldwide.

The thriving need for information has also been a major stimulator for the emergence of specialized translation; today's society relies heavily on information that specialized translation so cautiously gathers, synthesizes and even analyzes. In point of fact, the aim of specialized translation is to capitalize scientific knowledge to fund various social, economic, political, and scientific schemes.

Economic globalization, in its turn has largely contributed to the development of specialized translation; multinationals are today established all over the world; and specialized translation is a requirement for carrying business activities in the countries, where their subsidiaries are settled. Trading their brand also necessitates specialized translation in order to describe components and features of products, or instructions for use, in case the brand

is an apparatus. The translation is generally provided in leaflets or prospectuses.

Along these lines, specialized translation covers all subject-fields falling under non-literary categorization; it is concerned with the translation of content with a considerable level of specialization and abstraction; and characterized with an extensive use of related terminology.

The highly demanded types of subject-fields knowledge required for translation in the translation market are included in the following table:

<b>Types of specialized Translation</b>	<b>Related Fields of Knowledge</b>
Scientific translation	medicine, physics, biology, pharmaceuticals....
Economic translation	finance, accounting, management, marketing, advertising
Legal translation	general law, public law, civil rights, commercial law
Technical translation	Automobiles, energy, industry, electronics, mechanics...
Communication translation	Education, journalism, art....

The authors of subject-field knowledge are worldwide experts; they publish their investigations and researches in works referred to as specialized documents; they are written in a plain, accurate, scientific and methodological language; each subject-field is characterized by its own particular terminology.

Specialized translation should be conducted by competent, experienced and qualified translators. Nevertheless, even the most qualified and experienced translator can come across problematic situations that need to be considered with due care and sensitivity to reach the most ideal solution for the whole extent or at least a required part of it.

However, due to the limitations placed on this paper, only terminological and subject-field difficulties are discussed. Other difficulties will be the subject of future papers.

Terminological knowledge is the first difficulty, we debate in the present paper; it is considered as one of the most significant areas of specialized translation; the production of an appropriate target text is to a large extent dependent on a proper use of terminology. (Barbara Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, Marcel Thelen 2010:32)

Yet, it is important to clarify before going further in this paper that a translation problem is terminological if it is related to the source text's lexical units; in other words, the term's meaning in the specialized field. A terminological problem results from the translator's inability to relate the term to its pragmatic context.

In this regard, the major terminological problems encountered in specialized translation are:

- Unavailability of a source language term in the glossary of the target language.
- Availability of several target terms equivalents without sufficient clarifications determining the most appropriate equivalent.
- Inappropriateness of the available equivalent for the context of the particular target term.

It is evident that an inappropriate use of terminology, as well as its unsuitability for the level of specialization of the target text highly affects the audience comprehension, as well as the quality of the translation. In fact, most translation shortcomings result from the translator's incomprehension or misunderstanding of

a terminological unit caused by his illiteracy of the specialized concept; a situation, which justifies his incapability to provide an equivalent or a formal correspondence of the source term in the target language. Hence, the translator is unable to reproduce the source text communicative situation, or the context in which the term first appeared. A context, which is pragmatically restricted to the characteristics of the participants in specialized knowledge production including:

- Source text's author.
- Topic.
- Communicative event purpose.

Neubert claims that translators are not expected to know all terminological units; however, they should have enough competencies allowing them to comprehend a given term in a particular context; (2009:9) yet, this does not make them subject-field experts, but just skillful and trained enough to reproduce a source text information to a target audience.

Additionally, the translator's terminological competence cannot be developed through a process of memorization; but rather by experience and continuous updating of one's specialized knowledge, an activity which will probably enable him to contextually recognize knowledge represented by given terms.

All in all, the translator has to conceive a terminological unit as contextually and conceptually dependent; in other words, the meaning of a term is dependent on its context and interaction with other concepts.

Yves Gambier and Luc Van Doorslaer advocate the possibility for the translator to suggest a new term that should be acknowledged as a footnote. (2010:360) This can be allowed, in case the translator is unable to find an equivalent for a given terminological unit- a situation, which can occur when the topic of the source text is innovative; and has not yet been dealt with by the translator.

Nonetheless, M. Teresa Cabré claims that such a decision should be conducted judiciously in order not to fall under other pitfalls that can prove to be more difficult to solve.

*“It is clear that to be able to propose a term translators must have acquired a sound knowledge of lexical morphology, lexicology, sociolinguistics and pragmatics. Besides, some degree of feasibility of use of the suggested term is required.”*

*(in Yves Gambier, Luc van Doorslaer 2010:360)*

The translator can also be confronted with a situation, where there are different alternative equivalents for the same terminological unit; in this case, various possibilities should be considered; and the translator has to act on the basis of the most appropriate equivalent.

From this angle, Yves Gambier and Luc Van Doorslaer offer three types of resources for the selection of the most appropriate terminological unit: (2010:361)

- Monolingual textual resources related to the specialized topic.
- Bilingual and multilingual resources such as dictionaries and knowledge database.
- Bilingual or multilingual textual resources in the form of parallel or comparable corpus.

We conclude the issue of terminological difficulties in the translation of specialized texts by suggesting the following recommendations:

- The translator task consists in finding the most appropriate terminological equivalent. The terminological unit should have already been acknowledged by experts in the subject field.
- Neologism is allowed only when the source text terminological unit is unavailable in the target language.
- The translator should respect the thematic particularity of terms; each term should be associated to a particular subject-field.

Having dealt with the issue of terminology; our next concern is subject-field knowledge; in the world of translation, it refers to the

translator's background knowledge of the material submitted for translation.

Within this context, two major types of subject-field knowledge have been distinguished:

➤ Academic subject field knowledge refers to the translator academic level in the subject-field. In other words, the translator has a subject-field university degree in addition to his linguistic capacity as a translator.

➤ Professional knowledge refers to the translator professional knowledge in the subject-field. In other words, the translator had professionally practiced the subject-field. For example a retired accountant working actually as a translator.

Recent technological progress has greatly contributed to the growth of scientific production in the society; however, communicating this knowledge remains a critical challenge for any translator, whatever are his capacities and qualifications.

Translators conceive subject-field knowledge as an input and output. It is an input because it constitutes the source text specialized knowledge; and an output because it is processed and reproduced in another contextual communicative situation. On that account, it determines the subject-field knowledge of the source text, and the final product of a translation activity.

Subject-field constitutes the translator's first cognitive step in the process of translation; hence giving him an insight on the source text degree of complexity. It is also a decisive factor concerning his willingness in engaging in the translation activity or not.

The first contact of a translator with the material to be translated is indeed a contact with the source text subject- field. Being aware of his limits, the translator can decide whether it is worth engaging in this translation or not. A reliable translator would never bear the risk of producing a translation of an inferior quality that would undermine his credibility as a translator; or destroy the expectations

of the text original author in communicating a given piece of knowledge to a particular audience.

It is of importance to note that the translators' subject-field knowledge has not been acquired in an academic setting, but has been gained through experience, practice, research and continuous documentation.

As a matter of fact, A. Ilyas points out that a specialized translator can naturally present a low language proficiency that is however, to be compensated with opulent related subject field- knowledge. This is largely true since in specialized writing, the author is more concerned with facts, experiments, or argumentation than in exhibiting literary abilities; the priority in such contexts is satisfying an audience thirst for information.

*In scientific works, subject-matter takes priority over the style of the linguistic medium which aims at expressing facts, experiments, hypothesis, etc. The reader of such scientific works does not read it for any sensuous pleasure which a reader of literary work usually seeks, but he is after the information it contains. All that is required in fact is accuracy and lucidity of expression. This is applicable to the translator's language as well. Scientific words differ from ordinary and literary words since they do not accumulate emotional associations and implications. This explains why the translation of a scientific work is supposed to be more direct, freer from alternatives, and much less artistic than the other kinds of prose. The language of scientific and technical language is characterized by impersonal style, simpler syntax, use of acronyms, and clarity. (Ilyas 1989: 109)*

Accordingly, the translator's task consists of communicating a given specialized knowledge; thus, source and target texts should be semantically identical; a semantic divergence results in a poor, unfaithful translation that would probably affect the translator's social prestige as a responsible and trustworthy partner.



Style is also to be carefully considered for appropriate subject field rendering; the translator should manage to adopt more or less the author's style. Libo Huang claims that the "the task of a translator is nothing but to imitate the author's style." (2015:57) yet, certain exceptional cases have been allowed giving the translator the freedom to adapt the source text style to the target text contextual situation; mainly when this last concerns the translation of certain types of documents, such as a product leaflet, or a balance sheet. In such situations, an instrumental translation is required, which will not necessarily reproduce the source text style. Christiane Nord claims that the instrumental translation is "a communicative instrument in its own right." (80:205)

Another difficulty resulting from the translator's lack of subject field knowledge relates mainly to the fact that specialized domain includes an infinite number of specialties; and the translator is obviously not expected to be multidisciplinary. Hence, he should never embark on a translation without sufficient related prerequisite.

*"The translator him or herself is asked to take an ever more responsibility for his or her text; the translator is not merely somebody, who changes elements in one language to those in another, but he or she has to be responsible for the communicative status of his or her product."* (Jan-Ola Östman, Jef Verschueren 2011:18-19)

The nature of certain types of texts, known as hybrid can be problematic for many translators; these are texts that combine different specialties; hence requiring a multi-disciplinary translator; the situation becomes more complex, when the text is also highly technical; this is obviously produced by expert authors and intended for an expert audience; it includes complex concepts and terminology causing major translation difficulties.

According to Jody Byrne, developing subject-field knowledge is an ongoing challenge, and needs to be taken seriously by translators

seeking to qualify as specialized translators; attaining such an objective necessitates the following procedures: (2014:43)

- The translator should read as much as he can. Regardless of whether he is interested in the topic or not; or if he understands what he reads or not. The importance is to gain a more or less familiarity with subject-field knowledge, its related writing style and terminology.

- The translator should constantly make subject-fields research starting from the most basic to the more specialized ones. Looking for sources of information should be conceived as a priority; "the most valuable asset a translator can develop is the ability to research a topic quickly and find the appropriate information." (ibid)

- The translator should permanently seek to develop academic or professional relations with subject field experts, with whom he can exchange information and potentially consult, in potential complex translation situations. "These people are a goldmine of useful information." (ibid 44)

Lastly, a translation brief has been advocated as an important document, the translator can rely on to overcome and even prevent potential subject-field difficulties; indeed, it determines the information that is vital for correct communication of source text subject field knowledge; and hence has to be prioritized in the target text. The translation brief can be requested from the translation commissioner.

*"Translation brief implicitly compares the translator with a barrister who has received the basic information and instructions but is then free (as the responsible expert) to carry out those instructions they see fit...it specifies what kind of translation is needed."* (Nord 1997:30)

Chemorion argues that "the expected quality of the translation is implied in the translation brief, which the translator and initiator of

the translation agree upon. In other words, it allows the translation initiator to participate practically in the translation process by setting guidelines for the translator to work accordingly. (2008:241in idem)

Despite the above difficulties, Cui Ying asserts that “translators that pursue specialized translation during a number of years attain a high level of specialization and proficiency; and although, they will never attain the original authors’ level of subject-field expertise; they usually manage to develop a level of knowledge allowing them to produce high quality translation.”(2015:109). Likewise, “it is very hard to find an expert with an appropriate level of translation competence unless he has undergone a double training: subject-field and translation.”(ibid)

To sum up, one can say that high-quality specialized translation should reflect the translator’s ability to handle appropriately and relevantly the related terminology; it should also reproduce the source text author’s intended knowledge through the use of the most appropriate style.

A final key element that determines the tone of the final translation is the target audience. The translator needs to know the people who will be reading his translation; as a matter of fact, an excessively specialized terminology may be out of reach for the layman; while the specialist would certainly be offended if addressed through a popular language.

A further point that needs to be emphasized upon is that the scientific community relies heavily on specialized translators to reproduce scientific works as clearly and accurately as possible. Specialized translators are undeniably, second authors of these scientific works; yet, their responsibility is even greater than the original authors because their role consists in disseminating a precious knowledge, a scientist made considerable effort and time to come up with.

Thus, specialized translation should be conducted with greatest care; errors induced by the translator's terminological or subject-field incompetency are indeed very serious; not because they affect the overall meaning of the target text, but for a more heavier effect, which is that the target audience can in certain cases, not even realize that it is getting an irrelevant or insignificant information. Thereupon, specialized translators have a great responsibility for the accuracy and reliability of their translation, as this will be a reference for many future generations.

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